UNE ✦ SACRA

Spiritism

The Gospel According to Spiritism

✦ ✦ ✦

Allan Kardec

Translation (edition 1.3)

Credits

Author	Allan Kardec
Date	1864 (3rd edition, 1866)
Original language	French
Version	Translation (edition 1.3)
Translation	Popular translation, from the French original
Source	Internet Archive — L'Évangile selon le spiritisme, 3e éd. (Paris, Dentu, 1866), OCR corrigé avec les numérisations bub_gb_yfcU9eVzmVMC (1866) et levangileselonle00kard (1876)
License	CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · original: Public domain

About:

The Gospel According to Spiritism, published by Allan Kardec in April 1864 under the title Imitation of the Gospel According to Spiritism and recast in the 3rd edition (1866), which fixed its definitive form, gathers the moral passages of the Gospels — those which, Kardec held, all Christians accept without controversy — and explains them in the light of the spiritist doctrine.

Each of its 28 chapters starts from a teaching of Jesus ("Blessed are they that mourn", "Love your enemies", "Without charity there is no salvation"), comments on it and completes it with "Instructions of the Spirits", messages signed by spirits such as Saint Augustine, Fénelon or the Spirit of Truth.

The Introduction explains the aim of the work and the authority of the spiritist doctrine, and gives historical notes on the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and other groups, as well as a summary of the doctrine of Socrates and Plato.

The last chapter is a collection of spiritist prayers. The items are numbered afresh in each chapter. The text follows the 3rd edition (1866).

In Brazil it is the most widely read spiritist book and the basis of the "Gospel at Home", the weekly family reading practised in spiritist households.

Source: https://archive.org/details/lvangileselonles00kard

This popular translation and the design of this file belong to Une Sacra, under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 license (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0): you may copy and share it with the credit "Une Sacra (unesacra.com)", for non-commercial use and under the same license. The original text keeps the license of its source. Terms of use: unesacra.com/#/legal/terms

Digital edition generated on November 26, 2026 by Une Sacra, an open library of sacred texts. · UneSacra.com

Contents

Introduction

I. I Have Not Come to Destroy the Law

II. My kingdom is not of this world

III. There are many dwellings in my Father's house

IV. No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again

V. Blessed are the afflicted

VI. Christ the Comforter

VII. Blessed are the poor in spirit

VIII. Blessed are the pure in heart

IX. Blessed are the gentle and the peaceable

X. Blessed are the merciful

XI. Love your neighbor as yourself

XII. Love Your Enemies

XIII. Let your left hand not know what your right hand gives

XIV. Honor your father and your mother

XV. Without Charity There Is No Salvation

XVI. No One Can Serve God and Mammon

XVII. Be perfect

XVIII. Many Are Called and Few Are Chosen

XIX. Faith Moves Mountains

XX. The Workers of the Last Hour

XXI. There will be false christs and false prophets

XXII. Do Not Separate What God Has Joined

XXIII. Strange Morality

XXIV. Do Not Put the Lamp under a Bushel

XXV. Seek and You Will Find

XXVI. Give Freely What You Have Freely Received

XXVII. Ask and You Will Receive

XXVIII. Collection of Spiritist Prayers

INTRODUCTION

✦

1 J. Purpose of this work.

2 The material contained in the Gospels can be divided into five parts: the ordinary acts of Christ's life, the miracles, the predictions, the words that served to establish the doctrines of the Church, and moral teaching. While the first four parts have been the subject of controversy, the last has remained unassailable.

2.2 Before this divine code, unbelief itself bows; it is the ground on which all faiths can meet, the banner under which all can find shelter, whatever their beliefs, for it has never been the subject of religious disputes, which have always and everywhere been raised by questions of doctrine.

2.3 In discussing it, moreover, the sects would have found their own condemnation, for most have attached greater importance to the mystical part than to the moral part, which requires self-reform.

2.4 For individuals, it is a rule of conduct embracing every circumstance of private or public life, the principle of all social relations founded on the strictest justice; finally, and above all, it is the unfailing path to future happiness, a corner of the veil lifted from the life to come. This part is the exclusive subject of this work.

3 Everyone admires the morality of the Gospel; everyone proclaims its sublimity and necessity, but many do so on trust, on the strength of what they have heard about it, or on the authority of a few maxims that have be-

come proverbial. Few, however, know it thoroughly, and fewer still understand it and know how to draw its consequences.

3.2 The reason lies largely in the difficulty of reading the Gospel, which is unintelligible to most people. Its allegorical form and the deliberate mysticism of its language lead most people to read it to satisfy their conscience and fulfill a duty, just as they read prayers without understanding them, that is, without benefit.

3.3 The moral precepts, scattered here and there and mingled with the mass of other accounts, pass unnoticed; it then becomes impossible to grasp them as a whole and make them the subject of separate reading and meditation.

4 Treatises on Gospel morality have indeed been written, but arranging it in a modern literary style deprives it of the original simplicity that gives it both its charm and its authenticity. The same is true of isolated maxims reduced to their simplest proverbial expression; they then become mere aphorisms that lose part of their value and interest through the absence of the surrounding details and circumstances in which they were given.

5 To overcome these drawbacks, we have brought together in this work the passages that can properly constitute a code of universal morality, without distinction of faith. In the quotations, we have preserved everything useful to the development of the thought, removing only what was unrelated to the subject.

5.2 We have also scrupulously respected Sacy's original translation, as well as the division into verses. But instead of adhering to a chronological order, which would be impossible and of no real advantage in such a sub-

ject, the maxims have been grouped and methodically arranged according to their nature, so that, as far as possible, they follow from one another.

5.3 References to chapter and verse numbers make it possible to consult the usual arrangement, if desired.

6 This was merely a mechanical task which, by itself, would have been of only secondary use; the essential thing was to make it accessible to everyone by explaining obscure passages and developing all their consequences with a view to applying them to the different circumstances of life. This is what we have tried to do with the help of the good Spirits who assist us.

7 Many points in the Gospel, the Bible, and sacred writers in general are unintelligible, and many even seem irrational, only because the key to understanding their true meaning is lacking. This key is found completely in Spiritism, as those who have studied it seriously have already been able to see for themselves, and as will be recognized even more clearly in the future.

7.2 Spiritism is found everywhere in antiquity and in every age of humanity; traces of it are found everywhere in writings, beliefs, and monuments. Thus, while it opens new horizons for the future, it sheds no less vivid a light on the mysteries of the past.

8 To supplement each precept, we have added a few instructions chosen from those dictated by the Spirits in various countries and through different mediums. Had these instructions come from a single source, they might have been subject to a personal influence or that of their surroundings, whereas the diversity of their origins proves that the Spirits give their teachings everywhere and that no one is privileged in this respect 1.

9 This work is for everyone; each person can draw from it the means of bringing their conduct into harmony with Christ's morality. Spiritists will also find applications that concern them more particularly.

9.2 Thanks to the communications now permanently established between human beings and the invisible world, the law of the Gospel, taught to all nations by the Spirits themselves, will no longer be a dead letter, because everyone will understand it and will be continually urged to put it into practice by the advice of their spiritual guides.

9.3 The instructions of the Spirits are truly the voices of heaven that come to enlighten people and invite them to practice the Gospel.

10 1. We could undoubtedly have provided, on each subject, a greater number of communications obtained in many other cities and Spiritist centers besides those we cite; but above all, we had to avoid the monotony of needless repetition and limit our choice to those which, in substance and form, fitted more particularly within the scope of this work, reserving for later publications those that could not find a place here.

11 As for the mediums, we have refrained from naming any of them; most were not identified at their own request, and it was therefore inappropriate to make exceptions. Besides, the names of the mediums would have added no value to the work of the Spirits; it would thus have been merely a gratification of vanity, to which truly serious mediums attach no importance.

11.2 They understand that, since their role is purely passive, the value of the communications in no way increases their personal merit, and that it would be childish to take pride in an intellectual work to which they lend only mechanical assistance.

12 Enlighten human beings and invite them to practice the Gospel.

13 IL. Authority of Spiritist Doctrine. Universal verification of the teaching of the Spirits.

14 If Spiritist doctrine were a purely human conception, its only guarantee would be the insight of the person who conceived it; yet no one on earth could justifiably claim to possess absolute truth alone.

14.2 If the Spirits who revealed it had manifested themselves to a single person, nothing would guarantee its origin, for one would have to take the word of the person who claimed to have received their teaching.

14.3 Even assuming perfect sincerity on that person's part, they could at most convince those around them; they might have followers, but they would never succeed in bringing everyone together.

15 God willed that the new revelation should reach humanity by a swifter and more trustworthy route; this is why he charged the Spirits with carrying it from one pole to the other, manifesting themselves everywhere, without granting anyone the exclusive privilege of hearing their words.

15.2 One person may be deceived or may deceive themselves; this cannot be so when millions see and hear the same thing: it is a guarantee for each and for all. Besides, one person can be made to disappear, but masses cannot be made to disappear; books can be burned, but Spirits cannot be burned.

15.3 Even if all books were burned, the source of the doctrine would remain inexhaustible, precisely because it is not on earth, because it springs up everywhere, and because everyone can draw from it. In the absence of people to spread it, there will always be the Spirits, who reach everyone and whom no one can reach.

16 It is therefore really the Spirits themselves who spread the teaching, with the help of the countless mediums they bring forth on every side. If it had had only one interpreter, however favored that person might have been, Spiritism would scarcely be known; that interpreter, whatever class they belonged to, would have been the object of prejudice on the part of many people.

16.2 Not all nations would have accepted them, whereas the Spirits, communicating everywhere, to all peoples, all sects, and all parties, are accepted by all. Spiritism has no nationality; it stands outside all particular faiths; it is imposed by no social class, since everyone can receive instructions from relatives and friends beyond the grave.

16.3 It had to be so for it to call all people to brotherhood; had it not placed itself on neutral ground, it would have sustained divisions instead of soothing them.

17 This universality in the teaching of the Spirits gives Spiritism its strength; it is also the reason for its rapid spread. While the voice of a single person, even with the aid of printing, would have taken centuries to reach everyone's ears, thousands of voices are now heard simultaneously at every point on earth, proclaiming the same principles and conveying them to the most ignorant as well as the most learned, so that no one is deprived of their inheritance.

17.2 This is an advantage enjoyed by none of the doctrines that have appeared to this day. If, therefore, Spiritism is a truth, it fears neither human ill will, nor moral revolutions, nor physical upheavals of the globe, because none of these things can affect the Spirits.

18 But this is not the only advantage arising from this exceptional position; Spiritism finds in it an all-powerful safeguard against schisms that might be stirred up either by the ambition of a few or by the contradictions of certain Spirits. These contradictions are certainly a stumbling block, but one that carries within itself the remedy alongside the harm.

19 We know that, because of the differences in their abilities, the Spirits are far from individually possessing the whole truth; that not all are able to penetrate certain mysteries; that their knowledge is proportionate to their purification; that ordinary Spirits know no more than human beings, and less than some; that among them, as among humans, there are presumptuous individuals and false scholars who believe they know what they do not know; rigid theorists who take their ideas for the truth; and finally, that only Spirits of the highest order, those who are entirely freed from matter, have cast off earthly ideas and prejudices.

19.2 But we also know that deceptive Spirits have no scruples about sheltering behind assumed names to gain acceptance for their utopias. It follows that, in everything beyond exclusively moral teaching, the revelations each person may obtain are individual in character and lack authentication; that they must be regarded as the personal opinions of one Spirit or another; and that it would be unwise to accept them and lightly proclaim them as absolute truths.

20 The first test is unquestionably that of reason, to which everything that comes from the Spirits must be subjected, without exception; any theory that plainly contradicts common sense, rigorous logic, and the established facts we possess must be rejected, however respectable the name attached to it.

20.2 But this test is incomplete in many cases, because some people lack sufficient understanding, and many tend to take their own judgment as the sole arbiter of truth. In such cases, what do people do when they do not have absolute confidence in themselves? They seek the opinion of the greatest number, and the opinion of the majority becomes their guide.

20.3 So it must be with regard to the teaching of the Spirits, who themselves provide us with the means to do this.

21 Agreement in the teaching of the Spirits is therefore the best test; but this agreement must also occur under certain conditions. The least reliable of all is when a medium personally questions several Spirits on a doubtful point; it is quite clear that if the medium is under the sway of an obsession, or is dealing with a deceptive Spirit, that Spirit can say the same thing under different names.

21.2 Nor is there sufficient assurance in the agreement that may be obtained through the mediums of a single center, because they may be subject to the same influence.

22 The only sound assurance of the teaching of the Spirits lies in the agreement between revelations made spontaneously through a large number of mediums who are strangers to one another, and in different lands.

23 It is understood that we are not speaking here of communications concerning secondary interests, but of matters connected with the very principles of the doctrine. Experience proves that when a new principle is to be settled, it is taught spontaneously in different places at once, and in an identical manner, if not in form, at least in substance.

23.2 If, therefore, a Spirit chooses to formulate an eccentric system, based solely on its own ideas and apart from the truth, we can be certain that this system will remain confined within narrow limits and will fall before the unanimous instructions given everywhere else, as several examples have already shown.

23.3 It is this unanimity that brought down all the partial systems that arose at the beginning of Spiritism, when everyone explained the phenomena in their own way, before the laws governing relations between the visible and invisible worlds were known.

24 Such is the foundation on which we rely when formulating a principle of the doctrine; we do not present it as true because it agrees with our ideas; we do not in any way set ourselves up as the supreme arbiter of truth, and we say to no one: "Believe this because we tell you so."

24.2 In our own eyes, our opinion is only a personal opinion that may be right or wrong, because we are no more infallible than anyone else. Nor is a principle true for us merely because it is taught to us, but because it has received the confirmation of agreement.

25 In our position, receiving communications from nearly a thousand serious Spiritist centers scattered across the various parts of the globe, we are able to see the principles on which this agreement is established; this observation has guided us to this day, and it will also guide us in the new fields that Spiritism is called upon to explore.

25.2 Thus, by carefully studying communications received from various places, both in France and abroad, we recognize, from the very distinctive nature of the revelations, a tendency to enter a new path, and that the time has come to take a step forward.

25.3 These revelations, sometimes made in veiled language, have often gone unnoticed by many of those who received them; many others believed that they alone had received them.

25.4 Taken separately, they would have no value for us; only their concurrence gives them weight; then, when the time comes to bring them into the full light of publicity, everyone recalls having received instructions along the same lines.

25.5 It is this general movement that we observe and study, with the assistance of our spiritual guides, and that helps us judge whether it is appropriate for us to do something or to refrain.

26 This universal test is a guarantee of the future unity of Spiritism and will invalidate all contradictory theories. It is here that people will seek the criterion of truth in the future. What made the doctrine set out in The Spirits' Book and The Mediums' Book successful is that everyone, everywhere, could receive directly from the Spirits confirmation of their contents.

26.2 If the Spirits had come from all sides to contradict them, these books would long ago have suffered the fate of all fanciful conceptions. Even the support of the press would not have saved them from shipwreck, whereas, deprived of that support, they nevertheless made rapid progress because they had the support of the Spirits, whose goodwill more than compensated for the ill will of people.

26.3 So it will be with all ideas coming from Spirits or people that cannot withstand this test, whose power no one can dispute.

27 Let us suppose, then, that certain Spirits choose to dictate, under some title or other, a book expressing the opposite view; let us even suppose that, with hostile intent and a view to discrediting the doctrine, malice were to produce false communications: what influence could such writings have if they are contradicted on all sides by the Spirits?

27.2 It is the support of the latter that would have to be secured before putting forward a system in their name. Between the system of one and that of all lies the distance from one to infinity.

27.3 What effect can even all the arguments of detractors have on public opinion, when millions of friendly voices, coming from space, arrive from every corner of the universe and within every family to undermine those arguments? Has experience not already confirmed the theory in this respect?

27.4 What has become of all those publications that were supposedly going to destroy Spiritism? Which of them has even halted its progress? Until now, the question had not been considered from this point of view, unquestionably one of the most important; everyone has relied on themselves, but without reckoning with the Spirits.

28 The principle of agreement is also a safeguard against the alterations that might be imposed on Spiritism by sects wishing to take possession of it for their own benefit and adapt it to their liking.

28.2 Anyone who attempted to divert it from its providential purpose would fail, for the very simple reason that the Spirits, through the universality of their teaching, will bring down any modification that departs from the truth.

28.3 From all this emerges a fundamental truth: anyone wishing to obstruct the established and confirmed current of ideas might well cause a small, local, and temporary disturbance, but could never dominate the whole, even in the present, and still less in the future.

29 It follows, moreover, that instructions given by the Spirits on points of the doctrine that have not yet been clarified cannot carry authority as long as they remain isolated; consequently, they should be accepted only with every reservation and as information.

30 Hence the need to exercise the greatest care in publishing them; and if it is thought necessary to publish them, it is important to present them only as individual opinions, more or less probable, but in every case requiring confirmation. This confirmation must be awaited before presenting a principle as an absolute truth, if one does not wish to be accused of carelessness or unthinking credulity.

31 The higher Spirits proceed with extreme wisdom in their revelations; they approach the great questions of the doctrine only gradually, as the mind becomes capable of understanding truths of a higher order, and as circumstances become favorable for putting forward a new idea.

31.2 That is why they did not say everything at the beginning, and have not yet said everything today, never yielding to the impatience of those who are too eager and wish to pick the fruit before it is ripe.

31.3 It would therefore be pointless to try to anticipate the time appointed for each thing by Providence, for then the truly serious Spirits firmly refuse their assistance; but frivolous Spirits, caring little for the truth, answer everything; for this reason, there are always contradictory answers to all premature questions.

32 The principles above do not arise from a personal theory, but are the necessary consequence of the conditions in which the Spirits manifest themselves. It is quite clear that if a Spirit says one thing in one place, while millions of Spirits say the opposite elsewhere, the presumption of truth cannot favor the one who is alone, or almost alone, in its opinion; for a Spirit to claim to be right alone against everyone would be just as illogical as it would be for people.

32.2 Truly wise Spirits, if they do not feel sufficiently informed on a question, never settle it in an absolute manner; they declare that they are treating it only from their own point of view, and themselves advise waiting for confirmation.

33 However great, beautiful, and sound an idea may be, it cannot win everyone's agreement from the outset. The resulting conflicts are the inevitable consequence of the movement taking place; they are even necessary to bring the truth into clearer relief, and it is useful for them to occur at the beginning so that false ideas may wear out more quickly.

33.2 Spiritists who feel any fears about this should therefore be completely reassured. All isolated claims will, by the force of circumstances, fall before the great and powerful criterion of universal testing.

34 People will rally to the unanimous voice of the Spirits, rather than to the opinion of one person; no person, ourselves any more than anyone else, will establish Spiritist orthodoxy; nor will a Spirit coming to impose itself on anyone: it is the whole body of Spirits communicating throughout the earth by God's command; therein lies the essential character of the Spiritist doctrine; therein lies its strength, therein lies its authority.

34.2 God wished his law to rest on an unshakable foundation, which is why he did not make it rest on the fragile head of a single individual. Before this powerful tribunal, which recognizes neither cliques, nor jealous rivalries, nor sects, nor nations, all opposition, all ambition, and all claims to individual supremacy will be shattered; we ourselves would be shattered if we wished to substitute our own ideas for its sovereign decrees; it alone will settle all disputed questions, silence dissension, and determine who is right and who is wrong.

34.3 Before this imposing agreement of all the voices of heaven, what can the opinion of a person or a Spirit do? Less than a drop of water lost in the Ocean, less than a child's voice drowned out by the storm.

35 Universal opinion is therefore the supreme judge, the one that delivers the final verdict; it is formed from all individual opinions; if one of them is true, it has only its relative weight in the balance; if it is false, it cannot outweigh all the others. In this immense convergence, individualities fade away, and this is another defeat for human pride.

36 This harmonious whole is already taking shape; and this century will not pass before it shines in all its splendor, settling every uncertainty; for by then powerful voices will have been given the mission of making themselves heard to rally humanity under the same banner, once the field has been sufficiently plowed. Meanwhile, anyone wavering between two opposing systems can observe the direction in which general opinion is forming: this is a sure indication of the position taken by the majority of Spirits at the various places where they communicate; it is an equally sure sign of which of the two systems will prevail.

37 III. Historical Notes.

38 To understand certain passages of the Gospels properly, it is necessary to know the meaning of several words frequently used in them, which characterize the customs and state of Jewish society at that time. Since these words no longer have the same meaning for us, they have often been misinterpreted, and have thus left a degree of uncertainty. Understanding their meaning also explains the true sense of certain maxims that seem strange at first.

39 Samaritans. After the schism of the ten tribes, Samaria became the capital of the breakaway kingdom of Israel. Destroyed and rebuilt several times, it became, under the Romans, the chief city of Samaria, one of the four divisions of Palestine. Herod, called the Great, adorned it with magnificent monuments and, to flatter Augustus, gave it the name Augusta, or Sebaste in Greek.

40 The Samaritans were almost always at war with the kings of Judah; a deep aversion, dating from the separation, persisted between the two peoples, who avoided all dealings with one another.

40.2 To deepen the division and avoid having to come to Jerusalem to celebrate religious festivals, the Samaritans built a separate temple and adopted certain reforms; they accepted only the Pentateuch, containing the law of Moses, and rejected all the books added to it afterward. Their sacred books were written in Hebrew characters of the greatest antiquity.

40.3 In the eyes of orthodox Jews, they were heretics and, for that very reason, despised, cursed, and persecuted. The antagonism between the two nations therefore arose solely from differences of religious opinion, although their beliefs had the same origin; they were the Protestants of that time.

41 Samaritans can still be found today in some parts of the Levant, particularly in Nablus and Jaffa. They observe the law of Moses more strictly than other Jews and marry only among themselves.

42 Nazarenes, the name given, under the old law, to Jews who vowed, either for life or for a time, to preserve perfect purity; they pledged themselves to chastity, abstinence from alcoholic drinks, and keeping their hair uncut. Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist were Nazarenes.

43 Later, the Jews gave this name to the first Christians, in reference to Jesus of Nazareth.

44 It was also the name of a heretical sect of the first centuries of the Christian era which, like the Ebionites, whose principles it partly adopted, combined the practices of the Mosaic religion with Christian doctrines. This sect disappeared in the fourth century.

45 Publicans. In ancient Rome, this was the name given to knights who leased the right to collect public taxes and were responsible for collecting taxes and revenues of every kind, whether in Rome itself or in other parts of the empire. They were the equivalent of the tax farmers and revenue contractors of the old regime in France, such as still exist in certain countries.

45.2 The risks they ran led people to turn a blind eye to the wealth they often acquired, which in many cases came from extortion and scandalous profits. The name publican was later extended to everyone who handled public funds and to subordinate officials.

45.3 Today, the word is used disparagingly to describe unscrupulous financiers and business agents; people sometimes say, “Greedy as a publican; rich as a publican,” of an ill-gotten fortune.

46 Of all the aspects of Roman rule, taxation was what the Jews found hardest to accept and what caused them the greatest irritation; several revolts followed, and it became a religious question because it was regarded as contrary to the law. A powerful party even formed, headed by a certain Judas, called the Gaulonite, whose principle was the refusal to pay taxes.

46.2 The Jews therefore abhorred taxation and, consequently, everyone responsible for collecting it; hence their aversion to publicans of every rank, among whom there might be very respectable people, but who were despised because of their duties, along with those who associated with them and were included in the same condemnation.

46.3 Jews of standing would have thought that close relations with them compromised their reputation.

47 Toll collectors were tax collectors of the lowest rank, chiefly responsible for collecting duties at the entrance to towns. Their duties corresponded roughly to those of customs officers and collectors of municipal entry duties: they shared in the condemnation of publicans in general.

47.2 This is why, in the Gospel, the name publican is frequently coupled with that of people of ill repute; this description did not imply that they were debauched or disreputable vagrants; it was a term of contempt synonymous with people who were bad company, unworthy of associating with respectable people.

48 Pharisees (from the Hebrew Parasch, division, separation). Tradition formed an important part of Jewish theology; it consisted of the collected interpretations successively given to the meaning of the Scriptures, which had become articles of doctrine.

48.2 Among the teachers, it was the subject of endless discussions, most often over mere questions of words or forms, like the theological disputes and subtleties of medieval scholasticism; from these arose different sects, each claiming a monopoly on truth and, as almost always happens, heartily detesting one another.

49 The most influential of these sects was that of the Pharisees, whose leader was Hillel, a Jewish teacher born in Babylon, the founder of a famous school where it was taught that faith was due to the Scriptures alone. Its origin dates back to the year 180 or 200 BC.

49.2 The Pharisees were persecuted at various times, notably under Hyrcanus, high priest and king of the Jews, Aristobulus, and Alexander, king of Syria; nevertheless, when the latter restored their honors and property, they regained their power, which they retained until the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 of the Christian era, when their name disappeared following the dispersal of the Jews.

50 The Pharisees took an active part in religious controversies. Slavishly observant of outward religious practices and ceremonies, filled with an ardent zeal for making converts, and hostile to innovators, they made a show of great strictness in their principles; but beneath the appearance of meticulous devotion, they concealed dissolute conduct, great pride, and above all an excessive love of power.

50.2 For them, religion was more a means of advancement than the object of sincere faith. They had only the outward appearance and display of virtue; yet through this they exercised great influence over the people, who regarded them as holy figures; this is why they were very powerful in Jerusalem.

51 They believed, or at least professed to believe, in Providence, the immortality of the soul, eternal punishment, and the resurrection of the dead. (Ch. iv, no. 4.)

51.2 Jesus, who valued simplicity and qualities of the heart above all else, and who preferred in the law the spirit that gives life to the letter that kills, devoted himself throughout his mission to exposing their hypocrisy, and consequently made them his bitter enemies; this is why they joined forces with the chief priests to stir up the people against him and have him put to death.

52 Scribes, a name originally given to the secretaries of the kings of Judah and to certain administrators of the Jewish armies; later, this designation was applied specifically to the teachers who taught the law of Moses and interpreted it for the people. They made common cause with the Pharisees, whose principles and hostility toward innovators they shared; this is why Jesus included them in the same condemnation.

53 Synagogue (from the Greek Sunagoguê, assembly, congregation). There was only one temple in Judea, that of Solomon in Jerusalem, where the great religious ceremonies were celebrated. The Jews went there on pilgrimage every year for the principal festivals, such as Passover, the Dedication, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

53.2 It was on these occasions that Jesus made several journeys there. The other towns had no temples, but synagogues, buildings where the Jews gathered on Sabbath days for public prayers under the direction of the elders, scribes, or teachers of the law; readings were also given there from the sacred books, which were explained and commented upon; everyone could take part; this is why Jesus, without being a priest, taught in the synagogues on Sabbath days.

54 Since the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersal of the Jews, the synagogues in the towns where they live have served as their temples for worship.

55 Sadducees, a Jewish sect that formed around the year 248 BC, so named after Zadok, its founder. The Sadducees believed neither in the immortality of the soul, nor in the resurrection, nor in good and evil angels.

55.2 They did, nevertheless, believe in God, but as they expected nothing after death, they served him only for the sake of earthly rewards, to which, in their view, his providence was limited; thus, in their eyes, the satisfaction of the senses was the essential purpose of life.

55.3 As for the Scriptures, they adhered to the text of the ancient law, accepting neither tradition nor any interpretation; they placed good works and the simple fulfillment of the law above outward religious practices. They were, as we can see, the materialists, deists, and sensualists of the time.

55.4 This sect was small, but it included important figures and became a political party constantly opposed to the Pharisees.

56 Essenes or Esseans, a Jewish sect founded around the year 450 BC, in the time of the Maccabees, whose members lived in a kind of monastery and formed among themselves a sort of moral and religious association. They were distinguished by gentle manners and austere virtues, taught the love of God and neighbor and the immortality of the soul, and believed in the resurrection.

56.2 They lived in celibacy, condemned slavery and war, held their property in common, and devoted themselves to agriculture. Opposed to the sensual Sadducees, who denied immortality, and to the Pharisees, who were rigid in outward practices and whose virtue was only apparent, they took no part in the quarrels that divided these two sects.

56.3 Their way of life resembled that of the first Christians, and the moral principles they professed have led some people to think that Jesus belonged to this sect before the beginning of his public mission. What is certain is that he must have known of it, but nothing proves that he was affiliated with it, and everything written on this subject is hypothetical.

57 Therapeutae (from the Greek therapeutaï, derived from thérapeueïn, to serve, to care for; that is, servants of God or healers); Jewish sectarians contemporary with Christ, established mainly in Alexandria in Egypt. They had much in common with the Essenes, whose principles they professed; like them, they devoted themselves to the practice of every virtue. Their diet was extremely frugal; devoted to celibacy, contemplation, and solitary life, they formed a true religious order. Philo, a Jewish Platonist philosopher of Alexandria, was the first to speak of the Therapeutae; he describes them as a sect of Judaism. Eusebius, Saint Jerome, and other Church Fathers think they were Christians. Whether they were Jews or Christians,

it is clear that, like the Essenes, they form the link between Judaism and Christianity.

(1) The Death of Jesus, supposedly written by an Essene brother, is a completely apocryphal book, written to support an opinion, and which contains within itself proof of its modern origin.

58 From the fact that Jesus must have known the sect of the Essenes, it would be wrong to conclude that he drew his doctrine from it, and that, had he lived in another setting, he would have professed other principles.

58.2 Great ideas never emerge suddenly; those based on truth always have forerunners who partly prepare the way for them; then, when the time has come, God sends a man with the mission of gathering, arranging, and completing these scattered elements, and forming them into a whole; in this way the idea, since it does not arrive abruptly, finds minds fully prepared to accept it when it appears.

58.3 So it was with the Christian idea, which was anticipated several centuries before Jesus and the Essenes, and whose main forerunners were Socrates and Plato. Socrates, like Christ, wrote nothing, or at least left no writings; like him, he died the death of criminals, a victim of fanaticism, for having challenged accepted beliefs and placed true virtue above hypocrisy and the pretense of outward forms—in a word, for having fought religious prejudices.

58.4 Just as Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of corrupting the people through his teachings, he too was accused by the Pharisees of his time, for there have been such people in every age, of corrupting the young by proclaiming the doctrine of the unity of God, the immortality of the soul, and the future life.

58.5 Just as we know the doctrine of Jesus only through the writings of his disciples, we know that of Socrates only through the writings of his disciple Plato. We believe it useful to summarize its most striking points here, to show their agreement with the principles of Christianity.

59 To those who would regard this parallel as a desecration, and claim that there can be no likeness between the doctrine of a pagan and that of Christ, we reply that the doctrine of Socrates was not pagan, since its purpose was to combat paganism; that the doctrine of Jesus, more complete and purer than that of Socrates, has nothing to lose by the comparison; that the greatness of Christ's divine mission cannot be diminished by it; and that, moreover, this is history, which cannot be suppressed.

59.2 Humanity has reached a point where the light emerges by itself from beneath the bushel; it is mature enough to look it in the face; so much the worse for those who dare not open their eyes. The time has come to consider things broadly and from above, and no longer from the petty and narrow viewpoint of sectarian and caste interests.

60 These quotations will also prove that, while Socrates and Plato anticipated the Christian idea, the fundamental principles of Spiritism are also found in their doctrine.

61 Summary of the doctrine of Socrates and Plato.

62 I. A human being is an incarnate soul. Before its incarnation, the soul existed united with the primordial types, with the ideas of truth, goodness, and beauty; it separates from them when it incarnates, and, remembering its past, it is more or less tormented by the desire to return to it.

63 The distinction and independence of the intelligent principle and the material principle could not be stated more clearly; this is also the doctrine of the soul's preexistence; of the vague intuition it retains of another world to which it aspires, of its survival beyond the body, of its departure from the spiritual world to incarnate, and of its return to that same world after death; finally, it is the seed of the doctrine of the fallen Angels.

64 II. The soul goes astray and becomes troubled when it uses the body to examine some object; it grows dizzy as though drunk, because it attaches itself to things that are, by their nature, subject to change; whereas, when it contemplates its own essence, it turns toward what is pure, eternal, and immortal, and, being of the same nature, remains attached to it as long as it can; then its wanderings cease, for it is united with what is unchanging, and this state of the soul is what is called wisdom.

65 Thus a person who considers things from below, at ground level, from the material viewpoint, is deceived; to assess them correctly, one must see them from above, that is, from the spiritual viewpoint. The truly wise person must therefore, in a sense, isolate the soul from the body, to see with the eyes of the spirit. This is what Spiritism teaches. (Ch. II, no. 5.)

66 III. As long as we have our body and the soul remains immersed in this corruption, we will never possess the object of our desires: truth. Indeed, the body raises a thousand obstacles for us through the necessity of caring for it; moreover, it fills us with desires, appetites, fears, a thousand fantasies and a thousand follies, so that with it we cannot be wise for even a moment.

66.2 But if it is possible to know anything purely while the soul is united with the body, one of two things must follow: either we will never know the truth, or we will know it after death. Freed from the madness of the body, we will then, we may hope, converse with people who are equally free, and we will know for ourselves the essence of things.

66.3 This is why true philosophers practice dying, and death seems in no way fearful to them. (Heaven and Hell, 1st part, ch. II; 2nd part, ch. I.)

67 Here is the principle of the soul's faculties being obscured through the bodily organs, and of the expansion of those faculties after death. But this concerns only exceptional souls, already purified; it is not the same for impure souls.

68 IV. The impure soul, in this state, is weighed down and drawn back toward the visible world by its horror of what is invisible and immaterial; it then wanders, it is said, around monuments and tombs, near which dark phantoms have sometimes been seen, such as must be the images of souls that have left the body without being completely pure, and that retain something of material form, which allows the eye to perceive them.

68.2 These are not the souls of the good, but of the wicked, who are forced to wander in these places, where they bear the punishment for their first life, and where they continue to wander until the appetites inherent in the material form they have assumed bring them back into a body; and then they doubtless resume the same habits they favored during their first life.

69 Not only is the principle of reincarnation clearly expressed here, but the state of souls still under the sway of matter is described just as Spiritism reveals it through evocations. Furthermore, it is stated that reincarnation in

a material body is a consequence of the soul's impurity, whereas purified souls are freed from it.

69.2 Spiritism says the same thing; it merely adds that a soul that has made good resolutions in its wandering state, and has acquired knowledge, brings with it at rebirth fewer faults, more virtues, and more intuitive ideas than it had in its previous existence; and that each existence thus marks intellectual and moral progress for it. (Heaven and Hell, 2nd part: Examples.)

70 V. After our death, the guardian spirit (daimon, demon) assigned to us during our life leads us to a place where all those who must be taken to Hades to be judged gather. After remaining in Hades for the necessary time, souls are brought back to this life over many long periods.

71 This is the doctrine of guardian Angels or protecting Spirits, and of successive reincarnations after more or less lengthy intervals in the wandering state.

72 VI. Demons fill the interval separating heaven from earth; they are the link that unites the Great Whole with itself. Since the divinity never communicates directly with human beings, it is through demons that the gods interact and converse with them, whether they are awake or asleep.

73 The word daimon, from which demon was derived, was not understood in a bad sense in antiquity as it is in modern times; it did not refer exclusively to malevolent beings, but to all Spirits in general, among whom a distinction was made between the higher Spirits called gods and the less elevated Spirits, or demons properly so called, who communicated directly with human beings.

73.2 Spiritism also says that Spirits populate space; that God communicates with human beings only through pure Spirits charged with conveying his will; that Spirits communicate with them while they are awake and while they are asleep. Replace the word demon with the word Spirit, and you have the Spiritist doctrine; use the word angel, and you have the Christian doctrine.

74 VII. The philosopher's constant concern (as Socrates and Plato understood it) is to take the greatest care of the soul, less for this life, which is only a moment, than with eternity in view. If the soul is immortal, is it not wise to live with eternity in view?

75 Christianity and Spiritism teach the same thing.

76 VIII. If the soul is immaterial, it must go, after this life, to a world that is likewise invisible and immaterial, just as the body, as it decomposes, returns to matter. However, it is important to distinguish clearly between the pure soul, truly immaterial, which nourishes itself, like God, on knowledge and thoughts, and the soul more or less tainted with material impurities that prevent it from rising toward the divine and hold it in the places of its earthly sojourn.

77 Socrates and Plato, as we can see, understood perfectly the different degrees of the soul's dematerialization; they emphasize the difference in the condition of souls resulting from their greater or lesser purity. What they said through intuition, Spiritism proves through the many examples it places before our eyes. (Heaven and Hell, 2nd part.)

78 IX. If death were the dissolution of the entire person, it would be a great gain for the wicked, after their death, to be freed at once from their body, their soul, and their vices. Only those who have adorned their soul, not with an ornament foreign to it, but with one that is its own, will be able to await calmly the hour of their departure for the other world.

79 In other words, this means that materialism, which proclaims nothingness after death, would cancel all subsequent moral responsibility and consequently encourage evil; that the wicked have everything to gain from nothingness; that only those who have shed their vices and enriched themselves with virtues can calmly await their awakening in the other life.

79.2 Through the examples it places before our eyes daily, Spiritism shows us how painful the passage from one life to the other, and entry into the future life, are for the wicked. (Heaven and Hell, Part 2, ch. i.)

80 X. The body retains clearly marked traces of the care it has received or the accidents it has suffered; the same is true of the soul. When stripped of the body, it bears clear traces of its character and affections, and the impressions left upon it by every act of its life.

80.2 Thus the greatest misfortune that can befall a person is to go to the other world with a soul burdened with crimes. You see, Callicles, that neither you, nor Polus, nor Gorgias can prove that we ought to lead any other life that will benefit us when we are there.

80.3 Of so many different opinions, the only one that remains unshakable is that it is better to suffer an injustice than to commit one, and that above all we must strive not to appear good, but to be good. (Conversations of Socrates with his disciples in prison.)

81 Here we find this other essential point, confirmed today by experience: the unpurified soul retains the ideas, tendencies, character, and passions it had on earth. Is not this maxim, It is better to suffer an injustice than to commit one, entirely Christian? It is the same thought that Jesus expresses through this image: "If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer him the other as well." (Ch. xii, nos. 7, 8.)

82 XL. It is one of two things: either death is absolute destruction, or it is the passage of a soul to another place. If everything must be extinguished, death will be like one of those rare nights we spend without dreams and without any awareness of ourselves.

82.2 But if death is only a change of dwelling, a passage to a place where the dead are to gather, what happiness to meet those we have known there! My greatest pleasure would be to examine closely the inhabitants of that dwelling and distinguish there, as here, those who are wise from those who believe themselves wise and are not. But it is time for us to part, I to die, you to live. (Socrates to his judges.)

83 According to Socrates, people who have lived on earth meet again after death and recognize one another. Spiritism shows them continuing the relationships they had, so that death is neither an interruption nor a cessation of life, but a transformation without any break in continuity.

84 Had Socrates and Plato known the teachings that Christ gave five hundred years later, and those that the Spirits now give, they would have spoken no differently. There is nothing surprising in this if we consider that great truths are eternal, and that advanced Spirits must have known them before coming to earth, where they brought them; that Socrates, Plato, and the great philosophers of their time may later have been among those who

assisted Christ in his divine mission, and that they were chosen precisely because they were better able than others to understand his sublime teachings; and finally, that today they may be part of the company of Spirits charged with coming to teach people these same truths.

85 XII. We must never repay injustice with injustice, nor harm anyone, whatever wrong they may have done us. Few people, however, will accept this principle, and those who are divided on this matter can only despise one another.

86 Is this not the principle of charity, which teaches us not to repay evil with evil, and to forgive our enemies?

87 XIII. A tree is known by its fruit. Each action must be judged according to what it produces: it should be called bad when evil comes from it, and good when good comes from it.

88 This maxim, "A tree is known by its fruit," is repeated word for word several times in the Gospel.

89 XIV. Wealth is a great danger. Anyone who loves wealth loves neither himself nor what belongs to him, but something even more foreign to him than what belongs to him. (Ch. xvi.)

90 XV. The finest prayers and the finest sacrifices please the Divinity less than a virtuous soul striving to resemble it. It would be a serious matter if the gods paid more regard to our offerings than to our souls; by this means, the most guilty could win their favor. But no, only those who, through their words and deeds, fulfill what they owe to the gods and to other people are truly just and wise. (Ch. x, nos. 7, 8.)

91 XVI. I call that common lover who loves the body rather than the soul a vicious man. Love is everywhere in nature, inviting us to exercise our intelligence; it is found even in the movement of the stars. It is love that adorns nature with its rich carpets; it adorns itself and makes its home wherever it finds flowers and fragrances. It is also love that gives peace to people, calm to the sea, silence to the winds, and sleep to pain.

92 Love, which should unite people in a bond of brotherhood, is a consequence of Plato's theory of universal love as a law of nature. Socrates said that "love is neither a god nor a mortal, but a great demon," meaning a great Spirit presiding over universal love; it was above all this statement that was held against him as a crime.

93 XVII. Virtue cannot be taught; it comes as a gift from God to those who possess it.

94 This is more or less the Christian doctrine of grace; but if virtue is a gift from God, it is a favor, and we may ask why it is not granted to everyone. On the other hand, if it is a gift, those who possess it deserve no credit for it. Spiritism is more explicit: it says that those who possess virtue have acquired it through their efforts over successive lives, gradually shedding their imperfections. Grace is the strength with which God favors every person of goodwill to cast off evil and do good.

95 XVIII. There is a natural tendency in each of us to notice our own faults far less than those of others.

96 The Gospel says: "You see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but you do not see the beam in your own." (Ch. x, nos. 9, 10.)

97 XIX. If physicians fail in most illnesses, it is because they treat the body without the soul, and because, when the whole is not in good condition, it is impossible for the part to be well.

98 Spiritism provides the key to the relationships between the soul and the body, and proves that each acts continually upon the other. It thus opens a new path for science; by showing it the true cause of certain ailments, it gives it the means to combat them. When science takes into account the action of the spiritual element in the organism, it will fail less often.

99 XX. All people, beginning in childhood, do much more evil than good.

100 This statement by Socrates touches on the serious question of the predominance of evil on earth, a question that cannot be resolved without knowledge of the plurality of worlds and the purpose of the earth, which is inhabited by only a very small fraction of humanity. Spiritism alone provides the solution, which is developed below in chapters II, III, and V.

101 XXI. There is wisdom in not believing you know what you do not know.

102 This is addressed to those who criticize things about which they frequently know nothing at all. Plato completes this thought of Socrates by saying: "Let us first try, if possible, to make them more honest in their words; otherwise, let us pay them no attention and seek only the truth. Let us try to learn, but let us not insult one another."

102.2 This is how Spiritists should act toward their opponents, whether they argue in good or bad faith. If Plato were alive today, he would find things much as they were in his own time, and could speak in the same

way; Socrates too would find people to mock his belief in Spirits and call him mad, along with his disciple Plato.

103 It was for professing these principles that Socrates was first ridiculed, then accused of impiety and condemned to drink hemlock; so true is it that great new truths, arousing against themselves the interests and prejudices they offend, cannot become established without struggle and without making martyrs.

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

I. I HAVE NOT COME TO DESTROY THE LAW

✦

1 Do not think that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets; I have not come to destroy them, but to fulfill them; — for truly I tell you that heaven and earth will not pass away until everything in the law has been perfectly fulfilled, down to a single iota and a single dot. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, vv. 17, 18.)

2 Moses

There are two distinct parts to the Mosaic law: the law of God proclaimed on Mount Sinai, and the civil or disciplinary law established by Moses; the one is unchanging; the other, suited to the customs and character of the people, changes over time.

The law of God is expressed in the following ten commandments:

I. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. — You shall have no other foreign gods before me. — You shall make no carved image, nor any likeness of anything in heaven above or on the earth below, or of anything in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not adore them or offer them supreme worship.

II. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

III. Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy.

IV. Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land that the Lord your God will give you.

V. You shall not kill.

VI. You shall not commit adultery.

VII. You shall not steal.

VIII. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

IX. You shall not desire your neighbor's wife.

X. You shall not desire your neighbor's house, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to him.

This law belongs to all times and all countries, and by that very fact has a divine character. Quite different are the laws established by Moses, who was obliged to use fear to restrain a naturally turbulent and undisciplined people, among whom he had to combat deep-rooted abuses and prejudices acquired during slavery in Egypt. To give his laws authority, he had to attribute a divine origin to them, as all the lawgivers of primitive peoples have done; human authority had to rest on the authority of God; but only the idea of a fearsome God could impress ignorant people whose moral sense and feeling for perfect justice were still little developed. It is quite clear that he who had included in his commandments, "You shall not kill; you shall not harm your neighbor," could not contradict himself by making extermination a duty. The Mosaic laws, properly speaking, were therefore essentially temporary in character.

[3] Christ

Jesus did not come to destroy the law, that is, the law of God; he came to fulfill it, that is, to develop it, give it its true meaning, and adapt it to the degree of human advancement; this is why this law contains the principle of duties toward God and toward one's neighbor, which forms the foundation of his doctrine. As for the laws of Moses properly speaking, he profoundly changed them, both in substance and in form; he constantly opposed the abuse of outward observances and false interpretations, and he

could not have subjected them to a more radical reform than by reducing them to these words: "Love God above all things, and your neighbor as yourself," and by saying: this is the whole law and the prophets.

By these words, "Heaven and earth will not pass away until everything has been fulfilled, down to a single iota," Jesus meant that the law of God had to be fulfilled, that is, practiced throughout the earth, in all its purity, with all its developments and all its consequences; for what would be the use of establishing this law if it were to remain the privilege of a few people or even of a single nation? Since all people are children of God, they are, without distinction, the objects of the same care.

4 But the role of Jesus was not simply that of a moral lawgiver with no authority beyond his own words; he came to fulfill the prophecies that had announced his coming; he drew his authority from the exceptional nature of his Spirit and from his divine mission; he came to teach people that true life is not on earth, but in the kingdom of heaven; to teach them the path that leads there, the means of reconciliation with God, and to forewarn them of the course of things to come in the fulfillment of human destinies.

4.2 Yet he did not say everything, and on many points he confined himself to planting the seeds of truths that he himself declared could not yet be understood; he spoke of everything, but in terms that were more or less explicit; to grasp the hidden meaning of certain words, new ideas and new knowledge had to provide the key, and these ideas could not come before the human mind had reached a certain degree of maturity.

4.3 Science was to contribute greatly to the emergence and development of these ideas; science therefore had to be given time to progress.

[5] Life Spiritism

Spiritism is the new science that comes to reveal to humanity, through irrefutable evidence, the existence and nature of the spiritual world and its relations with the bodily world; it shows us this world no longer as something supernatural, but, on the contrary, as one of the living and ceaselessly active forces of nature, as the source of a host of phenomena previously misunderstood and, for that reason, consigned to the realm of fantasy and marvels. It is to these relations that Christ alludes on many occasions, and this is why many things he said have remained unintelligible or have been misinterpreted. Spiritism is the key by which everything is easily explained.

[6] The Law of the Old Testament is personified in Moses; that of the New Testament is personified in Christ; Spiritism is the third revelation of the law of God, but it is not personified in any individual, because it is the product of teaching given, not by one man, but by the Spirits, who are the voices of heaven, at every point on earth and through an innumerable multitude of intermediaries; it is, in a sense, a collective being encompassing all the beings of the spiritual world, each coming to offer humanity the contribution of their knowledge, to make that world known to them and the fate that awaits them there.

[7] Just as Christ said, “I do not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it,” Spiritism likewise says, “I do not come to destroy the Christian law, but to fulfill it.”

[7.2] It teaches nothing contrary to what Christ teaches, but develops, completes, and explains, in terms clear to everyone, what had been said only in allegorical form; it comes to fulfill, at the foretold times, what

Christ announced, and to prepare the fulfillment of things to come.

7.3 It is therefore the work of Christ, who himself presides, as he likewise announced, over the regeneration now taking place, and prepares the reign of God on earth.

8 Alliance of Science and Religion

Science and religion are the two levers of human intelligence; one reveals the laws of the material world and the other the laws of the moral world; but since both sets of laws have the same source, which is God, they cannot contradict each other; if they negate one another, one must necessarily be wrong and the other right, for God cannot wish to destroy his own work. The incompatibility that people thought they saw between these two orders of ideas stems from a lack of observation and too much exclusiveness on both sides; hence a conflict that gave rise to unbelief and intolerance.

The time has come when the teachings of Christ must receive their complement; when the veil deliberately cast over some parts of that teaching must be lifted; when science, ceasing to be exclusively materialistic, must take the spiritual element into account, and when religion ceases to disregard the organic and immutable laws of matter, these two forces, relying on one another and moving forward together, will lend each other support. Then religion, no longer contradicted by science, will acquire an unshakable power, because it will agree with reason, and the irresistible logic of facts can no longer be used against it.

Science and religion have been unable to agree until now because, each viewing things from its own exclusive standpoint, they rejected one another. Something was needed to fill the gap that separated them, a link to

bring them closer together; this link lies in the knowledge of the laws governing the spiritual world and its relations with the bodily world, laws just as immutable as those governing the movement of the stars and the existence of beings. Once these relations had been established through experience, a new light dawned: faith appealed to reason, reason found nothing illogical in faith, and materialism was defeated. But in this, as in all things, there are people who lag behind until they are swept along by the general movement, which crushes them if they try to resist it instead of yielding to it. An entire moral revolution is taking place at this moment and stirring people's minds; after developing for more than eighteen centuries, it is nearing its fulfillment and will mark a new era in humanity. The consequences of this revolution are easy to foresee; it must bring inevitable changes to social relations, changes that no one has the power to oppose, because they are part of God's purposes and arise from the law of progress, which is a law of God.

[9] Instructions of the Spirits The New Era

God is one, and Moses is the Spirit whom God sent on a mission to make him known, not only to the Hebrews, but also to the pagan peoples. The Hebrew people were the instrument God used to make his revelation through Moses and the prophets, and the vicissitudes of this people were intended to catch people's attention and bring down the veil that concealed the divinity from them.

The commandments of God given through Moses contain the seed of the most far-reaching Christian morality; the commentaries on the Bible narrowed its meaning because, put into practice in all its purity, it would not have been understood at that time; yet the ten commandments of God re-

mained like a shining frontispiece, like the beacon that was to light humanity along the road it had to travel.

The morality taught by Moses was suited to the stage of advancement of the peoples it was called upon to regenerate, and these peoples, still half savage in the development of their souls, would not have understood that God could be worshiped in any way other than through burnt offerings, or that an enemy should be shown mercy. Their intelligence, remarkable in material matters and even in the arts and sciences, was very backward in morality, and they would not have been converted under the influence of an completely spiritual religion; they needed a semi-material representation, such as the Hebrew religion then offered. Thus the burnt offerings spoke to their senses, while the idea of God spoke to their minds.

Christ introduced the purest, most sublime morality; the Christian morality of the Gospel, which must renew the world, bring people together, and make them brothers; which must cause charity and love of one's neighbor to spring from every human heart, and create a common solidarity among all people; a morality, finally, which must transform the earth and make it a dwelling place for Spirits superior to those who inhabit it today. It is the law of progress, to which nature is subject, that is being fulfilled, and Spiritism is the lever God uses to advance humanity.

The time has come when moral ideas must develop to bring about the progress that is part of God's purposes; they must follow the same path traveled by the ideas of freedom, which were their forerunner. But one must not believe that this development will take place without struggles; no, to reach maturity, they need upheavals and discussions, so that they attract the attention of the masses; once that attention is fixed, the beauty and holiness of this morality will strike people's minds, and they will em-

brace a science that gives them the key to the future life and opens the doors of eternal happiness to them. It was Moses who opened the way; Jesus continued the work; Spiritism will complete it. (An Israelite Spirit. Mulhouse, 1861.)

10 One day, God, in his inexhaustible charity, allowed humanity to see truth pierce the darkness; that day was the advent of Christ. After the bright light, darkness returned; the world, after alternations of truth and darkness, was losing its way again. Then, like the prophets of the Old Testament, the Spirits begin to speak and warn you; the world is shaken to its foundations; thunder will rumble; stand firm!

Spiritism is of divine order, since it rests on the very laws of nature, and be assured that everything of divine order has a great and useful purpose. Your world was losing its way; science, developed at the expense of the moral order, while leading you toward material well-being, was serving the spirit of darkness. You know this, Christians: the heart and love must move forward together with science. The reign of Christ, alas, after eighteen centuries, and despite the blood of so many martyrs, has not yet come. Christians, return to the master who wants to save you. Everything is easy for those who believe and love; love fills them with ineffable joy. Yes, my children, the world is shaken; the good Spirits tell you this often enough; bend beneath the wind that heralds the storm, so that you are not overthrown; that is, prepare yourselves, and do not resemble the foolish virgins who were caught unprepared at the bridegroom's arrival.

The revolution now approaching is moral rather than material; the great Spirits, divine messengers, breathe faith into you, so that all of you, enlightened and ardent workers, may make your humble voices heard; for

you are the grain of sand, but without grains of sand there would be no mountains. Therefore, let these words, "We are small," no longer have any meaning for you. To each their mission, to each their work. Does not the ant build the structure of its republic, and do not imperceptible animalcules raise continents? The new crusade has begun; apostles of universal peace and not of war, modern Saint Bernards, look ahead and march forward: the law of the worlds is the law of progress. (Fénelon. Poitiers, 1861.)

11 Saint Augustine is one of the greatest popularizers of Spiritism; he manifests himself almost everywhere; we find the reason for this in the life of this great Christian philosopher. He belongs to that vigorous company of the Fathers of the Church to whom Christianity owes its strongest foundations. Like many others, he was drawn away from paganism, or rather, from the deepest impiety, by the radiance of truth. When, amid his excesses, he felt in his soul that strange vibration that brought him back to himself and made him understand that happiness lay elsewhere than in enervating and fleeting pleasures; when at last, on his road to Damascus, he too heard the holy voice cry out to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" he exclaimed, "My God! My God! Forgive me, I believe, I am a Christian!" and from then on he became one of the firmest supporters of the Gospel. In the remarkable confessions left to us by this eminent Spirit, we can read the words, at once characteristic and prophetic, that he spoke after losing Saint Monica: "I am convinced that my mother will return to visit me and give me advice, revealing to me what awaits us in the future life." What a lesson in these words, and what a striking foresight of the future doctrine! This is why today, seeing that the hour has come to spread the truth he once foresaw, he has become its ardent propagator and multi-

plies himself, so to speak, to answer all who call upon him. (Erastus, disciple of Saint Paul. Paris, 1863.)

Note. Does Saint Augustine therefore come to overthrow what he built? Certainly not; but like so many others, he sees with the eyes of the spirit what he did not see as a man; his freed soul glimpses new light; it understands what it did not understand before; new ideas have revealed to him the true meaning of certain words; on earth he judged things according to the knowledge he possessed, but when a new light dawned for him, he was able to judge them more soundly; thus he had to reconsider his belief concerning incubus and succubus Spirits, and the anathema he had pronounced against the theory of the antipodes. Now that Christianity appears to him in all its purity, he can, on certain points, think differently than he did during his lifetime without ceasing to be a Christian apostle; he can, without renouncing his faith, become a propagator of Spiritism, because he sees in it the fulfillment of the things foretold. In proclaiming it today, he is merely bringing us back to a sounder and more logical interpretation of the texts. The same is true of the other Spirits who find themselves in a similar position.

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

II. MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD

✦

1 Pilate, having gone back into the palace and summoned Jesus, said to him: Are you the king of the Jews? — Jesus answered him: My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my people would have fought to keep me from falling into the hands of the Jews; but my kingdom is not here.
Pilate then said to him: So you are a king? — Jesus replied: You say it; I am a king; I was born and came into this world only to bear witness to the truth; whoever belongs to the truth listens to my voice. (Saint John, chap. xviii, vv. 33, 36, 37.)

2 The future life
With these words, Jesus clearly points to the future life, which he presents on every occasion as the destination toward which humanity is heading, and as something that should be among people's chief concerns on earth; all his maxims relate to this great principle. Without the future life, indeed, most of his moral precepts would have no reason to exist; this is why those who do not believe in the future life, imagining that he speaks only of the present life, do not understand them, or find them childish.
This doctrine may therefore be considered the central principle of Christ's teaching; this is why it is placed among the first subjects at the beginning of this work, because it must be the focus of all people; it alone can account for the anomalies of earthly life and be reconciled with God's justice.

3 The Jews had only very uncertain ideas about the future life; they believed in angels, whom they regarded as the privileged beings of creation, but they did not know that human beings could one day become angels and share their happiness. According to them, obedience to God's laws was rewarded with earthly blessings, the supremacy of their nation, and victories over their enemies; public calamities and defeats were the punishment for their disobedience. Moses could say no more to an ignorant pastoral people, who had to be moved above all by the things of this world. Later, Jesus came to reveal to them that there is another world where God's justice takes its course; this is the world he promises to those who observe God's commandments, and where the good will find their reward; this world is his kingdom; it is there that he is in all his glory, and where he will return when he leaves the earth.

Yet Jesus, adapting his teaching to the condition of the people of his time, did not consider it right to give them the full light, which would have dazzled them without enlightening them, because they would not have understood it; he confined himself, so to speak, to establishing the future life as a principle, as a law of nature from which no one can escape. Every Christian therefore necessarily believes in the future life; but the idea many have of it is vague, incomplete, and for that very reason false in several respects; for a great many, it is merely a belief without absolute certainty; hence their doubts and even their disbelief.

Spiritism came to complete Christ's teaching on this point, as on many others, when people were mature enough to understand the truth. With Spiritism, the future life is no longer a mere article of faith, a hypothesis; it is a material reality demonstrated by facts, for eyewitnesses come to describe it in all its phases and through all its changes of fortune; thus, not

only is doubt no longer possible, but even the most ordinary mind can picture it as it truly is, just as one pictures a country whose detailed description one reads; now, this description of the future life is so detailed, and the conditions of a happy or unhappy existence for those who are there are so rational, that one cannot help thinking that it could not be otherwise, and that this is indeed the true justice of God.

[4] The kingship of Jesus

Everyone understands that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world; but does he not also have a kingship on earth? The title of king does not always imply the exercise of temporal power; it is given by unanimous consent to someone whose genius places him foremost in any field of thought, who towers over his age and influences the progress of humanity. It is in this sense that people say: The king or prince of philosophers, artists, poets, writers, and so on. Does this kingship, born of personal merit and sanctioned by posterity, not often have a far greater influence than the kingship that wears a crown? It is imperishable, while the other is at the mercy of changing fortunes; it is always blessed by future generations, while the other is sometimes cursed. Earthly kingship ends with life; moral kingship still rules, and especially after death. In this respect, is Jesus not a more powerful king than many potentates? He was therefore right to say to Pilate: I am a king, but my kingdom is not of this world. The point of view

[5] A clear and precise idea of the future life gives an unshakable faith in the future, and this faith has immense consequences for people's moral improvement, because it completely changes the point of view from which they regard earthly life. For someone who places himself in thought within spiritual life, which has no end, bodily life is no more than a pas-

sage, a brief stop in an unwelcoming country. The changes of fortune and tribulations of life are no more than incidents that he bears patiently, because he knows that they last only a short time and must be followed by a happier state; death no longer holds any terror; it is no longer the door to nothingness, but the door of deliverance that opens to the exile the entrance to a dwelling of happiness and peace. Knowing that he is in a temporary place rather than a permanent one, he takes life's worries with greater indifference, and this gives him a calmness of mind that softens their bitterness.

Through mere doubt about the future life, a person turns all his thoughts towards earthly life; uncertain of the future, he gives everything to the present; seeing no blessings more precious than those of the earth, he is like a child who sees nothing beyond his toys; there is nothing he will not do to obtain them; the loss of the least of his possessions is a bitter sorrow; a setback, a disappointed hope, an unfulfilled ambition, an injustice he suffers, wounded pride or vanity are so many torments that make his life a perpetual anguish, and thus he willingly subjects himself to real torture at every moment. Taking his point of view from earthly life, at whose center he stands, everything around him assumes vast proportions: the misfortune that strikes him, like the good fortune that falls to others, takes on great importance in his eyes. In the same way, to someone within a city, everything seems large: the people at the top of the social ladder as well as the monuments; but let him move to a mountain, and people and things will seem very small to him.

So it is with someone who regards earthly life from the point of view of the future life: humanity, like the stars in the firmament, is lost in immensity; he then sees that the great and the small mingle like ants on a clod of

earth; that laborers and potentates are the same size, and he pities these short-lived beings who take so much trouble to win a place there that raises them so little and that they will hold for so short a time. Thus, the importance attached to earthly possessions is always in inverse proportion to faith in the future life.

6 If everyone thought this way, some will say, no one would concern themselves with earthly things anymore, and everything here would fall into decline. No; people instinctively seek their well-being, and even when certain that they will remain in a place for only a short time, they still want to be as comfortable, or as little uncomfortable, as possible; there is no one who, finding a thorn beneath his hand, would not remove it to avoid being pricked. Now, the pursuit of well-being compels people to improve everything, driven as they are by the instinct for progress and self-preservation, which is part of the laws of nature. They therefore work out of need, inclination, and duty, and in doing so fulfill the purposes of Providence, which placed them on earth for this end. Only, someone who considers the future attaches merely relative importance to the present, and readily finds comfort for his failures by thinking of the destiny awaiting him.

God therefore does not condemn earthly pleasures, but the abuse of those pleasures to the detriment of the concerns of the soul; those who apply these words of Jesus to themselves are guarded against this abuse: My kingdom is not of this world.

Someone who identifies with the future life is like a rich man who loses a small sum without being disturbed by it; someone who concentrates his thoughts on earthly life is like a poor man who loses everything he owns and falls into despair.

7 Spiritism broadens thought and opens new horizons to it; in place of that narrow and petty view which confines it to the present life, which makes the moment spent on earth the sole and fragile pivot of the eternal future, it shows that this life is only one link in the harmonious and magnificent whole of the Creator's work; it shows the solidarity that connects all the lives of the same being, all the beings of the same world, and the beings of all worlds; it thus gives universal brotherhood a foundation and a reason to exist, whereas the doctrine that the soul is created at the birth of each body makes all beings strangers to one another.

7.2 This solidarity among the parts of a single whole explains what is inexplicable if one considers only a single point. It is this whole that people in Christ's time could not have understood, which is why he reserved knowledge of it for other times.

8 Instructions from the Spirits An earthly kingship

Who better than I can understand the truth of these words of Our Lord: My kingdom is not of this world? Pride was my downfall on earth; who, then, would understand the nothingness of earthly kingdoms if I did not? What did I take with me of my earthly kingship? Nothing, absolutely nothing; and as if to make the lesson more terrible, it did not follow me even to the grave! I was a queen among people, and I believed I would enter the kingdom of heaven as a queen. What disillusionment! What humiliation when, instead of being received there as a sovereign, I saw above me, far above me, people whom I had thought very small and whom I had despised because they were not of noble blood! Oh, how I then understood the barrenness of the honors and grandeur that people seek so eagerly on earth!

To prepare a place for oneself in this kingdom requires self-denial, humility, charity in all its heavenly practice, and goodwill toward everyone; you are not asked what you were or what rank you held, but what good you did, what tears you wiped away.

Oh, Jesus, you said it: your kingdom is not here below, for one must suffer to reach heaven, and the steps of a throne bring us no closer to it; it is life's most painful paths that lead there; seek the way to it, then, through brambles and thorns, and not among flowers.

People chase earthly possessions as though they would keep them forever; but here illusion is gone; they soon realize that they have grasped only a shadow and neglected the only solid and lasting treasures, the only ones that benefit them in the heavenly dwelling, the only ones that can open its doors to them.

Have pity on those who have not gained the kingdom of heaven; help them with your prayers, for prayer brings people closer to the Most High; it is the link between heaven and earth: do not forget this. (A queen of France. Le Havre, 1863.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

III. THERE ARE MANY DWELLINGS IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

✦

1 Do not let your heart be troubled. — You believe in God; believe also in me. — There are many dwellings in my Father's house; if this were not so, I would already have told you, for I am going to prepare the place; — and after I have gone and prepared the place for you, I will return and take you to myself, so that where I am, you may also be. (Saint John, ch. xiv, v. 1,2, 3.)

2 Different states of the soul in the wandering state

The Father's house is the universe; the different dwellings are the worlds that move through infinite space and offer incarnate Spirits places to live suited to their advancement.

Apart from the diversity of worlds, these words can also be understood as referring to the happy or unhappy state of the Spirit in the wandering state. Depending on how purified it is and how free it is from material bonds, its surroundings, the appearance of things, the sensations it experiences, and the perceptions it possesses vary infinitely; while some cannot move away from the sphere in which they lived, others rise and travel through space and the worlds; while certain guilty Spirits wander in darkness, the happy ones enjoy a radiant light and the sublime spectacle of infinity; while, finally, the wicked person, tormented by remorse and regret, often alone, without comfort, separated from those they love, groans in the grip of moral suffering, the righteous person, reunited with loved ones,

tastes the sweetness of indescribable bliss. There too, then, are many dwellings, although they are neither bounded nor confined to particular places.

3 Different categories of inhabited worlds

From the teaching given by the Spirits, it follows that the various worlds have very different conditions regarding the degree of advancement or inferiority of their inhabitants. Among them are some whose inhabitants are still inferior to those of the earth, physically and morally; others are at the same level, and others are more or less superior to it in every respect. In the lower worlds, existence is entirely material, the passions reign supreme, and moral life is almost nonexistent. As moral life develops, the influence of matter diminishes, so that in the most advanced worlds, life is, so to speak, entirely spiritual.

4 In the intermediate worlds there is a mixture of good and evil, with one or the other predominating according to the degree of advancement. Although the various worlds cannot be classified in absolute terms, they can nevertheless, according to their state and purpose, and on the basis of the clearest distinctions, be divided generally as follows: primitive worlds, assigned to the first incarnations of the human soul; worlds of atonement and trials, where evil predominates; regenerating worlds, where souls that still have atonement to make draw new strength while resting from the weariness of struggle; happy worlds, where good prevails over evil; celestial or divine worlds, the dwelling places of purified Spirits, where good reigns alone.

4.2 The earth belongs to the category of worlds of atonement and trials, which is why human beings face so many hardships there.

5 Spirits incarnated on a world are not bound to it indefinitely, and do not complete there all the stages of progress they must pass through to reach perfection. When they have reached on one world the degree of advancement it allows, they pass to another, more advanced world, and so on until they have reached the state of pure Spirits.

5.2 These are so many stopping places, at each of which they find means of progress suited to their advancement. For them, passing to a world of a higher order is a reward, just as prolonging their stay in an unhappy world is a punishment, or being relegated to a world even more unhappy than the one they are forced to leave, when they have persisted in evil.

6 The purpose of the earth. Causes of human suffering

People are astonished to find on earth so much wickedness and so many evil passions, so much misery and so many infirmities of every kind, and conclude that the human race is a sorry thing. This judgment arises from the narrow viewpoint they adopt, which gives a false idea of the whole. We must consider that on earth we do not see all of humanity, but a very small fraction of it. Indeed, the human race includes all beings endowed with reason who populate the countless worlds of the universe; now, what is the population of the earth compared with the total population of these worlds? Far less than that of a hamlet compared with that of a great empire. The material and moral condition of earthly humanity is no longer surprising once we understand the purpose of the earth and the nature of those who inhabit it.

7 We would form a very false idea of the inhabitants of a great city if we judged them by the population of its lowest and most squalid neighborhoods. In a hospital, we see only the sick or the disabled; in a penal colony,

we see every kind of depravity and vice gathered together; in unhealthy regions, most inhabitants are pale, frail, and sickly. Well then, let us picture the earth as an outlying district, a hospital, a penitentiary, an unhealthy country, for it is all these at once, and we will understand why afflictions outweigh pleasures, for healthy people are not sent to hospitals, nor those who have done no wrong to houses of correction; and neither hospitals nor houses of correction are places of delight.

Now, just as the whole population of a city is not in hospitals or prisons, all of humanity is not on earth; just as people leave the hospital when they are cured, and prison when they have served their time, human beings leave the earth for happier worlds when they are cured of their moral infirmities.

8 Instructions from the Spirits I Lower worlds and higher worlds

The designation of lower worlds and higher worlds is relative rather than absolute; a given world is lower or higher in relation to those above or below it on the scale of progress.

Taking the earth as a point of comparison, we can form an idea of the state of a lower world by imagining its people at the level of the savage races or barbarian nations still found on the earth's surface, which are remnants of its primitive state. In the most backward worlds, the beings who inhabit them are, in a sense, rudimentary; they have the human form, but without any beauty; their instincts are tempered by no feeling of sensitivity or kindness, nor by any notions of right and wrong; brute force alone makes the law there. Without industry or inventions, the inhabitants spend their lives obtaining their food. Yet God abandons none of his creatures; in the depths of intellectual darkness lies, latent, the vague intuition of a

Supreme Being, developed to a greater or lesser degree. This instinct is enough to make some superior to others and to prepare their emergence into a fuller life; for they are not degraded beings, but children who are growing.

Between these lower degrees and the highest, there are countless steps, and in the pure Spirits, freed from matter and radiant with glory, it is difficult to recognize those who animated these primitive beings, just as it is difficult to recognize the embryo in the adult.

9 In worlds that have reached a higher degree, the conditions of moral and material life are quite different even from those on earth. The body's form is always, as everywhere, the human form, but made more beautiful, perfected, and above all purified. The body has none of earthly materiality and is consequently subject neither to the needs, nor the illnesses, nor the deterioration caused by the predominance of matter; the senses, more refined, have perceptions that the coarseness of the organs stifles here below; the specific lightness of bodies makes movement swift and easy; instead of dragging itself painfully over the ground, the body glides, so to speak, over its surface, or floats in the atmosphere with no effort beyond that of the will, in the way angels are depicted, or the ancients imagined the shades in the Elysian Fields. People retain, as they wish, the features of their past migrations and appear to their friends as they knew them, but illuminated by a divine light, transfigured by their inner impressions, which are always elevated. Instead of dull faces, ravaged by suffering and passions, intelligence and life shine with that radiance which painters have expressed through the nimbus or halo of the saints.

The little resistance that matter offers to Spirits who are already very ad-

vanced makes bodily development rapid and childhood short or almost nonexistent; life, free from worries and anguish, is proportionately much longer than on earth. In principle, longevity is proportional to the degree of advancement of the worlds. Death there has none of the horrors of decomposition; far from being a cause for dread, it is regarded as a happy transformation, because doubt about the future does not exist there. During life, the soul, not being enclosed in compact matter, radiates and enjoys a lucidity that places it in an nearly permanent state of emancipation and allows the free transmission of thought.

10 In these happy worlds, relations between peoples, always friendly, are never disturbed by the ambition to enslave their neighbors, nor by the war that follows. There are neither masters nor slaves, nor privileges of birth; moral and intellectual superiority alone establishes differences in station and confers supremacy.

10.2 Authority is always respected, because it is granted only to merit and is always exercised with justice. People do not seek to rise above others, but above themselves by becoming better. Their goal is to attain the rank of pure Spirits, and this constant desire is not a torment, but a noble ambition that leads them to study eagerly in order to become their equals.

10.3 All the tender and elevated feelings of human nature are expanded and purified there; hatred, petty jealousy, and the base cravings of envy are unknown; a bond of love and brotherhood unites all people; the stronger help the weaker.

10.4 They possess more or less according to how much they have acquired through their intelligence, but no one suffers from a lack of necessities, because no one there is undergoing atonement; in a word, evil does

not exist there.

11 In your world, you need evil to feel good, night to admire light, and illness to appreciate health; there, these contrasts are unnecessary; eternal light, eternal beauty, and eternal calm of the soul bring eternal joy, disturbed neither by the anguish of material life nor by contact with the wicked, who have no access there.

11.2 This is what the human mind has the greatest difficulty understanding; it has been ingenious in depicting the torments of hell, but has never been able to imagine the joys of heaven; and why is this?

11.3 Because, being inferior, it has endured only pain and misery, and has not glimpsed the celestial light; it can speak only of what it knows; but as it rises and becomes purified, the horizon brightens, and it understands the good that lies before it, just as it understood the evil it has left behind.

12 Yet these fortunate worlds are not privileged worlds, for God is partial to none of his children; he gives everyone the same rights and the same opportunities to reach them; he makes them all start from the same point, and endows none more richly than the others; the highest ranks are open to all: it is for them to win them through their work; it is for them to reach them as soon as possible, or to languish for centuries upon centuries in the lowest depths of humanity. (Summary of information from all the higher Spirits.) Worlds of expiation and trials.

13 What can I tell you about worlds of expiation that you do not already know, since you need only consider the earth you inhabit? The superior intelligence of a great many of its inhabitants shows that it is not a primitive world intended for the incarnation of Spirits who have barely left the Creator's hands. The innate qualities they bring with them are proof that

they have already lived and have made some progress; but the many vices to which they are prone also indicate great moral imperfection; this is why God has placed them on an unyielding earth, to atone for their faults through arduous work and the hardships of life, until they have earned the right to go to a happier world.

\ 4. Yet not all the Spirits incarnated on earth are sent there to atone. The races you call savage are Spirits who have barely emerged from childhood, and who are there, so to speak, to be educated, developing through contact with more advanced Spirits. Next come the partly civilized races, made up of these same Spirits as they progress. These are, in a sense, the indigenous races of the earth, which have grown little by little over long periods of centuries, and some of which have been able to attain the intellectual development of the most enlightened peoples.

The Spirits undergoing expiation there are, if one may put it this way, foreign; they have already lived on other worlds from which they were excluded because of their persistence in evil, and because they were a source of trouble for the good; they have been relegated for a time to the company of less advanced Spirits, whom they have the mission of helping to advance, for they have brought with them their developed intelligence and the seeds of the knowledge they have acquired; this is why the Spirits undergoing punishment are found among the most intelligent races; these are also the races for whom life's hardships are most bitter, because they have greater sensitivity and are more deeply affected by hurt than the primitive races, whose moral sense is duller.

15 The earth thus provides one example of worlds of expiation, whose varieties are infinite, but whose common feature is to serve as a place of exile for Spirits who rebel against God's law.

15.2 There these Spirits must struggle both against human perversity and against the harshness of nature, a twofold arduous task that develops the qualities of the heart and those of the intelligence at the same time. Thus God, in his goodness, makes even punishment serve the Spirit's progress. (Saint Augustine. Paris, 1862.) Regenerating worlds.

16 Among those stars that sparkle in the azure vault, how many worlds there are, like yours, designated by the Lord for expiation and trial! But there are also worlds more wretched and worlds better than yours, as well as transitional worlds that may be called regenerating.

16.2 Each planetary whirl, moving through space around a common center, carries with it its worlds of primitive life, exile, trial, regeneration, and bliss. You have been told of those worlds where the newborn soul is placed, when, still ignorant of good and evil, it can walk toward God, master of itself and in possession of its free will; you have been told what ample faculties the soul has been endowed with to do good; but, alas, some souls succumb, and God, unwilling to destroy them, allows them to go to those worlds where, from incarnation to incarnation, they purify themselves, regenerate themselves, and will return worthy of the glory that was intended for them.

17 Regenerating worlds serve as a transition between worlds of expiation and happy worlds; there the repentant soul finds calm and rest as it completes its purification. Certainly, in these worlds, human beings are still subject to the laws that govern matter; humanity experiences your sensa-

tions and desires, but is free from the unruly passions to which you are enslaved; there is no longer pride that silences the heart, envy that torments it, or hatred that stifles it; the word love is written on every brow; perfect fairness governs social relations; all show one another God, and strive to go to him by following his laws.

Yet perfect happiness is not there yet; it is the dawn of happiness. Human beings there are still flesh, and for that very reason subject to changes of fortune from which only completely dematerialized beings are exempt; they still have trials to undergo, but these do not bring the piercing anguish of expiation. Compared with the earth, these worlds are very happy, and many of you would be content to remain there, for it is calm after the storm, recovery after a cruel illness; but human beings, less absorbed by material things, glimpse the future more clearly than you do; they understand that there are other joys the Lord promises to those who make themselves worthy of them, when death has once again reaped their bodies to give them true life. Then the liberated soul will soar over every horizon; no more material and coarse senses, but the senses of a pure and heavenly perispirit, breathing in the emanations of God himself through the fragrances of love and charity that flow from his bosom.

18 But, alas, in these worlds human beings are still fallible, and the Spirit of evil has not completely lost its sway. To fail to advance is to go backward, and anyone who is not steadfast on the path of good may fall back into the worlds of expiation, where new and more terrible trials await.

So contemplate that azure vault in the evening, at the hour of rest and prayer, and among those countless spheres shining above your heads, ask yourselves which ones lead to God, and pray to him that a regenerating

world may open its bosom to you after your expiation on earth. (Saint Augustine. Paris, 1862.)

Progression of worlds

19 Progress is one of the laws of nature; all beings in creation, animate and inanimate, are subject to it through the goodness of God, who wishes everything to grow and prosper. Even destruction, which seems to human beings to be the end of things, is only a means of reaching a more perfect state through transformation, for everything dies to be reborn, and nothing returns to nothingness. As living beings progress morally, the worlds they inhabit progress materially. Anyone who could follow a world through its various phases, from the moment when the first atoms that formed it came together, would see it ascend an ever-progressing scale, but by degrees imperceptible to each generation, offering its inhabitants a more pleasant dwelling as they themselves advance along the path of progress. Thus the progress of human beings, of the animals that assist them, of plants, and of their dwelling proceeds in parallel, for nothing in nature stands still. How great this idea is, and how worthy of the Creator's majesty! And how small, by contrast, and unworthy of his power is the idea that confines his care and providence to the earth's imperceptible grain of sand, and limits humanity to the few people who inhabit it!

Following this law, the earth was once in a lower material and moral state than it is today, and will reach a more advanced level in both respects. It has reached one of its periods of transformation, when it will change from

a world of expiation into a regenerating world; then human beings will be happy there because God's law will reign there. (Saint Augustine, Paris, 1862.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

IV. NO ONE CAN SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD UNLESS THEY ARE BORN AGAIN

✦

1 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he questioned his disciples and said to them: What do people say about the Son of Man? Who do they say I am? — They answered him: Some say you are John the Baptist; others Elijah; others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.
— Jesus said to them: And you, who do you say I am?
— Simon Peter spoke up and said to him: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. — Jesus answered him: Blessed are you, Simon, son of John, because flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. (Saint Matthew, ch. xvi, vv. 13 to 17; Saint Mark, ch. viii, vv. 27 to 30.)

2 Meanwhile, Herod the Tetrarch heard about everything Jesus was doing, and he was perplexed, — because some said that John had risen from the dead; others that Elijah had appeared, and others that one of the ancient prophets had risen. — Then Herod said: I had John beheaded; but who is this man about whom I hear such great things? And he wanted to see him. (Saint Mark, ch. vi, vv. 14, 15; Saint Luke, ch. ix, vv. 7, 8, 9.)

3 (After the transfiguration.) His disciples then questioned him and said: Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must return first? — But Jesus answered them: It is true that Elijah must return and restore all things; —

but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but treated him as they pleased.

3.2 In the same way they will make the Son of Man suffer. — Then his disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist. (Saint Matthew, ch. xvii, vv. 10 to 13; Saint Mark, ch. ix, vv. 10, 11, 12.)

4 Resurrection and reincarnation

Reincarnation was among the Jewish doctrines under the name of resurrection; only the Sadducees, who thought that everything ends at death, did not believe in it. The Jews' ideas on this point, as on many others, were not clearly defined, because they had only vague and incomplete notions about the soul and its connection with the body. They believed that a person who had lived could live again, without clearly understanding how this could happen; they used the word resurrection for what Spiritism more aptly calls reincarnation. Indeed, resurrection implies the return to life of the body that has died, which science shows to be physically impossible, especially when the elements of that body have long since been scattered and absorbed. Reincarnation is the return of the soul or Spirit to bodily life, but in another body newly formed for it, which has nothing in common with the former one. The word resurrection could therefore apply to Lazarus, but not to Elijah or the other prophets. If, then, according to their belief, John the Baptist was Elijah, John's body could not have been Elijah's, since people had seen John as a child and knew his father and mother. John could therefore have been Elijah reincarnated, but not resurrected.

[5] Now there was a man among the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a senator of the Jews, — who came to Jesus at night and said to him: Master, we know that you have come from God to instruct us as a teacher; for no one could perform the miracles you perform unless God were with him.
Jesus answered him: Truly, truly, I tell you: No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.
Nicodemus said to him: How can a man who is already old be born? Can he enter his mother's womb again to be born a second time?
Jesus answered him: Truly, truly, I tell you: Unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. — What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is Spirit. — Do not be surprised that I told you that you must be born again. — The Spirit blows where it wishes, and you hear its voice, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with every man who is born of the Spirit.
Nicodemus answered him: How can this happen? — Jesus said to him: What! You are a teacher in Israel, and you do not know these things! — Truly, truly, I tell you that we speak only of what we know, and testify only to what we have seen; yet you will not accept our testimony. — But if you do not believe me when I speak to you of earthly things, how will you believe me when I speak to you of heavenly things? (Saint John, ch. iii, vv. 1 to 12.)

[6] The idea that John the Baptist was Elijah, and that the prophets could live again on earth, appears in many passages of the Gospels, particularly those quoted above (nos. 1, 2, 3).

6.2 If this belief had been an error, Jesus would not have failed to challenge it, as he challenged so many others; far from doing so, he endorses it with all his authority, and establishes it as a principle and a necessary condition when he says: No one can see the kingdom of heaven unless they are born again; and he insists by adding: Do not be surprised that I tell you that you must be born again.

7 These words: "Unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit," have been interpreted as meaning regeneration through the water of baptism; but the original text simply read: Is born again of water and the Spirit, whereas, in certain translations, of the Spirit has been replaced by: of the Holy Spirit, which no longer conveys the same meaning. This crucial point emerges from the earliest commentaries on the Gospel, as will one day be established beyond any possible doubt!

8 To understand the true meaning of these words, we must also consider the meaning of the word water, which was not used in its literal sense.
The ancients' knowledge of the physical sciences was very imperfect; they believed that the earth had emerged from the waters, which is why they regarded water as the ultimate generative element; thus it is said in Genesis: "The Spirit of God was borne upon the waters; floated on the surface of the waters; — Let the firmament be made in the midst of the waters; — Let the waters beneath the sky gather in one place, and let the dry element appear; — Let the waters produce living creatures that swim in the water, and birds that fly over the earth and beneath the firmament."
According to this belief, water had become the symbol of material nature, just as the Spirit was the symbol of intelligent nature. These words: "Unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit, or in water and in

Spirit," therefore mean: "Unless a man is born again with his body and his soul." This is the sense in which they were understood at first.

This interpretation is also supported by these other words: What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Here Jesus makes a definite distinction between the Spirit and the body. What is born of the flesh is flesh clearly indicates that the body alone comes from the body, and that the Spirit is independent of the body.

(1) Osterwald's translation conforms to the original text; it reads: is born again of water and the Spirit; Sacy's says: of the Holy Spirit; Lamennais's: of the Holy Spirit.

9 The Spirit blows where it wishes; you hear its voice, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes, may be understood as referring to the Spirit of God, who gives life to whomever he wishes, or to the human soul; in this latter sense, "You do not know where it comes from or where it goes" means that we know neither what the Spirit has been nor what it will be.

9.2 If the Spirit, or soul, were created at the same time as the body, we would know where it comes from, since we would know its beginning. In any case, this passage affirms the principle of the soul's preexistence, and consequently of the plurality of existences.

10 Now, from the time of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of Heaven is taken by force, and the violent seize it; — for, until John, all the prophets, as well as the law, prophesied; — and if you wish to understand what I tell you, he himself is Elijah who is to come. — Let anyone who has ears to hear listen. (Saint Matthew, ch. xi, vv. 12 to 15.) 11. If the principle of reincarnation expressed in Saint John could, strictly speaking, be inter-

preted in a purely mystical sense, the same cannot be said of this passage from Saint Matthew, which leaves no room for ambiguity: he himself is Elijah who is to come; there is neither a figure of speech nor an allegory here: it is a definite affirmation. — "From the time of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven is taken by force." What do these words mean, since John the Baptist was still alive at that time? Jesus explains them by saying: "If you wish to understand what I say, he himself is Elijah who is to come." Now, John being none other than Elijah, Jesus is referring to the time when John lived under the name of Elijah. "Until now, the kingdom of heaven is taken by force" is another allusion to the violence of the Mosaic law, which commanded the extermination of unbelievers in order to gain the Promised Land, the Paradise of the Hebrews, whereas, under the new law, heaven is gained through charity and gentleness.
Then he adds: Let anyone who has ears to hear listen. These words, so often repeated by Jesus, clearly state that not everyone was able to understand certain truths.

12 Those of your people who were put to death will live again; those who were killed in my midst will rise again. Awaken from your sleep, and sing the praises of God, you who dwell in the dust; because the dew that falls upon you is a dew of light, and you will lay waste to the earth and the reign of the giants. (Isaiah, ch. xxvi, v. 19.)

13 This passage from Isaiah is just as explicit: "Those of your people who were put to death will live again." If the prophet had meant spiritual life, if he had meant that those who were put to death were not dead in Spirit, he would have said: They still live, and not will live again.

13.2 In the spiritual sense, these words would be meaningless, since they would imply an interruption in the life of the soul. In the sense of moral regeneration, they would deny eternal punishment, since they establish the principle that all those who have died will live again.

14 But once a man has died, and his body, separated from his spirit, has been consumed, what becomes of him? — Once a man has died, could he indeed live again? In this war in which I find myself every day of my life, I wait for my change to come. (Job, ch. xiv, vv. 10, 14. Translation by Le Maistre de Sacy.)

When a man dies, he loses all his strength, he breathes his last; then where is he? — If a man dies, will he live again? Shall I wait every day of my struggle until some change comes to me? (Ibid. Osterwald's Protestant translation.)

When a man has died, he lives on; as I finish the days of my earthly existence, I will wait, for I will return to it again. (Ibid. Version of the Greek Church.)

15 The principle of the plurality of existences is clearly expressed in these three versions. We cannot suppose that Job meant to speak of regeneration through the water of baptism, which he certainly knew nothing about. "Once a man has died, could he live again?" The idea of dying once and living again implies that of dying and living again several times. The version of the Greek Church is even more explicit, if that is possible. "When the days of my earthly existence end, I shall wait, for I shall return to it;" that is, I shall return to earthly existence. This is as clear as if someone said: "I am leaving my house, but I shall return to it."

"In this war in which I find myself every day of my life, I wait for my

change to come." Job clearly means the struggle he wages against the miseries of life; he awaits his change, that is, he resigns himself. In the Greek version, I shall wait seems to apply more to the new existence: "When my earthly existence is over, I shall wait, for I shall return to it;" Job seems to place himself, after his death, in the interval separating one existence from another, and to say that there he will await his return.

16 There is therefore no doubt that, under the name of resurrection, the principle of reincarnation was one of the fundamental beliefs of the Jews; that it is formally confirmed by Jesus and the prophets; from which it follows that to deny reincarnation is to reject the words of Christ. His words will one day carry authority on this point, as on many others, when they are considered without prejudice.

17 But to this authority, from the religious point of view, is added, from the philosophical point of view, that of the evidence resulting from the observation of facts; when we seek to trace effects back to their causes, reincarnation appears as an absolute necessity, as a condition inherent in humanity, in a word, as a law of nature; it reveals itself through its results in an almost tangible way, just as a hidden motor reveals itself through movement; it alone can tell people where they come from, where they are going, why they are on earth, and account for all the anomalies and apparent injustices that life presents 1.

Without the principle of the soul's preexistence and the plurality of existences, most of the maxims of the Gospel are unintelligible; this is why they have given rise to such contradictory interpretations; this principle is

the key that must restore their true meaning.

Family ties strengthened by reincarnation and broken by a single existence.

18 Family ties are by no means destroyed by reincarnation, as some people think; on the contrary, they are strengthened and drawn closer: it is the opposite principle that destroys them.

Spirits form groups or families in space, united by affection, sympathy, and similarity of inclinations; these Spirits, happy to be together, seek one another out; incarnation separates them only briefly, for after returning to the wandering state, they meet again like friends returning from a journey. Often they even follow one another into incarnation, where they are brought together in the same family or the same circle, working together for their mutual advancement. If some are incarnate and others are not, they are no less united in thought; those who are free watch over those who are in captivity; the more advanced seek to help the stragglers progress. After each existence, they have taken a step along the path to perfection; less and less attached to matter, their affection is all the stronger because it is purer, because it is no longer disturbed by selfishness or by the clouds of passion. They can thus pass through an unlimited number of bodily existences without any harm being done to their mutual affection. It is understood that this concerns true affection from soul to soul, the only kind that survives the destruction of the body, for beings who are united here below only through the senses have no reason to seek one another out in the world of Spirits. Only spiritual affections endure; fleshly affections die out with the cause that gave rise to them; now, that cause no longer exists in the world of Spirits, whereas the soul still exists. As for peo-

ple united solely by self-interest, they are really nothing to one another: death separates them on earth and in heaven.

(1) For further discussion of the doctrine of reincarnation, see The Spirits' Book, ch. iv and v; What Is Spiritism?, ch. ii, by Allan Kardec; The Plurality of Existences, by Pezzani.

19 The unity and affection that exist between relatives are signs of the earlier sympathy that brought them together; thus, when speaking of a person whose character, tastes, and inclinations bear no resemblance to those of their relatives, people say that they do not belong to the family. In saying this, they state a greater truth than they realize.

19.2 God allows these incarnations of Spirits who are hostile or strangers to one another within families for the double purpose of serving as a trial for some and a means of advancement for others.

19.3 Then the bad gradually improve through contact with the good and through the care they receive from them; their character softens, their conduct becomes purer, their antipathies fade; this is how different categories of Spirits blend together, just as races and peoples do on earth.

20 The fear of an indefinite increase in the number of relatives as a result of reincarnation is a selfish fear, proving that one does not feel capable of a love broad enough to extend to a great many people. Does a father with several children love them any less than if he had only one? But let the selfish be reassured: this fear is unfounded.

20.2 Because a man has had ten incarnations, it does not follow that he will find ten fathers, ten mothers, ten wives, and a corresponding number of children and new relatives in the world of Spirits; he will always find

there only the same people he loves who were attached to him on earth in different capacities, and perhaps in the same capacity.

21 Let us now consider the consequences of the doctrine of non-reincarnation. This doctrine necessarily rules out the preexistence of the soul; since souls are created at the same time as the body, no earlier bond exists between them; they are complete strangers to one another; the father is a stranger to his son; family descent is thus reduced to bodily descent alone, without any spiritual bond.

21.2 There is therefore no reason to take pride in having had this or that illustrious person among one's ancestors. With reincarnation, ancestors and descendants may have known one another, lived together, loved one another, and may find themselves reunited later to strengthen their bonds of sympathy.

22 So much for the past. As for the future, according to one of the fundamental doctrines arising from non-reincarnation, the fate of souls is irrevocably fixed after a single existence; the final fixing of their fate implies the end of all progress, for if there is any progress at all, their fate is no longer final; depending on whether they have lived well or badly, they go immediately to the abode of the blessed or to eternal hell; they are thus immediately separated forever, with no hope of ever coming together again, so that fathers, mothers and children, husbands and wives, brothers, sisters, and friends can never be certain of seeing one another again: this is the most absolute breaking of family ties.

With reincarnation, and the progress that follows from it, all those who have loved one another meet again on earth and in space, and move onward together toward God. If some falter along the way, they delay their

advancement and their happiness, but all hope is not lost; helped, encouraged, and supported by those who love them, they will one day emerge from the mire in which they are caught. Finally, with reincarnation, there is perpetual solidarity between the incarnate and the discarnate, hence the strengthening of bonds of affection.

23 In summary, four alternatives lie before humanity for its future beyond the grave: 1° nothingness, according to materialist doctrine; 2° absorption into the universal whole, according to pantheist doctrine; 3° individuality with a permanently fixed fate, according to the doctrine of the Church; 4° individuality with indefinite progress, according to Spiritist doctrine. According to the first two, family ties are broken after death, and there is no hope of meeting again; with the third, there is a chance of seeing one another again, provided that one is in the same realm, and that realm may be hell as well as paradise; with the plurality of existences, which is inseparable from gradual progress, there is certainty that relationships between those who have loved one another will continue, and this is what constitutes the true family.

24 Instructions from the Spirits Limits of incarnation

What are the limits of incarnation?

Strictly speaking, incarnation has no clearly defined limits, if by it we mean the covering that constitutes the Spirit's body, since the material nature of this covering diminishes as the Spirit becomes purer. In certain worlds more advanced than earth, it is already less compact, less heavy, and less coarse, and consequently subject to fewer vicissitudes; at a higher degree, it is translucent and almost fluidic; from degree to degree, it loses its material nature and eventually merges with the perispirit. Depending on

the world in which the Spirit is called to live, it takes on the covering appropriate to the nature of that world.

The perispirit itself undergoes successive transformations; it becomes increasingly ethereal until the complete purification that characterizes pure Spirits. Although special worlds are assigned as stations to very advanced Spirits, these Spirits are not bound to them as they are in the lower worlds; their state of freedom allows them to travel wherever the missions entrusted to them may call them.

If incarnation is considered from the material point of view, as it takes place on earth, it can be said to be limited to the lower worlds; consequently, it is up to the Spirit to free itself from it more or less quickly by working toward its purification.

It must also be considered that in the wandering state, that is, in the interval between bodily existences, the Spirit's situation corresponds to the nature of the world to which its degree of advancement binds it; thus, in the wandering state, it is more or less happy, free, and enlightened, depending on how far it has freed itself from matter. (Saint Louis, Paris, 1859.) Necessity of incarnation.

25 Is incarnation a punishment, and are only guilty Spirits subject to it?

The passage of Spirits through bodily life is necessary so that they may carry out, through material action, the purposes whose fulfillment God entrusts to them; it is necessary for the Spirits themselves, because the activity they are obliged to engage in helps develop their intelligence. God, being supremely just, must give an equal share to all his children; that is why he gives them all the same starting point, the same abilities, the same obligations to fulfill, and the same freedom to act; any privilege would be a

preference, and any preference an injustice. But incarnation is only a temporary state for all Spirits; it is a task God imposes on them at the beginning of their lives, as a first test of the use they will make of their free will. Those who fulfill this task with zeal pass quickly and less painfully through these first stages of initiation, and enjoy the fruit of their labors sooner. Those, on the contrary, who misuse the freedom God grants them delay their advancement; thus, through their obstinacy, they may indefinitely prolong the need to reincarnate, and it is then that incarnation becomes a punishment. (Saint Louis, Paris, 1859.)

26 Note. An everyday comparison will make this difference easier to understand. A pupil attains the higher levels of learning only after passing through the series of classes that lead to them. These classes, whatever work they require, are a means of reaching the goal, and not a punishment. The diligent pupil shortens the journey and finds fewer thorns along the way; it is otherwise for one whose negligence and laziness oblige them to repeat certain classes. It is not the work of the class that is a punishment, but the obligation to do the same work again.

So it is with human beings on earth. For the Spirit of the savage, who is almost at the beginning of spiritual life, incarnation is a means of developing intelligence; but for the enlightened person whose moral sense is highly developed, and who is obliged to repeat the stages of a bodily life full of anguish when they could already have reached the goal, it is a punishment because of the need to prolong their stay in the lower, unhappy worlds. Those, on the contrary, who actively work toward their moral progress may not only shorten the duration of material incarnation, but also pass in a single step through the intermediate stages that separate

them from the higher worlds.

Could Spirits incarnate only once on the same globe, and live out their different existences in different spheres? This opinion would be acceptable only if all human beings on earth were at exactly the same intellectual and moral level. The differences between them, from the savage to the civilized person, show the stages they are called upon to pass through. Incarnation, moreover, must have a useful purpose; now, what would be the purpose of the fleeting incarnations of children who die at an early age? They would have suffered without benefit to themselves or to anyone else: God, whose laws are all supremely wise, does nothing useless. Through reincarnation on the same globe, he intended that the same Spirits, coming into contact again, should have an opportunity to make amends for the wrongs they had done one another; through their previous relationships, he also intended to establish family ties on a spiritual foundation, and to ground the principles of solidarity, brotherhood, and equality in a law of nature.

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

V. BLESSED ARE THE AFFLICTED

✦

1 Blessed are those who weep, for they will be comforted. — Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. — Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, vv. 5, 6, 10.)

2 Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of heaven is yours. — Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. — Happy are you who weep now, for you will laugh. (Saint Luke, ch. vi, vv. 20, 21.)
But woe to you who are rich! For you have your comfort in the world. — Woe to you who are satisfied, for you will hunger. — Woe to you who laugh now, for you will be brought to weeping and tears. (Saint Luke, ch. vi, vv. 24, 25.)

3 The justice of afflictions
The compensations Jesus promises to the afflicted on earth can take place only in the future life; without certainty about the future, these maxims would be meaningless; more than that, they would be a deception. Even with this certainty, it is difficult to understand the usefulness of suffering in order to be happy. It is, people say, to gain greater merit; but then we wonder why some suffer more than others; why some are born into poverty and others into wealth, without having done anything to justify their position; why nothing succeeds for some, while everything seems to smile upon others. But what is even harder to understand is seeing good things and evils so unequally shared between vice and virtue; seeing virtuous people suffer beside the wicked who prosper. Faith in the future can bring

comfort and patience, but it does not explain these anomalies, which seem to contradict God's justice.

Yet once we accept God, we cannot conceive of him without infinite perfection; he must be all power, all justice, all goodness, otherwise he would not be God. If God is supremely good and just, he cannot act on a whim or with partiality. The vicissitudes of life therefore have a cause, and since God is just, this cause must be just. This is what everyone must fully take to heart. God set humanity on the path toward this cause through the teachings of Jesus, and today, judging people mature enough to understand it, he reveals it to them in full through Spiritism, that is, through the voice of the Spirits.

Present causes of afflictions

4 The vicissitudes of life are of two kinds, or, if you prefer, have two very different sources that it is important to distinguish; some have their cause in the present life, others outside this life.

By tracing earthly troubles to their source, we will recognize that many are the natural consequence of the character and conduct of those who endure them.

How many people fall through their own fault! How many are victims of their lack of foresight, their pride, and their ambition!

How many people are ruined by a lack of order or perseverance, by misconduct, or by not knowing how to limit their desires!

How many unhappy unions there are because they are calculations of self-interest or vanity, and the heart has no part in them! How many dissensions and disastrous quarrels could have been avoided with greater moderation and less sensitivity to offense.

How many illnesses and infirmities result from intemperance and excesses of every kind.

How many parents suffer through their children because they did not combat their children's bad tendencies at the outset! Through weakness or indifference, they allowed the seeds of pride, selfishness, and foolish vanity, which dry up the heart, to develop within them; then, later, reaping what they have sown, they are astonished and grieved by their children's lack of respect and their ingratitude.

Let all those whose hearts are wounded by life's vicissitudes and disappointments examine their consciences calmly; let them trace, step by step, the source of the troubles that afflict them, and they will see whether, more often than not, they cannot say: If I had done, or had not done, such a thing, I would not be in this position.

Who, then, is to blame for all these afflictions, if not oneself? In a great many cases, people are thus the makers of their own misfortunes; but instead of acknowledging this, they find it simpler and less humiliating to their vanity to blame fate, Providence, unfavorable chance, or their unlucky star, while their unlucky star lies in their own negligence.

Troubles of this kind certainly account for a very substantial share of life's vicissitudes; people will avoid them when they work as hard at their moral improvement as at their intellectual improvement.

[5] Human law addresses certain faults and punishes them; those convicted can therefore tell themselves that they are suffering the consequence of what they have done; but the law does not and cannot address every fault; it strikes more particularly at those that harm society, rather than those that harm only the people who commit them. But God desires the

progress of all his creatures; this is why he leaves no departure from the right path unpunished; there is not a single fault, however slight, not a single violation of his law, that does not have necessary and inevitable consequences, more or less distressing; it follows that, in small things as in great ones, people are always punished through the very thing in which they have sinned. The sufferings that follow are a warning that they have done wrong; these sufferings give them experience, make them feel the difference between good and evil, and the need to improve themselves in order to avoid in the future what has been a source of sorrow to them; without this, they would have no reason to mend their ways; confident of going unpunished, they would delay their advancement, and consequently their future happiness.

But experience sometimes comes a little late; when life has been wasted and troubled, when strength is worn out and the harm is beyond remedy, people begin to say: If at the beginning of life I had known what I know now, how many false steps I would have avoided! If I could begin again, I would go about it quite differently; but there is no time left! Just as the lazy worker says: I have wasted my day, they too say: I have wasted my life; but just as the sun rises for the worker the next morning, and a new day begins that allows him to make up for lost time, so too, after the night of the grave, the sun of a new life will shine for them, a life in which they can put the experience of the past and their good resolutions for the future to use.

6 Prior causes of afflictions

But although there are troubles whose primary cause lies in people's own actions in this life, there are others for which they bear, at least apparently, no responsibility at all, and which seem to strike them as if by fate. Such,

for example, is the loss of loved ones and of those who support a family; such, too, are accidents that no foresight could have prevented; reversals of fortune that defeat every precaution; natural disasters; and then infirmities present from birth, especially those that deprive unfortunate people of the means of earning their living through work: deformities, idiocy, cretinism, etc.

Those born into such conditions have certainly done nothing in this life to deserve so sad a fate, without compensation, which they could not avoid, which they are powerless to change by themselves, and which leaves them at the mercy of public compassion. Why, then, are there beings so unfortunate, while beside them, under the same roof, in the same family, others are favored in every respect?

What, finally, can be said of those children who die at an early age and have known nothing of life but suffering? These are problems that no philosophy has yet been able to solve, anomalies that no religion has been able to justify, and that would deny God's goodness, justice, and providence if we supposed that the soul is created at the same time as the body, and that its fate is irrevocably fixed after a stay of a few moments on earth. What have these souls, newly emerged from the Creator's hands, done to endure so much misery here below and to deserve any reward or punishment in the future, when they have been able to do neither good nor evil?

Yet, by virtue of the axiom that every effect has a cause, these miseries are effects that must have a cause; and once we accept a just God, this cause must be just. Now, since the cause always precedes the effect, and since it is not in the present life, it must precede this life, that is, belong to a previous existence. On the other hand, since God cannot punish us for the good we have done, or for the evil we have not done, if we are punished, it is be-

cause we have done evil; if we have not done evil in this life, we have done it in another. This is an alternative from which there is no escape, and in which logic tells us on which side God's justice lies.

People are therefore not always punished, or fully punished, in their present existence, but they never escape the consequences of their faults. The prosperity of the wicked is only temporary, and if they do not atone today, they will atone tomorrow, while those who suffer are atoning for their past. Misfortune that at first seems undeserved therefore has its reason for being, and those who suffer can always say: "Forgive me, Lord, for I have sinned."

7 Sufferings arising from prior causes are often, like those arising from present faults, the natural consequence of the fault committed; that is to say, through a rigorous distributive justice, people endure what they have made others endure; if they have been harsh and inhumane, they may in turn be treated harshly and inhumanely; if they have been proud, they may be born into a humiliating condition; if they have been miserly or selfish, or have misused their wealth, they may be deprived of necessities; if they have been bad sons, they may suffer through their children, etc.

Thus, the plurality of existences and the purpose of the earth as a world of atonement explain the anomalies in the distribution of happiness and misfortune among the good and the wicked here below. This anomaly exists only in appearance because we consider things solely from the standpoint of the present life; but if we rise in thought so as to take in a series of existences, we will see that everyone receives the share they deserve, in addition to the share they receive in the world of Spirits, and that God's justice is never interrupted.

People must never lose sight of the fact that they are in a lower world, where only their imperfections keep them. With every vicissitude, they must tell themselves that if they belonged to a more advanced world, this would not happen, and that it is within their power to avoid returning here below by working toward their own improvement.

8 The tribulations of life may be imposed on hardened Spirits, or those too ignorant to make an informed choice, but they are freely chosen and accepted by repentant Spirits who wish to make amends for the evil they have done and try to do better. Such is the person who, having done a task badly, asks to begin it again so as not to lose the benefit of the work.

8.2 These tribulations are therefore both acts of atonement for the past, which they punish, and trials for the future, which they prepare. Let us give thanks to God, who in his goodness grants people the ability to make amends, and does not condemn them irrevocably for a first fault.

9 We should not believe, however, that all suffering endured here on earth is necessarily the sign of a particular fault; it is often simply a trial chosen by the Spirit to complete its purification and hasten its progress. Thus, atonement always serves as a trial, but a trial is not always an atonement. Yet trials and atonements are always signs of a relative inferiority, for what is perfect no longer needs to be tested. A Spirit may therefore have attained a certain degree of elevation but, wishing to advance further, requests a mission, a task to fulfill, for which its reward, if it emerges victorious, will be all the greater the harder the struggle has been. This applies especially to those people with naturally good instincts, elevated souls, and inborn noble feelings, who seem to have brought nothing bad from their previous existence, and who endure the greatest sorrows with truly

Christian resignation, asking God to let them bear them without complaint. By contrast, afflictions that provoke complaints and drive a person to rebel against God may be considered atonements.

Suffering that provokes no complaints may certainly be an atonement, but it is a sign that it was freely chosen rather than imposed, and evidence of a firm resolve, which is a sign of progress.

10 Spirits can aspire to perfect happiness only when they are pure: any stain bars them from entering the happy worlds. They are like passengers on a plague-stricken ship, who are forbidden to enter a city until they have purified themselves. It is through their various bodily existences that Spirits gradually shed their imperfections.

10.2 The trials of life bring progress when they are borne well; as atonements, they erase faults and purify. They are the remedy that cleanses the wound and heals the sick person; the more serious the illness, the stronger the remedy must be. Those who suffer greatly should therefore tell themselves that they had much to atone for, and rejoice that they will soon be healed.

10.3 Through their resignation, it is in their power to make this suffering beneficial, and to avoid losing its fruit through their complaints; otherwise, they would have to begin again.

11 Forgetting the past

It is useless to object that forgetting prevents us from benefiting from the experience of previous existences. If God has seen fit to draw a veil over the past, it is because this must be useful. Indeed, remembering it would have very serious disadvantages. In some cases, it might humiliate us profoundly, or it might inflate our pride, and thereby hinder our free will; in

every case, it would inevitably have disturbed social relationships.

The Spirit is often reborn in the same surroundings where it has already lived, and finds itself in contact with the same people, so that it may repair the harm it has done them. If it recognized them as people it had hated, its hatred might awaken again; and in any case, it would feel humiliated before those it had offended.

To help us improve, God has given us exactly what we need and what can suffice: the voice of conscience and our instinctive tendencies. He takes away what might harm us.

At birth, a person brings what they have acquired; they are born as they have made themselves. Each existence is a new starting point. It matters little to them to know what they have been: if they are being punished, it is because they have done wrong. Their present bad tendencies indicate what remains to be corrected in them, and this is where they must focus all their attention, for no trace remains of what they have completely corrected. The good resolutions they have made are the voice of conscience, which warns them of what is right or wrong and gives them the strength to resist evil temptations.

Besides, this forgetting occurs only during bodily life. On returning to spiritual life, the Spirit recovers the memory of the past. It is therefore only a temporary interruption, like the one that occurs in earthly life during sleep, which does not prevent us from remembering the next day what we did the day before and on the 1 preceding days.

It is not even only after death that the Spirit recovers the memory of its past; one might say that it never loses it, for experience proves that, during incarnation, while the body sleeps and the Spirit enjoys a certain freedom, it is conscious of its former actions. It knows why it suffers, and that it suf-

fers justly. The memory fades only during its outward life of relationships. But in the absence of a precise memory, which might be painful and harm its social relationships, it draws new strength from these moments when the soul is free, if it has known how to use them well.

12 Reason for resignation

With these words, Blessed are the afflicted, for they will be comforted, Jesus points both to the compensation awaiting those who suffer and to the resignation that leads them to bless suffering as the prelude to healing. These words may also be expressed as follows: You should consider yourselves fortunate to suffer, because your sorrows here on earth are the debt owed for your past faults, and these sorrows, patiently endured on earth, spare you centuries of suffering in the life to come. You should therefore be happy that God reduces your debt by allowing you to pay it now, thus assuring you peace for the future.

A person who suffers is like a debtor who owes a large sum, and whose creditor says: "If you pay me even a hundredth of it today, I will release you from all the rest, and you will be free; if you do not, I will pursue you until you have paid the very last coin." Would the debtor not be happy to endure all kinds of hardship to free himself by paying only a hundredth of what he owes? Instead of complaining about his creditor, would he not thank him?

Such is the meaning of these words: "Blessed are the afflicted, for they will be comforted." They are fortunate because they are paying their debt, and once it is paid, they will be free. But if, while paying on one side, they take on more debt on the other, they will never gain their freedom. Now, every new fault increases the debt, because there is not a single one, whatever it

may be, that does not bring with it a compulsory, inevitable punishment; if not today, then tomorrow; if not in this life, then in the next. Among these faults, failure to submit to the will of God must be placed first. Therefore, if we complain during afflictions, if we do not accept them with resignation and as something we must have deserved, if we accuse God of injustice, we incur a new debt that deprives us of the benefit we might have gained from suffering. That is why we will have to begin again, just as if we were making payments to a creditor who torments us, while borrowing from him again each time.

On entering the world of Spirits, a person is also like a worker who presents himself on payday. To some, the master will say: "Here is the payment for your days of work." To others, to those who were fortunate on earth, who lived in idleness and placed their happiness in the gratification of pride and worldly pleasures, he will say: "Nothing is due to you, for you received your wages on earth. Go and begin your task again."

13 A person can lessen or increase the bitterness of their trials through the way they view earthly life. They suffer all the more when they see their suffering as lasting longer.

13.2 Now, those who take the perspective of spiritual life embrace bodily life in a single glance; they see it as a point in infinity, understand its brevity, and tell themselves that this painful moment will pass very quickly.

13.3 The certainty of a happier future close at hand sustains and encourages them, and instead of complaining, they thank heaven for the sorrows that help them advance. By contrast, for those who see only bodily life, it seems endless, and sorrow bears down on them with its full weight.

13.4 The effect of this way of viewing life is to lessen the importance of worldly things, to lead people to moderate their desires and be content with their circumstances without envying those of others, and to soften the emotional impact of the setbacks and disappointments they experience.

13.5 From it they draw a calm and resignation as beneficial to the health of the body as to that of the soul, whereas through envy, jealousy, and ambition they willingly put themselves to torture, thus adding to the miseries and anxieties of their brief existence.

14 The calm and resignation drawn from this way of viewing earthly life, and from faith in the future, give the mind a serenity that is the best protection against madness and suicide. Indeed, it is certain that most cases of madness are due to the shock caused by hardships that people lack the strength to bear.

14.2 If, therefore, through the way Spiritism leads them to view the things of this world, they accept with indifference, and even with joy, the setbacks and disappointments that would have driven them to despair in other circumstances, it is clear that this strength, which places them above events, protects their reason from the shocks that would otherwise have shaken it.

15 The same is true of suicide. Except for suicides committed in drunkenness or madness, which may be called unconscious acts, it is certain that, whatever the particular motives, its cause is always discontent.

15.2 Now, those who are certain that they will be unhappy for only one day, and better off in the days that follow, can easily be patient; they despair only if they see no end to their suffering. What, then, is human life

compared with eternity, if not far less than a day?

15.3 But those who do not believe in eternity, who believe that everything in them ends with life, see an end only in death when they are overwhelmed by grief and misfortune. Hoping for nothing, they find it quite natural, and even very logical, to shorten their miseries through suicide.

16 Disbelief, mere doubt about the future—in a word, materialistic ideas—are the greatest incitements to suicide: they give rise to moral cowardice. And when we see people of science relying on the authority of their knowledge to try to prove to their listeners or readers that they have nothing to expect after death, are they not leading them to conclude that, if they are unhappy, they have nothing better to do than kill themselves? What could they say to dissuade them? What compensation can they offer them? What hope can they give them? Nothing but nothingness. From this we must conclude that, if nothingness is the only drastic remedy, the only prospect, it is better to fall into it sooner rather than later, and thus suffer for less time.

The spread of materialistic ideas is therefore the poison that instills the thought of suicide in many people, and those who make themselves its apostles take on a terrible responsibility. With Spiritism, doubt is no longer possible, and the outlook on life changes. Believers know that life continues indefinitely beyond the grave, but under entirely different conditions. From this come the patience and resignation that naturally turn them away from the thought of suicide; from this, in a word, comes moral courage.

17 Spiritism has, in this respect, another result that is just as positive, and perhaps more decisive. It shows us those who have taken their own lives coming to describe their unhappy situation, and proving that no one violates with impunity the law of God, which forbids a person to shorten their life.

17.2 Among those who have taken their own lives, there are some whose suffering, though only temporary instead of eternal, is no less terrible, and of a kind 1 to give pause to anyone tempted to leave this world before God commands it.

17.3 The Spiritist therefore has several reasons to counterbalance the thought of suicide: the certainty of a future life in which they know they will be all the happier for having been more unhappy 1 and more resigned on earth; the certainty that by shortening their life they achieve precisely the opposite of what they hoped for; that they free themselves from one evil only to suffer a worse, longer, and more terrible one; that they are mistaken if they believe that by killing themselves they will reach heaven sooner; that suicide is an obstacle to their joining in the other world the loved ones they hoped to find there again; hence the conclusion that suicide, bringing them nothing but disappointments, is against their own interests.

17.4 Thus the number of suicides prevented by Spiritism is considerable, and we may conclude that when everyone is a Spiritist, there will be no more deliberate suicides.

17.5 Comparing the results of materialist and Spiritist doctrines solely from the standpoint of suicide, we therefore find that the logic of one leads to it, while the logic of the other turns people away from it, as experience confirms.

18 Instructions from the Spirits Suffering Well and Suffering Badly

When Christ said, “Blessed are the afflicted, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs,” he did not mean those who suffer in general, for all who are here below suffer, whether on a throne or on a bed of straw; but alas! few suffer well; few understand that only trials endured well can lead them to the kingdom of God. Discouragement is a fault; God withholds consolations from you because you lack courage. Prayer supports the soul, but it is not enough: it must be supported by a living faith in God's goodness. You have often been told that he does not place a heavy burden on weak shoulders; but the burden is proportionate to your strength, just as the reward will be proportionate to your resignation and courage; the reward will be more magnificent than the affliction is painful; but this reward must be earned, and that is why life is full of tribulations.

The soldier who is not sent into battle is dissatisfied, because the rest of camp life brings no advancement; be like the soldier, then, and do not wish for a rest in which your body would grow weak and your soul become numb. Be content when God sends you a struggle. This struggle is not the fire of battle, but the bitterness of life, which sometimes requires more courage than a bloody combat, for someone who stands firm before the enemy may falter in the grip of emotional pain. A person receives no reward for this kind of courage, but God reserves crowns and a glorious place for them. When something causes you sorrow or annoyance, try to rise above it, and when you have succeeded in mastering the impulses of impatience, anger, or despair, say to yourself with rightful satisfaction: “I have been the stronger.”

Blessed are the afflicted may therefore be rendered as follows: Blessed are those who have the opportunity to prove their faith, their firmness, their

perseverance, and their submission to God's will, for they will receive a hundredfold the joy they lack on earth, and after labor will come rest. (Lacordaire, Le Havre, 1863.) The Ill and the Remedy

19 Is your earth, then, a place of joy, a paradise of delights? Does the prophet's voice no longer ring in your ears? Did it not cry out that there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth for those born in this valley of sorrows? You who come to live here, then, expect burning tears and bitter sorrows, and the sharper and deeper your pains, look to heaven and bless the Lord for having chosen to test you!... 0 people! Will you acknowledge your master's power only when he has healed the wounds of your body and crowned your days with bliss and joy? Will you acknowledge his love only when he has adorned your body with every glory and restored its radiance and whiteness? Imitate the one who was given to you as an example; reduced to the lowest depths of degradation and misery, he lies on a dung heap and says to God: “Lord! I have known all the joys of wealth, and you have reduced me to the deepest misery; thank you, thank you, my God, for being willing to test your servant!” How long will your gaze stop at the horizons marked out by death? When will your soul at last wish to soar beyond the boundaries of a grave? Even if you had to weep and suffer for an entire lifetime, what is that beside the eternity of glory reserved for the one who has undergone the trial with faith, love, and resignation? Seek consolation for your troubles, then, in the future God is preparing for you, and the cause of your troubles in your past; and you who suffer most, consider yourselves the blessed of the earth.

In your disembodied state, when you floated through space, you chose your trial because you believed yourselves strong enough to bear it; why

complain now? You who asked for wealth and glory did so to withstand the struggle against temptation and overcome it. You who asked to struggle in spirit and body against moral and physical evil did so because you knew that the greater the trial, the more glorious the victory, and that if you emerged triumphant, even if your flesh were thrown onto a dung heap, at its death it would release a soul radiant in its whiteness and made pure again through the baptism of expiation and suffering.

What remedy, then, should be prescribed for those afflicted by cruel obsessions and searing troubles? Only one is infallible: faith, a gaze turned toward heaven. If, in the throes of your cruelest sufferings, your voice sings the Lord's praises, the angel at your bedside will point with his hand to the sign of salvation and the place you are to occupy one day... Faith is the sure remedy for suffering; it always reveals the horizons of infinity, before which the few dark days of the present fade away. Do not ask us any longer, then, what remedy should be used to heal this ulcer or that wound, this temptation or that trial; remember that the one who believes is strengthened by the remedy of faith, and that the one who doubts its effectiveness for a second is punished at once, because at that very instant they feel the piercing anguish of affliction.

The Lord has marked with his seal all those who believe in him. Christ told you that with faith you can move mountains, and I tell you that whoever suffers and has faith for support will be placed under his protection and will suffer no more; the moments of greatest pain will be for them the first notes of the joy of eternity. Their soul will become so detached from their body that, while the body writhes in convulsions, it will soar through the heavenly regions, singing with the angels hymns of gratitude and glory to the Lord.

Blessed are those who suffer and weep! Let their souls rejoice, for God will fill them with blessings. (St. Augustine, Paris, 1863.) Happiness Is Not of This World.

20 I am not happy! Happiness is not meant for me! This is what people in every social position commonly exclaim. This, my dear children, proves better than every possible argument the truth of this maxim from Ecclesiastes: “Happiness is not of this world.” Indeed, neither wealth, nor power, nor even flourishing youth are the essential conditions of happiness; I will go further: not even the combination of these three much-envied conditions, since among the most privileged classes we constantly hear people of every age complaining bitterly about their condition in life. In view of such a result, it is inconceivable that the working and struggling classes should so covetously envy the position of those whom fortune seems to have favored. Here below, whatever we do, everyone has their share of labor and misery, their portion of suffering and disappointment. From this it is easy to reach the conclusion that earth is a place of trials and expiations.

Thus, those who preach that earth is humanity's only dwelling place 5 and that only here, and in a single existence, are people allowed to attain the highest degree of happiness their nature permits, deceive themselves and mislead those who listen to them, since experience extending over countless centuries has shown that this globe only exceptionally contains the conditions necessary for an individual's complete happiness.

As a general proposition, we may affirm that happiness is a utopia that successive generations rush to pursue without ever being able to reach it; for if a wise person is a rarity here below, an entirely happy person is no more

to be found.

What constitutes happiness on earth is so fleeting for someone who is not guided by wisdom that, for one year, one month, one week of complete satisfaction, all the remaining time passes in a succession of bitter experiences and disappointments; and note, my dear children, that I am speaking here of the fortunate people of the earth, those whom the crowds envy. Consequently, if earthly life is devoted to trials and expiation, we must admit that elsewhere there are more favored dwelling places where the human Spirit, still imprisoned in material flesh, enjoys in their fullness the pleasures attached to human life. That is why God has scattered within your vortex those beautiful higher planets toward which your efforts and inclinations will one day draw you, when you have been sufficiently purified and perfected.

Nevertheless, do not infer from my words that earth is forever destined to be a place of punishment; certainly not! For from the progress already achieved you can easily infer future progress, and from the social improvements already won, new and more fruitful improvements. Such is the immense task to be accomplished by the new doctrine that the Spirits have revealed to you.

Therefore, my dear children, let a holy emulation inspire you, and let each of you vigorously cast off the old self. You must all devote yourselves to spreading this Spiritism, which has already begun your own regeneration. It is a duty to let your brothers share in the rays of the sacred light. To work, then, my dearly beloved children! May all your hearts in this solemn gathering aspire to the grand goal of preparing for future generations a world where happiness will no longer be an empty word. (François-Nicolas-Madeleine, Cardinal Morlot. Paris, \ 863.)

21 Loss of Loved Ones Premature Deaths

When death comes to reap in your families, taking the young before the old without restraint, you often say: God is not just, since he sacrifices those who are strong and full of promise to preserve those who have lived long years full of disappointments; since he takes away those who are useful and leaves those who are no longer of any use; since he breaks a mother's heart by depriving her of the innocent creature who was all her joy.

Human beings, this is where you need to rise above the earthbound concerns of life to understand that good is often found where you think you see evil, and wise foresight where you think you see the blind fatality of fate. Why measure divine justice by the worth of your own? Can you think that the master of worlds would, on a mere whim, inflict cruel suffering on you? Nothing happens without an intelligent purpose, and whatever happens, everything has its reason for being. If you examined more closely all the sorrows that befall you, you would always find in them a divine reason, a reason that brings renewal, and your paltry interests would become a secondary consideration that you would put last.

Believe me, for someone in an incarnation of twenty years, death is preferable to those shameful excesses that bring sorrow to honorable families, break a mother's heart, and turn parents' hair white before their time. Premature death is often a great blessing that God grants to the one who departs, who is thus spared the miseries of life or the temptations that might have led to ruin. Those who die in the flower of youth are not victims of fate, but God judges that it is beneficial for them to remain no longer on earth.

It is a terrible misfortune, you say, for a life so full of hopes to be cut short

so soon! What hopes do you mean? Those of earth, where the one who departs might have shone, made a way in the world, and made a fortune? Always this narrow view that cannot rise above matter. Do you know what the fate of this life, so full of hopes in your eyes, would have been? Who tells you that it would not have been steeped in bitterness? Do you then count the hopes of the life to come as nothing, since you prefer to them those of the fleeting life you drag out on earth? Do you then think it better to hold a rank among human beings than among blessed Spirits?

Rejoice instead of complaining when it pleases God to withdraw one of his children from this valley of misery. Is there not selfishness in wishing that the child should remain here to suffer with you? Ah! Such sorrow is understandable in those who have no faith and who see death as an eternal separation; but you, Spiritists, know that the soul lives better when freed from its bodily covering; mothers, you know that your beloved children are near you; yes, they are very near; their fluidic bodies surround you, their thoughts protect you, your remembrance fills them with joy; but your unreasonable sorrows also afflict them, because they reveal a lack of faith and are a rebellion against the will of God.

You who understand spiritual life, listen to the beating of your hearts as you call upon these dear loved ones, and if you pray to God to bless him, you will feel within you those powerful consolations that dry your tears, those wondrous aspirations that will show you the future promised by the sovereign Master. (Sanson, former member of the Spiritist Society of Paris, 1863.)

22 If He Had Been a Good Man, He Would Have Been Killed

You often say, when speaking of a bad man who escapes danger: If he had been a good man, he would have been killed. Well, in saying this you are right, for it does indeed happen very often that God gives a Spirit still young on the paths of progress a longer trial than a good one, who, as a reward for his merit, will receive the favor of having his trial made as short as possible. Thus, when you use this saying, you do not suspect that you are committing blasphemy.

If a good man dies and a wicked man's house stands beside his, you hasten to say: It would have been much better if it had been this one. You are greatly mistaken, for the one who leaves has finished his task, and the one who remains may not have begun his. Why, then, would you wish the wicked man to have no time to finish it, and the other to remain bound to the soil of earth? What would you say of a prisoner who had served his time and was kept in prison while freedom was given to someone who had no right to it? Know, then, that true freedom lies in release from the bonds of the body, and that as long as you are on earth, you are in captivity.

Accustom yourselves not to condemn what you cannot understand, and believe that God is just in all things; often what seems evil to you is good; but your faculties are so limited that the great whole escapes your dull senses. Strive, in thought, to leave your narrow sphere, and as you rise, the importance of material life will diminish in your eyes, for it will appear to you only as an incident in the infinite duration of your spiritual existence, the only true existence. (Fénelon, Sens, 1861.)

Voluntary Torments

23 Human beings are constantly pursuing happiness, which constantly eludes them, because unmixed happiness does not exist on earth. Yet, despite the changes of fortune that inevitably accompany this life, they could at least enjoy relative happiness, but they seek it in things that perish and are subject to those same changes, that is, in material pleasures, instead of seeking it in the pleasures of the soul, which are a foretaste of the everlasting pleasures of heaven; instead of seeking peace of heart, the only real happiness here below, they crave everything that can agitate and disturb them; and, strangely enough, they seem deliberately to create torments for themselves that they could easily avoid.

Are there any greater than those caused by envy and jealousy? For the envious and the jealous there is no rest: they are perpetually feverish; what they lack and others possess keeps them awake at night; their rivals' successes make their heads spin; their competitive spirit is directed only toward outshining their neighbors, and all their joy lies in arousing in others as foolish as themselves the raging jealousy that possesses them. Poor fools indeed, who do not consider that tomorrow, perhaps, they will have to leave all these baubles behind, whose coveting poisons their lives! These words do not apply to them: "Blessed are the afflicted, for they will be comforted," for their worries are not among those that find compensation in heaven.

How many torments, on the contrary, are spared by those who know how to be content with what they have, who look without envy upon what they lack, who do not seek to appear greater than they are. They are always rich, for if they look below them instead of above, they will always see peo-

ple who have still less; they are calm, because they do not create imaginary needs for themselves; and is calm amid the storms of life not happiness? (Fénelon, Lyon, 1860.) Real Misfortune.

24 Everyone speaks of misfortune, everyone has felt it and believes they know its many forms. I come to tell you that almost everyone is mistaken, and that real misfortune is not at all what people, that is, the unfortunate, suppose it to be. They see it in poverty, in the hearth without a fire, in the threatening creditor, in the cradle emptied of the angel who once smiled there, in tears, in the coffin followed with uncovered head and broken heart, in the anguish of betrayal, in the destitution of pride that would like to drape itself in purple and barely hides its nakedness beneath the rags of vanity; all this, and many other things besides, is called misfortune in human language. Yes, it is misfortune for those who see only the present; but true misfortune lies more in the consequences of a thing than in the thing itself. Tell me whether an event that is most fortunate at the moment, but has disastrous consequences, is not in reality more unfortunate than one that at first causes great distress and ends by producing good. Tell me whether the storm that breaks your trees, but purifies the air by dispersing the unhealthy miasmas that would have caused death, is not a blessing rather than a misfortune.

To judge a thing, then, one must see what follows from it; thus, to assess what is truly fortunate or unfortunate for human beings, one must look beyond this life, because that is where the consequences are felt; now, everything they call misfortune in their shortsightedness ends with life and finds its compensation in the life to come.

I am going to reveal misfortune to you in a new form, in the beautiful,

flower-covered form that you welcome and desire with all the strength of your deluded souls. Misfortune is joy, pleasure, noise, vain agitation, the foolish gratification of vanity that silence the conscience, suppress the activity of thought, and dull people's awareness of their future; misfortune is the opium of oblivion that you long for with all your hearts.

Have hope, you who weep! Tremble, you who laugh because your bodies are satisfied! God cannot be deceived; destiny cannot be evaded; and trials, creditors more merciless than the pack unleashed by poverty, lie in wait for your deceptive rest to plunge you suddenly into the agony of true misfortune, the kind that takes the soul by surprise when it has been weakened by indifference and selfishness.

Let Spiritism enlighten you, then, and restore to their true light truth and error, so strangely distorted by your blindness! Then you will act like brave soldiers who, far from fleeing danger, prefer the struggles of perilous battles to a peace that can bring them neither glory nor advancement. What does it matter to a soldier if he loses his weapons, his baggage, and his clothes in the fray, provided he emerges victorious and with glory! What does it matter to those who have faith in the future if they leave their fortune and their cloak of flesh on the battlefield of life, provided their souls enter the heavenly kingdom radiant? (Delphine de Girardin, Paris, 1861.) Melancholy.

25 Do you know why a vague sadness sometimes takes hold of your hearts and makes life seem so bitter to you? It is your Spirit longing for happiness and freedom, and, bound to the body that serves as its prison, exhausting itself in vain efforts to escape. But when it sees that these efforts are useless, it becomes discouraged, and as the body falls under its influ-

ence, weariness, dejection, and a kind of apathy take hold of you, and you feel unhappy.

Believe me, resist with vigor these feelings that weaken your will. These longings for a better life are innate in the spirit of all people, but do not seek their fulfillment here below; and now that God sends you his Spirits to teach you about the happiness he has in store for you, wait patiently for the angel of deliverance who is to help you break the bonds that hold your Spirit captive. Remember that during your trial on earth you have a mission to fulfill of which you are unaware, whether by devoting yourselves to your family or by carrying out the various duties God has entrusted to you. And if, during this trial and while performing your task, you see cares, anxieties, and sorrows descend upon you, be strong and courageous in bearing them. Face them boldly; they are short-lived and are to lead you close to the friends you mourn, who rejoice at your arrival among them and will stretch out their arms to lead you to a place where the sorrows of earth cannot enter. (Francis of Geneva. Bordeaux.)

26 Voluntary Trials. The True Hair Shirt

You ask whether it is permissible to ease your own trials; this question amounts to asking: Is someone who is drowning allowed to try to save himself? Is someone who has a thorn embedded in his flesh allowed to remove it? Is someone who is ill allowed to call a doctor? Trials are intended to exercise intelligence as well as patience and resignation; a person may be born into a painful and difficult situation precisely to compel him to seek ways of overcoming the difficulties. Merit consists in bearing without complaint the consequences of troubles that cannot be avoided, in persevering in the struggle, and in not despairing if one fails, but not in a pas-

sivity that would be laziness rather than virtue.

This question naturally leads to another: Since Jesus said, “Blessed are the afflicted,” is there merit in seeking afflictions by making one's trials harder through voluntary suffering? To this I will answer very clearly: Yes, there is great merit when suffering and deprivation are intended for the good of one's neighbor, for this is charity through sacrifice; no, when they are intended only for oneself, for this is selfishness through fanaticism.

There is an important distinction to be made here; for yourselves personally, be content with the trials God sends you, and do not add to their burden, which is already so heavy at times; accept them without complaint and with faith: that is all he asks of you. Do not weaken your bodies through needless deprivation and purposeless mortification, for you need all your strength to accomplish your mission of work on earth. To torture and torment your body deliberately is to violate God's law, which gives you the means to sustain and strengthen it; to weaken it needlessly is truly suicide. Use, but do not abuse: such is the law; the abuse of the best things carries its punishment in its inevitable consequences.

It is different with suffering that people impose upon themselves to relieve their neighbors. If you endure cold and hunger to warm and feed someone in need, and your body suffers from it, that is the sacrifice God blesses. You who leave your perfumed boudoirs to bring comfort to a foul attic room; you who soil your delicate hands by tending wounds; you who deprive yourselves of sleep to keep watch at the bedside of a sick person whose only bond with you is that of a brother in God; you, finally, who wear out your health in doing good works: there is your hair shirt, a true hair shirt of blessing, for the joys of the world have not dried up your hearts; you have not fallen asleep amid the enervating pleasures of wealth,

but have made yourselves comforting angels to the poor and deprived.
But you who withdraw from the world to avoid its temptations and live in isolation, what use are you on earth? Where is your courage in trials, since you flee the struggle and desert the battle? If you want a hair shirt, apply it to your soul and not to your body; mortify your Spirit and not your flesh; scourge your pride; accept humiliations without complaint; bruise your self-love; brace yourselves against the pain of insult and slander, which is more piercing than bodily pain. That is the true hair shirt whose wounds will be counted to your credit, because they will testify to your courage and your submission to God's will. (A guardian angel. Paris, 1863.)

27 Should we put an end to our neighbor's trials when we can, or should we, out of respect for God's purposes, let them run their course?
We have told you and repeated very often that you are on this earth of atonement to complete your trials, and that everything that happens to you is a consequence of your previous lives, the interest on the debt you must pay. But this thought gives rise in some people to reflections that must be checked, for they could have disastrous consequences.
Some think that since we are on earth to atone, trials must run their course. Some even go so far as to believe that not only should nothing be done to ease them, but that, on the contrary, one should help make them more beneficial by making them more severe. This is a great error. Yes, your trials must follow the course God has laid out for them, but do you know that course? Do you know how far they must go, and whether your merciful Father has not said to the suffering of one or another of your brothers: “You shall go no further”? Do you know whether his providence has chosen you, not as an instrument of torment to increase the sufferings

of the guilty, but as the balm of comfort that is to heal the wounds his justice had opened? So when you see one of your brothers stricken, do not say: This is God's justice; it must run its course. Instead, say to yourselves: Let us see what means our merciful Father has placed within my power to ease my brother's suffering. Let us see whether my moral comfort, my material support, and my advice might help him pass through this trial with greater strength, patience, and resignation. Let us even see whether God has placed in my hands the means to end this suffering; whether I too have been given, as a trial and perhaps as atonement, the task of stopping the trouble and replacing it with peace.

Always help one another, then, in your respective trials, and never regard yourselves as instruments of torture; this thought should revolt every person of good heart, and every Spiritist above all; for the Spiritist, better than anyone else, should understand the infinite extent of God's goodness. The Spiritist must consider that his entire life should be an act of love and devotion; that whatever he may do to counteract the Lord's decisions, his justice will run its course. He may therefore, without fear, make every effort to ease the bitterness of atonement, but God alone can stop it or prolong it as he sees fit.

Would it not be great pride on a person's part to believe he has the right, so to speak, to twist the weapon in the wound? To increase the dose of poison in the breast of someone who suffers, on the pretext that such is his atonement? Oh! Always regard yourselves as an instrument chosen to bring it to an end. Let us sum up here: you are all on earth to atone; but all of you, without exception, must make every effort to ease your brothers' atonement, according to the law of love and charity. (Bernardin, a protecting Spirit. Bordeaux, 1863.)

28 A man is dying, suffering cruelly; his condition is known to be hopeless. Is it permissible to spare him a few moments of anguish by hastening his end?

Who, then, would give you the right to prejudge God's purposes? Can he not bring a man to the edge of the grave and draw him back from it, to make him examine himself and lead him to other thoughts? However near death a dying person may be, no one can say with certainty that his last hour has come. Has science never been mistaken in its predictions?

I know well that there are cases that can rightly be regarded as hopeless; but even if there is no sound hope of a lasting return to life and health, are there not countless examples of a sick person reviving and recovering his faculties for a few moments just as he is about to breathe his last! Well! This hour of grace granted to him may be of the greatest importance to him; for you do not know what reflections his Spirit may have had amid the convulsions of dying, or what torments a flash of repentance may spare him.

The materialist, who sees only the body and takes no account of the soul, cannot understand these things; but the Spiritist, who knows what happens beyond the grave, knows the value of the final thought. Ease the final sufferings as much as you can; but take care not to shorten life, even by a single minute, for that minute may spare many tears in the future. (Saint Louis. Paris, 1860.)

29 Is someone who is weary of life, but does not want to kill himself, guilty if he seeks death on a battlefield, with the thought of making his death useful?

Whether a man kills himself or has himself killed, the aim is always to

shorten his life, and consequently there is suicide in intention, if not in fact. The thought that his death will serve some purpose is an illusion; it is merely a pretext to give his action a favorable appearance and excuse it in his own eyes; if he seriously wished to serve his country, he would seek to live while defending it, and not to die, for once dead he is no longer of any use to it. True devotion consists in not fearing death when it is a question of being useful, in braving danger, in sacrificing one's life beforehand and without regret if necessary; but the premeditated intention of seeking death by exposing oneself to danger, even to render a service, cancels out the merit of the action. (Saint Louis. Paris, 4 860.)

30 A man exposes himself to imminent danger to save the life of a fellow human being, knowing beforehand that he himself will perish; can this be regarded as suicide?

As long as there is no intention of seeking death, there is no suicide, but devotion and self-denial, even if one is certain of perishing. But who can have that certainty? Who can say that Providence does not have an unexpected means of deliverance in store at the most critical moment? Can it not save even someone standing at the mouth of a cannon? Often it may wish to push the trial of resignation to its utmost limit; then an unexpected circumstance averts the fatal blow. (Id.)

31. Do those who accept their sufferings with resignation, in submission to God's will and with a view to their future happiness, work only for themselves, and can they make their sufferings beneficial to others?

These sufferings can benefit others materially and morally. Materially, if, through the work, privations, and sacrifices they impose on themselves, they contribute to the material well-being of those close to them; morally,

through the example they give of their submission to God's will. This example of the power of Spiritist faith can encourage the unfortunate to accept their suffering with resignation, saving them from despair and its harmful consequences for the future. (Saint Louis. Paris, 1860.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

VI. CHRIST THE COMFORTER

✦

1 The light yoke.— The promised Comforter. — Instructions from the Spirits: Coming of the Spirit of Truth. The light yoke,

Come to me, all you who are afflicted and burdened, and I will give you relief. — Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me that I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls; for my yoke is gentle and my burden is light. (Saint Matthew, ch. xi, vv. 28, 29, 30.)

2 All sufferings—hardship, disappointments, physical pain, the loss of loved ones—find their consolation in faith in the future, in trust in the justice of God, which Christ came to teach humanity. On the contrary, afflictions bear down with their full weight on those who expect nothing after this life, or who simply doubt, and no hope comes to soften their bitterness. This is what leads Jesus to say: Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you relief.

Yet Jesus places a condition on his assistance and on the happiness he promises the afflicted; this condition lies in the law he teaches; his yoke is the observance of that law; but this yoke is light and this law is gentle, since they make love and charity a duty.

3 The promised Comforter

If you love me, keep my commandments; — and I will pray to my Father, and he will send you another comforter, so that he may remain with you forever: — The Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him and does not know him. But as for you, you will know him, because he will remain with you and will be in you. — But the com-

forter, who is the Holy Spirit, whom my Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have told you. (Saint John, ch. xiv, vv. 15, 16, 17 and 26.)

4 Jesus promises another comforter: the Spirit of Truth, whom the world does not yet know, because it is not mature enough to understand him, and whom the Father will send to teach all things and to bring to mind what Christ has said. If, then, the Spirit of Truth is to come later to teach all things, it is because Christ has not said everything; if he comes to bring to mind what Christ has said, it is because it will have been forgotten or misunderstood.

Spiritism comes at the appointed time to fulfill Christ's promise: the Spirit of Truth presides over its establishment; it calls people back to the observance of the law; it teaches all things by making clear what Christ spoke of only in parables. Christ said: "Let those who have ears to hear, hear;" Spiritism comes to open eyes and ears, for it speaks without figures of speech or allegories; it lifts the veil deliberately left over certain mysteries; finally, it comes to bring supreme consolation to the dispossessed of the earth and to all who suffer, by giving every sorrow a just cause and a useful purpose.

Christ said: "Blessed are the afflicted, for they will be comforted;" but how can people find happiness in suffering if they do not know why they suffer? Spiritism shows its cause in previous existences and in the purpose of the earth, where people atone for their past; it shows its purpose in the fact that sufferings are like the beneficial crises that bring about healing, and that they are the purification that ensures happiness in future existences. People understand that they have deserved to suffer, and they find their

suffering just; they know that this suffering helps them advance, and they accept it without complaint, as workers accept the labor that will earn them their wages. Spiritism gives them an unshakable faith in the future, and piercing doubt no longer has any hold on their souls; by allowing them to see things from above, the importance of earthly hardships fades into the vast and splendid horizon they behold, and the prospect of the happiness awaiting them gives them the patience, resignation, and courage to reach the end of the road.

Thus Spiritism fulfills what Jesus said of the promised comforter: knowledge of things that allows people to know where they come from, where they are going, and why they are on earth; a reminder of the true principles of God's law, and consolation through faith and hope.

5 Instructions from the Spirits Coming of the Spirit of Truth

I come, as I did before, among the lost children of Israel, to bring truth and dispel darkness. Listen to me. Spiritism, like my word in former times, must remind unbelievers that above them reigns the unchanging truth: the good God, the great God who makes plants sprout and raises the waves. I revealed the divine doctrine; like a reaper, I bound into sheaves the goodness scattered throughout humanity, and I said: Come to me, all you who suffer!

But ungrateful people turned away from the straight and broad road that leads to my Father's kingdom, and they lost their way on the harsh paths of impiety. My Father does not wish to annihilate the human race; he wishes you to help one another, the dead and the living—that is, dead according to the flesh, for death does not exist—to come to one another's aid, and for the voices of those who are no more, instead of the voices of

prophets and apostles, to be heard crying out to you: Pray and believe! For death is resurrection, and life is the chosen trial during which the virtues you cultivate must grow and develop like the cedar. Weak people, who understand the darkness of your minds, do not push away the torch that divine mercy places in your hands to light your way and bring you, lost children, back into your Father's embrace.

I am too deeply moved by compassion for your hardships, for your immense weakness, not to extend a helping hand to the unfortunate wanderers who, seeing heaven, fall into the abyss of error. Believe, love, meditate on the things revealed to you; do not mix weeds with good grain, utopias with truths.

Spiritists! Love one another; that is the first teaching; educate yourselves, that is the second. All truths are found in Christianity; the errors that have taken root in it are of human origin; and now, from beyond the grave that you believed to be nothingness, voices cry out to you: Brothers! Nothing perishes; Jesus Christ is the conqueror of evil; be the conquerors of impiety. (The Spirit of Truth. Paris, 1860.)

6 I come to teach and comfort the poor and dispossessed; I come to tell them to raise their resignation to the level of their trials; let them weep, for sorrow was sacred in the Garden of Olives; but let them hope, for comforting angels will also come to wipe away their tears.

Workers, plow your furrow; begin the next day the hard day's work of the day before; the labor of your hands provides earthly bread for your bodies, but your souls are not forgotten; and I, the divine gardener, cultivate them in the silence of your thoughts; when the hour of rest has sounded, when the weft slips from your hands and your eyes close to the light, you will

feel my precious seed stir and sprout within you. Nothing is lost in our Father's kingdom, and your sweat and your hardships form the treasure that will make you rich in the higher spheres, where light replaces darkness, and where the most destitute among you may perhaps be the most radiant.

Truly I tell you, those who carry their burdens and help their brothers are my beloved; learn the precious doctrine that dispels the error of rebellion and teaches you the sublime purpose of human trials. As the wind sweeps away dust, let the breath of the Spirits dispel your envy of the world's rich, who are often very miserable, for their trials are more perilous than yours. I am with you, and my apostle teaches you. Drink from the living spring of love, and prepare yourselves, captives of life, to soar one day, free and joyful, into the embrace of Him who created you weak so that you could become better, and who wishes you to shape your own soft clay, so that you may be the makers of your immortality. (The Spirit of Truth, Paris, 1861.)

7 I am the great physician of souls, and I come to bring you the remedy that will heal them; the weak, the suffering, and the infirm are my most cherished children, and I come to save them. Come, then, to me, all you who suffer and are burdened, and you will be relieved and comforted; do not seek strength and consolation elsewhere, for the world is powerless to give them.

7.2 God makes a supreme appeal to your hearts through Spiritism; listen to him. Let impiety, falsehood, error, and unbelief be rooted out of your aching souls; they are monsters that drink your purest blood and inflict wounds on you that are almost always fatal. From now on, humble and submissive to the Creator, practice his divine law.

7.3 Love and pray; be receptive to the Spirits of the Lord; call upon him from the depths of your heart; then he will send you his beloved Son to teach you and speak these kind words to you: Here I am; I come to you because you have called me. (The Spirit of Truth. Bordeaux, 1861.)

8 God comforts the humble and gives strength to the afflicted who ask him for it. His power covers the earth, and everywhere, beside a tear, he has placed a soothing balm. Devotion and selflessness are a continual prayer and contain a profound teaching; human wisdom lies in these two words.

8.2 May all suffering Spirits understand this truth, instead of crying out against the sorrows, the anguish that is your lot here below. Take, then, these two words as your motto: devotion and selflessness, and you will be strong, because they sum up all the duties that charity and humility impose on you. The feeling of duty fulfilled will give you peace of mind and resignation.

8.3 The heart beats better, the soul grows calm, and the body no longer falters, for the body suffers all the more when the spirit is more deeply wounded. (The Spirit of Truth. Le Havre, 1863.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

VII. BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

✦

1 What is meant by the poor in spirit.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, v. 3.)

2 Unbelief has made fun of this maxim: Blessed are the poor in spirit, as it has of many other things, without understanding it. By the poor in spirit, Jesus does not mean people lacking intelligence, but the humble: he says that the kingdom of heaven is for them, and not for the proud.

People of learning and intellect, as the world understands them, generally have such a high opinion of themselves and their superiority that they regard divine things as unworthy of their attention; their gaze, fixed on themselves, cannot rise to God. This tendency to believe themselves above everything all too often leads them to deny whatever, being above them, might lower them, and even to deny the Divinity; or, if they agree to acknowledge him, they deny him one of his finest attributes: his providential action upon the things of this world, convinced that they alone are enough to govern it well. Taking their intelligence as the measure of universal intelligence, and judging themselves capable of understanding everything, they cannot believe in the possibility of what they do not understand; once they have spoken, their judgment is, to them, beyond appeal.

If they refuse to acknowledge the invisible world and a power beyond humanity, it is not, however, because these are beyond their understanding, but because their pride rebels at the idea of something above which they

cannot place themselves, and which would make them step down from their pedestal. This is why they have only scornful smiles for everything outside the visible and tangible world; they credit themselves with too much intellect and learning to believe in things fit, in their view, for simple people, regarding those who take them seriously as poor in spirit.

Yet, whatever they may say, they will have to enter, like everyone else, this invisible world that they ridicule; there their eyes will be opened and they will recognize their error. But God, who is just, cannot receive on the same terms the person who has disregarded his power and the person who has humbly submitted to his laws, nor give them an equal share.

By saying that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the simple, Jesus means that no one is admitted there without simplicity of heart and humility of spirit; that an unlearned person who possesses these qualities will be preferred to a learned person who believes more in himself than in God. In all circumstances he places humility among the virtues that bring people closer to God, and pride among the vices that draw them away from him; and for a very natural reason: humility is an act of submission to God, while pride is a rebellion against him. It is therefore better, for a person's future happiness, to be poor in spirit \ in the worldly sense, and rich in moral qualities.

3 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled

At that same time the disciples came to Jesus and said to him: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? — Jesus called a little child, placed him in their midst, and said to them: Truly I tell you that unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. — Whoever therefore humbles himself and makes himself small

like this child will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, — and whoever receives in my name a child such as I have just described receives me myself. (Saint Matthew, ch. xviii, v. 4 to 5.)

4 Then the mother of Zebedee's children came to him with her two sons and worshiped him, indicating that she wished to ask him for something. — He said to her: What do you want? Command, she said to him, that these two sons of mine may sit in your kingdom, one at your right and the other at your left.

4.2 — But Jesus answered them: You do not know what you are asking; can you drink the cup that I am about to drink? They said to him: We can. — He answered them: It is true that you will drink the cup that I will drink; but as for sitting at my right or at my left, it is not mine to grant you, but it will be for those for whom my Father has prepared it.

4.3 — When the ten other apostles heard this, they became indignant with the two brothers. — And Jesus called them to him and said: You know that the rulers of the nations dominate them, and that the great exercise authority over them.

4.4 — It must not be the same among you; but whoever wishes to become the greatest must be your servant; — and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life for the redemption of many. (Saint Matthew, ch. xx, v. 20 to 28.)

5 One Sabbath day Jesus entered the house of one of the leading Pharisees to eat a meal, and those who were there watched him. — Then, noticing how the guests chose the foremost places, he offered them this parable and said to them: — When you are invited to a wedding feast, do not take the

foremost place, for fear that someone more distinguished than you may be among the guests, and that the one who invited you may come and say to you: Give your place to this person, and then you will be forced in shame to take the lowest place.

5.2 — But when you have been invited, go and take the lowest place, so that when the one who invited you comes, he may say to you: My friend, move up higher. Then this will bring you honor before those who are at the table with you; — for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Saint Luke, ch. xiv, v. 1 and 7 to 11.)

6 These maxims follow from the principle of humility that Jesus continually sets forth as an essential condition of the happiness promised to the Lord's chosen, and which he expressed in these words: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.” He takes a child as a model of simplicity of heart and says: Whoever humbles himself and makes himself small like a child will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven; that is, whoever makes no claim to superiority or infallibility.

The same fundamental thought is found in this other maxim: “Whoever wishes to become the greatest must be your servant,” and in this one: “Whoever humbles himself will be exalted, and whoever exalts himself will be humbled.”

Spiritism confirms the theory through example, by showing us that those who were small on earth are great in the world of Spirits, and that those who were the greatest and most powerful here are often very small there. This is because the former took with them when they died the only thing that brings true greatness in heaven and is never lost: virtues; whereas the

others had to leave behind what made them great on earth and cannot be taken along: wealth, titles, glory, birth; having nothing else, they arrive in the other world stripped of everything, like shipwrecked people who have lost everything, even their clothes; they have kept only their pride, which makes their new position more humiliating, for they see above them, radiant with glory, those whom they trampled underfoot on earth.

Spiritism shows us another application of this principle in successive incarnations, where those who held the highest positions in one existence are brought down to the lowest rank in a following existence, if they were ruled by pride and ambition. Therefore do not seek the foremost place on earth, or seek to place yourselves above others, if you do not wish to be forced to descend; seek, on the contrary, the humblest and most modest place, for God will surely know how to give you a higher one in heaven if you deserve it.

Mysteries hidden from the wise and the prudent

7 Then Jesus spoke these words: I give you glory, my Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, and have revealed them to the simple and the little ones. (Saint Matthew, ch. xi, v. 25.)

8 It may seem strange that Jesus thanks God for having revealed these things to the simple and the little ones, who are the poor in spirit, and for having hidden them from the wise and the prudent, who seem better able to understand them. This is because the former must be understood as the humble, who humble themselves before God and do not believe themselves superior to everyone else; and the latter as the proud, vain about their worldly learning, who believe themselves prudent because they deny,

treating God as an equal when they do not disown him; for in antiquity, wise was synonymous with learned; this is why God leaves them to search for the secrets of the earth, and reveals those of heaven to the simple and the humble who bow before him.

9 So it is today with the great truths revealed by Spiritism. Some unbelievers are surprised that the Spirits make so little effort to convince them; this is because the latter concern themselves with those who seek the light in good faith and with humility, in preference to those who believe they possess all the light and seem to think that God should be only too happy to bring them back to him by proving to them that he exists.

God's power shines forth in the smallest things as in the greatest; he does not put the light under a bushel, since he pours it out abundantly on every side; blind, then, are those who do not see it. God does not wish to force their eyes open, since they choose to keep them closed. Their turn will come, but first they must feel the anguish of darkness and recognize God, and not chance, in the hand that strikes their pride. To overcome unbelief, he uses the means he finds fitting for each individual; it is not for the unbeliever to prescribe what he must do and to say to him: If you want to convince me, you must go about it in this or that way, at this time rather than another, because that time suits me.

Let unbelievers therefore not be surprised if God, and the Spirits who carry out his will, do not submit to their demands. Let them ask themselves what they would say if the least of their servants wished to impose his will on them. God sets his conditions and does not submit to those of others; he listens kindly to those who approach him with humility, and not to those who believe themselves greater than he.

10 Could God not, some will say, impress them personally with striking signs before which the most hardened unbeliever would have to bow? Certainly he could, but then where would their merit be, and besides, what purpose would it serve?

10.2 Do we not see people every day refusing to accept the evidence and even saying: If I saw it, I would not believe it, because I know it is impossible? If they refuse to acknowledge the truth, it is because their minds are not yet mature enough to understand it, nor their hearts to feel it.

10.3 Pride is the film that clouds their sight; what use is it to present light to a blind person? The cause of the affliction must therefore be cured first; this is why, like a skilled physician, he first chastises pride.

10.4 He does not, then, abandon his lost children; he knows that sooner or later their eyes will open, but he wants this to happen of their own free will, when, overcome by the torments of unbelief, they will throw themselves of their own accord into his arms and, like the prodigal child, ask him for mercy!

11 Instructions from the Spirits Pride and humility

May the peace of the Lord be with you, my dear friends! I come to you to encourage you to follow the right path.

To the poor Spirits who once lived on earth, God gives the mission of coming to enlighten you. Blessed be he for granting us the grace of being able to help you improve. May the Holy Spirit enlighten me and help me make my words understandable, and grant me the grace of bringing them within everyone's reach! All of you who are incarnate, who are suffering and seeking the light, may God's will help me make it shine before your eyes!

Humility is a virtue largely forgotten among you; the great examples of it that you have been given are seldom followed, and yet, without humility, can you be charitable toward your neighbor? Oh, no, for this feeling places people on an equal footing; it tells them they are brothers, that they must help one another, and leads them toward goodness. Without humility, you adorn yourselves with virtues you do not possess, as though wearing a garment to hide the deformities of your body. Remember the One who saved us; remember his humility, which made him so great and placed him above all the prophets.

Pride is the terrible adversary of humility. If Christ promised the kingdom of heaven to the poorest, it is because the great ones of the earth imagine that titles and riches are rewards given for their merit, and that their essence is purer than that of the poor; they believe these things are their due, which is why, when God takes them away, they accuse him of injustice. Oh, folly and blindness! Does God distinguish between you by your bodies? Is the covering of the poor person not the same as that of the rich? Did the Creator make two kinds of human beings? Everything God does is great and wise; never attribute to him the ideas born of your proud minds. O rich one, while you sleep beneath your gilded paneling, sheltered from the cold, do you not know that thousands of your brothers, who are your equals, are lying on straw? Is the unfortunate person suffering from hunger not your equal? At that word, your pride rebels, I know it well; you will agree to give him alms, but to shake his hand as a brother, never! "What!" you say. "I, born of noble blood, a great man of the earth, should be the equal of this wretch dressed in rags! An empty utopia of so-called philosophers! If we were equal, why would God have placed him so low and me so high?" It is true that your clothes are hardly alike; but if you

were both stripped of them, what difference would there be between you? Noble blood, you will say; but chemistry has found no difference between the blood of the great lord and that of the commoner; between that of the master and that of the slave. Who tells you that you, too, have not been wretched and unfortunate like him? That you have not begged for alms? That one day you will not beg them from the very person you despise today? Are riches eternal? Do they not end with this body, the perishable covering of your Spirit? Oh, look within yourself with humility! Turn your eyes at last to the reality of the things of this world, to what brings greatness and lowliness in the next; remember that death will spare you no more than anyone else; that your titles will not protect you from it; that it may strike you tomorrow, today, in an hour; and if you bury yourself in your pride, oh, then I pity you, for you will deserve pity!

You proud ones! What were you before you were noble and powerful? Perhaps you were lower than the least of your servants. Bow those haughty heads, then, which God can bring low at the very moment you raise them highest. All people are equal in the divine balance; virtues alone distinguish them in God's eyes. All Spirits are of the same essence, and all bodies are molded from the same clay; your titles and your names change nothing; they remain in the grave, and they are not what gives the happiness promised to the chosen; charity and humility are their titles of nobility.

Poor creature! You are a mother, your children are suffering; they are cold; they are hungry; bent beneath the weight of your cross, you go and humble yourself to obtain a piece of bread for them. Oh, I bow before you; how nobly holy and great you are in my eyes! Hope and pray; happiness is not yet of this world. To the poor who are oppressed and trust in him, God gives the kingdom of heaven.

And you, young girl, poor child given over to work and deprivation, why these sad thoughts? Why weep? Raise your eyes devoutly and serenely toward God: he gives food to the little birds; trust in him, and he will not abandon you. The sound of festivities and worldly pleasures makes your heart beat faster; you too would like to adorn your head with flowers and mingle with the happy people of the earth; you tell yourself that, like those women you watch passing by, carefree and laughing, you too could be rich. Oh, hush, child! If you knew how many tears and nameless sorrows are hidden beneath those embroidered clothes, how many sobs are stifled beneath the sound of that joyful orchestra, you would prefer your humble retreat and your poverty. Remain pure in God's eyes, if you do not want your guardian angel to return to him, his face hidden beneath his white wings, and leave you with your remorse, without a guide, without support in this world, where you would be lost while awaiting punishment in the next.

And all of you who suffer from the injustices of others, be forgiving toward your brothers' faults, telling yourselves that you, too, are not beyond reproach: this is charity, but it is also humility. If you suffer from slander, bow your head beneath this trial. What does the world's slander matter to you? If your conduct is pure, can God not compensate you for it? To bear with courage the humiliations inflicted by others is to be humble and to recognize that God alone is great and powerful.

Oh, my God, must Christ return a second time to this earth to teach people your laws, which they forget? Must he again drive out the merchants from the temple, who defile your house, which is only a place of prayer? And who knows, O people! If God granted you this grace, perhaps you would deny him as you did before; you would call him a blasphemer be-

cause he would humble the pride of modern Pharisees; perhaps you would make him walk the road to Golgotha once again.

When Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive God's commandments, the people of Israel, left to themselves, abandoned the true God; men and women gave their gold and their jewels to make themselves an idol, which they worshiped. Civilized people, you do as they did; Christ left you his teaching; he gave you the example of every virtue, and you have abandoned both example and precepts; each of you contributing your passions, you have made yourselves a God to suit you: according to some, terrible and bloodthirsty; according to others, unconcerned with the affairs of the world; the God you have made for yourselves is still the golden calf that each person adapts to their tastes and ideas.

Come to your senses, my brothers, my friends; may the voice of the Spirits touch your hearts; be generous and charitable without ostentation; that is, do good with humility; let each of you gradually tear down the altars you have raised to pride; in a word, be true Christians, and you will have the reign of truth. No longer doubt God's goodness, when he gives you so many proofs of it. We come to prepare the way for the fulfillment of the prophecies. When the Lord gives you a more striking manifestation of his mercy, may the heavenly messenger find in you only one great family; may your gentle and humble hearts be worthy of hearing the divine word he will come to bring you; may the chosen one find along his path only the palm branches laid down for your return to goodness, charity, and brotherhood, and then your world will become an earthly paradise. But if you remain deaf to the voice of the Spirits sent to purify and renew your civilized society, rich in knowledge and yet so poor in good feelings, alas, all that would remain for us would be to weep and mourn over your fate. But

no, it will not be so; return to God your father, and then all of us who have helped fulfill his will shall sing the hymn of thanksgiving, to thank the Lord for his inexhaustible goodness and to glorify him forever and ever. So be it. (Lacordaire. Constantine, 1863.)

12 People, why do you complain of the calamities you yourselves have heaped upon your heads? You have disregarded the holy and divine morality of Christ, so do not be surprised that the cup of iniquity has overflowed on every side.

Distress is becoming widespread; whom can you blame but yourselves, who constantly seek to crush one another? You cannot be happy without mutual goodwill, and how can goodwill exist alongside pride? Pride is the source of all your troubles; strive, then, to destroy it if you do not wish to see its disastrous consequences continue. Only one means of doing so is open to you, but that means is unfailing: take as the unchanging rule of your conduct the law of Christ, a law you have either rejected or distorted in your interpretation.

Why do you hold in such high esteem what glitters and delights the eyes, rather than what touches the heart? Why do you lavish praise on vice amid wealth, while you have only a disdainful glance for true merit in obscurity? Let a wealthy libertine, ruined in body and soul, appear anywhere, and every door is opened to him, every courtesy is shown to him, while people barely deign to offer a condescending greeting to the good man who lives by his labor. When the regard shown to people is measured by the weight of the gold they possess or the name they bear, what incentive can they have to correct their faults?

It would be quite otherwise if gilded vice were condemned by public

opinion as vice in rags is; but pride is indulgent towards everything that flatters it. An age of greed and money, you say. No doubt, but why have you allowed material needs to encroach upon common sense and reason? Why does everyone wish to rise above his brother? Today society is suffering the consequences.

Do not forget: such a state of affairs is always a sign of moral decline. When pride reaches its utmost limits, it is a sign of an approaching fall, for God always strikes down the arrogant. If he sometimes allows them to rise, it is to give them time to reflect and mend their ways under the blows he deals their pride from time to time as a warning; but instead of humbling themselves, they rebel. Then, when the measure is full, he brings them down completely, and their fall is all the more terrible because they had risen so high.

Poor human race, whose selfishness has corrupted all your ways, take courage nonetheless; in his infinite mercy, God sends you a powerful remedy for your troubles, unexpected help in your distress. Open your eyes to the light: here are the souls of those who are no more, coming to remind you of your true duties. They will tell you, with the authority of experience, how little the vanities and grandeur of your fleeting existence amount to beside eternity; they will tell you that the greatest is the one who has been the humblest among the lowly here below; that the one who has most loved his brothers is also the one who will be most loved in heaven; that the powerful of the earth, if they have abused their authority, will be reduced to obeying their servants; that charity and humility, finally, those two sisters who walk hand in hand, are the most effective claims to obtaining grace before the Eternal One. (Adolphe, Bishop of Algiers. Marmande, 1862.)

13 The mission of the intelligent person on earth

Do not be proud of what you know, for that knowledge has very narrow limits in the world you inhabit. But suppose you are one of the foremost minds on this globe: you have no right to take vanity in it. If God, in his designs, has caused you to be born in surroundings where you have been able to develop your intelligence, it is because he wants you to use it for the good of all; for he is giving you a mission by placing in your hands the instrument with which you can, in turn, develop less advanced minds and bring them to God. Does not the nature of the instrument indicate the use to be made of it? Does not the spade that the gardener places in his worker's hands show him that he must dig? And what would you say if this worker, instead of working, raised his spade to strike his master? You would say that it was dreadful and that he deserved to be driven away. Well, is it not the same with someone who uses his intelligence to destroy the idea of God and Providence among his brothers? Does he not raise against his master the spade that was given to him to clear the ground? Is he entitled to the promised wages, and does he not, on the contrary, deserve to be driven out of the garden?

He will be, have no doubt, and will drag himself through miserable lives filled with humiliation until he has bowed before the One to whom he owes everything.

Intelligence holds great merit for the future, but only on condition that it is put to good use; if all people endowed with it used it according to God's intentions, the Spirits' task of advancing humanity would be easy. Unfortunately, many make it an instrument of pride and of their own ruin. People abuse their intelligence as they do all their other faculties, and

yet they have no shortage of lessons to warn them that a powerful hand can take back what it has given them. (Ferdinand, protecting Spirit. Bordeaux, 1862.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

VIII. BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

✦

1 Let the little children come to me.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, v. 8.)

2 Then little children were brought to him so that he might touch them; and as his disciples harshly rebuked those who brought them — Jesus, seeing this, became angry and said to them: Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like them. — Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it. — And taking them in his arms, he blessed them, laying his hands on them. (Saint Mark, ch. x, vv. 13 to 16.)

3 Purity of heart is inseparable from simplicity and humility; it excludes every thought of selfishness and pride. This is why Jesus takes childhood as the emblem of this purity, just as he took it as the emblem of humility.
This comparison might not seem appropriate if we consider that the child's Spirit may be very old, and that, on being reborn into bodily life, it brings with it the imperfections it has not shed in its previous existences; only a Spirit that has reached perfection could give us a model of true purity. But the comparison is accurate from the standpoint of the present life: for the little child, having been unable as yet to show any perverse

tendency, offers us an image of innocence and candor. Thus Jesus does not say categorically that the kingdom of God belongs to them, but to those who are like them.

4 Since the child's Spirit has already lived, why does it not show itself as it is from birth? Everything in God's works is wise. The child needs tender care that maternal affection alone can provide, and this affection grows with the child's weakness and innocence. To a mother, her child is always an angel, and it had to be so to engage her devoted care; she could not have been as unreserved with the child if, instead of innocent charm, she had found, beneath childish features, a mature character and the ideas of an adult, and still less if she had known its past.

Furthermore, the activity of the intelligent principle had to be proportionate to the weakness of the body, which could not have withstood too great an activity of the Spirit, as can be seen in children who are excessively precocious. This is why, as incarnation approaches, the Spirit enters a state of confusion and gradually loses awareness of itself; for a certain period it is in a kind of sleep during which all its faculties remain latent. This transitional state is necessary to give the Spirit a new starting point and to make it forget, in its new earthly existence, the things that might have hindered it. Its past, however, continues to influence it; it is reborn into life greater, morally and intellectually stronger, supported and assisted by the intuition it retains of the experience it has acquired.

From birth onward, its ideas gradually resume their development as its organs develop; hence it may be said that, during the early years, the Spirit is truly a child, because the ideas that form the basis of its character are still dormant. During the time when its instincts slumber, it is more pliable

and therefore more receptive to impressions that can change its nature and help it progress, making the task assigned to parents easier.
The Spirit thus wears the robe of innocence for a time, and Jesus speaks truly when, despite the soul's previous existence, he takes the child as the emblem of purity and simplicity.

5 Sin in thought. Adultery
You have heard that it was said to the ancients: You shall not commit adultery. — But I tell you that whoever has looked at a woman with an impure desire for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, vv. 27 and 28.)

6 The word adultery must not be understood here exclusively in its literal meaning, but in a more general sense; Jesus often used it by extension to designate evil, sin, and any evil thought whatsoever, as, for example, in this passage: “For if anyone is ashamed of me and my words among this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes with the holy angels in the glory of his Father.” (Saint Mark, ch. viii, v. 38.)
True purity lies not only in actions; it also lies in thought, for whoever is pure in heart does not even think of evil. This is what Jesus meant: he condemns sin even in thought, because it is a sign of impurity.

7 This principle naturally leads to this question: Do we suffer the consequences of an evil thought that is not put into action?
An important distinction must be made here. As a soul that has taken the wrong path advances in spiritual life, it becomes enlightened and gradually sheds its imperfections, according to the greater or lesser willingness it brings to this task through its free will. Every evil thought is therefore the

result of the soul's imperfection; but depending on the desire it has formed to purify itself, this very evil thought becomes an opportunity for advancement, because it rejects it vigorously. It is the sign of a stain it strives to erase; it will not yield if an opportunity arises to satisfy an evil desire; and after resisting, it will feel stronger and joyful in its victory.

The soul, on the contrary, that has made no good resolutions seeks the opportunity, and if it does not carry out the evil act, this is not because of its will, but because it lacks the opportunity; it is therefore as guilty as if it had committed it.

In summary, in the person who does not even conceive the thought of evil, progress has been achieved; in the person to whom this thought comes, but who rejects it, progress is being achieved; finally, in the person who has this thought and takes pleasure in it, evil still retains its full strength. In one, the work is done; in the other, it remains to be done. God, who is just, takes all these distinctions into account in determining people's responsibility for their actions and thoughts.

8 True purity. Unwashed hands

Then scribes and Pharisees who had come from Jerusalem approached Jesus and said to him: — Why do your disciples violate the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat their meals.

But Jesus answered them: Why do you yourselves violate God's commandment to follow your tradition? For God gave this commandment: — Honor your father and your mother; and this other one: Whoever speaks abusively to his father or mother shall be punished with death. — But you say: Whoever says to his father or mother, Every gift I make to God benefits you, fulfills the law, — even though afterward he neither honors nor

helps his father or mother; and thus you have made God's commandment ineffective through your tradition.

Hypocrites, Isaiah prophesied well about you when he said: — These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me: (— and in vain do they honor me by teaching human maxims and ordinances.

Then, having called the people to him, he said to them: Listen and understand this well: — It is not what enters the mouth that defiles a person; it is what comes out of a person's mouth that defiles him. — What comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this is what makes a person impure; — for from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimony, blasphemies, and malicious gossip; — these are the things that make a person impure; but eating without having washed one's hands does not make a person impure.

Then his disciples approached him and said: Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard what you have just said? — But he answered: Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. — Leave them alone; they are blind people leading blind people; if one blind person leads another, both fall into the pit. (Saint Matthew, ch. xv, vv. 1 to 20.)

9 While he was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to dine at his house; and Jesus went there and sat down at the table. — The Pharisee then began to say to himself: Why has he not washed his hands before dining? — But the Lord said to him: You Pharisees take great care to clean the outside of the cup and the dish; but the inside of your hearts is full of plunder and wickedness. Fools that you are! Did the one who made the outside not also make the inside? (Saint Luke, ch. xi, vv. 37 to 40.)

10 The Jews had neglected God's true commandments to devote themselves to the practice of regulations established by human beings, whose strict observers made them matters of conscience; the substance, which was very simple, had eventually disappeared beneath the complexity of the form. Since it was easier to observe outward practices than to reform oneself morally, to wash one's hands than to cleanse one's heart, people deceived themselves and believed they had fulfilled their duty to God because they conformed to these practices, while remaining as they were; for they were taught that God asked for nothing more. This is why the prophet says: In vain do these people honor me with their lips, teaching human maxims and ordinances.

So it has been with Christ's moral teaching, which has eventually been relegated to second place, with the result that many Christians, following the example of the ancient Jews, believe their salvation is more securely assured by outward practices than by moral ones. It is to these additions made by human beings to God's law that Jesus alludes when he says: Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.

The purpose of religion is to lead people to God; yet people reach God only when they are perfect. Therefore, any religion that does not make people better fails to achieve its purpose; a religion on which people believe they can rely to do evil is either false or distorted in its principle. Such is the result of all religions in which form prevails over substance. Belief in the effectiveness of outward signs is worthless if it does not prevent people from committing murders, adulteries, and acts of plunder, from uttering slander, and from harming their neighbors in any way whatsoever. It produces superstitious people, hypocrites, or fanatics, but it does

not produce people of virtue.
It is therefore not enough to have the appearance of purity; above all, one must have purity of heart.

[11] Stumbling blocks. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off
Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks; for stumbling blocks must come; but woe to the man through whom the stumbling block comes.
If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have one of those millstones turned by a donkey hung around his neck and to be thrown into the depths of the sea.
Take great care not to despise any of these little ones; I tell you that in heaven their angels constantly see the face of my Father who is in heaven; for the Son of Man came to save what was lost.
If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut them off and throw them far from you; it is far better for you to enter life with only one foot or one hand than to have two and be thrown into eternal fire. — And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it far from you; it is better for you to enter life with only one eye than to have two and be cast into the fire of hell. (Saint Matthew, ch. XVIII, vv. 6 to 10. — Ch. V, vv. 27 to 30.)

[12] In ordinary usage, scandal refers to any action that openly offends morality or propriety. The scandal lies not in the action itself, but in the public reaction it may cause. The word scandal always implies a certain amount of publicity. Many people are content to avoid scandal because their pride would suffer from it and their standing among others would be diminished; as long as their shameful deeds remain unknown, that is enough for them, and their conscience is at ease. In the words of Jesus,

they are: “tombs whitewashed on the outside, but full of decay within; vessels cleaned on the outside, dirty within.”

In the Gospel sense, the meaning of the word stumbling block, so often used, is much broader, which is why its meaning is not understood in certain cases. It is no longer merely what offends another person's conscience, but everything that results from human vices and imperfections, every harmful effect one individual has on another, whether publicly known or not. In this case, the stumbling block is the actual result of moral evil. 13. There must be stumbling blocks in the world, Jesus said, because human beings, being imperfect on earth, are inclined to do evil, and bad trees bear bad fruit. These words must therefore be understood to mean that evil is a consequence of human imperfection, and not that people are obliged to do it.

14 Stumbling blocks must come, because human beings, undergoing atonement on earth, punish themselves through contact with their vices, of which they are the first victims and whose harmful effects they eventually come to understand. When they grow weary of suffering from evil, they will seek the remedy in goodness. The effects of these vices thus serve both as punishment for some and as a trial for others; this is how God brings good out of evil, just as human beings themselves make use of bad or discarded things.

15 If that is so, some will say, evil is necessary and will last forever; for if it were to disappear, God would be deprived of a powerful means of punishing the guilty; therefore it is useless to try to improve human beings. But if there were no more guilty people, there would be no more need for punishments.

15.2 Suppose humanity were transformed into good people: none would seek to harm their neighbor, and all would be happy because they would be good. Such is the state of advanced worlds from which evil is excluded; such will be the state of the earth when it has progressed sufficiently.

15.3 But while some worlds advance, others are forming, populated by primitive Spirits, and also serving as a dwelling, a place of exile and a place of atonement for imperfect, rebellious Spirits who persist in evil and are cast out of worlds that have become happy.

16 But woe to the one through whom the stumbling block comes; this means that, since evil is always evil, the person who has unknowingly served as an instrument of divine justice, whose bad instincts have been put to use, has nevertheless done evil and must be punished. Thus, for example, an ungrateful child is a punishment or a trial for the father who suffers because of him, because that father may himself have been a bad son who made his own father suffer, and is undergoing punishment in kind; but the son is no more excusable for this, and will have to be punished in turn through his own children or in some other way.

17 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; a forceful figure of speech that it would be absurd to take literally, and which simply means that we must destroy within ourselves every cause of stumbling, that is, of evil; tear from our hearts every impure feeling and every vicious principle; it also means that it would be better for a man to have had his hand cut off than for that hand to have been the instrument of a bad deed; to be deprived of sight than for his eyes to have given him evil thoughts. Jesus said

nothing absurd to anyone who grasps the allegorical and profound meaning of his words; but many things cannot be understood without the key that Spiritism provides.

18 Instructions from the Spirits: Let the little children come to me

Christ said: "Let the little children come to me." These words, profound in their simplicity, carried with them not merely a call to children, but a call to souls moving in the lower circles where misfortune knows no hope. Jesus was calling to him the intellectual childhood of the fully formed creature: the weak, the enslaved, the vicious; he could teach nothing to physical childhood, bound up in matter, subject to the yoke of instinct, and not yet belonging to the higher order of reason and will that operate around it and on its behalf.

Jesus wanted people to come to him with the trust of those little beings with faltering steps, whose summons won him the hearts of women, who are all mothers; in this way he brought souls under his tender and mysterious authority. He was the torch that lights the darkness, the morning bugle that sounds the awakening; he was the initiator of Spiritism, which must in turn call to itself, not little children, but people of goodwill. Vigorous action has begun; it is no longer a matter of believing instinctively and obeying mechanically: people must follow the intelligent law that reveals its universality to them.

My beloved, the time has come when errors, once explained, will become truths; we will teach you the exact meaning of the parables, and we will show you the powerful connection that links what has been with what is.

Truly I tell you: the spirit manifestation is growing on the horizon; and here is its messenger, who will shine like the sun on the mountaintops. (John the Evangelist. Paris, 1863.)

19 Let the little children come to me, for I have the milk that strengthens the weak. Let those who are fearful and frail and need support and comfort come to me. Let the ignorant come to me so that I may enlighten them; let all who suffer come to me, the multitude of the afflicted and the unfortunate; I will teach them the great remedy for easing the troubles of life, I will give them the secret of healing their wounds! What is it, my friends, this supreme balm, possessing the greatest healing power, this balm that is applied to every wound of the heart and closes it? It is love, it is charity! If you have this divine fire, what will you fear? At every moment of your life you will say: My Father, may your will be done and not mine; if it pleases you to try me through pain and tribulations, blessed are you, for I know that it is for my good that your hand weighs heavily upon me. If it pleases you, Lord, to have pity on your weak creature, if you give its heart the joys that are permitted, blessed are you again; but grant that divine love may not fall asleep in its soul, and that it may constantly raise the voice of its gratitude to your feet!...

If you have love, you will have everything worth desiring on your earth; you will possess the finest pearl, which neither events nor the malice of those who hate and persecute you will be able to take from you. If you have love, you will have placed your treasures where worms and rust cannot reach them, and you will see everything that can stain your soul's purity gradually fade away from it; you will feel the weight of matter grow lighter day by day, and, like the bird that soars through the air and no

longer remembers the earth, you will rise ceaselessly, you will rise forever, until your enraptured soul can drink from its source of life in the bosom of the Lord. (A protective Spirit. Bordeaux, 1861.)

20 Blessed are those whose eyes are closed

My good friends, you have called me, but why? Is it to have me lay hands on the poor suffering woman who is here and heal her? Ah! What suffering, good God! She has lost her sight, and darkness is gathering around her. Poor child! Let her pray and hope; I cannot perform miracles without the will of the good God. All the healings I have been able to obtain, and which have been reported to you, attribute them only to him who is the Father of us all. In your afflictions, then, always look to heaven and say from the depths of your heart: "My Father, heal me, but let my sick soul be healed before the infirmities of my body; let my flesh be chastised, if necessary, so that my soul may rise toward you with the whiteness it had when you created it." After this prayer, my good friends, which the good God will always hear, strength and courage will be given to you, and perhaps also that healing which you will have asked for only timidly, as a reward for your self-denial.

But since I am here, in a gathering where it is above all a matter of study, I will tell you that those who are deprived of sight should consider themselves blessed in their atonement. Remember that Christ said you must tear out your eye if it was evil, and that it was better for it to be thrown into the fire than to be the cause of your damnation. Alas! How many there are on your earth who will one day curse in the darkness the fact that they saw the light! Oh! Yes, how fortunate are those whose sight is afflicted as an atonement! Their eye will not be a cause of stumbling and falling;

they can live wholly the life of souls; they can see more than you who see clearly... When God allows me to open the eyelids of one of these poor sufferers and restore the light to them, I say to myself: Dear soul, why do you not know all the delights of the Spirit who lives in contemplation and love? You would not ask to see images less pure and less sweet than those you are allowed to glimpse in your blindness.

Oh! Yes, blessed is the blind person who wishes to live with God; happier than you who are here, he feels happiness, he touches it, he sees souls and can soar with them into the spirit spheres that even the predestined of your earth do not see. The open eye is always ready to make the soul falter; the closed eye, on the contrary, is always ready to make it rise to God. Believe me, my good and dear friends, blindness of the eyes is often the true light of the heart, while sight is often the dark angel that leads to death.

And now a few words for you, my poor suffering woman: hope and take courage! If I said to you: My child, your eyes are going to open, how joyful you would be! And who knows whether that joy might not be your ruin? Trust in the good God, who made happiness and allowed sorrow! I will do all that I am permitted to do for you; but you, in turn, must pray, and above all reflect on everything I have just told you.

Before I leave, all of you who are here, receive my blessing. (Vianney, parish priest of Ars. Paris, 1863.) i I. Note. When an affliction is not a consequence of the acts of the present life, its cause must be sought in a previous life. What are called the whims of fate are nothing other than the effects of God's justice. God does not inflict arbitrary punishments: he wishes there always to be a connection between the fault and the penalty. If, in his goodness, he has cast a veil over our past actions, he nevertheless

points us in the right direction by saying: “Whoever has killed by the sword will perish by the sword”; words that may be rendered thus: “One is always punished through that by which one has sinned.” If, then, someone is afflicted by the loss of sight, it is because sight has been a cause of their downfall. Perhaps they have also caused someone else to lose their sight; perhaps someone became blind through the excessive work they imposed on them, or as a result of ill-treatment, lack of care, etc., and they are then suffering the penalty of retaliation. They themselves, in their repentance, may have chosen this atonement, applying to themselves these words of Jesus: “If your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out.”

(1) This communication was given concerning a blind person, for whom the Spirit of J.-B. Vianney, parish priest of Ars, had been summoned.

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

IX. BLESSED ARE THE GENTLE AND THE PEACEABLE

✦

1 Insults and violence.
Blessed are the gentle, for they will possess the earth. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, v. 4.)

2 Blessed are the peaceable, for they will be called children of God. (Ibid., v. 9.)

3 You have heard that it was said to the Ancients: You shall not kill, and whoever kills will deserve to be condemned by judgment. — But I tell you that whoever becomes angry with his brother will deserve to be condemned by judgment; that whoever says to his brother: Raca, will deserve to be condemned by the council; and that whoever says to him: You are a fool, will deserve to be condemned to the fire of hell. (Ibid., v. 21, 22.)

4 Through these maxims, Jesus makes gentleness, moderation, mildness, friendliness, and patience a law; he therefore condemns violence, anger, and even any unkind expression directed at one's fellow human beings. Among the Hebrews, Raca was a term of contempt meaning a worthless man, and was spoken while spitting and turning one's head away. He goes even further, since he threatens with the fire of hell anyone who says to his brother: You are a fool.
It is clear that here, as in every circumstance, intention makes the fault more or less serious; but how can a mere word be serious enough to deserve such severe condemnation? It is because every offensive word expresses a

feeling contrary to the law of love and charity that must govern human relations and maintain harmony and unity among people; because it is an attack on mutual goodwill and brotherhood; because it sustains hatred and animosity; and finally because, after humility before God, charity toward one's neighbor is the first law of every Christian.

5 But what does Jesus mean by these words: “Blessed are the gentle, for they will possess the earth,” when he tells us to renounce the goods of this world and promises those of heaven?

While awaiting the goods of heaven, human beings need those of the earth in order to live; he merely advises them not to attach more importance to the latter than to the former.

By these words, he means that, until now, the goods of the earth have been monopolized by the violent to the detriment of the gentle and the peaceable; that the latter often lack necessities, while others have more than they need; he promises that justice will be done to them on earth as in heaven, because they are called the children of God. When the law of love and charity becomes the law of humanity, selfishness will cease to exist; the weak and the peaceable will no longer be exploited or crushed by the strong and the violent. Such will be the state of the earth when, according to the law of progress and the promise of Jesus, it has become a happy world through the expulsion of the wicked.

6 Instructions from the Spirits Friendliness and gentleness

Goodwill toward one's fellow human beings, the fruit of love for one's neighbor, produces friendliness and gentleness, which are its outward expression. Yet appearances should not always be trusted; education and familiarity with society can give a veneer of these qualities. How many peo-

ple have a feigned good nature that is merely a mask for the outside world, a garment whose carefully planned cut conceals hidden deformities! The world is full of people who have a smile on their lips and venom in their hearts; who are gentle as long as nothing offends them, but who bite at the slightest annoyance; whose honeyed tongue, when they speak to someone's face, becomes a poisoned dart when they speak behind their back.

To this class also belong those men with kindly outward manners who, at home, are domestic tyrants, making their families and subordinates suffer under the weight of their pride and despotism; they seem to want compensation for the restraint they have imposed on themselves elsewhere; not daring to exercise authority over strangers who would put them in their place, they are less eager to make themselves feared by those who cannot resist them; their vanity delights in being able to say: "Here I command and am obeyed," without considering that they could more rightly add: "And I am hated."

It is not enough for milk and honey to flow from the lips; if the heart has no part in it, it is hypocrisy. Those whose friendliness and gentleness are sincere never contradict themselves; they are the same in society and in private; they also know that though appearances may deceive people, they do not deceive God. (Lazarus. Paris, 1861.)

7 Patience

Pain is a blessing that God sends to his chosen ones; so do not grieve when you suffer, but instead bless the almighty God who has marked you with pain here below for glory in heaven.

Be patient; patience too is a form of charity, and you must practice the law

of charity taught by Christ, God's messenger. The charity that consists in giving alms to the poor is the easiest form of charity; but there is another that is far more difficult and consequently far more deserving: forgiving those whom God has placed on our path to be the instruments of our suffering and to put our patience to the test.

Life is difficult, I know; it consists of a thousand trifles that are like pinpricks and eventually wound us; but we must look at the duties imposed on us, and at the consolations and compensations we have on the other hand, and then we will see that blessings outnumber sorrows. The burden seems lighter when we look upward than when we bow our heads towards the earth.

Take courage, friends, Christ is your model; he suffered more than any of you, and he had nothing to reproach himself for, whereas you have to atone for your past and strengthen yourselves for the future. Be patient, then; be Christians: that word contains everything. (A friendly Spirit. Le Havre, 1862.)

8 Obedience and resignation

The doctrine of Jesus teaches obedience and resignation throughout, two virtues that accompany gentleness and are very active in their struggle, although people wrongly confuse them with the denial of feeling and will. Obedience is the consent of reason; resignation is the consent of the heart; both are active forces, for they bear the burden of trials that senseless rebellion allows to fall back upon us. A coward cannot be resigned, any more than the proud and the selfish can be obedient. Jesus was the embodiment of these virtues, scorned by the materialistic ancient world. He came at a time when Roman society was perishing through the failings of corrup-

tion; he came to make the triumphs of sacrifice and renunciation of the flesh shine amid a humanity sunk in weakness.

Each age is thus stamped with the virtue or vice that will save or destroy it. The virtue of your generation is intellectual activity; its vice is moral indifference. I say only activity, for genius suddenly rises and reveals to one person alone horizons that the multitude will see only after him, whereas activity is the combined effort of all to reach a less brilliant goal, but one that proves the intellectual advancement of an age. Submit to the impulse we come to give your minds; obey the great law of progress, which is the watchword of your generation. Woe to the lazy spirit, to those who close their understanding! Woe! For we who guide humanity on its march will strike them with the whip and compel their rebellious will through the combined action of bridle and spur; all proud resistance will have to yield sooner or later; but blessed are the gentle, for they will lend a willing ear to these teachings. (Lazarus. Paris, 1863.)

Anger.

9 Pride leads you to believe yourselves greater than you are; to be unable to bear a comparison that might lower you; on the contrary, to see yourselves so far above your brothers, whether in intellect, social position, or even personal advantages, that the slightest comparison irritates and offends you; and what happens then? You give way to anger.

Look for the origin of those fits of temporary madness that make you like a brute by causing you to lose your composure and reason; search, and you will almost always find wounded pride at their root. Is it not pride, wounded by contradiction, that makes you reject sound observations and angrily dismiss the wisest advice? Even the impatience caused by often

childish annoyances stems from the importance people attach to themselves, believing that everything must bow before them.

In his frenzy, an angry man lashes out at everything, at unreasoning nature, at inanimate objects that he breaks because they do not obey him. Ah! If at such moments he could see himself calmly, he would be frightened of himself or find himself quite ridiculous! Let him judge by this the impression he must make on others. Even if only out of self-respect, he should strive to overcome a tendency that makes him an object of pity.

If he considered that anger remedies nothing, that it damages his health and even endangers his life, he would see that he is its first victim; but another consideration should restrain him above all: the thought that he makes everyone around him unhappy; if he has any heart, does it not fill him with remorse to make those he loves most suffer? And what agonizing regret if, in a fit of rage, he committed an act he would have to reproach himself for all his life!

All in all, anger does not exclude certain qualities of the heart; but it prevents much good from being done and can lead to much evil; that should be enough to encourage efforts to master it. The Spiritist has a further motive: anger is contrary to Christian charity and humility. (A protecting Spirit. Bordeaux, 1863.)

10 Because of the very mistaken idea that people cannot reform their own nature, they believe themselves excused from making efforts to correct faults in which they willingly indulge, or which would require too much perseverance; thus, for example, a man inclined to anger almost always excuses himself on the grounds of his temperament; rather than admit his guilt, he blames his physical constitution, thereby accusing God of his

own misdeeds. This is yet another consequence of the pride found mingled with all his imperfections.

Undeniably, some temperaments lend themselves more readily than others to violent acts, just as more supple muscles lend themselves better to feats of strength; but do not believe that this is the primary cause of anger, and be assured that a peaceable Spirit, even in a bilious body, will always be peaceable; and that a violent Spirit in a sluggish body will be no gentler; the violence will merely take on a different character; lacking a physical constitution suited to supporting its violence, its anger will be held within, while in the other case it will be expressed outwardly.

The body no more gives anger to someone who does not have it than it gives the other vices; all virtues and all vices are inherent in the Spirit; otherwise, where would merit and responsibility lie? A man whose body is deformed cannot make himself straight, because the Spirit has no part in it, but he can change what belongs to the Spirit when he has the firm will to do so. Does experience not prove to you, Spiritists, how far the power of the will can go, through the truly miraculous transformations you see taking place? Tell yourselves, then, that people remain subject to vice only because they wish to remain so; but those who wish to correct themselves can always do so, otherwise the law of progress would not exist for humanity. (Hahnemann. Paris, 1863.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

X. BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

✦

1 Forgive so that God may forgive you.
Blessed are the merciful, for they themselves will receive mercy. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, v. 7.)

2 If you forgive people the wrongs they do to you, your heavenly Father will also forgive your sins; — but if you do not forgive people when they have offended you, your Father will not forgive your sins either. (Ibid., ch. vi, v. 14, 15.)

3 If your brother has sinned against you, go and point out his fault to him privately, between you and him; if he listens to you, you will have won your brother over. — Then Peter came up and said to him: Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he has sinned against me? As many as seven times? — Jesus answered him: I do not say to you as many as seven times, but seventy times seven times. (Ibid., ch. xviii, v. 15, 21, 22.)

4 Mercy is the complement of gentleness; for someone who is not merciful cannot be gentle and peaceable; it consists in forgetting and forgiving offenses. Hatred and resentment reveal a soul without elevation or greatness; forgetting offenses is the mark of an elevated soul that rises above the injuries others may inflict upon it; the former is always anxious, suspiciously sensitive, and full of bitterness; the latter is calm, full of kindness and charity.
Woe to anyone who says: I will never forgive, for even if people do not condemn him, God certainly will; by what right could he ask forgiveness for

his own faults if he himself does not forgive those of others? Jesus teaches us that mercy must have no limits when he says to forgive one's brother, not seven times, but seventy times seven times.

But there are two very different ways of forgiving: one is great, noble, truly generous, without ulterior motives, and delicately spares the pride and feelings of the other party, even if the latter is entirely in the wrong; in the second, the offended person, or the person who believes himself to be offended, imposes humiliating conditions on the other and makes him feel the weight of a pardon that irritates instead of soothing; if he holds out his hand, it is not with goodwill, but with ostentation, so that he can say to everyone: See how generous I am! Under such circumstances, reconciliation cannot be sincere on both sides. No, this is not generosity; it is a way of satisfying pride. In every dispute, the person who is most conciliatory, who shows the most selflessness, charity, and true greatness of soul, will always win the sympathy of impartial people.

[5] Coming to terms with one's adversaries

Come to terms with your adversary as soon as possible while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary hand you over to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer of justice, and you be put in prison. — Truly I tell you that you will not leave there until you have paid the very last obol. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, v. 25, 26.)

[6] The practice of forgiveness, and of goodness in general, has more than a moral effect; it also has a material effect. Death, as we know, does not deliver us from our enemies; vengeful Spirits often pursue beyond the grave,

with their hatred, those against whom they have harbored resentment; this is why the proverb that says, “When the beast is dead, its venom is dead,” is false when applied to human beings.

6.2 The evil Spirit waits until the person he wishes to harm is bound to his body and less free, so that he can torment him more easily, strike at his interests or his dearest affections. In this fact we must recognize the cause of most cases of obsession, especially those of a certain seriousness, such as subjugation and possession.

6.3 Those who are obsessed or possessed are therefore almost always victims of an earlier vengeance, which they have probably brought upon themselves through their conduct. God allows this to punish them for the evil they themselves have done, or, if they have done none, for having lacked forbearance and charity by failing to forgive.

6.4 For the sake of one's future peace, it is therefore important to make amends as soon as possible for the wrongs one has done to one's neighbor, and to forgive one's enemies, so as to extinguish, before dying, every source of discord, every well-founded cause of future animosity; in this way, one can turn a bitter enemy in this world into a friend in the next; at the very least, one puts right on one's side, and God does not leave someone who has forgiven exposed to vengeance.

6.5 When Jesus recommends coming to terms with one's adversary as soon as possible, it is not only to settle disputes during the present existence, but to prevent them from continuing in future existences. You will not leave there, he says, until you have paid the very last obol, that is, until you have fully satisfied God's justice.

7 The sacrifice most pleasing to God

If, then, when you present your offering at the altar, you remember that your brother has something against you, — leave your gift there at the foot of the altar, and first go and be reconciled with your brother, and then you shall return to offer your gift. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, v. 23, 24.)

8 When Jesus says: “Go and be reconciled with your brother before presenting your offering at the altar,” he teaches that the sacrifice most pleasing to the Lord is that of one's own resentment; that before coming before him to be forgiven, one must have forgiven others oneself, and that if one has wronged one of one's brothers, one must have made amends; only then will the offering be accepted, because it will come from a heart free of every evil thought.

8.2 He gives this precept a material form because the Jews offered material sacrifices; he had to adapt his words to their customs. The Christian does not offer material gifts; he has spiritualized sacrifice, but the precept is all the stronger for it; he offers his soul to God, and that soul must be purified; on entering the Lord's temple, he must leave outside every feeling of hatred and animosity, every evil thought against his brother; only then will his prayer be carried by the angels to the feet of the Eternal.

8.3 This is what Jesus teaches through these words: Leave your offering at the foot of the altar, and first go and be reconciled with your brother, if you wish to be pleasing to the Lord.

9 The straw and the beam in the eye

Why do you see a straw in your brother's eye, when you do not see a beam in your own eye? — Or how can you say to your brother: Let me take a

straw out of your eye, when you have a beam in your own? — Hypocrites, first remove the beam from your own eye, and then you will see how to take the straw out of your brother's eye. (Saint Matthew, ch. vii, v. 3, 4, 5.)

10 One of humanity's failings is to see the evil in others before seeing the evil within ourselves. To judge ourselves, we would need to be able to look at ourselves in a mirror, to step outside ourselves, as it were, and consider ourselves as another person, asking: What would I think if I saw someone doing what I am doing? It is unquestionably pride that leads people to conceal their own faults from themselves, both moral and physical. This failing is fundamentally contrary to charity, for true charity is modest, simple, and forbearing; prideful charity is an absurdity, since these two feelings cancel each other out. How, indeed, can a man vain enough to believe in his own importance and the superiority of his qualities at the same time have enough selflessness to highlight in others the good that might eclipse him, instead of the evil that might make him look better? If pride is the father of many vices, it is also the negation of many virtues; it is found at the root of, and as the motive for, almost every action. This is why Jesus devoted himself to combating it as the main obstacle to progress.

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. Let whoever is without sin cast the first stone at her.

11 Do not judge, so that you may not be judged; — for you will be judged as you have judged others; and the same measure you have used for them will be used for you. (Saint Matthew, ch. vii, v. 1, 2.)

12 Then the Scribes and the Pharisees brought him a woman who had been caught in adultery, and made her stand in the midst of the people, — saying to Jesus: Teacher, this woman has just been caught in adultery; now, Moses commands us in the law to stone adulterers. What, then, is your opinion on this? — They said this to test him, so that they might have grounds to accuse him. But Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. — As they continued questioning him, he stood up and said to them: Let whoever among you is without sin cast the first stone at her. — Then he bent down again and continued writing on the ground. — But when they heard him speak in this way, they withdrew one after another, the oldest leaving first; and so Jesus remained alone with the woman, who was in the middle of the square.

Then Jesus stood up and said to her: Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you? — She said to him: No, Lord. Jesus answered her: Neither will I condemn you. Go, and from now on sin no more. (Saint John, ch. viii, v. 3 to 11.)

13 "Let whoever is without sin cast the first stone at her," said Jesus. This maxim makes forbearance a duty for us, because there is no one who does not need it on their own account. It teaches us that we must not judge others more severely than we judge ourselves, nor condemn in others what we excuse in ourselves. Before reproaching someone for a fault, let us see whether the same reproach might fall upon us.

Censure of another person's conduct can have two motives: to curb evil, or to discredit the person whose actions are being criticized; the latter motive is never excusable, for it is slander and malice. The former can be praiseworthy, and even becomes a duty in certain cases, since good should result

from it, and without it evil would never be curbed in society; besides, should people not help their fellow human beings to progress? We should therefore not take this principle in an absolute sense: "Do not judge if you do not wish to be judged," for the letter kills, and the spirit gives life.

Jesus could not forbid censuring what is wrong, since he himself gave us an example of it, and did so in forceful terms; but he meant that the authority of censure is proportionate to the moral authority of the person who pronounces it; to become guilty of what one condemns in others is to abdicate that authority; it is also to deprive oneself of the right to curb wrongdoing. Moreover, one's inner conscience refuses all respect and all willing submission to anyone who, invested with any kind of power, violates the laws and principles he is charged with applying. In God's eyes, the only legitimate authority is that which rests on the example of goodness it sets; this also follows from the words of Jesus.

14 Teachings of the Spirits Forgiveness of offenses

How many times must I forgive my brother? You shall forgive him not seven times, but seventy times seven times. This is one of those sayings of Jesus that should strike your understanding most deeply and speak most strongly to your heart. Compare these words of mercy with the prayer, so simple, so concise, and so great in its aspirations, that Jesus gives his disciples, and you will always find the same thought. Jesus, the supremely righteous one, answers Peter: You shall forgive, but without limits; you shall forgive every offense as often as it is committed against you; you shall teach your brothers that selflessness which makes one invulnerable to attacks, mistreatment, and insults; you shall be gentle and humble in heart, never setting a measure on your gentleness; finally, you shall do what you

wish the heavenly Father to do for you. Does he not often have to forgive you, and does he count the number of times his forgiveness descends to erase your faults?

Listen, then, to this answer from Jesus, and, like Peter, apply it to yourselves; forgive, show forbearance, be charitable, generous, even lavish with your love. Give, for the Lord will repay you; forgive, for the Lord will forgive you; lower yourselves, for the Lord will raise you up; humble yourselves, for the Lord will seat you at his right hand.

Go, my beloved, study and reflect on these words that I address to you on behalf of the One who, from the heights of heavenly splendor, always looks toward you and lovingly continues the thankless task he began eighteen centuries ago. Forgive your brothers, then, as you yourselves need to be forgiven. If their actions have harmed you personally, that is all the more reason to show forbearance, for the merit of forgiveness is proportional to the seriousness of the harm; there would be no merit in overlooking your brothers' wrongs if they had caused you only slight wounds.

Spiritists, never forget that in words, as in deeds, forgiveness of insults must not be an empty phrase. If you call yourselves Spiritists, then be so; forget the harm that may have been done to you, and think of only one thing: the good you can give in return. Anyone who has entered this path must not stray from it even in thought, for you are responsible for your thoughts, which God knows. See to it, then, that they are free of every feeling of resentment; God knows what remains in the depths of each person's heart. Happy, then, is the one who can fall asleep each evening saying: I hold nothing against my neighbor. (Simeon. Bordeaux, 1862.)

15 To forgive your enemies is to ask forgiveness for yourself; to forgive your friends is to give them proof of friendship; to forgive offenses is to show that you are becoming better. Forgive, then, my friends, so that God may forgive you, for if you are harsh, demanding, unyielding, if you hold a grudge even over a slight offense, how can you expect God to forget that every day you have the greatest need of forbearance? Oh! Woe to anyone who says, "I will never forgive," for he pronounces his own condemnation. Besides, who knows whether, on examining yourself, you may find that you were the aggressor? Who knows whether, in this struggle that begins with a pinprick and ends in a break, you were the first to strike? Whether a hurtful word escaped you? Whether you showed all the restraint that was needed? Your opponent is undoubtedly wrong to be oversensitive, but that is a reason for you to show forbearance and not deserve the reproach you direct at him. Let us suppose that you really were the offended party on one occasion: who can say that you did not make matters worse through retaliation, and that you did not turn what could easily have been forgotten into a serious quarrel? If it was within your power to prevent the consequences, and you did not do so, you are guilty. Finally, let us suppose that you have absolutely nothing to reproach yourself for: you will have all the more merit in showing mercy.

But there are two very different ways of forgiving: there is forgiveness from the lips and forgiveness from the heart. Many people say of their opponent, "I forgive him," while inwardly taking secret pleasure in the misfortune that befalls him, telling themselves that he is only getting what he deserves. How many say, "I forgive," and add, "but I will never be reconciled; I will never see him again as long as I live." Is that forgiveness according to the Gospel? No; true forgiveness, Christian forgiveness, is the kind

that draws a veil over the past; it is the only kind for which you will receive credit, for God is not satisfied with appearances: he searches the depths of hearts and the most secret thoughts; he cannot be deceived by words and empty pretenses. Complete and absolute forgetting of offenses is characteristic of great souls; resentment is always a sign of baseness and inferiority. Do not forget that true forgiveness is recognized far more by deeds than by words. (Paul the apostle. Lyon, 1861.)

1/ Forbearance.

16 Spiritists, today we wish to speak to you about forbearance, that gentle, brotherly feeling which everyone should have toward their brothers, but which very few put into practice.

Forbearance does not see the faults of others, or, if it does see them, it takes care not to speak of them or spread them about; on the contrary, it conceals them so that they are known to itself alone, and if malice uncovers them, it always has an excuse ready to soften them—that is, a plausible, serious excuse, and none of those which, while seeming to lessen the fault, bring it into sharper relief with treacherous skill.

Forbearance never concerns itself with the bad deeds of others, unless it is to be of service, and even then it takes care to soften them as much as possible. It makes no hurtful remark, has no reproaches on its lips, but only advice, most often discreetly expressed. When you voice criticism, what conclusion should be drawn from your words? That you, who blame others, would not have done what you reproach them for; that you are better than the guilty person. O people! When, then, will you judge your own hearts, your own thoughts, your own deeds, without concerning yourselves with what your brothers do? When will you turn your stern eyes

only upon yourselves?

Be strict with yourselves, then, and forbearing toward others. Think of the one who judges in the final instance, who sees the secret thoughts of every heart, and who therefore often excuses the faults you blame, or condemns what you excuse, because he knows the motive behind every deed, and because you, who cry out so loudly, "Condemnation!" might perhaps have committed more serious faults.

Be forbearing, my friends, for forbearance draws people close, calms, and sets them right, while severity discourages, drives them away, and irritates them. (Joseph, protecting Spirit. Bordeaux, 1863.)

17 Be forbearing toward the faults of others, whatever they may be; judge only your own actions severely, and the Lord will show you forbearance, just as you have shown it toward others.

Support the strong: encourage them to persevere; strengthen the weak by showing them the goodness of God, who takes account of the slightest repentance; show everyone the angel of repentance spreading its white wing over human faults, thus veiling them from the eyes of the one who cannot look upon what is impure. Understand, all of you, the infinite mercy of your Father, and never forget to say to him through your thoughts and above all through your deeds: "Forgive us our offenses, as we forgive those who have offended us." Understand well the value of these sublime words; not only is their wording admirable, but so is the teaching they contain.

What do you ask of the Lord when you ask him to forgive you? Is it merely that your offenses be forgotten? Such forgetting leaves you with nothing, for if God merely forgets your faults, he does not punish, but neither does he reward. Can a reward be the recompense for good that has not

been done, and still less for evil that has been done, even if that evil has been forgotten? In asking him to forgive your transgressions, you ask him for the favor of his grace so that you may not fall into them again; for the strength needed to enter a new path, a path of submission and love in which you can add reparation to repentance.

When you forgive your brothers, do not be content to draw the veil of forgetfulness over their faults; that veil is often quite transparent to your eyes; bring them love along with forgiveness; do for them what you will ask your heavenly Father to do for you. Replace the anger that stains with the love that purifies. Preach by example that active, tireless charity which Jesus taught you; preach it as he himself did throughout the time he lived on earth, visible to bodily eyes, and as he has continued to preach it unceasingly since he became visible only to the eyes of the spirit. Follow this divine model; walk in his footsteps: they will lead you to the place of refuge where you will find rest after the struggle. Like him, all of you take up your cross, and climb your Calvary with difficulty but with courage: at the summit is glorification. (John, bishop of Bordeaux, 1862.)

18 Dear friends, be strict with yourselves and forbearing toward the weaknesses of others; this too is a practice of holy charity that very few people observe. You all have bad inclinations to overcome, faults to correct, habits to change; you all have a burden, more or less heavy, to lay down so that you may climb to the summit of the mountain of progress. Why, then, are you so clear-sighted about your neighbor and so blind about yourselves? When will you stop noticing the speck of straw in your brother's eye that hurts him, without looking at the beam in your own that blinds you and makes you stumble from one fall to the next? Take the word of your broth-

ers the Spirits: Anyone proud enough to believe himself superior in virtue and merit to his incarnate brothers is foolish and guilty, and God will punish him on the day of his justice. The true character of charity is modesty and humility, which consist in seeing the faults of others only in passing and devoting oneself to bringing out what is good and virtuous in them; for although the human heart is an abyss of corruption, there always exists in some of its most hidden recesses the seed of a few good feelings, a living spark of the spiritual essence.

Spiritism, comforting and blessed doctrine, happy are those who know you and benefit from the wholesome teachings of the Spirits of the Lord! For them, the path is lit, and all along the road they can read these words, which show them how to reach their goal: charity in practice, charity of the heart, charity toward one's neighbor as toward oneself; in a word, charity toward all and love of God above all else, because love of God sums up every duty, and it is impossible to truly love God without practicing the charity that he makes a law for all his creatures. (Dufêtre, bishop of Nevers. Bordeaux.)

19 Since no one is perfect, does it follow 41 that no one has the right to correct their neighbor?

Certainly not, since each of you must work for the progress of all, and especially of those entrusted to your care; but this is a reason to do so with moderation, for a useful purpose, and not, as is most often done, for the pleasure of disparaging others. In the latter case, blame is an act of malice; in the former, it is a duty that charity requires us to carry out with every

possible consideration; and even then, the blame we direct at others should also be directed at ourselves, as we ask whether we too deserve it. (Saint Louis. Paris, 4 860.)

20 Is it wrong to observe the imperfections of others when no benefit to them can come of it, and when we do not disclose them?
Everything depends on the intention; certainly it is not forbidden to see evil where evil exists; there would even be a disadvantage in seeing only good everywhere: this illusion would hinder progress. The wrong lies in turning this observation to our neighbor's detriment, needlessly discrediting them in public opinion. It would also be wrong to do so merely to indulge a feeling of ill will and delight in finding others at fault. It is quite another matter when, concealing the evil from the public, we confine ourselves to observing it for our own benefit, that is, to make an effort to avoid what we blame in others. Besides, is this observation not useful to the moralist? How could he portray humanity's failings if he did not study the models? (Saint Louis. Paris, 1860.)

21 Are there cases in which it is useful to expose evil in others?
This question is very delicate, and here we must appeal to charity properly understood. If a person's imperfections harm only that person, there is never any benefit in making them known; but if they may harm others, the interests of the greater number must take precedence over those of one individual. Depending on the circumstances, unmasking hypocrisy and

falsehood may be a duty; for it is better for one man to fall than for several to become his dupes or his victims. In such a case, we must weigh the total advantages and disadvantages. (Saint Louis. Paris, 1860.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XI. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

✦

1 is que The greatest commandment. Do for others what we would want others to do for us. Parable of the creditors and debtors. — Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. — Instructions from the Spirits: The law of love — Selfishness. — Faith and charity. — Charity toward criminals. — Should one risk one's life for a wrongdoer? The greatest commandment,
The Pharisees, having learned that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered together; — and one of them, who was a teacher of the law, came to ask him this question to test him: — Teacher, what is the greatest commandment of the law? — Jesus answered them: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; this is the greatest and first commandment. And here is the second, which is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourselves. — The whole law and the prophets are contained in these two commandments. (Saint Matthew, ch. xxii, v. 34 to 40.)

2 Do to others everything you want them to do to you, for this is the law and the prophets. (Ibid., ch. vii, v. 12.)
Treat all people in the same way that you would want them to treat you. (Saint Luke, ch. vi, v. 31.)

3 The kingdom of heaven is compared to a king who wished to have his servants account for what they owed; — and when he began to do so, one was brought before him who owed him ten thousand talents. — But since

he had no means of repaying him, his master ordered that he, his wife and his children, and everything he had be sold to settle this debt. — The servant, throwing himself at his feet, pleaded with him, saying: Lord, have a little patience, and I will repay you everything. — Then that servant's master, moved with compassion, let him go and forgave his debt. — But no sooner had this servant gone out than, finding one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, he seized him by the throat and almost strangled him, saying: Pay me what you owe me. — And his fellow servant, throwing himself at his feet, pleaded with him, saying: Have a little patience, and I will repay you everything. — But he would not listen; and he went away and had him put in prison, to be kept there until he repaid what he owed him.

The other servants, his companions, seeing what was happening, were deeply distressed and informed their master of everything that had happened. — Then the master summoned him and said: Wicked servant, I forgave you everything you owed me because you begged me to; — should you not also have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you? And his master, moved to anger, handed him over to the torturers until he paid everything he owed.

This is how my Father who is in heaven will treat you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from the depths of his heart for the wrongs he has committed against him. (Saint Matthew, ch. xviii, vv. 23 to 35.)

[4] "Love your neighbor as yourself; do for others what we would want others to do for us" is the most complete expression of charity, for it sums up all our duties toward our neighbor. We can have no surer guide in this re-

gard than to take what we desire for ourselves as the measure of what we should do for others.

4.2 By what right could we demand more fair dealing, indulgence, goodwill, and devotion from our fellow human beings than we ourselves show them? Putting these maxims into practice tends to destroy selfishness; when people take them as the rule of their conduct and the basis of their institutions, they will understand true brotherhood and cause peace and justice to reign among them; there will no longer be hatred or dissension, but unity, harmony, and mutual goodwill.

5 Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar

Then the Pharisees withdrew and plotted among themselves to trap him in his words. — So they sent their disciples to him with the Herodians, to say: Teacher, we know that you are truthful and that you teach the way of God in truth, without showing favor to anyone, because you do not judge people by their standing; — tell us, then, your opinion on this: Are we permitted to pay tribute to Caesar, or not to pay it?

But Jesus, knowing their malice, said to them: Hypocrites, why are you testing me? Show me the silver coin used to pay the tribute. And when they presented him with a denarius, Jesus said to them: Whose image and inscription are these? — Caesar's, they told him. Then Jesus answered them: Give, then, to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.

Having heard him speak in this way, they marveled at his answer, and leaving him, they withdrew. (Saint Matthew, ch. xxii, vv. 15 to 22; Saint Mark, ch. xii, vv. 13 to 17.)

6 The question put to Jesus arose from the fact that the Jews, loathing the tribute imposed on them by the Romans, had made it a religious question; a large party had formed to refuse the tax; paying tribute was therefore a contentious issue of the day for them, without which the question put to Jesus: "Are we permitted to pay or not to pay tribute to Caesar?" would have made no sense.

6.2 This question was a trap; for, depending on his answer, they hoped to stir up either the Roman authorities or the dissenting Jews against him. But "Jesus, knowing their malice," avoids the difficulty by giving them a lesson in justice and telling them to give each person what is due to them. (See the introduction, article: Tax collectors.)

7 This maxim, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar," should not be understood in a restrictive and absolute sense. Like all the teachings of Jesus, it is a general principle summed up in a practical and familiar form, and drawn from a particular circumstance. This principle follows from the one that tells us to act towards others as we would want others to act toward us; it condemns all material and moral harm done to others, every violation of their interests; it calls for respect for everyone's rights, just as everyone wishes their own to be respected; it extends to the fulfillment of duties undertaken toward the family, society, and the authorities, as well as toward individuals.

Instructions from the Spirits The law of love

8 Love sums up the entire doctrine of Jesus, for it is the feeling above all others, and feelings are instincts raised to the level of the progress achieved. At his starting point, a human being has only instincts; more advanced and corrupted, he has only sensations; but educated and purified,

he has feelings; and the finest point of feeling is love, not love in the ordinary sense of the word, but that inner sun which concentrates and unites in its burning center all aspirations and all revelations beyond the human realm. The law of love replaces individuality with the merging of beings; it destroys social misery. Happy is the one who, rising beyond his humanity, loves his suffering brothers with an expansive love! Happy is the one who loves, for he knows neither distress of the soul nor distress of the body; his feet are light, and he lives as though carried beyond himself. When Jesus had spoken that divine word of love, it sent a thrill through the peoples, and the martyrs, intoxicated with hope, went down into the arena.

Spiritism, in its turn, comes to speak a second word of the divine alphabet; be attentive, for this word lifts the stone from empty tombs, and reincarnation, triumphing over death, reveals to the dazzled human being his intellectual heritage; it no longer leads him to torture, but to the conquest of his own being, elevated and transfigured. Blood has redeemed the Spirit, and today the Spirit must redeem the human being from matter.

I have said that at his beginning a human being has only instincts; therefore, the one in whom instincts dominate is closer to the starting point than to the goal. To advance toward the goal, one must overcome instincts in favor of feelings, that is, perfect these feelings by stifling the latent seeds of matter. Instincts are the germination and the embryos of feeling; they carry progress within them, as the acorn holds the oak, and the least advanced beings are those who, shedding their chrysalis only little by little, remain enslaved to their instincts. The Spirit must be cultivated like a field; all future wealth depends on the present plowing, and more than earthly goods, it will bring you glorious elevation; it is then that, under-

standing the law of love that unites all beings, you will seek in it the sweet delights of the soul that are the prelude to heavenly joys. (Lazarus, Paris, 1862)

9 Love is divine in essence, and from the first to the last, you possess deep within your hearts the spark of this sacred fire. This is a fact you have been able to observe many times: the most abject, the most vile, the most criminal person has a deep and ardent affection for some being or object, an affection that withstands everything that might diminish it and often reaches sublime proportions.

I said for some being or object because there are individuals among you who lavish the treasures of love overflowing from their hearts on animals, on plants, and even on material objects: a kind of misanthrope who complains about humanity in general, resisting the natural inclination of the soul, which seeks affection and sympathy around it; they reduce the law of love to the level of instinct. But whatever they do, they cannot stifle the vigorous seed God placed in their hearts at their creation; this seed develops and grows with morality and intelligence, and although often suppressed by selfishness, it is the source of the holy and gentle virtues that make affections sincere and lasting, and help you travel the steep and barren road of human existence.

There are some people who find the trial of reincarnation repugnant because others share in the loving affections they jealously guard. Poor brothers! It is your affection that makes you selfish; your love is confined to an intimate circle of relatives or friends, and you are indifferent to everyone else. Well then! To practice the law of love as God intends it, you must gradually come to love all your brothers without distinction. The task will

be long and difficult, but it will be accomplished: God wills it, and the law of love is the first and most important precept of your new doctrine, because it is this law that must one day destroy selfishness in whatever form it appears; for besides personal selfishness, there is also the selfishness of family, caste, and nationality. Jesus said: "Love your neighbor as yourselves;" now, where does the boundary of one's neighbor lie? Is it the family, the sect, the nation? No, it is the whole of humanity. In the higher worlds, mutual love brings harmony to and guides the advanced Spirits who inhabit them, and indeed planet destined for imminent progress, social on, will see practiced by its my law, reflection of the Divinity, of love are the moral improvement of the human race and happiness during earthly life. The most rebellious and the most vicious will have to reform when they see the benefits produced by this practice: Do not do to others what you would not want done to you, but instead do them all the good it is in your power to do.

Do not believe in the barrenness and hardness of the human heart; it yields despite itself to true love; love is a magnet it cannot resist, and the contact of by its transforma inhabitants this under The effects of the la this love gives life and fertility to the seeds of this virtue that lies dormant in your hearts. The earth, a place of trial and exile, will then be purified by this sacred fire, and will see the practice of charity, humility, patience, devotion, self-denial, resignation, sacrifice, all virtues born of love. So never tire of hearing the words of John the Evangelist; as you know, when infirmity and old age interrupted his preaching, he repeated only these gentle words: "My little children, love one another."

Dear beloved brothers, make good use of these lessons; practicing them is difficult, but the soul gains immense benefit from them. Believe me, make

the sublime effort I ask of you: “Love one another,” and you will soon see the earth transformed and become the Elysium where the souls of the righteous will come to enjoy rest. (Fénelon. Bordeaux, 1861.)

10 My dear fellow students, the Spirits present here tell you through my voice: Love deeply, so that you may be loved. This thought is so true that you will find in it everything that consoles and soothes the sorrows of each day; or rather, by practicing this wise maxim, you will rise so far above matter that you will become spiritual before shedding your earthly body. Since Spiritist studies have developed your understanding of the future, you have one certainty: advancement towards God, with all the promises that answer the aspirations of your soul; you must therefore rise high enough to judge without the grip of matter, and refrain from condemning your neighbor before turning your thoughts toward God.

To love, in the deepest sense of the word, is to be loyal, upright, and conscientious, so as to do for others what you would wish for yourself; it is to seek around you the inner meaning of all the sorrows that overwhelm your brothers, in order to bring them relief; it is to regard the great human family as your own, for you will find this family again at a certain time, in more advanced worlds, and the Spirits who compose it are, like you, children of God, marked on the forehead to rise toward infinity. This is why you cannot deny your brothers what God has freely given you, because you, for your part, would be glad for your brothers to give you what you needed. Offer, then, a word of hope and support to all who suffer, so that you may be all love, all justice.

Believe that these wise words: “Love deeply so that you may be loved,” will make their way; they are revolutionary and follow a path that is fixed

and unchanging. But you who listen to me have already made progress; you are infinitely better than you were a hundred years ago; you have changed so much for the better that you accept without dispute a host of new ideas about freedom and brotherhood that you would once have rejected; now, a hundred years from now, you will accept just as easily those that have not yet been able to enter your minds.

Today, now that the Spiritist movement has taken a great step forward, see how quickly the ideas of justice and renewal contained in the Spirits' dictations are accepted by the average part of the thinking world; this is because these ideas answer everything divine within you; it is because you have been prepared by a fruitful seed: that of the last century, which planted the great ideas of progress in society; and as everything is linked together under the finger of the Most High, all the lessons received and accepted will be contained in this universal exchange of love for one's neighbor; through it, incarnate Spirits, judging better and feeling more deeply, will reach out their hands to one another from the farthest reaches of your planet; people will come together to understand and love one another, to destroy all injustices and all causes of misunderstanding between peoples.

Great thought of renewal through Spiritism, so well described in The Spirits' Book, you will produce the great miracle of the coming century, that of bringing together all the material and spiritual interests of humankind, through the application of this properly understood maxim: Love deeply, so that you may be loved. (Sanson, former member of the Spiritist Society of Paris, 1863.)

Selfishness

11 Selfishness, this scourge of humanity, must disappear from the earth, whose moral progress it hinders; the task of raising the earth in the hierarchy of worlds is reserved for Spiritism. Selfishness is therefore the target toward which all true believers must direct their weapons, their strength, and their courage; I say their courage, for it takes more courage to conquer oneself than to conquer others. Let everyone therefore devote all their care to fighting it within themselves, for this monster that devours all minds, this child of pride, is the source of all the miseries here below. It is the negation of charity, and consequently the greatest obstacle to human happiness.

Jesus gave you the example of charity, and Pontius Pilate that of selfishness; for when the Righteous One is about to pass through the holy stations of his martyrdom, Pilate washes his hands, saying: What does it matter to me! He says to the Jews: This man is righteous, why do you want to crucify him? And yet he lets him be led away to his execution.

It is because of this antagonism between charity and selfishness, because of the spread of this leprosy of the human heart, that Christianity has not yet fulfilled its entire mission. It is upon you, new apostles of the faith, enlightened by the higher Spirits, that the task and duty fall to root out this evil, to give Christianity its full strength and clear the road of the brambles that hinder its progress. Drive selfishness from the earth so that it may rise in the scale of worlds, for it is time for humanity to put on the robe of adulthood, and to do this you must first drive selfishness from your hearts. (Emmanuel. Paris, 1861.)

12 If people loved one another with a shared love, charity would be better practiced; but for this to happen, you would have to strive to rid yourselves of the armor that covers your hearts, so as to be more sensitive toward those who suffer. Rigidity kills good feelings; Christ was never deterred; whoever approached him, whoever they might be, was never turned away: the adulterous woman and the criminal were helped by him; he never feared that his own reputation might suffer as a result. When, then, will you take him as the model for all your actions? If charity reigned on earth, the wicked would no longer hold sway; they would flee in shame; they would hide, for they would feel out of place everywhere. Then evil would disappear; let this truth sink deeply into you.

Begin by setting the example yourselves; be charitable toward everyone without distinction; strive no longer to notice those who look upon you with contempt, and leave all justice to God, for every day, in his kingdom, he separates the good grain from the weeds.

Selfishness is the negation of charity; now, without charity there is no peace in society; I say more, no security; with selfishness and pride, which go hand in hand, there will always be a race won by the most cunning, a struggle of interests in which the holiest affections are trampled underfoot, in which even the sacred bonds of family are not respected. (Pascal. Sens, 1862.)

13 Faith and charity

I told you recently, my dear children, that charity without faith was not enough to maintain among people a social order capable of making them happy. I should have said that charity is impossible without faith. You may indeed find generous impulses even in a person without religion, but

that austere charity which is practiced only through self-denial, through the constant sacrifice of every selfish interest, can be inspired only by faith, for faith alone enables us to bear the cross of this life with courage and perseverance.

Yes, my children, it is in vain that a person hungry for pleasure would try to deceive himself about his destiny here on earth by maintaining that he is entitled to concern himself only with his own happiness. Certainly, God created us to be happy in eternity; nevertheless, earthly life must serve solely for our moral improvement, which is more easily attained with the help of our bodily organs and the material world. Besides the ordinary trials of life, the diversity of your tastes, your inclinations, and your needs is also a means of improving yourselves by practicing charity. For it is only through mutual concessions and sacrifices that you can maintain harmony among such diverse elements.

You will, however, be right in affirming that happiness is intended for human beings here on earth if you seek it, not in material pleasures, but in doing good. The history of Christianity tells of martyrs who went joyfully to their torment; today, and in your society, being a Christian requires neither the burnt offering of martyrdom nor the sacrifice of life, but only and simply the sacrifice of your selfishness, your pride, and your vanity. You will triumph if charity inspires you and faith sustains you. (Protective Spirit. Kraków, 1861.)

14 Charity toward criminals

True charity is one of the most sublime teachings God has given the world. Complete brotherhood must exist among the true disciples of his doctrine. You must love the unfortunate and criminals as creatures of God,

to whom forgiveness and mercy will be granted if they repent, just as they will be granted to you for the wrongs you commit against his law. Remember that you are more blameworthy, more guilty than those to whom you refuse forgiveness and compassion, for frequently they do not know God as you know him, and less will be asked of them than of you.

Do not judge, oh! Do not judge, my dear friends, for the judgment you pass will be applied to you even more severely, and you need indulgence for the sins you constantly commit. Do you not know that there are many actions that are crimes in the eyes of the God of purity, yet the world does not even consider them minor faults?

True charity consists not only in the alms you give, nor even in the words of comfort with which you may accompany them; no, that is not all God requires of you. The sublime charity taught by Jesus also consists in the kindness shown to your neighbor at all times and in all things. You can also practice this sublime virtue toward many beings who have no need of alms, and whom words of love, comfort, and encouragement will bring to the Lord.

The time is near, I say again, when the great brotherhood will reign over this globe; the law of Christ is the law that will govern humanity: that law alone will be its restraint and its hope, and will lead souls to the blessed abodes. Love one another, then, as children of the same father; make no distinction among the other unfortunate people, for God wishes everyone to be equal; therefore despise no one. God allows great criminals to be among you so that they may serve as a lesson to you. Soon, when people have been brought to the true laws of God, there will no longer be any need for such lessons, and all impure and rebellious Spirits will be scattered across lower worlds in keeping with their inclinations.

You owe those of whom I speak the help of your prayers: that is true charity. You must not say of a criminal: "He is a wretch; the earth must be purged of him; the death inflicted on him is too gentle for a being of that kind." No, that is not how you should speak. Look at your model, Jesus; what would he say if he saw this unfortunate man beside him? He would pity him; he would regard him as a very wretched sick man; he would hold out his hand to him. You cannot actually do this, but at least you can pray for him, help his Spirit during the few moments he still has to spend on your earth. Repentance may touch his heart if you pray with faith. He is your neighbor just as much as the best of men; his lost and rebellious soul was created, like yours, to improve itself; help him, then, to escape the mire, and pray for him. (Elizabeth of France. Le Havre, 1862.)

15. A man is in danger of death; to save him, you must risk your own life; but you know that this man is a criminal and that, if he survives, he may commit further crimes. Should you nevertheless risk your life to save him? This is a very serious question, and one that may naturally come to mind. I will answer according to my moral advancement, since the point at issue is whether one should risk one's life even for a criminal. Devotion is blind: we help an enemy, so we must help the enemy of society—in a word, a criminal. Do you think it is only from death that you rush to snatch this unfortunate man? Perhaps it is from his entire past life. For consider this: in those fleeting moments that rob him of his last minutes of life, the doomed man looks back on his past life, or rather, it rises before him. Death, perhaps, comes too soon for him; reincarnation may be terrible; rush forward, then, you whom Spiritist science has enlightened! Rush forward, snatch him from his damnation, and then perhaps this man, who would have died cursing you, will throw himself into your arms. However,

you must not ask yourselves whether he will or will not do so, but go to his aid, for by saving him you obey that voice of the heart which tells you: “You can save him, save him!” (Lamennais. Paris, 1862.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XII. LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

✦

1 Repaying evil with good.
You have learned that it was said: You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemies. But I say to you: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and slander you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven, who makes his sun rise on the good and the wicked, and sends rain on the just and the unjust; — for if you love only those who love you, what reward will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? — And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not the pagans do the same? — I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, v. 20 and 43 to 47.)

2 If you love only those who love you, what credit will you receive for it, since people who lead wicked lives also love those who love them? — And if you do good only to those who do good to you, what credit will you receive for it, since people who lead wicked lives do the same? — And if you lend only to those from whom you hope to receive the same favor, what credit will you receive for it, since people who lead wicked lives lend to one another in this way, to receive the same benefit? —
But as for you, love your enemies, do good to everyone, and lend without expecting anything in return, and then your reward will be very great, and

you will be children of the Most High, because he is good to the ungrateful and even to the wicked. — Therefore be full of mercy, as your God is full of mercy. (Saint Luke, ch. vi, v. 32 to 36.)

3 If love of one's neighbor is the principle of charity, loving one's enemies is its sublime application, for this virtue is one of the greatest victories over selfishness and pride.

Yet the meaning of the word love in this context is generally misunderstood; Jesus did not mean by these words that we should feel for an enemy the tenderness we feel for a brother or a friend; tenderness presupposes trust, and we cannot trust someone whom we know wishes us harm; we cannot share the confidences of friendship with him, because we know he is capable of abusing them; between people who distrust one another, there can be none of the impulses of sympathy that exist between those whose thoughts are in harmony; finally, we cannot take the same pleasure in being with an enemy as with a friend.

This very feeling results from a physical law: that of the assimilation and repulsion of fluids; a malicious thought directs a fluidic current whose impression is painful; a benevolent thought surrounds you with a pleasant emanation; hence the difference in the sensations we experience at the approach of a friend or an enemy. Loving one's enemies therefore cannot mean that we should make no distinction between them and our friends; this precept seems difficult, even impossible to practice, only because we mistakenly believe that it requires us to give them the same place in our hearts. If the poverty of human languages compels us to use the same word to express different shades of feeling, reason must distinguish between them according to the circumstances.

Loving one's enemies, then, does not mean feeling an affection for them that is contrary to nature, for contact with an enemy makes the heart beat in an entirely different way from contact with a friend; it means harboring neither hatred, resentment, nor a desire for revenge against them; it means forgiving them for the harm they do us, without hidden motives and without conditions; it means placing no obstacle in the way of reconciliation; it means wishing them well instead of wishing them harm; it means rejoicing rather than grieving at the good that comes to them; it means offering them a helping hand in times of need; it means refraining, in words and actions, from anything that might harm them; finally, it means repaying them with good for evil in everything, without any intention of humiliating them. Whoever does this fulfills the conditions of the commandment: Love your enemies.

[4] Loving one's enemies makes no sense to the unbeliever; someone for whom the present life is everything sees in his enemy only a harmful being who disturbs his peace, and of whom he believes only death can rid him; hence the desire for revenge; he has no interest in forgiving, except to gratify his pride in the eyes of the world; in some cases, even forgiving seems to him a weakness beneath his dignity; if he does not take revenge, he still harbors resentment and a secret desire for harm.

For the believer, but above all for the Spiritist, the outlook is entirely different, because he looks to the past and the future, between which the present life is only a point; he knows that, by the very purpose of the earth, he must expect to find wicked and depraved people here; that the acts of malice to which he is subjected are part of the trials he must undergo, and the elevated viewpoint he adopts makes life's hardships less bitter,

whether they come from people or circumstances; if he does not complain about his trials, he must not complain about those who are their instruments; if, instead of complaining, he thanks God for testing him, he must thank the hand that gives him the opportunity to show his patience and resignation. This thought naturally inclines him to forgiveness; he also feels that the more generous he is, the more he rises in his own esteem and places himself beyond the reach of his enemy's malicious attacks.

A man who holds a high position in the world does not consider himself offended by the insults of someone he regards as his inferior; so it is with someone who rises in the moral world above material humanity; he understands that hatred and resentment would degrade and lower him; now, to be superior to his adversary, he must have a greater, nobler, more generous soul.

[5] Disembodied enemies

The Spiritist has still other reasons for being forgiving toward his enemies. First, he knows that wickedness is not a permanent human condition; that it arises from a temporary imperfection, and that, just as a child corrects his faults, the wicked person will one day acknowledge his wrongs and become good.

He also knows that death frees him only from his enemy's physical presence, but that this enemy can pursue him with his hatred even after leaving the earth; that revenge therefore fails in its purpose; that, on the contrary, it produces greater irritation, which can continue from one existence to another. It fell to Spiritism to prove, through experience and the law governing relations between the visible and invisible worlds, that the expression: Extinguishing hatred in blood, is fundamentally false, and that

the truth is that blood sustains hatred even beyond the grave; and thus to give an effective justification and a practical usefulness to forgiveness and to Christ's sublime maxim: Love your enemies. No heart is so depraved that it cannot be touched by kind treatment, even without its knowing it; through kind treatment, we at least remove every pretext for retaliation; we can turn an enemy into a friend before and after his death. Through bad treatment we provoke him, and it is then that he himself serves as an instrument of God's justice to punish the person who has not forgiven.

6 We can therefore have enemies among both the embodied and the disembodied; enemies in the invisible world show their malice through the obsessions and subjugations to which so many people are subjected, and which are one form of life's trials; these trials, like the others, help us advance and must be accepted with resignation, and as a consequence of the inferior nature of the earthly globe; if there were no wicked people on earth, there would be no wicked Spirits around the earth. Therefore, if we must show forbearance and goodwill toward embodied enemies, we must show them equally toward those who are disembodied.

In the past, blood sacrifices were offered to appease the gods of the underworld, who were none other than wicked Spirits. The gods of the underworld were succeeded by demons, who are the same thing. Spiritism comes to prove that these demons are none other than the souls of depraved people who have not yet shed their material instincts; that we appease them only by sacrificing our hatred, that is, through charity; that charity has the effect not only of preventing them from doing evil, but of bringing them back to the path of goodness and contributing to their sal-

vation. Thus the maxim: Love your enemies, is not confined to the narrow circle of the earth and the present life, but forms part of the great law of universal solidarity and brotherhood.

7 If someone strikes you on the right cheek, offer him the other also

You have learned that it was said: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. — But I tell you not to resist the harm others wish to do you; if someone has struck you on the right cheek, offer him the other also; — and if someone wants to take you to court to take your tunic, give him your cloak as well; — and if someone wants to compel you to walk a thousand steps with him, walk another two thousand. — Give to anyone who asks you, and do not turn away anyone who wants to borrow from you. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, v. 38 to 42.)

8 The world's prejudices concerning what is commonly called the point of honor give rise to that touchy sensitivity, born of pride and an exaggerated sense of self, which leads people to return insult for insult, injury for injury. This seems like justice to those whose moral sense does not rise above earthly passions; that is why the Mosaic law said: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a law in harmony with the time in which Moses lived. Christ came and said: Return good for evil. He also said: "Do not resist the evil others wish to do to you; if someone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other." To the proud, this maxim seems cowardly, for they do not understand that it takes more courage to endure an insult than to take revenge, always for the same reason: their vision does not extend beyond the present. Should this maxim, however, be taken literally? No, any more than the one that says to tear out your eye if it is a cause of stumbling; carried to its full consequences, it would condemn every restraint, even a le-

gal one, and give the wicked free rein by removing all fear from them; if no check were placed on their attacks, all good people would soon become their victims. The very instinct of self-preservation, which is a law of nature, tells us that we must not willingly offer our necks to a murderer. Through these words, therefore, Jesus did not forbid self-defense, but condemned revenge. To say that we should offer one cheek when the other is struck is to say, in another form, that we must not return evil for evil; that we should humbly accept everything that tends to lower our pride; that it is more glorious to be struck than to strike, to endure an injustice patiently than to commit one ourselves; that it is better to be deceived than to deceive, to be ruined than to ruin others. It is also a condemnation of dueling, which is merely a manifestation of pride. Faith in the future life and in God's justice, which never leaves evil unpunished, alone can give us the strength to endure patiently the attacks made on our interests and our self-esteem; that is why we constantly say: Look ahead; the more you rise in thought above material life, the less you will be hurt by earthly things.
Teachings of the Spirits. Revenge

9 Revenge is one last remnant left behind by the barbarous customs that are gradually disappearing from among humanity. Together with dueling, it is one of the last traces of those savage customs under which humanity struggled at the beginning of the Christian era. That is why revenge is a sure sign of the backward state of the people who indulge in it and of the Spirits who can still inspire it. Therefore, my friends, this feeling must never stir the heart of anyone who calls and declares themselves a Spiritist. To take revenge is, as you know, so contrary to this commandment of Christ: “Forgive your enemies!” that anyone who refuses to forgive is not

only no Spiritist, but is not even a Christian. Revenge is an impulse all the more harmful because deceit and baseness are its constant companions; indeed, those who surrender to this fatal and blind passion almost never take revenge openly. When stronger, they pounce like wild beasts upon those they call their enemies, when the sight of them inflames their passion, anger, and hatred. But most often they assume a hypocritical appearance, concealing deep within their hearts the evil feelings that drive them; they take roundabout paths, follow their unsuspecting enemies in the shadows, and wait for the right moment to strike without danger; they hide from them while constantly watching them; they set hateful traps for them and, when the occasion arises, sow poison in their cups. When their hatred does not go to these extremes, they attack their enemies' honor and affections instead; they do not shrink from slander, and their treacherous insinuations, skillfully scattered to every wind, grow as they spread. Thus, when those they pursue enter circles through which their poisoned breath has passed, they are astonished to find cold faces where they once found friendly and kindly ones; they are stunned when hands that once sought theirs now refuse to shake them; finally, they are crushed when their dearest friends and relatives turn away and flee from them. Ah! Cowards who take revenge in this way are a hundred times more guilty than those who go straight to their enemies and insult them openly.

Away, then, with these savage customs! Away with these ways of another age! Any Spiritist who claimed today still to have the right to take revenge would be unworthy to remain any longer in the ranks of those who have adopted as their motto: Without charity, there is no salvation! But no, I

cannot dwell on the thought that a member of the great Spiritist family could ever, in the future, yield to the impulse of revenge in any way other than to forgive. (Jules Olivier. Paris, 1862.).

10 Hatred

Love one another, and you will be happy. Make it your particular task to love those who inspire indifference, hatred, and contempt in you. Christ, whom you must take as your model, gave you the example of this devotion; a missionary of love, he loved to the point of giving his blood and his life. The sacrifice that requires you to love those who insult and persecute you is painful; but that is precisely what makes you superior to them; if you hate them as they hate you, you are no better than they are; it is the spotless offering presented to God on the altar of your hearts, a sweet-smelling offering whose fragrances rise to him. Although the law of love requires us to love all our brothers and sisters without distinction, it does not armor the heart against mistreatment; on the contrary, this is the most painful trial, I know, since during my last earthly existence I experienced this torment; but God is there, and he punishes in this life and in the next those who fail to observe the law of love. Do not forget, my dear children, that love brings us closer to God, and hatred draws us away from him. (Fénelon. Bordeaux, 1861.) Dueling.

11 Only those are truly great who, regarding life as a journey that must lead them to a goal, care little for the roughness of the road; they never allow themselves to be diverted for a moment from the straight path; with their eyes constantly fixed on the destination, they care little whether the brambles and thorns along the path threaten to scratch them; these brush against them without hurting them, and they continue on their way all

the same. To risk your life to avenge an insult is to shrink from life's trials; it is always a crime in God's eyes, and if you were not misled as you are by your prejudices, it would be a ridiculous act of utter madness in human eyes.

Killing in a duel is a crime; your own laws acknowledge it; no one has the right, under any circumstances, to make an attempt on the life of another human being; it is a crime in the eyes of God, who has laid down your rule of conduct; here, more than anywhere else, you are judges in your own cause. Remember that you will be forgiven according to how you yourselves have forgiven; through forgiveness you draw closer to the Divine, for mercy is the sister of power. As long as a single drop of human blood is shed on earth by human hands, the true reign of God will not yet have come, that reign of peace and love which must forever banish animosity, discord, and war from your globe. Then the word duel will exist in your language only as a distant and vague memory of a past that is no more; people will know no other rivalry among themselves than the noble rivalry of doing good. (Adolphe, Bishop of Algiers. Marmande, 1861.)

[12] Dueling may doubtless, in certain cases, be proof of physical courage and disregard for life, but it is unquestionably proof of moral cowardice, as in suicide. Those who take their own lives lack the courage to face life's hardships; duelists lack the courage to face offenses. Did Christ not tell you that there is more honor and courage in offering the left cheek to someone who has struck the right than in avenging an insult? Did Christ not say to Peter in the Garden of Olives: “Put your sword back into its sheath, for whoever kills by the sword will perish by the sword”? Through these words, does Jesus not condemn dueling forever? Indeed, my chil-

dren, what is this courage born of a violent, hot-blooded, and angry temperament, roaring at the first offense? Where is the greatness of soul in someone who, at the slightest insult, wishes to wash it away in blood? But let him tremble! For always, deep within his conscience, a voice will cry out to him: Cain! Cain! What have you done with your brother? I needed blood to save my honor, he will say to that voice; but it will answer him: You wanted to save it before people for the few moments you had left to live on earth, and you did not think of saving it before God! Poor fool! How much blood, then, would Christ demand of you for all the insults he received! Not only did you wound him with the thorn and the spear, not only did you fasten him to a shameful scaffold, but even in the midst of his agony he could hear the mockery heaped upon him. What reparation did he ask of you after so many insults? The lamb's final cry was a prayer for his executioners. Oh! Like him, forgive, and pray for those who offend you.

Friends, remember this precept: “Love one another,” and then you will answer a blow dealt by hatred with a smile, and an insult with forgiveness. The world will doubtless rise up in fury and call you cowards; hold your heads high, and then show that your brows, too, would not fear to bear thorns after Christ's example, but that your hands refuse to become accomplices to a murder supposedly authorized by a false show of honor that is merely pride and self-love. In creating you, did God give you the power of life and death over one another? No, he gave this right to nature alone, so that it might reshape and rebuild itself; but he has not even allowed you to dispose of your own lives. Like those who take their own lives, duelists will be marked with blood when they come before God, and for both the Supreme Judge prepares harsh and lengthy punishments. If

he threatened with his justice anyone who calls his brother Racca, how much more severe will the punishment be for someone who appears before him with hands stained red with his brother's blood! (Saint Augustine. Paris, 1862.)

13 The duel is, like what was formerly called the judgment of God, one of those barbarous institutions that still govern society. Yet what would you say if you saw the two opponents plunged into boiling water or subjected to contact with a red-hot iron to settle their quarrel, and the one who best endured the ordeal declared to be in the right? You would call these customs senseless. The duel is even worse than all this. For the accomplished duelist, it is murder committed in cold blood with full premeditation, for he is sure of the blow he will strike; for the opponent who is almost certain to die because of his weakness and lack of skill, it is suicide committed with the coldest deliberation. I know that people often seek to avoid these equally criminal alternatives by leaving the outcome to chance; but is this not, in another form, a return to the judgment of God of the Middle Ages? And even then, people were infinitely less guilty: the very name judgment of God indicates a faith, naive indeed, but still a faith in God's justice, which could not allow an innocent person to perish, whereas in a duel people rely on brute force, so that it is often the offended party who dies.

0 stupid self-love, foolish vanity and mad pride, when will you be replaced by Christian charity, love of one's neighbor and the humility that Christ taught by example and precept? Only then will those monstrous prejudices disappear that still govern people, and that laws are powerless to sup-

press, because it is not enough to forbid evil and prescribe good: the principle of good and the horror of evil must be in the human heart. (A Protecting Spirit. Bordeaux, 1861.)

14 What will people think of me, you frequently say, if I refuse the satisfaction demanded of me, or if I do not demand it from someone who has offended me? Fools like you, backward men, will blame you; but those enlightened by the torch of intellectual and moral progress will say that you are acting according to true wisdom. Reflect a little: a word often spoken thoughtlessly or quite harmlessly by one of your brothers wounds your pride, you give him a sharp reply, and a challenge follows. Before reaching the decisive moment, do you ask yourself whether you are acting as a Christian? What account will you owe society if you deprive it of one of its members? Do you think of the remorse of having taken a husband from a wife, a child from a mother, a father and provider from children? Certainly, the person who has given offense owes amends; but is it not more honorable for him to offer them freely by acknowledging his wrongs than to endanger the life of someone who has a right to complain? As for the offended party, I agree that sometimes a person may be deeply hurt, either personally or through those close to us; self-love alone is no longer at stake: the heart is wounded and suffers. But besides the stupidity of staking one's life against a wretch capable of a shameful deed, does the insult, whatever it may be, cease to exist once that person is dead? Does the bloodshed not give greater publicity to something that, if false, should fall away of itself, and, if true, should be concealed in silence? All that remains, then, is the satisfaction of fulfilled revenge; alas, a sad satisfaction that often leaves bitter regrets even in this life. And if it is the offended

party who dies, where is the satisfaction?

When charity becomes the rule of human conduct, people will bring their deeds and words into line with this maxim: “Do not do to others what you would not wish them to do to you.” Then all causes of discord will disappear, and with them the causes of duels and wars, which are duels between peoples. (Francis Xavier. Bordeaux, 1861.)

15 The man of the world, the fortunate man who, over a hurtful word or a trivial cause, stakes the life he holds from God and stakes the life of his fellow man, which belongs to God alone, is a hundred times more guilty than the wretch who, driven by greed or sometimes by need, enters a home to steal what he covets and kills those who oppose his purpose. The latter is almost always an uneducated man with only imperfect notions of good and evil, whereas the duelist nearly always belongs to the most enlightened class; one kills brutally, the other methodically and politely, which leads society to excuse him. I would even add that the duelist is infinitely more guilty than the unfortunate man who, yielding to a feeling of revenge, kills in a moment of fury. The duelist cannot plead the force of passion as an excuse, for between the insult and the satisfaction he always has time to reflect; he therefore acts coldly and with premeditated intent. Everything is calculated and studied to kill his opponent more surely. It is true that he also risks his own life, and this is what redeems the duel in the eyes of the world, because people see in it an act of courage and a disregard for one's own life; but is there true courage when one is sure of oneself? The duel, a remnant of barbarous times when might made right, will disappear with a sounder understanding of the true point of honor, and as people gain a stronger faith in the life to come. (Augustine. Bordeaux,

1861.)

16. Note. — Duels are becoming increasingly rare, and although painful examples can still be seen from time to time, their number cannot be compared with what it once was. In former times, a man did not leave his home without anticipating an encounter, and so he always took the necessary precautions. A characteristic sign of the customs of an age and a people is the habitual carrying, openly or concealed, of offensive and defensive weapons; the abolition of this practice bears witness to the softening of manners, and it is interesting to trace its progression from the time when knights never rode except clad in iron and armed with a lance, down to the carrying of a simple sword, which became more an ornament and an accessory to a coat of arms than an offensive weapon. Another feature of these customs is that in former times single combat took place in the middle of the street, before a crowd that moved aside to leave the field clear, whereas today people hide; today a man's death is an event that stirs emotion; formerly no one paid attention to it. Spiritism will sweep away these last vestiges of barbarism by instilling in people the spirit of charity and brotherhood.

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XIII. LET YOUR LEFT HAND NOT KNOW WHAT YOUR RIGHT HAND GIVES

✦

1 Doing good without ostentation.

Take care not to do your good works before others to be seen by them; otherwise you will receive no reward from your Father who is in heaven. — Therefore, when you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. — But when you give alms, let your left hand not know what your right hand is doing; — so that your alms may be given in secret; and your Father, who sees what happens in secret, will reward you. (Saint Matthew, ch. vi, vv. 1 to 4.)

2 When Jesus came down from the mountain, a great crowd followed him; — and at that moment a leper came to him and worshiped him, saying: Lord, if you wish, you can heal me. — Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said: I wish it; be healed; and at once his leprosy was healed. — Then Jesus said to him: Take care not to speak of this to anyone; but go and show yourself to the priests, and offer the gift prescribed by Moses, so that it may serve as a testimony to them. (Saint Matthew, ch. viii, vv. 1 to 4.)

3 Doing good without ostentation has great merit; concealing the hand that gives is even more meritorious; it is the unmistakable sign of great moral superiority: for to see things from a higher standpoint than ordi-

nary people, one must set aside the present life and identify with the life to come; in a word, one must rise above humanity to forgo the satisfaction that comes from the recognition of others and await God's approval. Anyone who values human approval more than God's proves that he has more faith in people than in God, and that the present life means more to him than the life to come, or even that he does not believe in the life to come; if he says otherwise, he acts as though he does not believe what he says.

How many people help others only in the hope that those they help will proclaim their kindness from the rooftops; who will give a large sum in broad daylight, but would not give a single coin in the shadows! That is why Jesus said: "Those who do good with ostentation have already received their reward"; indeed, anyone who seeks glory on earth through the good he does has already paid himself; God owes him nothing more; all that remains for him to receive is the punishment for his pride.

Let the left hand not know what the right hand gives is a figure of speech that admirably describes modest benevolence; but while there is real modesty, there is also affected modesty, a pretense of modesty; some people conceal the hand that gives while taking care to leave a little of it showing, watching to see whether anyone notices them hiding it. What an unworthy parody of Christ's teachings! If proud benefactors are held in low esteem among people, how will they be regarded by God! They too have received their reward on earth. They have been seen; they are satisfied with having been seen: that is all they will have.

What, then, will be the reward of someone who makes his kindness a burden to its recipient, who in a sense demands expressions of gratitude, who makes the recipient feel his position by exalting the cost of the sacrifices he

makes for him? Oh! Such a person does not even have an earthly reward, for he is deprived of the sweet satisfaction of hearing his name blessed, and that is a first punishment for his pride; the tears he dries for the sake of his vanity, instead of rising to heaven, have fallen back upon the sufferer's heart and wounded it. The good he does brings him no benefit, since he reproaches others with it, for every kindness used as a reproach is a debased and worthless coin.

Helpfulness without ostentation has a double merit; besides material charity, it is moral charity; it respects the recipient's feelings; it allows him to accept the kindness without wounding his self-respect, while preserving his human dignity, for someone may accept a service who would not accept alms; now, to turn a service into alms by the manner in which it is rendered is to humiliate the person who receives it, and there is always pride and malice in humiliating someone. True charity, on the contrary, is considerate and resourceful in concealing the kindness, in avoiding even the slightest appearance of anything hurtful, for every emotional wound adds to the suffering born of need; it knows how to find gentle, kindly words that put the recipient at ease before the benefactor, whereas proud charity crushes him. True generosity reaches its highest expression when the benefactor, reversing roles, finds a way to appear himself indebted to the person he helps. This is what these words mean: Let the left hand not know what the right hand gives.

[4] Hidden misfortunes

In great calamities, charity is stirred, and generous efforts are made to repair the devastation; but alongside these widespread disasters, there are thousands of individual disasters that go unnoticed, people lying on a mis-

erable bed without complaint. It is these quiet, hidden misfortunes that true generosity knows how to seek out, without waiting for them to come asking for assistance.

Who is this distinguished-looking woman, simply yet neatly dressed, followed by a young girl dressed just as modestly? She enters a shabby-looking house where she is doubtless known, for she is greeted respectfully at the door. Where is she going? She climbs up to the attic: there lies a mother surrounded by small children; at her arrival, joy lights up their thin faces; for she has come to ease all these sorrows; she brings necessities accompanied by gentle, comforting words that allow her kindness to be accepted without a blush, for these unfortunate people are not professional beggars; the father is in the hospital, and meanwhile the mother cannot provide for their needs. Thanks to her, these poor children will suffer neither cold nor hunger; they will go to school warmly dressed, and the mother's breast will not run dry for the youngest. If one of them is ill, no physical care will be beneath her. From there she goes to the hospital to bring the father a few comforts and reassure him about his family's welfare. At the street corner, a carriage awaits her, a veritable storehouse of everything she brings to those under her care, whom she visits one after another in this way; she asks neither their beliefs nor their opinions, for to her all people are brothers and children of God. When her rounds are over, she says to herself: I have begun my day well. What is her name? Where does she live? No one knows; to the unfortunate, hers is a name that reveals nothing; but she is the angel of consolation; and in the evening, a chorus of blessings rises to the Creator on her behalf: Catholics, Jews, Protestants, all bless her.

Why is she dressed so simply? Because she does not wish to insult poverty

with her luxury. Why does she bring her young daughter along? To teach her how to practice benevolence. Her daughter also wants to give to charity, but her mother says to her: “What can you give, my child, since you have nothing of your own? If I give you something to pass on to others, what merit will you have? In reality, I would be giving to charity and you would be getting the credit; that is not fair. When we visit the sick, you help me care for them; now, giving care is giving something. Does that not seem enough to you? Nothing could be simpler; learn to make useful things, and you will make clothes for these little children; in this way you will give something that comes from you.” This is how this truly Christian mother trains her daughter to practice the virtues taught by Christ. Is she a Spiritist? What does it matter!

In her own home, she is a woman of society, because her position requires it; but no one knows what she does, because she seeks no approval other than that of God and her conscience. Yet one day an unforeseen circumstance brings to her home one of the women under her care, who was bringing back some work; the woman recognized her and wished to bless her benefactress. “Hush!” she said to her; “tell no one.” Thus spoke Jesus.

The widow's mite.

5 Jesus, sitting opposite the collection box, watched how the people put money into it, and how several rich people put in a great deal. — A poor widow also came and put in only two small coins worth a quarter of a sou.

5.2 — Then Jesus called his disciples and said to them: Truly I tell you, this poor widow has given more than all those who put money into the collection box; — for all the others gave out of their abundance, but she

gave out of her poverty, even all she had and all she had left to live on. (Saint Mark, ch. xii, vv. 41 to 44. — Saint Luke, ch. xxi, vv. 1 to 4.)

6 Many people regret that they cannot do as much good as they would like, for lack of sufficient resources, and if they desire wealth, it is, they say, to put it to good use. The intention is praiseworthy, no doubt, and may be very sincere in some; but is it quite certain that it is entirely selfless in everyone?

6.2 Are there not some who, while wishing to do good to others, would be quite happy to begin by doing good to themselves, giving themselves a few more pleasures, obtaining a little of the luxury they lack, and then giving the rest to the poor?

6.3 This ulterior motive, which they may conceal from themselves, but which they would find in the depths of their hearts if they cared to search there, cancels the merit of the intention, for true charity thinks of others before thinking of itself.

6.4 Charity at its highest, in this case, would be to seek through one's own work, by using one's strength, intelligence, and talents, the resources needed to carry out one's generous intentions; that would be the sacrifice most pleasing to the Lord.

6.5 Unfortunately, most people dream of easier ways to become rich all at once and without effort, chasing fantasies such as discoveries of treasure, a lucky stroke of chance, the recovery of unexpected inheritances, and so on. What can be said of those who hope to find helpers among the Spirits to assist them in searches of this kind?

6.6 They certainly neither know nor understand the sacred purpose of Spiritism, still less the mission of the Spirits whom God allows to communicate with people; and so they are punished by disappointments.

6.7 (The Mediums' Book, Those whose intention is free from all thought of personal gain should console themselves for their inability to do as much good as they would like with the thought that the poor person's small offering, given at the cost of self-denial, weighs more in God's scales than the gold of the rich person who gives without denying himself anything.

6.8 It would no doubt be a great satisfaction to be able to relieve poverty generously; but if this is denied, one must submit and confine oneself to doing what one can. Besides, is gold the only means of drying tears, and must one remain idle because one has none?

6.9 Anyone who sincerely wishes to be useful to his brothers finds a thousand opportunities; let him seek them, and he will find them; if not in one way, then in another, for there is no one with the full use of his faculties who cannot render some service, offer comfort, ease physical or emotional suffering, or take some useful step; in the absence of money, does not everyone have effort, time, and rest, some part of which he can give? There too is the poor person's small offering, the widow's mite.

7 Invite the poor and those with disabilities

He also said to the man who had invited him: When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, or your rich neighbors, for fear that they may then invite you in return and thus repay what they have received from you. — But when you give a feast, invite the poor, those with disabilities, the lame, and the blind; — and you

will be happy that they have no means of repaying you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

One of those at the table, having heard these words, said to him: Happy is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. (Saint Luke, ch. xiv, vv. 12 to 15.)

8 "When you give a feast," Jesus says, "do not invite your friends, but the poor and those with disabilities." These words, absurd if taken literally, are sublime if we seek their spirit. Jesus cannot have meant that we should gather beggars from the street at our table instead of our friends; his language was almost always figurative, and people unable to understand the delicate shades of thought needed powerful images, producing the effect of sharply contrasting colors. The essence of his thought is revealed in these words: "You will be happy that they have no means of repaying you"; this means that we should do good without expecting anything in return, but for the sole pleasure of doing it. To offer a striking comparison, he says: Invite the poor to your feasts, for you know that they will be able to give you nothing in return; and by feasts we must understand not meals in the strict sense, but a share in the abundance you enjoy.

These words can, however, also be applied in a more literal sense. How many people invite to their table only those who can, as they say, do them honor, or who can invite them in return! Others, on the contrary, find satisfaction in welcoming those among their relatives or friends who are less fortunate; and who does not have such people among their own? Sometimes this is a way of doing them a great service without appearing to do so. These people, without going out to gather the blind and those with

disabilities, practice the maxim of Jesus if they do it out of kindness, without ostentation, and if they know how to conceal the favor beneath sincere warmth.

9 Instructions from the Spirits Material charity and moral charity

"Let us love one another and do to others what we would wish to have done to us." All religion, all morality, is contained in these two precepts; if they were followed here on earth, you would all be perfect: no more hatred, no more disagreements; I will say even more: no more poverty, for the surplus from every rich person's table would feed many poor people, and in the dark neighborhoods where I lived during my last incarnation, you would no longer see poor women dragging behind them wretched children who lack everything.

You who are rich! Give this a little thought; help the unfortunate as best you can; give, so that God may one day repay you for the good you have done, so that, when you leave your earthly covering, you may find a procession of grateful Spirits who will welcome you at the threshold of a happier world.

If you could know the joy I felt on finding again up there those whom I had been able to help in my last life!...

Love your neighbor, then; love them as yourselves, for you know now that the unfortunate person you turn away may be a brother, a father, a friend whom you are casting away from you; and how great will your despair be when you recognize them in the world of Spirits!

I hope you fully understand what moral charity can be, the kind that everyone can practice; the kind that costs nothing material, yet is more difficult to put into practice.

Moral charity consists in bearing with one another, and this is what you do least in this earthly world where you are incarnated for the moment. Believe me, there is great merit in knowing how to remain silent so that someone more foolish than yourself may speak; and this too is a kind of charity. Knowing how to be deaf when a mocking word escapes a mouth accustomed to ridicule; not seeing the disdainful smile that greets your arrival among people who, often wrongly, believe themselves above you, while in spirit life, the only real life, they are sometimes very far from it: this is a merit, not of humility, but of charity; for overlooking the faults of others is moral charity.

Yet this charity must not prevent the other kind; but above all, take care not to despise your fellow beings; remember everything I have already told you: You must constantly remember that, in turning away a poor person, you may be rejecting a Spirit who was dear to you and who is temporarily in a position below your own. I have seen again one of the poor of your earth whom I was fortunately able to help on occasion, and whom I now sometimes implore in my turn.

Remember that Jesus said we are brothers, and always think of this before turning away the leper or the beggar. Farewell; think of those who suffer, and pray. (Sister Rosalie. Paris, 1860.)

10 My friends, I have heard several of you say to yourselves: How can I give charity? Often I do not even have the necessities!

Charity, my friends, can be practiced in many ways; you can give charity in thoughts, in words, and in deeds. In thoughts: by praying for the poor abandoned souls who died without having had the opportunity to see the light; a heartfelt prayer brings them relief. In words: by offering a little

good advice to your everyday companions; say to those embittered by despair and deprivation, who blaspheme the name of the Most High: “I was like you; I suffered, I was unhappy, but I came to believe in Spiritism, and look, I am happy now.” To the elderly who tell you: “It is useless; I am at the end of my course; I will die as I have lived.” Say to them: “God's justice is equal for us all; remember the workers of the tenth hour.” To little children who, already corrupted by those around them, go wandering along the roads, ready to yield to evil temptations, say: “God sees you, my dear little ones,” and do not be afraid to repeat these gentle words to them often; they will eventually take root in their young minds, and instead of little vagabonds, you will have made men. This too is charity.

Several of you also say: “Bah! There are so many of us on earth, God cannot see us all.” Listen carefully to this, my friends: When you are on the top of a mountain, does your gaze not take in the billions of grains of sand that cover that mountain? Well! God sees you in the same way; he leaves you your free will, just as you let those grains of sand go wherever the wind scatters them; only God, in his infinite mercy, has placed deep within your heart a watchful sentinel called conscience. Listen to it; it will give you only good advice. Sometimes you numb it by opposing it with the spirit of evil; then it falls silent; but be sure that the poor neglected thing will make itself heard as soon as you have let it glimpse the shadow of remorse. Listen to it, question it, and often you will find comfort in the advice you receive from it.

My friends, to every new regiment the general gives a flag; I give you this maxim of Christ: “Love one another.” Practice this maxim; gather together around this banner, and you will receive happiness and consolation from it. (A protective Spirit. Lyon, 1860.) Benevolence.

11. Benevolence, my friends, will give you in this world the purest and sweetest pleasures, the joys of the heart that are troubled neither by remorse nor by indifference. Oh! May you understand all the greatness and sweetness contained in the generosity of noble souls, that feeling which makes us regard others as we regard ourselves, and joyfully strip ourselves to clothe our brother. May you, my friends, have no sweeter occupation than making others happy! What worldly celebrations can you compare with those joyful celebrations when, as representatives of the Divine, you restore joy to those poor families who know nothing of life but its hardships and bitterness; when you suddenly see those worn faces shine with hope, for those unfortunate people had no bread, and their little children, unaware that to live is to suffer, cried out, wept, and repeated these words that pierced their mother's heart like a sharp sword: I am hungry!... Oh! Understand how delightful are the feelings of someone who sees joy reborn where, a moment before, they saw only despair! Understand your obligations toward your brothers! Go, go out to meet misfortune; go above all to the aid of hidden suffering, for it is the most painful. Go, my beloved, and remember these words of the Savior: "When you clothe one of these little ones, remember that you are doing it to me!"

Charity! Sublime word that sums up all virtues, it is you who must lead peoples to happiness; by practicing you, they will create infinite pleasures for themselves in the future, and during their exile on earth, you will be their consolation, the foretaste of the joys they will savor later when they all embrace in the bosom of the God of love. It is you, divine virtue, who gave me the only moments of happiness I enjoyed on earth. May my incarnated brothers believe the voice of the friend who speaks to them and says: It is in charity that you must seek peace of heart, contentment of the

soul, and the remedy for life's afflictions. Oh! When you are about to accuse God, look below you; see how much suffering there is to relieve; how many poor children without families; how many elderly people who have no friendly hand to help them and close their eyes when death claims them! How much good there is to do! Oh! Do not complain; on the contrary, thank God, and lavish your sympathy, your love, and your money with open hands on all those who, deprived of this world's goods, languish in suffering and isolation. Here on earth you will reap very sweet joys, and later... God alone knows!... (Adolphe, Bishop of Algiers. Bordeaux, 1861.)

12 Be kind and charitable; it is the key to heaven that you hold in your hands. All eternal happiness is contained in this maxim: Love one another. The soul can rise into the spiritual regions only through devotion to others; it finds happiness and comfort only in the impulses of charity. Be kind, support your brothers, set aside the dreadful scourge of selfishness; fulfilling this duty should open the road to eternal happiness for you. Besides, which of you has not felt your heart leap and your inner joy expand at the account of a noble act of devotion, of a truly charitable deed? If you sought only the delight that a good deed brings, you would always remain on the path of spiritual progress. You have no shortage of examples; only willing hearts are rare. Look at the many good people whose pious memory your history preserves.

Has Christ not told you everything concerning these virtues of charity and love? Why are his divine teachings set aside? Why do people close their ears to his divine words and their hearts to all his gentle maxims? I wish people would bring greater interest and greater faith to readings from the Gospel. This book is neglected; it is made into an empty word, a

sealed letter; this admirable code is left forgotten. Your troubles come only from your deliberate abandonment of this summary of divine laws. Read, then, these pages, burning with the devotion of Jesus, and meditate on them.

Strong men, gird yourselves; weak men, make weapons of your gentleness and your faith. Show greater conviction and greater perseverance in spreading your new doctrine. We have come only to give you encouragement; it is only to stir your zeal and your virtues that God allows us to manifest ourselves to you. Yet if people truly wished, they would need only God's help and their own will: spirit manifestations are intended only for closed eyes and unreceptive hearts.

Charity is the fundamental virtue that must support the entire structure of earthly virtues: without it, the others do not exist. Without charity there is no hope of a better destiny, no moral concern to guide us; without charity there is no faith, for faith is only a pure ray that makes a charitable soul shine.

Charity is the eternal anchor of salvation on every globe: it is the purest emanation of the Creator himself; it is his own virtue that he gives to the creature. How could anyone fail to recognize this supreme goodness? With this thought in mind, what heart could be perverse enough to suppress and drive away this wholly divine feeling? What child could be wicked enough to rebel against this gentle caress: charity?

I dare not speak of what I have done, for Spirits too are modest about their works; but I believe the work I began is among those that should contribute most to relieving the suffering of your fellow beings. I frequently see Spirits asking for the mission of continuing my task; I see them, my gentle and dear sisters, in their pious and divine ministry; I see them practicing

the virtue I commend to you, with all the joy that this life of devotion and sacrifice brings. It is a great happiness for me to see how their character is honored, how their mission is loved and tenderly protected. Good people, with willing and determined hearts, unite to carry forward the great work of spreading charity. You will find the reward of this virtue in its very practice; there is no spiritual joy that it does not give even in this present life. Be united; love one another according to the teachings of Christ. So be it. (Saint Vincent de Paul. Paris, 1858.)

13 My name is charity; I am the main road that leads to God. Follow me, for I am the goal toward which you must all strive.

This morning I made my usual rounds, and with a grieving heart I come to tell you: Oh, my friends, how much misery, how many tears, and how much you have to do to dry them all! In vain I tried to comfort poor mothers; I whispered in their ears: Take courage! There are kind hearts watching over you; you will not be abandoned. Be patient! God is here; you are his beloved, his chosen ones. They seemed to hear me and turned wide, bewildered eyes toward me. I could read on their poor faces that their bodies, those tyrants of the Spirit, were hungry, and that although my words brought a little peace to their hearts, they did not fill their stomachs. Again I repeated: Take courage! Take courage! Then a poor mother, very young, who was nursing a little child, took it in her arms and held it out into the empty space, as though begging me to protect this poor little being who received only insufficient nourishment from a barren breast. Elsewhere, my friends, I saw poor elderly people without work and soon to be without shelter, prey to all the sufferings of want, and so ashamed of their misery that they, who had never begged, dared not implore the pity

of passersby. My heart moved with compassion, I, who have nothing, became a beggar for them, and I go everywhere to stir generosity, to breathe good thoughts into generous and compassionate hearts. That is why I come to you, my friends, and tell you: Over there are unfortunate people whose bread bins are empty, whose hearths have no fire, and whose beds have no blankets. I do not tell you what you must do; I leave the initiative to your kind hearts. If I dictated your course of action, you would no longer have the merit of your good deed. I tell you only: I am charity, and I hold out my hand to you for your suffering brothers.

But if I ask, I also give, and I give much. I invite you to a great banquet, and I provide the tree from which you will all eat your fill! See how beautiful it is, how laden with flowers and fruit! Go, go, gather, take all the fruit of this beautiful tree called benevolence. In place of the branches you have taken, I will attach all the good deeds you do, and I will bring this tree back to God so that he may fill it again, for benevolence is inexhaustible. Follow me, then, my friends, so that I may count you among those who enlist under my banner. Have no fear; I will lead you along the path of salvation, for I am Charity. (Carita, martyred in Rome. Lyon, 1861.)

14 There are several ways of practicing charity, which many of you confuse with almsgiving; yet there is a great difference. Almsgiving, my friends, is sometimes useful, for it relieves the poor; but it is almost always humiliating both for the giver and for the receiver. Charity, on the contrary, binds the benefactor and the recipient together, and it takes so many different forms! You can be charitable even toward your relatives and friends, by being lenient with one another, forgiving one another's weaknesses, and taking care not to wound anyone's pride. For you, Spiritists, charity lies in the

way you treat those who do not think as you do: by leading those who see less clearly to believe, without offending them or openly challenging their convictions, but by bringing them very gently to our meetings, where they can hear us, and where we will surely find the opening in their hearts through which we must enter. So much for one aspect of charity.

Now listen to what charity toward the poor means, toward those who are deprived here below but rewarded by God if they know how to accept their hardships without complaint, and this depends on you. I will make myself understood through an example.

Several times a week I see a gathering of ladies of all ages; to us, as you know, they are all sisters. What are they doing? They work quickly, quickly; their fingers are nimble. See too how radiant their faces are, and how their hearts beat in unison! But what is their purpose? They see winter approaching, which will be harsh for poor households. The ants have been unable to gather enough grain during the summer to provide for their needs, and most of their belongings are pawned. The poor mothers worry and weep as they think of the little children who will be cold and hungry this winter! But be patient, poor women! God has inspired women more fortunate than you; they have gathered together and are making little clothes for you. Then one of these days, when snow has covered the earth and you complain, saying, "God is not just," for that is what you who suffer so often say, you will see one of the children of these good workers appear, these women who have made themselves workers for the poor. Yes, it was for you that they worked like this, and your complaint will turn into a blessing, for in the hearts of the unfortunate, love follows very closely upon hatred.

As all these workers need encouragement, I see communications from

good Spirits reaching them from every side. The men who belong to this society also contribute by giving one of those readings that are so greatly enjoyed. And we, to reward the zeal of everyone and of each person in particular, promise these diligent workers a good clientele that will pay them, in ready cash, with blessings, the only currency accepted in heaven. We assure them, moreover, without fear of promising too much, that they will never lack such clients. (Carita. Lyon, 1861.)

15 My dear friends, every day I hear some among you say, "I am poor; I cannot practice charity," and every day I see you lacking leniency toward your fellow beings. You forgive them nothing, and you set yourselves up as judges, often harsh ones, without asking yourselves whether you would be pleased to be treated in the same way. Is leniency not also charity? You who can practice charity only through leniency, at least do so, but do so generously. As for material charity, I want to tell you a story from the other world.

Two men had just died. God had said: As long as these two men live, each of their good deeds will be placed in a bag, and at their death these bags will be weighed. When these two men reached their final hour, God had the two bags brought to him. One was large, bulky, well stuffed, and rang with the metal that filled it; the other was very small and so thin that the few coins it contained could be seen through it. Each man recognized his bag: Here is mine, said the first; I recognize it; I was rich and gave a great deal. There is mine, said the other; I was always poor, alas! I had almost nothing to share. But what a surprise! When the two bags were placed on the scales, the larger one became light, and the little one grew heavy, so much so that it far outweighed the other side of the scales. Then God said

to the rich man: You gave a great deal, that is true, but you gave for show, and to see your name displayed in all the temples of pride; moreover, in giving you deprived yourself of nothing. Go to the left, and be satisfied that your almsgiving still counts for some small thing. Then he said to the poor man: You gave very little, my friend; but each coin in these scales represents something you denied yourself. Though you did not give alms, you practiced charity, and better still, you practiced charity naturally, without thinking that you would be given credit for it. You were lenient; you did not judge your fellow being, but instead excused him in all his actions. Pass to the right, and go receive your reward. (A protecting Spirit. Lyon, 1861.)

16 Can the wealthy, happy woman, who does not need to spend her time on household tasks, not devote a few hours to useful work for her fellow beings? Let her use what she spends on surplus pleasures to buy something to cover the unfortunate person shivering with cold; let her delicate hands make coarse but warm clothes; let her help a mother clothe the child about to be born; if her own child has a little less lace, the poor person's child will be warmer. To work for the poor is to work in the Lord's vineyard.

And you, poor working woman, who have nothing to spare, but who, in your love for your brothers and sisters, also wish to give from the little you possess, give a few hours of your day, of your time, your only treasure; make some of those elegant pieces of needlework that tempt the fortunate; sell the work of your evening hours, and you too will be able to contribute your share toward relieving your brothers and sisters; you may have a few fewer ribbons, but you will give shoes to someone whose feet are bare.

And you, women devoted to God, also labor at his work, but let your delicate and costly handiwork be made for more than adorning your chapels and drawing attention to your skill and patience; work, my daughters, and let the proceeds of your handiwork be devoted to relieving your brothers and sisters in God; the poor are his beloved children; to work for them is to glorify him. Be for them the Providence that says: God gives food to the birds of the air. Let the gold and silver woven beneath your fingers be turned into clothing and food for those who lack them. Do this, and your work will be blessed.

And all of you who can produce, give; give your genius, give your inspirations, give your heart, which God will bless. Poets and writers, who are read only by people of society, fill their leisure hours, but let the proceeds of some of your works be devoted to relieving the unfortunate; painters, sculptors, artists of every kind, let your intelligence also come to the aid of your brothers and sisters; you will have no less glory for it, and there will be a little less suffering.

All of you can give; whatever class you belong to, you have something you can share; whatever God has given you, you owe a part of it to someone who lacks the necessities of life, because in their place you would be glad for someone else to share with you. Your earthly treasures will be a little smaller, but your treasures in heaven will be more abundant; there you will reap a hundredfold what you have sown in good deeds here below. (John. Bordeaux, 1861.) Pity.

17 Pity is the virtue that brings you closest to the angels; it is the sister of charity that leads you toward God. Ah! Let your heart be moved at the sight of the hardships and sufferings of your fellow beings; your tears are a

balm you pour upon their wounds, and when, through gentle sympathy, you succeed in restoring their hope and resignation, what sweetness you feel! This sweetness, it is true, has a certain bitterness, for it is born beside misfortune; but although it lacks the sharp intensity of worldly pleasures, it does not bring the piercing disappointments of the emptiness they leave behind; it has a penetrating gentleness that gladdens the soul. Pity, deeply felt pity, is love; love is devotion; devotion is forgetting oneself; and this forgetfulness, this self-denial for the sake of the unfortunate, is the highest virtue, the one the divine Messiah practiced throughout his life and taught in his doctrine, so holy and so sublime. When this doctrine is restored to its original purity and accepted by all peoples, it will bring happiness to the earth by at last allowing harmony, peace, and love to reign there.

The feeling best suited to helping you progress by taming your selfishness and pride, the one that disposes your soul toward humility, kindness, and love of your neighbor, is pity! That pity which moves you to your very depths before the sufferings of your brothers and sisters, which makes you hold out a helping hand to them and draws sympathetic tears from you. Never stifle this heavenly emotion in your hearts, then; do not act like those hardened, selfish people who turn away from the afflicted because the sight of their misery would momentarily disturb their happy existence; fear remaining indifferent when you can be useful. Tranquility bought at the price of guilty indifference is the tranquility of the Dead Sea, which hides foul mud and decay in the depths of its waters.

Yet how far pity is from causing the distress and weariness that frighten the selfish person! Certainly, when the soul encounters another's misfortune and reflects upon itself, it experiences a natural and profound shock

that makes your whole being tremble and affects you painfully; but the reward is great when you succeed in restoring courage and hope to an unfortunate brother who is touched by the clasp of a friendly hand, and whose eyes, moist with both emotion and gratitude, turn gently toward you before looking up to heaven to thank it for having sent him a comforter, a support. Pity is the melancholy but heavenly forerunner of charity, that foremost virtue whose sister it is and whose good deeds it prepares and ennobles. (Michael. Bordeaux, 1862.)

18 Orphans

My brothers and sisters, love orphans; if you knew how sad it is to be alone and abandoned, especially at a young age! God allows there to be orphans to encourage us to act as fathers to them. What divine charity it is to help a poor little abandoned creature, to keep it from suffering hunger and cold, to guide its soul so that it does not stray into vice! Whoever holds out a hand to an abandoned child is pleasing to God, for that person understands and practices his law. Remember also that often the child you help was dear to you in another incarnation; and if you could remember, it would no longer be charity, but a duty. Thus, my friends, every suffering being is your brother or sister and has a right to your charity, not the charity that wounds the heart, not the alms that burn the hand into which they fall, for your small offerings are often very bitter! How often they would be refused if sickness and destitution were not waiting in the attic! Give gently; add to your kindness the most precious gift of all: a kind word, a caress, a friendly smile; avoid that patronizing tone that twists the

blade in a bleeding heart, and remember that by doing good, you are working for yourselves and your loved ones. (A Familiar Spirit. Paris, 1860.)

19 What should we think of people who, having had their kindness repaid with ingratitude, no longer do good for fear of encountering ungrateful people?

Such people have more selfishness than charity; for doing good only to receive expressions of gratitude is not doing it selflessly, and selfless kindness is the only kind pleasing to God. It is also pride, for they take pleasure in the humility of the recipient who comes to lay gratitude at their feet. Whoever seeks on earth the reward for the good they do will not receive it in heaven; but God will give credit to those who do not seek it on earth.

You must always help the weak, even knowing beforehand that those to whom you do good will not be grateful for it. Know that if someone you help forgets your kindness, God will give you more credit for it than if you had already been rewarded by the recipient's gratitude. God allows you sometimes to be repaid with ingratitude to test your perseverance in doing good.

Besides, how do you know whether this kindness, forgotten for the moment, will not bear good fruit later? Be certain, on the contrary, that it is a seed that will sprout with time. Unfortunately, you always see only the present; you work for yourselves, without considering others. Acts of kindness eventually soften the hardest hearts; they may go unrecognized here below, but when the Spirit is freed from its veil of flesh, it will remember, and that memory will be its punishment; then it will regret its ingratitude; it will wish to make amends for its fault, to pay its debt in another exis-

tence, often even by accepting a life of devotion to its benefactor. In this way, without suspecting it, you will have contributed to its moral advancement, and later you will recognize the full truth of this maxim: A good deed is never lost. But you will also have worked for yourselves, for you will have the merit of having done good selflessly, without allowing disappointments to discourage you.

Ah! My friends, if you knew all the bonds that, in your present life, connect you to your previous existences; if you could take in the multitude of relationships that bring beings closer to one another for their mutual progress, you would admire still more the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, who allows you all to live again in order to reach him. (Protective Guide. Sens, 1862.)

20 Is charity properly understood when it is confined to people who share the same opinion, belief, or party?

No, it is above all the spirit of sect and party that must be abolished, for all people are brothers and sisters. True Christians see only brothers and sisters in their fellow beings, and before helping someone in need, they do not inquire into that person's belief or opinion on any matter. Would they be following the precept of Jesus Christ, who says to love even your enemies, if they turned away an unfortunate person because that person had a different faith from their own? Let them offer help, then, without demanding any account of that person's conscience, for if the person is an enemy of religion, this is the way to make them love it; turning them away would make them hate it. (Saint Louis. Paris, 1860.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XIV. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER

✦

1 You know the commandments: you shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall wrong no one; honor your father and your mother. (Saint Mark, ch. x, v. 19; Saint Luke, ch. xviii, v. 20; Saint Matthew, ch. xix, v. 18, 19.)

2 Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land that the Lord your God will give you. (Decalogue; Exodus, ch. xx, v. 12.)

3 Filial piety

The commandment, “Honor your father and your mother,” follows from the general law of charity and love of one's neighbor, for one cannot love one's neighbor without loving one's father and mother; but the word honor includes a further duty toward them, that of filial piety. By this, God wished to show that love must be accompanied by respect, consideration, obedience, and forbearance, which implies the obligation to fulfill towards them, even more rigorously, everything that charity commands toward one's neighbor. This duty naturally extends to those who take the place of a father and mother, and whose devotion is all the more meritorious because it is less obligatory. God always severely punishes every violation of this commandment.

To honor one's father and mother is not merely to respect them, but also to assist them in need; to provide them with rest in their old age; to sur-

round them with care, as they did for us in our childhood.

True filial piety is shown above all toward parents who have no resources. Do those who think they are making a great effort by giving them barely enough to keep them from starving, while denying themselves nothing, fulfill this commandment? Do those who relegate them to the smallest corners of the house to keep them off the streets, while reserving the best and most comfortable places for themselves? Fortunate indeed are the parents when this is not done grudgingly, and when they are not made to pay for the time they have left to live by having the burdens of the household thrust upon them! Must old and feeble parents then be the servants of young and strong children? Did their mother bargain over her milk when they were in the cradle? Did she count her sleepless nights when they were ill, or her steps to obtain what they needed? No, children owe their poor parents more than the bare necessities: they also owe them, as far as they can, the small comforts beyond necessity, the thoughtful attentions and tender care that are merely the interest on what they have received, the payment of a sacred debt. Only in this is there filial piety acceptable to God.

Woe, then, to anyone who forgets what they owe to those who supported them in their weakness, who gave them moral life along with physical life, and who often endured harsh privations to ensure their well-being; woe to the ungrateful, for they will be punished by ingratitude and abandonment; they will be struck in their dearest affections, sometimes even in the present life, but certainly in another existence, where they will endure what they have made others endure.

Some parents, it is true, disregard their duties and are not what they should be toward their children; but it is for God to punish them, not for

their children; it is not for the children to reproach them, because perhaps they themselves have deserved that it should be so. If charity makes it a law to return good for evil, to be indulgent toward the imperfections of others, not to speak ill of one's neighbor, to forget and forgive wrongs, and even to love one's enemies, how much greater must this obligation be toward one's parents! Children must therefore take all of Jesus' precepts concerning one's neighbor as the rule for their conduct toward their parents, and remind themselves that any blameworthy behavior toward strangers is even more blameworthy toward those close to them, and that what may be merely a fault in the first case can become a crime in the second, because ingratitude is then added to the lack of charity.

4 God said, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land that the Lord your God will give you"; why, then, does he promise life on earth as a reward, rather than heavenly life? The explanation lies in the words, "That God will give you," omitted from the modern wording of the Decalogue, which distorts its meaning. To understand these words, we must consider the circumstances and ideas of the Hebrews at the time they were spoken; they did not yet understand the future life; their vision did not extend beyond bodily life; they were therefore bound to be more affected by what they could see than by what they could not see; this is why God speaks to them in language within their understanding and, as with children, holds out to them the prospect of something that can satisfy them. They were then in the desert; the land that God would give them was the Promised Land, the goal of their aspirations: they desired nothing more, and God tells them that they will live there a long time, meaning that they will possess it for a long time if they observe

his commandments.

But by the coming of Jesus, their ideas had developed further; the time having come to give them less coarse nourishment, he introduces them to spiritual life by telling them, "My kingdom is not of this world; it is there, and not on earth, that you will receive the reward for your good works." Through these words, the material Promised Land becomes a heavenly homeland; thus, when he calls them back to the observance of the commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," it is no longer the earth that he promises them, but heaven. (Ch. ii and m.)

5 Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?

And when he had entered the house, so great a crowd gathered there that they could not even eat their meal. — When his relatives heard of this, they came to seize him, for they said that he had lost his mind.

Meanwhile, his mother and his brothers came and, standing outside, sent for him. — Now the people were sitting around him, and he was told: Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you. — But he answered them: Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? — And looking at those who were sitting around him, he said: Here are my mother and my brothers; — for whoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister, and my mother. (Saint Mark, ch. iii, v. 20, 21 and 31 to 35; Saint Matthew, ch. xii, v. 46 to 50.)

6 Certain words seem strange coming from Jesus and contrast with his goodness and his unfailing kindness toward everyone. Unbelievers have not failed to use them as a weapon, saying that he contradicted himself.

6.2 One undeniable fact is that the essential foundation, the cornerstone of his teaching, is the law of love and charity; he therefore could not destroy on one side what he established on the other; from this we must draw the strict conclusion that, if certain sayings contradict that principle, the words attributed to him have been inaccurately reported, misunderstood, or are not his.

7 One is rightly surprised to see Jesus, on this occasion, show so much indifference toward his relatives and, in a sense, disown his mother.

As for his brothers, we know that they had never felt any sympathy for him; being little-advanced Spirits, they had not understood his mission; in their eyes, his conduct was strange, and his teachings had not touched them, since he had no disciples among them; it would even seem that, to a certain extent, they shared the prejudices of his enemies; it is certain, moreover, that when he came among his family, they received him more as a stranger than as a brother, and Saint John states explicitly (ch. vii, v. 5) "that they did not believe in him."

As for his mother, no one could dispute her tenderness towards her son; but we must also admit that she does not seem to have formed a very accurate idea of his mission, for she was never seen to follow his teachings or to bear witness to him, as John the Baptist did; maternal concern was her dominant feeling. To suppose that Jesus disowned his mother would be to misunderstand his character; such a thought could not have moved the one who said: Honor your father and your mother. We must therefore seek another meaning in his words, which are almost always veiled in allegorical form.

Jesus neglected no opportunity to give a teaching; he therefore seized the

opportunity offered by his family's arrival to establish the difference between bodily kinship and spiritual kinship.

Bodily kinship and spiritual kinship

8 Blood ties do not necessarily establish ties between Spirits. The body comes from the body, but the Spirit does not come from the Spirit, because the Spirit existed before the formation of the body; it is not the father who creates his child's Spirit; he merely provides it with a bodily covering, but he must help its intellectual and moral development so that it may progress.

The Spirits who incarnate in the same family, especially among close relatives, are most often Spirits with an affinity for one another, united by previous relationships that find expression in their affection during earthly life; but it can also happen that these Spirits are complete strangers to one another, divided by equally longstanding antipathies, which likewise find expression in their antagonism on earth, serving as a trial for them. True family ties are therefore not those of blood relationship, but those of affinity and shared thoughts that unite Spirits before, during, and after their incarnation. It follows that two beings born of different fathers may be more truly brothers in Spirit than if they were brothers by blood; they may be drawn to each other, seek each other out, and enjoy each other's company, while two brothers by blood may repel each other, as we see every day; a moral problem that Spiritism alone could resolve through the plurality of existences. (Ch. iv, no. 13.)

There are therefore two kinds of families: families bound by spiritual ties and families bound by bodily ties; the former, which endure, are strengthened through purification and continue in the world of Spirits through

the soul's various migrations; the latter, as fragile as matter, fade with time and often break apart morally even during the present life. This is what Jesus wished to make understood when he said of his disciples: Here are my mother and my brothers, meaning my family through the ties of the Spirit, for whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven is my brother, my sister, and my mother.

His brothers' hostility is clearly expressed in Saint Mark's account, since, he says, they intended to seize him on the pretext that he had lost his mind. When their arrival was announced, knowing their feelings toward him, it was natural for him to say of his disciples, from a spiritual point of view: “Here are my true brothers”; as his mother was with them, he makes the teaching general, which in no way implies that he meant his mother according to the body was nothing to him as a Spirit, or that he felt only indifference toward her; his conduct on other occasions has sufficiently proved the contrary.

[9] Instructions of the Spirits The ingratitude of children and family ties

Ingratitude is one of the most immediate fruits of selfishness; it always outrages honest hearts; but that of children toward their parents has an even more odious character. It is from this particular point of view that we shall consider it, to analyze its causes and effects. Here, as everywhere, Spiritism sheds light on one of the problems of the human heart.

When a Spirit leaves the earth, it takes with it the passions or virtues inherent in its nature, and goes into space, improving itself or remaining at a standstill until it wishes to see the light. Some have therefore departed carrying powerful hatreds and unsatisfied desires for revenge; but some of these, more advanced than the others, are allowed a glimpse of the truth.

They recognize the disastrous effects of their passions, and it is then that they make good resolutions. They understand that to reach God there is only one password: charity. Now, there can be no charity without forgetting outrages and insults; no charity with hatred in the heart and without forgiveness.

Then, through an extraordinary effort, they look upon those they hated on earth; but at the sight of them their hostility awakens. They rebel at the thought of forgiving, even more than at that of renouncing themselves, and above all at the thought of loving those who may have destroyed their fortune, their honor, their family. Yet the hearts of these unfortunate beings are stirred; they hesitate, they waver, troubled by these opposing feelings. If the good resolution prevails, they pray to God and implore the good Spirits to give them strength at the most decisive moment of the trial.

Finally, after some years of meditation and prayer, the Spirit takes advantage of a body being prepared in the family of someone it hated, and asks the Spirits entrusted with transmitting the supreme orders for permission to go and fulfill on earth the destiny of this newly formed body. What, then, will its conduct be within this family? It will depend on how firmly its good resolutions endure. Constant contact with the beings it hated is a terrible trial under which it sometimes succumbs, if its will is not strong enough. Thus, according to whether the good or the bad resolution prevails, it will be the friend or the enemy of those among whom it is called to live. This explains the hatreds and instinctive aversions observed in certain children, which no previous act seems to justify. Nothing, indeed, in this existence could have provoked this antipathy; to understand it, one must look to the past. O Spiritists! Understand today the great role of human-

ity; understand that when you produce a body, the soul that incarnates in it comes from space to progress. Know your duties, and devote all your love to bringing this soul closer to God: this is the mission entrusted to you, and you will receive its reward if you fulfill it faithfully. Your care and the education you give it will help its improvement and future well-being. Remember that God will ask every father and every mother: What have you done with the child entrusted to your care? If it has remained backward through your fault, your punishment will be to see it among the suffering Spirits, when it was within your power to make it happy. Then you yourselves, tormented by remorse, will ask to repair your fault; you will request a new incarnation for yourselves and for the child, in which you will surround it with more enlightened care, and it, full of gratitude, will surround you with its love.

Do not, then, reject the child in the cradle who pushes its mother away, or the one who repays you with ingratitude; it is not chance that has made it so and given it to you. An imperfect intuition of the past is revealing itself, and from this you may judge that one or the other has already hated deeply or been deeply offended; that one or the other has come to forgive or to atone. Mothers! Embrace, then, the child who causes you sorrow, and say to yourselves: One of us has been guilty. Earn the divine joys that God attaches to motherhood by teaching this child that it is on earth to improve itself, to love, and to bless. But alas! Many of you, instead of using education to drive out the bad tendencies brought from previous existences, sustain and develop those very tendencies through blameworthy weakness or carelessness; and later, your heart, wounded by your children's ingratitude, will be for you, even in this life, the beginning of your atonement.

The task is not as difficult as you might believe; it does not require worldly learning. The uneducated can fulfill it as well as the learned, and Spiritism makes it easier by revealing the cause of the imperfections of the human heart.

From the cradle, children reveal the good or bad instincts they bring from their previous existence; you must apply yourselves to studying them. All evils have their source in selfishness and pride; watch, then, for the slightest signs that reveal the seeds of these vices, and devote yourselves to fighting them before they have taken deep root. Act like the good gardener, who removes unwanted shoots as soon as he sees them emerging on the tree. If you allow selfishness and pride to develop, do not be surprised to be repaid later with ingratitude. When parents have done everything they should for their children's moral advancement, if they do not succeed, they have nothing to reproach themselves for, and their conscience can be at peace. But for the very natural sorrow they feel at the failure of their efforts, God has in store a great, an immense consolation: the certainty that this is only a delay, that they will be allowed to complete in another existence the work begun in this one, and that one day the ungrateful child will reward them with its love. (Chap. xiii, no. 19.)

God has not made the trial greater than the strength of the one who asks for it; he permits only those that can be endured. If one does not succeed, it is therefore not the ability that is lacking, but the will, for how many there are who, instead of resisting harmful impulses, take pleasure in them. It is for these that tears and lamentations are reserved in their later existences; but admire the goodness of God, who never closes the door to repentance. A day comes when the guilty person is weary of suffering, when their pride is finally subdued; it is then that God opens his fatherly

arms to the prodigal child who throws himself at his feet. Severe trials, understand me well, are almost always a sign of an end to suffering and of the Spirit's improvement, when they are accepted with God in mind. This is a decisive moment, and it is above all then that one must not falter by complaining, unless one wishes to lose the benefit and have to begin again. Instead of complaining, thank God, who offers you the opportunity to overcome so that he may give you the prize of victory. Then, when you have left the turmoil of the earthly world and enter the world of Spirits, you will be acclaimed there like a soldier emerging victorious from the midst of battle.

Of all trials, the most painful are those that affect the heart. A person may courageously endure poverty and material deprivation, yet succumb under the weight of domestic sorrows, wounded by the ingratitude of their loved ones. Oh, what piercing anguish that is! But in these circumstances, what can better restore moral courage than knowledge of the causes of the evil, and the certainty that although there may be long periods of heartbreak, there is no eternal despair, for God cannot wish his creature to suffer forever? What could be more comforting, more encouraging than the thought that it is within one's power, through one's own efforts, to shorten suffering by destroying within oneself the causes of evil? But for this, one must not keep one's gaze fixed on the earth and see only a single existence; one must rise above it and look into the infinity of the past and the future. Then God's great justice is revealed to your eyes, and you wait patiently, because you understand what seemed to you to be monstrous things on earth; the wounds you receive there seem to you no more than scratches. In this view of the whole, family ties appear in their true light; they are no longer the fragile bonds of matter that unite its members, but the lasting

bonds of the Spirit, which endure and grow stronger as they are purified, instead of being broken by reincarnation.

Spirits drawn together by similar tastes, the same degree of moral progress, and affection form families. These same Spirits, in their earthly migrations, seek one another out to gather together as they do in space; this is the origin of united and harmonious families. And if, in their wanderings, they are temporarily separated, they meet again later, happy with their new progress. But as they must not work only for themselves, God allows less advanced Spirits to incarnate among them, to draw advice and good examples from them for their own advancement. They sometimes cause trouble there, but therein lies the trial, therein lies the task. Welcome them, then, as brothers; come to their aid, and later, in the world of Spirits, the family will rejoice at having saved shipwrecked souls who, in their turn, will be able to save others. (Saint Augustine. Paris, 1862.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XV. WITHOUT CHARITY THERE IS NO SALVATION

✦

1 What is needed to be saved, Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Now, when the Son of Man comes in his majesty, accompanied by all the angels, he will sit on the throne of his glory; — and all the nations being gathered before him, he will separate them from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, — and he will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right: Come, you who have been blessed by my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world; — for I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I needed lodging, and you took me in; — I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to see me.

Then the righteous will answer him: Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food, or thirsty and give you drink? — When did we see you without lodging and take you in, or without clothes and clothe you? — And when did we see you sick or in prison and come to visit you? — And the King will answer them: Truly I tell you, every time you did this for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.

Then he will say to those on his left: Depart from me, you who are cursed; go into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; — for I was hungry, and you gave me no food; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; — I needed lodging, and you did not take me in; I was without clothes,

and you did not clothe me; I was sick and in prison, and you did not visit me.

Then they too will answer him: Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, without lodging, without clothes, sick, or in prison, and fail to help you? — But he will answer them: Truly I tell you, every time you failed to give this help to one of the least of these, you failed to give it to me.

And then these will go into eternal punishment, and the righteous into eternal life. (Saint Matthew, ch. xxv, vv. 31 to 46.)

2 Then a teacher of the law stood up and said to him, to test him: Master, what must I do to possess eternal life? — Jesus answered him: What is written in the law? What do you read there? — He answered him: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. — Jesus said to him: You have answered very well; do this and you will live. But this man, wishing to show that he was righteous, said to Jesus: And who is my neighbor? — And Jesus spoke to him, saying:

A man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, covered him with wounds, and went away, leaving him half dead. — Then a priest happened to be going down the same road, and, seeing him, passed by. — A Levite, who also came to the same place, looked at him and likewise passed by. — But a Samaritan who was traveling came to the place where this man was, and, seeing him, was moved with compassion. — So he went up to him, poured oil and wine into his wounds, and bandaged them; and, putting him on his horse, he took him to an inn and cared for him. — The next day he took out two denarii, which he gave to the innkeeper, and said to him: Take good care of

this man, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I return. Which of these three seems to you to have been the neighbor of the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? — The teacher answered him: The one who showed him mercy. — Then go, Jesus said to him, and do likewise. (Saint Luke, ch. x, vv. 25 to 37.)

3 All the moral teaching of Jesus is summed up in charity and humility, that is, in the two virtues opposed to selfishness and pride. In all his teachings, he shows these virtues to be the path to eternal happiness: Blessed, he says, are the poor in spirit, that is, the humble, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs; blessed are the pure in heart; blessed are the gentle and peaceable; blessed are the merciful; love your neighbor as yourself; do to others what you would wish them to do to you; love your enemies; forgive offenses if you wish to be forgiven; do good without ostentation; judge yourself before judging others. Humility and charity are what he never ceases to recommend and what he himself exemplifies; pride and selfishness are what he never ceases to oppose; but he does more than recommend charity: he clearly and explicitly sets it forth as the absolute condition of future happiness.

In the picture Jesus gives of the Last Judgment, as in many other things, allowance must be made for imagery and allegory. To people such as those he was addressing, who were still unable to understand purely spiritual things, he had to present material images that were striking and capable of making an impression; to be more readily accepted, he even had to avoid departing too far, in form, from accepted ideas, always leaving to the future the true interpretation of his words and of the points on which he could not explain himself clearly. But alongside the incidental and figura-

tive part of the picture, there is one dominant idea: the happiness awaiting the righteous and the misery reserved for the wicked.

In this supreme judgment, what are the grounds for the sentence? What does the inquiry concern? Does the judge ask whether one has fulfilled this or that formality, observed this or that outward practice to a greater or lesser degree? No; he inquires into only one thing: the practice of charity, and he pronounces judgment by saying: You who have helped your brothers, go to the right; you who have been harsh toward them, go to the left. Does he inquire into the orthodoxy of faith? Does he distinguish between someone who believes one way and someone who believes another? No; for Jesus places the Samaritan, regarded as a heretic but possessing love for his neighbor, above the orthodox believer who lacks charity. Jesus therefore makes charity not merely one of the conditions of salvation, but the only condition; had there been others to fulfill, he would have stated them. If he places charity first among the virtues, it is because it implicitly contains all the others: humility, gentleness, benevolence, forbearance, justice, etc.; and because it is the absolute negation of pride and selfishness.

The greatest commandment.

4 But the Pharisees, having learned that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered together; — and one of them, who was a teacher of the law, came to ask him this question, to test him: — Master, what is the great commandment of the law?

4.2 — Jesus answered him: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. — This is the greatest and the first commandment.

4.3 — And here is the second, which is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. — The whole law and the prophets are contained in these two commandments. (Saint Matthew, ch. xxii, vv. 34 to 40.)

5 Charity and humility are therefore the only path to salvation; selfishness and pride are the path to perdition. This principle is stated in precise terms in these words: “You shall love God with all your soul and your neighbor as yourself; the whole law and the prophets are contained in these two commandments.” And so that there may be no ambiguity in the interpretation of love for God and one's neighbor, he adds: “And here is the second commandment, which is like the first”; that is, one cannot truly love God without loving one's neighbor, nor love one's neighbor without loving God; therefore, whatever one does against one's neighbor is done against God. Since one cannot love God without practicing charity toward one's neighbor, all human duties are summed up in this maxim:
Without charity there is no salvation.

6 The necessity of charity according to Saint Paul
Even if I spoke all human languages, and even the language of angels, if I have no charity, I am only like sounding brass and a resounding cymbal; — and even if I had the gift of prophecy, understood all mysteries, and had perfect knowledge of all things; even if I also had all possible faith, enough to move mountains, if I have no charity, I am nothing. — And even if I distributed my possessions to feed the poor and gave up my body to be burned, if I have no charity, all this is of no use to me.
Charity is patient; it is gentle and generous; charity is not envious; it is neither rash nor hasty; it is not puffed up with pride; — it is not disdainful; it does not seek its own interests; it takes offense at nothing and is embit-

tered by nothing; it harbors no evil suspicions; it does not rejoice in injustice, but rejoices in truth; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Now these three virtues remain: faith, hope, and charity; but the most excellent among them is charity. (Saint Paul, 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, ch. xiii, vv. 1 to 7 and 13.)

7 Saint Paul understood this great truth so well that he says: "Even if I had the language of angels; even if I had the gift of prophecy and understood all mysteries; even if I had all possible faith, enough to move mountains, if I have no charity, I am nothing. Of these three virtues: faith, hope, and charity, the most excellent is charity." He thus places charity unequivocally above even faith; this is because charity is within everyone's reach, the ignorant and the learned, the rich and the poor, and because it is independent of any particular belief.

He does more: he defines true charity; he shows it not only in acts of generosity, but in the union of all the qualities of the heart, in goodness and benevolence toward one's neighbor.

8 Outside the Church there is no salvation. Outside the truth there is no salvation

While the maxim: Without charity there is no salvation, rests on a universal principle and opens access to supreme happiness to all God's children, the dogma: Outside the Church there is no salvation, rests not on fundamental faith in God and the immortality of the soul, a faith common to all religions, but on specific faith in particular dogmas; it is exclusive and absolute; instead of uniting God's children, it divides them; instead of encouraging them to love their brothers, it maintains and sanctions hostility

between the adherents of different religions, who regard one another as eternally cursed, even if they are relatives or friends in this world; disregarding the great law of equality before the grave, it separates them even in the resting place of the dead. The maxim: Without charity there is no salvation, affirms the principle of equality before God and freedom of conscience; with this maxim as their rule, all people are brothers, and whatever their way of worshiping the Creator, they reach out to one another and pray for one another. With the dogma: Outside the Church there is no salvation, they curse one another, persecute one another, and live as enemies; the father does not pray for the son, nor the son for the father, nor the friend for the friend, if they believe one another to be irretrievably damned. This dogma is therefore essentially contrary to the teachings of Christ and the law of the Gospel.

[9] Outside the truth there is no salvation would be equivalent to: Outside the Church there is no salvation, and just as exclusive, for there is not a single sect that does not claim the privilege of possessing the truth. Who can flatter himself that he possesses it in its entirety, when the circle of knowledge is constantly expanding and ideas are being corrected every day? Absolute truth belongs only to Spirits of the highest order, and earthly humanity cannot claim it, because it is not given to humanity to know everything; it can aspire only to a truth that is relative and proportionate to its advancement. If God had made the possession of absolute truth the express condition of future happiness, it would be a decree of universal condemnation; whereas charity, even in its broadest sense, can be practiced by everyone. Spiritism, in agreement with the Gospel, acknowledging that one can be saved whatever one's belief, provided one observes God's law,

does not say: Outside Spiritism there is no salvation; and since it does not yet claim to teach the whole truth, neither does it say: Outside the truth there is no salvation, a maxim that would divide instead of unite, and perpetuate antagonism.

Instructions of the Spirits Without charity there is no salvation.

10. My children, the maxim: Without charity there is no salvation, contains the destinies of human beings on earth and in heaven; on earth, because beneath this banner they will live in peace; in heaven, because those who have practiced it will find favor before the Lord. This motto is the heavenly torch, the luminous pillar that guides human beings through the desert of life to lead them to the Promised Land; it shines in heaven like a holy halo on the brows of the elect, and on earth it is engraved in the hearts of those to whom Jesus will say: Go to the right, you who are blessed by my Father. You recognize them by the fragrance of charity they spread around them. Nothing better expresses the thought of Jesus, nothing better sums up human duties than this maxim of divine origin; Spiritism could offer no better proof of its origin than by giving it as a rule, for it is the reflection of the purest Christianity; with such a guide, no one will ever go astray. Apply yourselves, then, my friends, to understanding its profound meaning and consequences, and to seeking all its applications for yourselves. Submit all your actions to the scrutiny of charity, and your conscience will answer you; it will not only keep you from doing evil, but will make you do good: for a passive virtue is not enough; an active virtue is needed; doing good always requires an act of will; to refrain from doing evil, inertia and indifference are often enough.

My friends, thank God who has allowed you to enjoy the light of Spiritism; not because only those who possess it can be saved, but because,

by helping you better understand the teachings of Christ, it makes you better Christians; therefore, let those who see you be able to say that a true Spiritist and a true Christian are one and the same, for all who practice charity are disciples of Jesus, whatever religion they belong to. (Paul, apostle. Paris, 1860.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XVI. NO ONE CAN SERVE GOD AND MAMMON

✦

1 The salvation of the rich.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon. (Saint Luke, ch. xvi, v. 13.)

2 Then a young man came up to him and said: Good master, what good must I do to gain eternal life? — Jesus answered him: Why do you call me good? God alone is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments. — Which commandments? he asked him. Jesus said to him: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness. — Honor your father and your mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.

The young man answered him: I have kept all these commandments from my youth; what do I still lack? — Jesus said to him: If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come and follow me.

When the young man heard these words, he went away deeply saddened, because he had great possessions. — And Jesus said to his disciples: Truly I tell you, it is very difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. — I tell you once again: It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven (1). (Saint Matthew, ch. xix, v. 16 to 24. — Saint Luke, ch. xviii, v. 18 to 25. — Saint Mark, ch. x, v. 17 to 25.)

(1) This bold figure of speech may seem somewhat strained, for one cannot see the connection between a camel and a needle. This comes from the fact that in Hebrew the same word was used for a cable and a camel. In the translation it was given the latter meaning; it is likely that Jesus had the former in mind; it is at least more natural.

3 Guarding against greed

Then a man in the crowd said to him: Master, tell my brother to share with me the inheritance that has come to us. — But Jesus said to him: O man! Who appointed me to judge you or divide your property? — Then he said to them: Take care to guard against all greed; for however much a man may have, his life does not depend on the possessions he owns.

He then told them this parable: There was a rich man whose lands had yielded an extraordinary harvest; — and he thought to himself: What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store all that I have to gather? — This, he said, is what I will do: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will put my entire harvest and all my goods; — and I will say to my soul: My soul, you have many goods stored up for several years; rest, eat, drink, feast well. — But at that very moment God said to the man: You fool! Your soul will be taken back from you this very night; and who will have what you have amassed?

This is what happens to anyone who stores up treasures for himself and is not rich before God. (Saint Luke, ch. xii, vv. 16 to 21.)

Jesus at the home of Zacchaeus.

4 Jesus had entered Jericho and was passing through the city; — and there was a man named Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector and very rich, — who wanted to see Jesus to learn who he was, but could not because of the

crowd, for he was very short; — so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was to pass that way. — When Jesus came to that place, he looked up; and seeing him, he said to him: Zacchaeus, hurry down, because I must stay at your house today. — Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed him with joy. — Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying: He has gone to stay with a man who leads an evil life. (See Introduction; article on Tax Collectors.)

But Zacchaeus, standing before the Lord, said to him: Lord, I give half my possessions to the poor; and if I have wronged anyone in any way, I repay him four times as much. — At this Jesus said to him: Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a child of Abraham; — for the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost. (Saint Luke, ch. xix, v. 4 to 10.)

5 Parable of the wicked rich man

There was a rich man who dressed in purple and linen and feasted magnificently every day. — There was also a poor man named Lazarus, lying at his gate, covered with sores, — who longed to satisfy his hunger with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table; but no one gave him any, and the dogs came and licked his wounds. — Now it happened that this poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and hell became his tomb. — And while he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom; — and he cried out, saying these words: Father Abraham, have pity on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering extreme torment in this flame.

But Abraham answered him: My son, remember that you received your

good things during your life, while Lazarus had only suffering; that is why he is now comforted, and you are in torment.

Moreover, there is forever a great gulf between us and you; so that those who would wish to pass from here to you cannot, just as no one can cross here from where you are.

The rich man said to him: Then I beg you, Father Abraham, to send him to my father's house, — where I have five brothers, so that he may bear witness to these things, lest they too should come to this place of torment. — Abraham replied: They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them. — No, he said, Father Abraham; but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent. — Abraham answered him: If they listen neither to Moses nor to the prophets, they will not believe even if someone rises from the dead. (Saint Luke, ch. xvi, v. 1 9 to 31.)

6 Parable of the talents

The Lord acts like a man who, before making a long journey out of his country, called his servants and entrusted his property to them. — And after giving five talents to one, two to another, and one to another, according to their different abilities, he left at once. — The one who had received five talents went away, traded with the money, and gained five more. — The one who had received two likewise gained two more. But the one who had received only one went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money there. — A long time later, the master of these servants returned and called them to account. — And the one who had received five talents came and presented five more to him, saying: Lord, you entrusted five talents to me; here, besides those, are five more that I have gained. — His master answered him: O good and faithful servant, because you have been

faithful in a few things, I will put you in charge of many others; enter into the joy of your Lord. — The one who had received two talents then came before him and said: Lord, you entrusted two talents to me; here, besides those, are two more that I have gained. — His master answered him: O good and faithful servant, because you have been faithful in a few things, I will put you in charge of many others; enter into the joy of your Lord. — The one who had received only one talent then came and said to him: Lord, I know that you are a hard man, that you reap where you have not sown and gather where you have put nothing; — so, because I was afraid of you, I went and hid your talent in the ground; here it is, I return what is yours. — But his master answered him: Wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have put nothing, — so you should have placed my money in the hands of bankers, so that on my return I could recover what is mine with interest. — Take the talent he has from him, then, and give it to the one who has ten talents; — for to all those who already have, more will be given, and they will be filled with good things; but from the one who has nothing, even what he seems to have will be taken away; and throw this useless servant into the outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Saint Matthew, ch. xxv, v. 14 to 30.)

7 The Providential Usefulness of Wealth

If wealth were an absolute obstacle to the salvation of those who possess it, as one might infer from certain words of Jesus interpreted according to the letter rather than the spirit, God, who bestows it, would have placed in the hands of some people an instrument of inevitable ruin, a thought that offends reason. Wealth is undoubtedly a very slippery trial, more dangerous

than poverty because of its enticements, the temptations it offers, and the fascination it exerts; it is the greatest stimulant of pride, selfishness, and sensual living; it is the strongest bond that ties people to the earth and turns their thoughts away from heaven; it produces such dizziness that we often see someone who rises from poverty to wealth quickly forget their former circumstances, those who shared them, and those who helped them, and become unfeeling, selfish, and vain.

But because it makes the road difficult, it does not follow that it makes it impossible, or that it cannot become a means of salvation in the hands of someone who knows how to use it, just as certain poisons can restore health if used appropriately and with discernment.

When Jesus said to the young man who questioned him about the means of gaining eternal life, "Give up all your possessions and follow me," he did not mean to establish as an absolute principle that everyone must strip themselves of what they possess, and that salvation can be obtained only at that price, but to show that attachment to earthly possessions is an obstacle to salvation. This young man, indeed, believed he had fulfilled his duty because he had observed certain commandments, and yet he recoiled at the thought of giving up his possessions; his desire to obtain eternal life did not extend to that sacrifice.

The proposal Jesus made to him was a decisive test intended to reveal his innermost thoughts; he could undoubtedly be a thoroughly upright man by worldly standards, harm no one, speak no ill of his neighbor, be neither vain nor proud, and honor his father and mother; but he did not have true charity, for his virtue did not extend to self-denial. This is what Jesus wished to demonstrate; it was an application of the principle: Without charity there is no salvation.

The consequence of these words, taken in their strictest sense, would be the abolition of wealth as harmful to future happiness and as the source of a host of evils on earth; it would also be the condemnation of the work through which it can be acquired; an absurd consequence that would return humanity to a savage life and would, for that very reason, contradict the law of progress, which is a law of God.

If wealth is the source of many evils, if it excites so many bad passions, if it even provokes so many crimes, the blame must fall not on the thing itself, but on the person who abuses it, as they abuse all of God's gifts; through abuse, they make harmful what could be most useful to them; this is a consequence of the inferior state of the earthly world. If wealth were to produce only evil, God would not have placed it on earth; it is for humanity to bring good out of it. Although it is not a direct element of moral progress, it is unquestionably a powerful element of intellectual progress.

Indeed, humanity's mission is to work toward the material improvement of the globe; people must clear it, make it healthy, and prepare it to receive one day the entire population its size can accommodate; to feed this constantly growing population, production must increase; if the production of one region is insufficient, supplies must be sought far away. For this very reason, relations between peoples become a necessity; to make them easier, the material obstacles separating them must be removed and communications made faster. For undertakings that are the work of centuries, people have had to draw materials even from the depths of the earth; they have sought in science the means to carry them out more safely and more quickly; but to accomplish them, they need resources: necessity has led them to create wealth, just as it has led them to discover science. The activity required by these very undertakings expands and develops their intelli-

gence; this intelligence, which they first concentrate on satisfying material needs, will later help them understand the great moral truths. Wealth being the primary means of carrying out these undertakings, without it there would be no more great works, no more activity, no more incentive, no more research; it is therefore rightly considered an element of progress.

Inequality of Wealth

8 The inequality of wealth is one of those problems we seek in vain to solve if we consider only the present life. The first question that arises is this: Why are all people not equally wealthy? They are not for a very simple reason: they are not equally intelligent, active, and hardworking in acquiring wealth, or moderate and farsighted in preserving it. Moreover, it is a mathematically demonstrated fact that wealth, if equally distributed, would give each person a tiny and insufficient share; that, supposing this distribution were made, the balance would soon be upset by differences in character and ability; that, supposing it were possible and lasting, with each person having barely enough to live on, it would mean the destruction of all the great undertakings that contribute to humanity's progress and well-being; that, supposing it gave everyone what they needed, there would no longer be the spur that drives people toward great discoveries and useful enterprises. If God concentrates wealth at certain points, it is so that from there it may spread in sufficient quantities, according to need.

Once this is accepted, we ask why God gives it to people incapable of making it fruitful for the good of all. Here again is proof of God's wisdom and goodness. By giving human beings free will, he intended them to learn, through their own experience, to distinguish good from evil, and to make the practice of good the result of their efforts and their own will. They

must not be driven inevitably toward either good or evil; otherwise, they would be merely passive and unaccountable instruments, like animals. Wealth is a means of testing them morally; but since it is also a powerful means of furthering progress, he does not wish it to remain unproductive for long, which is why he constantly moves it from one person to another. Everyone must possess it to try their hand at using it and show what use they know how to make of it; but since it is materially impossible for everyone to have it at the same time, and since, moreover, if everyone possessed it, no one would work and the improvement of the globe would suffer, each possesses it in turn: someone who does not have it today has already had it or will have it in another existence, and someone who has it now may no longer have it tomorrow. There are rich and poor because, God being just, everyone must work in turn; for some, poverty is the trial of patience and resignation; for others, wealth is the trial of charity and self-denial.

We rightly lament the pitiful use some people make of their wealth, the base passions aroused by greed, and we wonder whether God is just in giving wealth to such people. Certainly, if human beings had only one existence, nothing would justify such a distribution of earthly possessions; but if, instead of limiting our view to the present life, we consider all our existences together, we see that everything is balanced with justice. The poor therefore no longer have reason to accuse Providence or to envy the rich, and the rich no longer have reason to take pride in what they possess. If they abuse it, neither decrees nor sumptuary laws will remedy the evil; laws may momentarily change outward appearances, but they cannot change the heart; this is why their effects are only temporary and are al-

ways followed by a more unrestrained reaction. The source of evil lies in selfishness and pride; abuses of every kind will cease of their own accord when people guide their conduct by the law of charity.

[9] Instructions from the Spirits True Property

People truly own only what they can take with them from this world. What they find on arriving and what they leave on departing, they enjoy during their stay; but since they are forced to abandon it, they have only its use, not its actual possession. What, then, do they possess? Nothing that serves the body, everything that serves the soul: intelligence, knowledge, moral qualities; these are what they bring and what they take away, what no one has the power to take from them, what will serve them even more in the other world than in this one; it is up to them to be richer at their departure than at their arrival, for their future position depends on the good they have acquired. When someone travels to a distant country, they put together a stock of goods that have value in that country; but they do not burden themselves with those that would be useless to them. Do the same, then, for the future life, and stock up on everything that may serve you there.

A traveler arriving at an inn is given fine lodgings if they can pay for them; someone who has little is given less pleasant accommodation; as for someone who has nothing, they sleep on straw. So it is with people upon their arrival in the world of Spirits: their place there depends on their assets; but they do not pay for it with gold. They will not be asked: How much did you have on earth? What rank did you hold there? Were you a prince or a craftsman? Instead, they will be asked: What have you brought back from it? The value of their possessions or titles will not be calculated, but the

sum of their virtues; and by this reckoning, the craftsman may be richer than the prince. In vain will they claim that before their departure they paid for their admission with gold; they will be answered: Places cannot be bought here; they are earned through the good one has done; with earthly currency, you could buy fields, houses, and palaces; here everything is paid for with the qualities of the heart. Are you rich in these qualities? Welcome, and go to the highest place, where every happiness awaits you; are you poor? Go to the lowest, where you will be treated according to what you possess. (Pascal. Geneva, 1860.)

10 Earthly goods belong to God, who distributes them as he sees fit, and man is only their user, their more or less honest and intelligent administrator. So little are they man's individual property that God often overturns every expectation, and wealth slips away from someone who believes he has the strongest claim to it.

You may say that this is understandable in the case of inherited wealth, but that the same is not true of wealth acquired through work. Undoubtedly, if any wealth is legitimate, it is this, when it is honestly acquired, for property is legitimately acquired only when no one has been wronged in obtaining it. An account will be demanded for a single coin wrongly acquired at another's expense. But because a man owes his fortune to himself, does he take any more of it with him when he dies? Are his efforts to pass it on to his descendants not often fruitless? For if God does not wish it to fall to them, nothing can prevail against his will. Can he use and abuse it with impunity during his lifetime, without having to give an account? No; in allowing him to acquire it, God may have wished to reward his efforts, courage, and perseverance during this life; but if he

uses it only to satisfy his senses or his pride, if it becomes a cause of his downfall, it would have been better for him never to have possessed it. He loses on one side what he has gained on the other by canceling the merit of his work, and when he leaves the earth, God will tell him that he has already received his reward. (M. A protecting Spirit, Brussels, 1861.)

The Use of Wealth.

11. You cannot serve God and Mammon; remember this well, you who are ruled by the love of gold, you who would sell your soul to possess treasures because they can raise you above other people and give you the pleasures of the passions; no, you cannot serve God and Mammon! If, then, you feel your soul ruled by the desires of the flesh, hurry to shake off the yoke that weighs upon you, for God, just and stern, will say to you: What have you done, unfaithful steward, with the goods I entrusted to you? This powerful means of doing good you have used only for your own satisfaction.

What, then, is the best use of wealth? Look for the solution to this problem in these words: "Love one another"; there lies the secret of using your riches well. Whoever is moved by love of their neighbor has their course of conduct clearly laid out; the use that pleases God is charity—not the cold and selfish charity that consists in scattering around oneself the surplus of a life of luxury, but charity full of love, which seeks out misfortune and lifts up those who suffer without humiliating them. Rich person, give from your surplus; do better still: give a little of what you need, for what you need is still a surplus, but give wisely. Do not turn away a plea for fear of being deceived, but go to the source of the trouble; give relief first, inquire afterward, and see whether work, advice, or even affection might be more effective than your alms. Spread around you, along with material comfort, love of God, love of work, and love of your neighbor. Invest your

riches in a fund that will never fail you and will yield great interest: good works. The wealth of intelligence should serve you as the wealth of gold does; spread around you the treasures of learning; pour out upon your brothers the treasures of your love, and they will bear fruit. (Cheverus. Bordeaux, 1861.)

12 When I consider the brevity of life, I am deeply pained by your ceaseless concern for material well-being, while you attach so little importance and devote little or no time to your moral improvement, which is to count for you throughout eternity.

12.2 Seeing all your activity, one might think that a matter of the greatest importance to humanity was at stake, whereas it is almost always only a question of enabling you to satisfy exaggerated needs and vanity, or to indulge in excess.

12.3 How much trouble, worry, and torment people put themselves through, how many sleepless nights, to increase a fortune that is often more than sufficient! To crown this blindness, it is not uncommon to see those whom an immoderate love of wealth and the pleasures it provides subjects to exhausting work boast of a life they call one of sacrifice and merit, as though they were working for others and not for themselves.

12.4 Foolish people! Do you really believe, then, that you will be credited for the care and effort motivated by selfishness, greed, or pride, while you neglect to care for your future, as well as the duties that brotherly solidarity imposes on all who enjoy the advantages of social life?

12.5 You have thought only of your body; its well-being and pleasures were the sole object of your selfish concern; for its sake, though it dies, you have neglected your Spirit, which will live forever. Thus this master, so

pampered and indulged, has become your tyrant; it commands your Spirit, which has made itself its slave. Was this the purpose of the existence God had given you? (A protecting Spirit. Krakow, 1861.)

13 Since man is the custodian and manager of the goods God places in his hands, a strict account will be demanded of the use he has made of them through his free will. Misuse consists in employing them only for his personal satisfaction; their use, on the contrary, is good whenever some benefit to others results from it; the merit is proportionate to the sacrifice one makes.

13.2 Giving aid is only one way of using wealth; it relieves present poverty, soothes hunger, protects against the cold, and gives shelter to those who have none; but a duty just as compelling and just as meritorious consists in preventing poverty.

13.3 This, above all, is the mission of great fortunes, through the work of every kind they can have carried out; and even if they should draw a legitimate profit from it, the good would be no less real, for work develops intelligence and enhances the dignity of a person, who is always proud to be able to say that he has earned the bread he eats, whereas alms humiliate and degrade.

13.4 Wealth concentrated in one hand should be like a spring of living water, spreading fertility and well-being around it. O you rich people who will use it according to the Lord's purposes, your own hearts will be the first to quench their thirst at this beneficial spring; in this life you will have the ineffable joys of the soul instead of the material pleasures of the selfish, which leave the heart empty.

13.5 Your name will be blessed on earth, and when you leave it, the supreme master will address to you the words of the parable of the talents: "0 good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord." In this parable, is the servant who buries the money entrusted to him in the ground not an image of misers, in whose hands wealth is unproductive?

13.6 If, nevertheless, Jesus speaks chiefly of alms, it is because at that time and in the country where he lived, people did not know the kinds of work that the arts and industry have since created, and in which wealth can be usefully employed for the common good.

13.7 To all who can give, whether little or much, I will therefore say: Give alms when necessary, but whenever possible turn them into wages, so that those who receive them need not blush. (Fénelon. Algiers, 1860.)

14 Detachment from Earthly Possessions

I come, my brothers, my friends, to offer my small contribution to help you walk boldly along the path of improvement you have entered. We owe ourselves to one another; only through a sincere and brotherly union between Spirits and those who are incarnate is regeneration possible.

Your love of earthly possessions is one of the strongest obstacles to your moral and spiritual advancement; through this attachment to ownership, you cripple your capacity to love by directing it entirely toward material things. Be sincere: does wealth bring unalloyed happiness? When your coffers are full, is there not always an emptiness in your heart? At the bottom of this basket of flowers, is there not always a reptile hidden? I understand that a man who has earned his wealth through diligent and honorable work feels satisfaction, and quite rightly so; but there is a great distance between this very natural satisfaction, which God approves, and an

attachment that absorbs every other feeling and paralyzes the impulses of the heart; as great a distance as between sordid greed and excessive extravagance, two vices between which God has placed charity, that holy and beneficial virtue which teaches the rich to give without ostentation, so that the poor may receive without humiliation.

Whether your wealth comes from your family or you have earned it through your work, there is one thing you must never forget: everything comes from God, everything returns to God. Nothing belongs to you on earth, not even your poor body: death strips you of it as it does of all material possessions; you are trustees and not owners, make no mistake about it; God has lent to you, and you must repay, and he lends to you on the condition that at least what is surplus should go to those who lack necessities.

One of your friends lends you a sum of money; if you are at all honest, you make a point of repaying him, and you remain grateful to him. Well, that is the position of every rich man; God is the heavenly friend who has lent him wealth; he asks only for love and gratitude for himself, but he requires that the rich man in turn give to the poor, who are his children just as much as he is.

The possessions God has entrusted to you arouse a burning and foolish covetousness in your hearts; when you become excessively attached to wealth that is as perishable and fleeting as you are, have you considered that a day will come when you must account to the Lord for what comes from him? Do you forget that wealth invests you with the sacred role of ministers of charity on earth, to distribute it wisely? What, then, are you when you use solely for your own benefit what has been entrusted to you, if not unfaithful trustees? What results from this deliberate neglect of your duties? Death, unyielding and inexorable, comes to tear apart the veil

behind which you were hiding, and forces you to render your accounts to the very friend who had helped you, and who at that moment puts on the judge's robe before you.

In vain do you seek on earth to deceive yourselves by giving the name of virtue to what is often merely selfishness; by calling economy and foresight what is merely greed and avarice, or generosity what is merely extravagance for your own benefit. A father, for example, will refrain from giving to charity, save, and pile up gold upon gold, all, he says, to leave his children as much property as possible and prevent them from falling into poverty; this is quite right and fatherly, I agree, and he cannot be blamed for it; but is that really always his only guiding motive? Is it not often a compromise with his conscience, to justify in his own eyes and in the eyes of the world his personal attachment to earthly possessions? Yet I grant that fatherly love may be his sole motive; is that a reason to forget his brothers before God? When he himself already has more than enough, will he leave his children in poverty because they will have a little less of that surplus? Is this not teaching them selfishness and hardening their hearts? Is it not stifling their love of their neighbor? Fathers and mothers, you are greatly mistaken if you believe that in this way you increase your children's affection for you; by teaching them to be selfish toward others, you teach them to be selfish toward you as well.

When a man has worked hard and amassed property by the sweat of his brow, you will frequently hear him say that when money has been earned, its worth is better understood: nothing could be truer. Well then! Let this man, who admits that he knows the full value of money, give to charity according to his means, and he will have greater merit than someone who, born into abundance, knows nothing of the exhausting hardships of work.

But if, on the contrary, this same man, remembering his struggles and his labors, is selfish and harsh toward the poor, he is far more guilty than others; for the more one knows firsthand the hidden sufferings of poverty, the more inclined one should be to relieve them in others.

Unfortunately, in a man who has possessions there is always a feeling as strong as his attachment to wealth: pride. It is not uncommon to see a newly rich man overwhelm an unfortunate person who begs for his assistance with an account of his labors and his resourcefulness, instead of helping him, and end by saying: "Do what I did." According to him, God's goodness has played no part in his wealth; all the credit belongs to him alone; his pride blindfolds his eyes and stops his ears; he does not understand that, with all his intelligence and skill, God can bring him down with a single word.

Squandering one's wealth is not detachment from earthly possessions; it is carelessness and indifference; man, as the trustee of these possessions, has no more right to squander them than to appropriate them for his own benefit; extravagance is not generosity; it is often a form of selfishness; someone who throws gold around by the handful to satisfy a whim would not give a single coin to help another. Detachment from earthly possessions consists in valuing wealth at its true worth, knowing how to use it for others and not for oneself alone, never sacrificing the interests of the future life to it, and losing it without complaint if it pleases God to take it from you. If, through unforeseen reversals, you become another Job, say as he did: "Lord, you gave it to me, you have taken it from me; may your will be done." That is true detachment. First, be submissive; have faith in him who, having given and taken away, can restore to you; courageously resist the dejection and despair that paralyze your strength; never forget, when

God strikes you, that beside the greatest trial he always places a consolation. But remember above all that there are possessions infinitely more precious than those of the earth, and this thought will help you detach yourselves from the latter. The less value one attaches to a thing, the less one feels its loss. The man who clings to earthly possessions is like the child who sees only the present moment; the one who is not attached to them is like the adult who sees more important things, for he understands these prophetic words of the Savior: My kingdom is not of this world.

The Lord does not command you to strip yourselves of what you possess and reduce yourselves to voluntary beggary, for then you become a burden on society; to act in this way would be to misunderstand detachment from earthly possessions; it is selfishness of another kind, for it means freeing oneself from the responsibility that wealth places upon its possessor. God gives it to whomever he pleases, to manage for the benefit of all; the rich man therefore has a mission, a mission he can make beautiful and beneficial to himself; to reject wealth when God gives it to you is to forgo the benefit of the good you can do by administering it wisely. Knowing how to do without it when you do not have it, how to put it to good use when you have it, and how to sacrifice it when necessary is to act according to the Lord's purposes. Let anyone who receives what the world calls good fortune exclaim: My God, you are sending me a new responsibility; give me the strength to fulfill it according to your holy will.

That, my friends, is what I meant to teach you by detachment from earthly possessions; I sum it up by saying: Learn to be content with little. If you are poor, do not envy the rich, for wealth is not necessary for happiness; if you are rich, do not forget that these possessions are entrusted to you, and that you will have to account for their use as in a guardian's ac-

counting. Do not be an unfaithful trustee by using them to satisfy your pride and sensuality; do not believe you have the right to use solely for yourself what is merely a loan, and not a gift. If you do not know how to repay, you no longer have the right to ask, and remember that whoever gives to the poor pays off the debt he has incurred toward God. (Lacordaire. Constantine, 1863.)

15 Does the principle that man is only the trustee of the wealth God allows him to enjoy during his life deprive him of the right to pass it on to his descendants?

Man is fully entitled to pass on after his death what he enjoyed during his life, because the effect of this right is always subject to the will of God, who can, whenever he wishes, prevent his descendants from enjoying it; this is why fortunes that seem most firmly established are seen to collapse. Man's will to keep his wealth within his family is therefore powerless, which does not deprive him of the right to pass on the loan he has received, since God will take it back when he sees fit. (Saint Louis, Paris, 1860.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XVII. BE PERFECT

✦

1 Characteristics of perfection.

Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and slander you; — for if you love only those who love you, what reward will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? — And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not the pagans do the same? — Therefore be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, vv. 44, 46, 47, 48.)

2 Since God possesses infinite perfection in all things, this maxim, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," taken literally, would presuppose the possibility of attaining absolute perfection. If a created being could be as perfect as the Creator, it would become his equal, which is inadmissible. But the people Jesus was addressing would not have understood this distinction; he simply presents them with a model and tells them to strive to reach it.

These words must therefore be understood as referring to relative perfection, the perfection humanity is capable of and which brings it closest to the Divine. What does this perfection consist of? Jesus tells us: "Loving our enemies, doing good to those who hate us, praying for those who persecute us." He thereby shows that the essence of perfection is charity in its broadest sense, because it involves the practice of all the other virtues.

Indeed, if we observe the effects of all vices, and even of simple faults, we will recognize that there is not one that does not impair the feeling of charity to some degree, because all have their source in selfishness and

pride, which are its negation; for everything that overstimulates the sense of self destroys, or at least weakens, the elements of true charity, which are goodwill, forbearance, self-denial, and devotion. Love of one's neighbor, extended even to love of one's enemies, cannot coexist with any fault contrary to charity and is therefore always a sign of a greater or lesser degree of moral superiority; it follows that the degree of perfection is proportional to the extent of this love. That is why Jesus, after giving his disciples the rules of charity in its most sublime form, tells them: "Therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

3 The good person

The truly good person is one who practices the law of justice, love, and charity in its greatest purity. When he examines his conscience about his own actions, he asks himself whether he has violated this law; whether he has done any harm; whether he has done all the good he could; whether he has deliberately neglected an opportunity to be useful; whether anyone has cause to complain of him; and finally, whether he has done for others everything he would have wanted them to do for him.

He has faith in God, in his goodness, his justice, and his wisdom; he knows that nothing happens without God's permission, and he submits in all things to his will.

He has faith in the future; that is why he places spiritual blessings above worldly possessions.

He knows that all life's changes of fortune, all sorrows, all disappointments, are trials or atonements, and he accepts them without complaint.

The person filled with charity and love of his neighbor does good for its own sake, without hope of anything in return, repays evil with good, de-

fends the weak against the strong, and always sacrifices his own interests to justice.

He finds satisfaction in the good he does, in the services he renders, in the people he makes happy, in the tears he dries, and in the comfort he gives to the afflicted. His first impulse is to think of others before thinking of himself, to seek the interests of others before his own. The selfish person, 1 on the contrary, calculates the gains and losses of every generous action.

He is kind, humane, and benevolent toward everyone, without distinction of race or belief, because he sees brothers in all people.

He respects all sincerely held convictions in others and does not condemn those who think differently from him.

In all circumstances, charity is his guide; he tells himself that anyone who harms another through malicious words, who wounds someone's feelings through pride and disdain, who does not shrink from causing pain or annoyance, however slight, when he can avoid it, fails in the duty of love toward his neighbor and does not deserve the Lord's mercy.

He has neither hatred, nor resentment, nor desire for revenge; following the example of Jesus, he forgives and forgets offenses, remembering only kindnesses; for he knows that he will be forgiven as he himself has forgiven.

He is lenient toward the weaknesses of others, because he knows that he himself needs leniency, and he remembers these words of Christ: Let whoever is without sin cast the first stone at her.

He takes no pleasure in seeking out the faults of others or in exposing them. If necessity obliges him to do so, he always looks for the good that may lessen the evil.

He studies his own imperfections and works unceasingly to overcome

them. All his efforts are directed toward being able to tell himself the next day that there is something better in him than the day before.

He does not seek to display his intelligence or his talents at the expense of others; on the contrary, he seizes every opportunity to bring out what reflects well on others.

He takes no pride in his wealth or his personal advantages, because he knows that everything he has been given can be taken away.

He uses, but does not abuse, the possessions granted to him, because he knows that they are a trust for which he will have to give an account, and that the most harmful use he can make of them for himself is to use them to satisfy his passions.

If the social order has placed people under his authority, he treats them with kindness and goodwill, because they are his equals before God; he uses his authority to raise their moral standing, and not to crush them with his pride; he avoids anything that might make their subordinate position more painful.

The subordinate, for his part, understands the duties of his position and makes a point of fulfilling them conscientiously. (Ch. xvii, no. 9.)

Finally, the good person respects in his fellow human beings all the rights granted by the laws of nature, just as he would wish those rights to be respected in his own case.

This is not a list of all the qualities that distinguish the good person, but whoever strives to possess these is on the path that leads to all the others.

[4] Good Spiritists

Spiritism, properly understood, but above all deeply felt, inevitably leads to the results described above, which characterize the true Spiritist as well

as the true Christian, the two being one and the same. Spiritism creates no new morality; it helps people understand and practice the morality of Christ by giving firm and enlightened faith to those who doubt or falter.

But many of those who believe in the facts of the manifestations understand neither their consequences nor their moral significance, or, if they do understand them, they do not apply them to themselves. What is the reason for this? Is it a lack of precision in the doctrine? No, for it contains neither allegories nor figures of speech that could give rise to false interpretations; its very essence is clarity, and this is what gives it its power, because it speaks directly to the understanding. There is nothing mysterious about it, and its initiates possess no secret hidden from ordinary people.

Does understanding it therefore require exceptional intelligence? No, for we see people of recognized ability who do not understand it, while ordinary minds, even young people barely past adolescence, grasp its subtlest nuances with admirable accuracy. This is because the part of the science that is, so to speak, material requires only eyes to observe, while its essential part requires a certain degree of sensitivity that may be called maturity of the moral sense, a maturity independent of age and level of education, because it is inherent in the development, in a particular sense, of the incarnate Spirit.

In some people, the bonds of matter are still too strong to allow the Spirit to free itself from earthly things; the fog surrounding them hides the infinite from their view. That is why they do not easily break with their tastes or their habits, being unable to conceive of anything better than what they have; belief in Spirits is, for them, a simple fact, but it changes their instinctive tendencies little or not at all. In a word, they see only a ray of light, insufficient to guide them and give them a powerful aspiration capa-

ble of overcoming their inclinations. They attach more importance to phenomena than to morality, which seems commonplace and monotonous to them; they continually ask the Spirits to initiate them into new mysteries, without asking themselves whether they have made themselves worthy of being entrusted with the Creator's secrets. These are the imperfect Spiritists, some of whom stop along the way or distance themselves from their fellow believers because they shrink from the obligation to reform themselves, or else reserve their sympathies for those who share their weaknesses or prejudices. Nevertheless, accepting the principle of the doctrine is a first step that will make the second easier for them in another existence.

The person who can rightly be called a true and sincere Spiritist has reached a higher degree of moral advancement; the Spirit, which more fully dominates matter, gives him a clearer perception of the future; the principles of the doctrine stir in him feelings that remain silent in the others. In a word, his heart is touched; thus his faith is unshakable. One is like the musician who is moved by certain chords, while another hears only sounds. The true Spiritist is recognized by his moral transformation and by the efforts he makes to master his bad inclinations; while one takes pleasure in his limited horizon, the other, who conceives of something better, strives to free himself from it, and always succeeds when he firmly wills it.

5 Parable of the Seed

That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea; — and a great crowd gathered around him; so he boarded a boat and sat down in it, while all the people stood on the shore; — and he told them many things

in parables, speaking to them in this way:

The sower went out to sow; — and as he sowed, some of the seed fell along the path, and the birds of the sky came and ate it.

Some fell on rocky ground where it had little soil; and it sprang up at once, because the soil where it lay had no depth. — But when the sun rose, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered.

Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it.

Some, finally, fell on good soil, and it bore fruit, some grains yielding a hundredfold, others sixtyfold, and others thirtyfold.

Let anyone who has ears to hear, hear. (Saint Matthew, ch. xiii, vv. 1 to 9.)

Listen, then, to the parable of the sower.

Whenever anyone hears the word of the kingdom and pays no attention to it, the evil spirit comes and takes away what was sown in that person's heart; this is the one who received the seed along the path.

The one who receives the seed among the stones is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; — but has no root within and endures only for a time; and when troubles and persecutions arise because of the word, immediately finds in them a cause for stumbling and falling.

The one who receives the seed among the thorns is the one who hears the word; but then the cares of this world and the illusion of riches choke that word within and make it unfruitful.

But the one who receives the seed in good soil is the one who hears the word, pays attention to it, and bears fruit, yielding a hundredfold, or sixty-fold, or thirtyfold. (Saint Matthew, ch. xvi, vv. 18 to 23.

6 The parable of the seed perfectly represents the differences in the way people put the teachings of the Gospel to use. How many people there are, indeed, for whom it is only a dead letter which, like the seed fallen on rock, produces no fruit!

It applies just as aptly to the different categories of Spiritists. Is it not a picture of those who concern themselves only with material phenomena and draw no conclusions from them, because they see them merely as an object of curiosity? Of those who seek only brilliance in the communications of the Spirits, and take an interest in them only insofar as they satisfy their imagination, but who, after hearing them, are as cold and indifferent as before? Who find the advice very good and admire it, but apply it to others and not to themselves? Of those, finally, for whom these instructions are like the seed fallen on good soil, and bear fruit?

7 Instructions of the Spirits Duty

Duty is the moral obligation toward oneself first, and toward others afterward. Duty is the law of life; it is found in the smallest details as well as in noble deeds. Here I wish to speak only of moral duty, and not of the duty imposed by occupations.

In the realm of feelings, duty is very difficult to fulfill, because it conflicts with the enticements of self-interest and the heart; its victories have no witnesses, and its defeats receive no punishment. A person's inner duty is left to free will; the prompting of conscience, that guardian of inner integrity, warns and supports the person, but often remains powerless before the sophistries of passion. The duty of the heart, faithfully observed, elevates a person; but how can this duty be defined? Where does it begin? Where does it end? Duty begins precisely at the point where you threaten

your neighbor's happiness or peace; it ends at the boundary you would not wish to see crossed in your own case.

God created all people equal in suffering; the lowly and the great, the ignorant and the enlightened, suffer from the same causes, so that each may judge soundly the harm they can do. The same criterion does not exist for good, which is infinitely more varied in its expressions. Equality in suffering is a sublime provision of God, who wishes his children, taught by their shared experience, not to do evil by pleading ignorance of its effects.

Duty is the practical summary of all moral reflections; it is a courage of the soul that faces the anguish of struggle; it is austere and flexible; ready to adapt to various complications, it remains unyielding before their temptations. The person who fulfills their duty loves God more than creatures, and creatures more than themselves; that person is both judge and slave in their own cause.

Duty is reason's finest jewel; it depends on reason as a son depends on his mother. A person must love duty, not because it protects against the troubles of life, which humanity cannot escape, but because it gives the soul the strength necessary for its development.

Duty grows and shines in a higher form at each of humanity's higher stages; the creature's moral obligation toward God never ceases; it must reflect the virtues of the Eternal, who does not accept an imperfect sketch, because he wishes the beauty of his work to shine before him. (Lazarus. Paris, 4 863.)

8 Virtue

Virtue, at its highest degree, encompasses all the essential qualities that make up a good person. To be good, charitable, hardworking, temperate,

modest: these are the qualities of a virtuous person. Unfortunately, they are often accompanied by small moral weaknesses that mar and diminish them. Whoever parades their virtue is not virtuous, since they lack the principal quality, modesty, and possess the vice most opposed to it: pride. Virtue truly worthy of the name does not like to display itself; its presence is sensed, but it withdraws into obscurity and shuns the admiration of crowds. Saint Vincent de Paul was virtuous; the worthy parish priest of Ars was virtuous, as were many others little known to the world, but known to God. All these good people were themselves unaware that they were virtuous; they let themselves follow the current of their holy inspirations, and practiced goodness with complete selflessness and utter forgetfulness of themselves.

It is to virtue understood and practiced in this way that I invite you, my children; it is to this truly Christian and truly Spiritist virtue that I urge you to devote yourselves; but banish from your hearts thoughts of pride, vanity, and self-conceit, which always mar the finest qualities. Do not imitate the man who sets himself up as a model and praises his own qualities to every willing ear. This ostentatious virtue often conceals a host of petty shameful acts and hateful acts of cowardice.

As a matter of principle, the person who exalts themselves, who raises a statue to their own virtue, by that act alone destroys whatever real merit they may possess. But what shall I say of someone whose entire worth consists in appearing to be what they are not? I readily admit that a person who does good may feel an inner satisfaction deep in their heart, but as soon as that satisfaction is expressed outwardly to win praise, it degenerates into self-conceit.

0 all of you whom the Spiritist faith has warmed with its rays, and who

know how far humanity is from perfection, never fall into such a failing. Virtue is a grace that I wish for all sincere Spiritists, but I will tell them: Better fewer virtues with modesty than many with pride. It is through pride that successive humanities have lost their way; it is through humility that they must one day redeem themselves. (Francis, Nicolas, Madeleine. Paris, 1863.)

[9] Superiors and Subordinates

Authority, like wealth, is a trust for which the person invested with it will be called to account; do not believe that it is given to provide the vain pleasure of commanding, nor, as most of the powerful of the earth falsely believe, as a right or a possession. God, however, proves to them clearly enough that it is neither, since he takes it away whenever he pleases. If it were a privilege attached to their person, it would be inalienable. No one can therefore say that something belongs to them when it can be taken away without their consent. God gives authority as a mission or a trial when he sees fit, and takes it away in the same way. Anyone entrusted with authority, whatever its extent, from a master over a servant to a sovereign over a people, must not hide from themselves that they have souls in their care; they will answer for the good or bad guidance they have given their subordinates, and the faults these may commit, the vices into which they may be drawn as a result of that guidance or of bad examples, will fall back upon them, while they will reap the fruits of their care in leading them towards good. Everyone on earth has a mission, small or great; whatever it may be, it is always given for good; to distort its underlying purpose is therefore to fail in it.

If God asks the rich person: What have you done with the wealth that, in

your hands, should have been a spring spreading fertility all around? he will ask anyone who possesses authority of any kind: What use have you made of that authority? What evil have you stopped? What progress have you brought about? If I gave you subordinates, it was not to make them slaves of your will, or obedient instruments of your whims or greed; I made you strong, and entrusted the weak to you so that you might support them and help them rise toward me.

The superior who is imbued with the words of Christ despises none of those beneath them, because they know that social distinctions establish no distinctions before God. Spiritism teaches them that, although these people obey them today, they may have commanded them before, or may command them later, and that then they will be treated as they themselves have treated others.

If the superior has duties to fulfill, the subordinate, for their part, has duties that are no less sacred. If the latter is a Spiritist, their conscience will tell them still more clearly that they are not exempt from these duties, even if their superior fails to fulfill theirs, because they know that one must not return evil for evil, and that the faults of some do not justify the faults of others. If they suffer from their position, they tell themselves that they have doubtless deserved it, because they themselves may once have abused their authority, and must in turn experience the disadvantages of what they made others suffer. If they are forced to endure this position for lack of finding a better one, Spiritism teaches them to accept it as a trial of their humility, necessary for their advancement. Their belief guides their conduct; they act as they would wish their subordinates to act toward them if they were in charge. For that very reason, they are more conscientious in fulfilling their obligations, for they understand that any neglect in

the work entrusted to them harms the person who pays them and to whom they owe their time and care; in a word, they are prompted by the sense of duty their faith gives them, and by the certainty that every departure from the right path is a debt that must be paid sooner or later. (Francis, Nicolas, Madeleine, Cardinal Morlot, Paris, 1863.) The Individual in the World.

10 A feeling of piety should always inspire the hearts of those who gather under the eyes of the Lord and implore the assistance of the good Spirits. Purify your hearts, then; let no worldly or futile thought remain there; lift your spirit toward those you call upon, so that, finding in you the necessary dispositions, they may scatter abundantly the seed that must germinate in your hearts and bear fruits of charity and justice there.

Do not believe, however, that by constantly urging you to prayer and mental invocation, we are encouraging you to lead a mystical life that keeps you outside the laws of the society in which you are condemned to live. No, live with the people of your time, as people should live; give due attention to the needs and even the frivolities of the day, but do so with a feeling of purity that can sanctify them.

You are called upon to come into contact with spirits of different natures and opposing characters: do not offend any of those you encounter. Be cheerful, be happy, but with the cheerfulness that a good conscience gives, with the happiness of the heir to heaven counting the days that bring him closer to his inheritance.

Virtue does not consist in assuming a stern and gloomy appearance, or in rejecting the pleasures that your human conditions allow; it is enough to relate every act of your life to the Creator who gave you that life; it is

enough, when beginning or completing a work, to lift your thoughts toward that Creator and ask him, in an outpouring of the soul, either for his protection so that you may succeed, or for his blessing upon the completed work. Whatever you do, return to the source of all things; never do anything without letting the remembrance of God purify and sanctify your acts.

Perfection lies entirely, as Christ said, in the practice of absolute charity; but the duties of charity extend to every social position, from the lowest to the highest. A person living alone would have no charity to practice; only through contact with his fellow human beings, through the most painful struggles, does he find the opportunity for it. Whoever isolates himself therefore willingly deprives himself of the most powerful means of attaining perfection; having only himself to think about, he lives the life of a selfish person. (Chap. v, Do not imagine, then, that in order to live in constant communication with us, to live under the eye of the Lord, you must wear a hair shirt and cover yourselves with ashes; no, no, once again; be happy according to the needs of humanity, but never let your happiness contain a thought or an act that could offend him, or cause those who love and guide you to veil their faces. God is love and blesses those who love in holiness. (A Protecting Spirit. Bordeaux, 1863.)

Caring for the body and the spirit.

41. Does moral perfection consist in the mortification of the body? To resolve this question, I rely on elementary principles, and I begin by demonstrating the need to care for the body, which, through its alternating states of health and illness, has a very significant influence on the soul, which must be considered captive in the flesh. For this prisoner to live, move freely, and even entertain illusions of freedom, the body must be healthy,

fit, and strong. Let us continue the comparison: here they both are, then, in perfect condition; what must they do to maintain the balance between their abilities and their needs, which are so different? Here two systems confront one another: that of the ascetics, who wish to subdue the body, and that of the materialists, who wish to debase the soul: two acts of violence almost equally senseless. Alongside these great parties swarms the numerous tribe of the indifferent, who, without conviction or passion, love halfheartedly and enjoy themselves sparingly. Where, then, is wisdom? Where, then, is the knowledge of how to live? Nowhere; and this great problem would remain entirely unresolved if Spiritism did not come to the aid of seekers by showing them the relationships that exist between the body and the soul, and by saying that, since they need one another, both must be cared for. Love your soul, then, but also care for the body, the instrument of the soul; to disregard the needs indicated by nature itself is to disregard the law of God. Do not punish it for the faults that your free will has made it commit, and for which it is no more responsible than a poorly guided horse is for the accidents it causes. Will you, then, be more perfect if, while tormenting the body, you remain just as selfish, proud, and uncharitable toward your neighbor? No, perfection does not lie there; it lies entirely in the reforms you bring about in your Spirit; bend it, subdue it, humble it, mortify it: this is the way to make it obedient to the will of God, and the only way that leads to perfection. (Georges, Protecting Spirit, Paris, 1863.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XVIII. MANY ARE CALLED AND FEW ARE CHOSEN

✦

1 Parable of the wedding feast.
Jesus, speaking to them again in a parable, said:
The kingdom of heaven is like a king who, wishing to celebrate his son's wedding, — sent his servants to call those who had been invited to the wedding; but they refused to come. — He sent other servants again, with orders to say to the guests on his behalf: I have prepared my dinner; I have had my oxen and all my fattened livestock slaughtered; everything is ready, come to the wedding. — But they paid no attention and went away, one to his country home and another to his business. — The others seized his servants and killed them after subjecting them to many abuses. — When the king learned of this, he was filled with anger, and sending his armies, he destroyed those murderers and burned their city.
Then he said to his servants: The wedding feast is ready; but those who were called were not worthy of it. Go therefore to the crossroads, and call everyone you find to the wedding. — His servants then went out into the streets and gathered everyone they found, good and bad; and the wedding hall was filled with people who sat down at the table.
The king then came in to see those who were at the table, and noticing a man who was not wearing a wedding garment, — he said to him: My friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And the man remained speechless. — Then the king said to his attendants: Bind

his hands and feet, and throw him into the outer darkness: there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there; — for many are called and few are chosen. (Saint Matthew, ch. xxii, vv. 1 to 14.)

2 The unbeliever smiles at this parable, which seems childishly naive to him, for he cannot understand how anyone could make such difficulties about attending a feast, and still less how guests could carry their resistance so far as to slaughter the messengers of the master of the house. "Parables," he says, "are no doubt figures of speech, but they must still remain within the bounds of plausibility."

The same can be said of all allegories, of the most ingenious fables, if we do not strip away their outer covering to seek their hidden meaning. Jesus drew his from the most ordinary practices of life and adapted them to the customs and character of the people he addressed; most are intended to bring the idea of spiritual life to the masses; their meaning often seems incomprehensible only because this point of view is not taken as the starting point.

In this parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven, where all is joy and happiness, to a feast. By the first guests, he alludes to the Hebrews, whom God had called first to the knowledge of his law. The master's messengers are the prophets who came to urge them to follow the path of true happiness; but their words received little attention; their warnings were scorned; several were even slaughtered like the servants in the parable. The guests who excuse themselves because their fields and business need attention represent worldly people who, absorbed in earthly things, are indifferent to heavenly things.

It was a belief among the Jews of that time that their nation was to gain

supremacy over all others. Had God not, indeed, promised Abraham that his descendants would cover the whole earth? But always mistaking form for substance, they believed in actual, material domination.

Before the coming of Christ, all peoples except the Hebrews were idolaters and polytheists. If a few men who rose above the common people conceived the idea of divine unity, this idea remained a personal system of thought, but nowhere was it accepted as a fundamental truth, except by a few initiates who concealed their knowledge beneath a mysterious veil impenetrable to the masses. The Hebrews were the first to practice monotheism publicly; it was to them that God transmitted his law, first through Moses, then through Jesus; it was from this small center that the light went forth that was to spread over the whole world, triumph over paganism, and give Abraham spiritual descendants "as numerous as the stars of the firmament." But the Jews, while rejecting idolatry, had neglected the moral law to devote themselves to the easier practice of outward forms. Evil was at its height; the enslaved nation was torn by factions and divided by sects; unbelief itself had penetrated even into the sanctuary. It was then that Jesus appeared, sent to call them back to the observance of the law and open to them the new horizons of the life to come; among the first invited to the great banquet of universal faith, they rejected the word of the heavenly Messiah and put him to death; thus they lost the fruit they would have reaped from having taken the lead.

It would be unjust, however, to accuse the entire people of this state of affairs; the responsibility lies mainly with the Pharisees and Sadducees, who brought the nation to ruin through the pride and fanaticism of the former and the unbelief of the latter. It is chiefly them that Jesus likens to the guests who refuse to come to the wedding meal. Then he adds: "Seeing

this, the Master had everyone found at the crossroads invited, good and bad"; by this he meant that the word would be preached to all other peoples, pagans and idolaters, and that those who accepted it would be admitted to the feast in place of the first guests.

But it is not enough to be invited; it is not enough to bear the name of Christian, or to sit at the table to take part in the heavenly banquet; above all, and as an express condition, one must be clothed in the wedding garment, that is, have purity of heart and practice the law according to its spirit; now this law is contained entirely in these words: Without charity there is no salvation. But among all those who hear the divine word, how few keep it and put it to good use! How few make themselves worthy of entering the kingdom of heaven! This is why Jesus says: Many will be called and few will be chosen.

[3] The narrow gate

Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate of perdition is wide, and the road that leads to it is spacious, and many enter through it. — How small is the gate of life! How narrow is the way that leads to it! And how few find it! (Saint Matthew, ch. vii, vv. 13, 14.)

[4] Someone having asked him this question: Lord, will only a few be saved? He answered them: — Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for I assure you that many will seek to enter it and will not be able to. — And when the master of the house has gone in and shut the door, and you, standing outside, begin to knock, saying: Lord, open the door for us; he will answer you: I do not know where you are from. — Then you will begin to say: We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our public squares. — And he will answer you: I do not know where you are from; depart from

me, all you who commit iniquity.

Then there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets are in the kingdom of God, while you yourselves are cast outside. — People will come from the East and the West, from the North and the South, who will have a place at the feast in the kingdom of God. — Then those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last. (Saint Luke, ch. xiii, vv. 23 to 30.)

5 The gate of perdition is wide because evil passions are numerous, and the road of evil is traveled by the greatest number. The gate of salvation is narrow because anyone who wishes to pass through it must make great efforts to overcome their evil tendencies, and few are willing to do so; this complements the saying: Many are called and few are chosen.

Such is the present state of earthly humanity, because the earth is a world of atonement and evil prevails here; when it is transformed, the road of good will be the most traveled. These words must therefore be understood in a relative sense and not in an absolute sense. If this were to be humanity's normal state, God would have deliberately doomed the vast majority of his creatures to perdition; an inadmissible supposition once we recognize that God is all justice and all goodness.

But what misdeeds could this humanity have committed to deserve so sad a fate, in its present and in its future, if it were all confined to the earth, and if the soul had had no other existences? Why so many obstacles scattered along its path? Why this gate so narrow that only the smallest number are able to pass through it, if the soul's fate is fixed forever after death? Thus, with a single existence, we are constantly in contradiction with ourselves and with God's justice. With the soul's prior existence and the plu-

rality of worlds, the horizon broadens; light is shed on the most obscure points of faith; the present and the future are bound to the past; only then can we understand all the depth, all the truth, and all the wisdom of Christ's sayings.

6 Those who say: Lord! Lord!
Not all those who say to me: Lord! Lord! will enter the kingdom of heaven; only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. — Many will say to me on that day: Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not cast out demons in your name, and did we not perform many miracles in your name? — And then I will say to them openly: Depart from me, you who do works of iniquity. (Saint Matthew, ch. vii, vv. 21, 22, 23.)

7 Therefore, whoever hears these words that I speak and puts them into practice will be compared to a wise man who built his house on rock; — and when the rain fell, the rivers overflowed, and the winds blew and beat against that house, it did not fall, because it was founded on rock.

7.2 — But whoever hears these words that I speak and does not put them into practice will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand; and when the rain fell, the rivers overflowed, and the winds blew and beat against that house, it was overthrown, and great was its ruin. (Saint Matthew, ch. vii, vv. 24 to 27. — Saint Luke, ch. vi, vv. 46 to 49.)

8 Therefore, whoever breaks one of these least commandments and teaches others to break them will be regarded as the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever practices and teaches them will be great in the kingdom of heaven. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, v. 19.)

9 All those who profess the mission of Jesus say: Lord! Lord! But what good is it to call him Master or Lord if one does not follow his precepts? Are those Christians who honor him with outward acts of devotion while at the same time sacrificing to pride, selfishness, greed, and all their passions? Are those his disciples who spend whole days in prayer and are no better, no more charitable, and no more forgiving toward their fellow human beings? No, for, like the Pharisees, they have prayer on their lips and not in their hearts. With outward forms, they may impress people, but not God. In vain will they say to Jesus: "Lord, we prophesied, that is, taught in your name; we cast out demons in your name; we ate and drank with you." He will answer them: "I do not know who you are; depart from me, you who commit iniquities, you who contradict your words by your actions, who slander your neighbor, who rob widows and commit adultery; depart from me, you whose hearts pour forth hatred and bitterness, you who shed your brothers' blood in my name, who cause tears to flow instead of drying them. For you there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for the kingdom of God belongs to those who are gentle, humble, and charitable. Do not hope to sway the Lord's justice with your many words and genuflections; the only path open to you for finding favor before him is the sincere practice of the law of love and charity."

The words of Jesus are eternal because they are the truth. They are not only the safeguard of heavenly life, but also the pledge of peace, tranquility, and stability in the affairs of earthly life: that is why all human institutions, political, social, and religious, that rest upon these words will be as firm as the house built on rock; people will preserve them because they

will find their happiness in them. But those that violate them will be like the house built on sand: the wind of revolutions and the river of progress will sweep them away.

10 Much will be required of the one who has received much.'
The servant who knew his master's will, yet did not keep himself ready and did not do what his master wished of him, will be beaten severely; — but the one who did not know his will and did things deserving punishment will be beaten less. Much will be required of the one to whom much has been given, and a greater accounting will be demanded of the one to whom more things have been entrusted. (Saint Luke, ch. xii, v. 47, 48.)

11 I have come into this world to pass judgment, so that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind. — Some Pharisees who were with him heard these words and said to him: Are we also blind, then? — Jesus answered them: If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say that you see, and that is why your sin remains in you. (Saint John, ch. ix, v. 39, 40, 41.)

12 These maxims apply especially to the teaching of the Spirits. Anyone who knows Christ's precepts is certainly guilty if he does not practice them; but besides the fact that the Gospel containing them circulates only among Christian sects, how many people within these do not read it, and among those who read it, how many do not understand it! As a result, the very words of Jesus are lost on most people.
The teaching of the Spirits, which reproduces these maxims in different forms, develops them and begins them so as to bring them within everyone's reach, has this distinctive feature: it is not confined within limits, and everyone, literate or illiterate, believer or unbeliever, Christian or

otherwise, can receive it, since the Spirits communicate everywhere. None of those who receive it, directly or through an intermediary, can plead ignorance; they can excuse themselves neither by their lack of education nor by the obscurity of the allegorical meaning. Anyone, therefore, who does not use them for his own improvement, who admires them as interesting and curious things without his heart being touched, who is no less vain, no less proud, no less selfish, no less attached to material possessions, and no better toward his neighbor, is all the more guilty because he has more means of knowing the truth.

Mediums who receive good communications are even more blameworthy for persisting in wrongdoing, because they often write their own condemnation, and because, if they were not blinded by pride, they would recognize that it is to them that the Spirits address themselves. But instead of taking to heart the lessons they write, or see being written, their only thought is to apply them to others, thus fulfilling these words of Jesus: "You see a speck of straw in your neighbor's eye, and you do not see the beam in your own." Ch. x, no. 9.)

By these other words: "If you were blind, you would have no sin," Jesus means that guilt is in proportion to the understanding one possesses; now the Pharisees, who claimed to be, and indeed were, the most enlightened part of the nation, were more blameworthy in God's eyes than the ignorant people. The same is true today.

Much will therefore be required of Spiritists, because they have received much, but much will also be given to those who have benefited from it.

The first thought of every sincere Spiritist should be to look in the advice given by the Spirits for anything that may concern him.

Spiritism comes to increase the number of those called; through the faith it gives, it will also increase the number of those chosen.
Instructions of the Spirits To the one who has, more will be given

13 His disciples came to him and said: Why do you speak to them in parables? — And he answered them: Because to you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

13.2 — For whoever already has will be given more, and will have abundance; but from the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. — That is why I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while listening they neither hear nor understand.

13.3 — And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, when he says: You will listen with your ears, and you will not hear; you will look with your eyes, and you will not see. (Saint Matthew, ch. xiii, v. 10

14 Pay close attention to what you hear; for the same measure you have used toward others will be used towards you, and still more will be given to you; — for to the one who already has, more will be given, and from the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. (Saint Mark, ch. iv, 15. “More is given to the one who already has, and taken away from the one who has nothing;” ponder these great teachings, which have often seemed paradoxical to you. The one who has received is the one who possesses an understanding of the divine word; he has received only because he has tried to make himself worthy of it, and because the Lord, in his merciful love, encourages efforts directed toward good. These sustained, persevering efforts attract the Lord’s graces; they are a magnet drawing to itself gradual improvement, the abundant graces that make you strong enough to climb the holy mountain, at whose summit lies rest after labor.

"From the one who has nothing, or who has little, something is taken away;" take this as a figurative contrast. God will not take away from his creatures the good he has graciously done them. Blind and deaf people! Open your minds and hearts; see through your spirit; hear through your soul, and do not interpret so grossly unjustly the words of the one who has made the Lord's justice shine before your eyes. It is not God who takes away from the one who had received little; it is the Spirit himself who, wasteful and careless, does not know how to preserve what he has and increase, by making it fruitful, the small offering that has fallen into his heart.

The one who does not cultivate the field that his father's labor secured for him and that he inherits sees that field become covered with weeds. Is it his father who takes back the harvests he was unwilling to prepare? If he has allowed the seeds intended to grow in that field to become moldy through neglect, should he blame his father if they produce nothing? No, no; instead of accusing the one who had prepared everything for him of taking back his gifts, let him blame the true author of his misfortunes, and then, repentant and active, let him set to work with courage; let him break the barren soil through the effort of his will; let him plow it to its depths with the help of repentance and hope; let him confidently sow the good seed he has chosen from among the bad, let him water it with his love and charity, and God, the God of love and charity, will give to the one who has already received. Then he will see his efforts crowned with success, and one seed produce a hundred, and another a thousand. Take courage, laborers; take up your harrows and plows; plow your hearts; uproot the weeds

from them; sow in them the good seed the Lord entrusts to you, and the dew of love will make it bear fruits of charity. (A friendly Spirit. Bordeaux, 1862.)"

16 Christians are known by their deeds

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Listen to these words of the master, all of you who reject the Spiritist doctrine as the work of the devil.

Open your ears; the time to hear has come. Is wearing the Lord's livery enough to be a faithful servant? Is saying, "I am a Christian," enough to follow Christ? Seek true Christians, and you will know them by their deeds. "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit."—"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." These are the master's words; disciples of Christ, understand them well. What fruit should the tree of Christianity bear, that mighty tree whose thick branches cast their shade over part of the world, but have not yet sheltered all those who are to gather around it? The fruits of the tree of life are fruits of life, hope, and faith. Christianity, as it has been shaped for many centuries, still preaches these divine virtues; it seeks to spread its fruits, but how few gather them! The tree is still good, but the gardeners are bad. They have wanted to shape it according to their own ideas; they have wanted to mold it to suit their needs; they have pruned it, stunted it, mutilated it; its barren branches do not bear bad fruit, but they no longer bear any fruit at all. The thirsty traveler who stops beneath its shade to seek the fruit of hope that should restore his strength and courage

sees only dry branches that foretell a storm. In vain he asks the tree of life for the fruit of life: the leaves fall, withered; human hands have handled them so much that they have scorched them!

Open your ears and your hearts, then, my beloved! Tend this tree of life whose fruits give eternal life. The one who planted it urges you to care for it with love, and you will see it bear its divine fruits abundantly once again. Leave it as Christ gave it to you: do not mutilate it; its vast shade seeks to spread over the universe: do not shorten its branches. Its nourishing fruits fall abundantly to sustain the thirsty traveler who wishes to reach his destination; do not gather these fruits to lock them away and let them rot so that they benefit no one. "Many are called and few are chosen"; this is because there are hoarders of the bread of life, just as there are often hoarders of material bread. Do not join their ranks; the tree that bears good fruit must spread it for everyone. Go, then, and seek those who are thirsty; bring them beneath the branches of the tree and share with them the shelter it offers you.—"Grapes are not gathered from thorns." My brothers, turn away, then, from those who call you to offer you the brambles along the path, and follow those who lead you into the shade of the tree of life.

The divine Savior, the supremely righteous one, said it, and his words will not pass away: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven."

May the Lord of blessing bless you; may the God of light enlighten you; may the tree of life shower its fruits upon you abundantly! Believe and pray. (Simeon, Bordeaux, 1863.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XIX. FAITH MOVES MOUNTAINS

✦

1 The power of faith.

When he came to the people, a man approached him, knelt at his feet, and said to him: Lord, have pity on my son, who is moonstruck and suffers greatly, for he often falls into the fire and frequently into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him. — And Jesus answered: O unbelieving and corrupt generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring this child here to me. — And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the child, who was healed at that very moment. — Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said to him: Why were we unable to drive out this demon? — Jesus answered them: Because of your unbelief. For truly I tell you, if you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mountain: Move from here to there, and it would move there, and nothing would be impossible for you. (Saint Matthew, ch. xvii, vv. 14 to 19.)

2 In the literal sense, it is certain that confidence in one's own strength makes one capable of accomplishing material things that cannot be done when one doubts oneself; but here these words must be understood solely in the moral sense.

2.2 The mountains that faith lifts are the difficulties, the resistance, the ill will, in a word, that one encounters among people, even when the best things are at stake; the prejudices of habit, material interest, selfishness, the blindness of fanaticism, and prideful passions are so many mountains blocking the path of anyone working for humanity's progress.

2.3 Strong faith gives the perseverance, energy, and resources that overcome obstacles, in small things as in great ones; wavering faith gives rise to uncertainty and hesitation, which benefit those one seeks to oppose; it does not seek the means to prevail, because it does not believe it can prevail.

3 In another sense, faith means the confidence one has in the accomplishment of something, the certainty of reaching a goal; it gives a kind of clarity that allows one to see, in thought, the end toward which one strives and the means of reaching it, so that whoever possesses it walks, so to speak, with a sure step. In either case, it can lead to the accomplishment of great things.

Sincere and true faith is always calm; it gives the patience that knows how to wait, because, resting on intelligence and an understanding of things, it is certain of success; doubtful faith feels its own weakness; when driven by self-interest, it becomes furious and believes it can make up for strength with violence. Calm in a struggle is always a sign of strength and confidence; violence, on the contrary, is proof of weakness and self-doubt.

4 One must take care not to confuse faith with presumption. True faith goes hand in hand with humility; whoever possesses it places greater trust in God than in himself, because he knows that, as a mere instrument of God's will, he can do nothing without him; this is why good Spirits come to his aid. Presumption is less faith than pride, and pride is always punished sooner or later by the disappointment and failures inflicted upon it.

5 The power of faith has a direct and special application in magnetic action; through it, a person acts upon the fluid, the universal agent; he modifies its qualities and gives it an impulse that is, so to speak, irresistible.

5.2 This is why someone who combines great natural fluidic power with ardent faith can, through will alone directed toward good, bring about those strange phenomena of healing and others that once passed for wonders, yet are merely the consequences of a natural law. This is why Jesus says to his apostles: If you did not heal, it is because you did not have faith.

6 Religious faith. The condition for unshakable faith

From a religious point of view, faith is belief in the particular dogmas that constitute the different religions; all religions have their articles of faith. In this respect, faith can be reasoned or blind. Blind faith, examining nothing, accepts the false as well as the true without scrutiny, and at every step clashes with evidence and reason; carried to excess, it produces fanaticism. When faith rests on error, it breaks down sooner or later; only faith based on truth is assured of a future, because it has nothing to fear from the progress of knowledge, since what is true in the shadows is equally true in broad daylight. Every religion claims exclusive possession of the truth; to advocate blind faith on a point of belief is to admit one's inability to demonstrate that one is right.

7 It is commonly said that faith cannot be commanded, and from this many people say that it is not their fault if they have no faith. Certainly, faith cannot be commanded, and what is even truer: faith cannot be imposed. No, it cannot be commanded, but it can be acquired, and no one is denied the possibility of possessing it, even among the most resistant. We are speaking of fundamental spiritual truths, not of this or that particular belief. It is not for faith to come to them; it is for them to go toward faith, and if they seek it sincerely, they will find it. Be certain, then, that those

who say: "We would like nothing better than to believe, but we cannot," say it with their lips and not with their hearts, for in saying this they close their ears. Yet evidence abounds around them; why, then, do they refuse to see it? For some, it is indifference; for others, the fear of being forced to change their habits; for most, it is pride that refuses to acknowledge a higher power, because they would have to bow before it.

In some people, faith seems almost innate; a spark is enough to develop it. This ease in assimilating spiritual truths is a clear sign of previous progress; in others, on the contrary, these truths penetrate only with difficulty, a no less clear sign of a nature that lags behind. The former have already believed and understood; when reborn, they bring with them an intuitive sense of what they have known: their education is complete; the latter have everything to learn: their education is still to be undertaken; it will take place, and if it is not completed in this existence, it will be in another.

The resistance of the unbeliever, it must be admitted, often has less to do with him than with the way things are presented to him. Faith needs a foundation, and that foundation is a full understanding of what one is to believe; to believe, seeing is not enough; above all, one must understand. Blind faith no longer belongs to this century; yet it is precisely the dogma of blind faith that produces the greatest number of unbelievers today, because it seeks to impose itself and demands the surrender of one of humanity's most precious prerogatives: reasoning and free will. It is chiefly against this faith that the unbeliever resists, and of this faith it is true to say that it cannot be commanded; admitting no evidence, it leaves a vagueness in the mind from which doubt arises. Reasoned faith, which rests on facts and logic, leaves no obscurity behind it; one believes because

one is certain, and one is certain only when one has understood; this is why it does not falter; for the only unshakable faith is that which can face reason in every age of humanity.

This is the result to which Spiritism leads, and so it triumphs over unbelief whenever it does not encounter systematic opposition driven by self-interest.

8 Parable of the withered fig tree

As they were leaving Bethany, he became hungry; — and seeing a fig tree in the distance, he went to see whether he could find anything on it, and when he came near, he found only leaves, for it was not the season for figs. — Then Jesus said to the fig tree: May no one eat any fruit from you; and his disciples heard this. — The next day, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree, which had withered down to the root. — And Peter, remembering the words of Jesus, said to him: Master, see how the fig tree you cursed has withered. — Jesus spoke and said to them: Have faith in God. — Truly I tell you that whoever says to this mountain: Move from there and throw yourself into the sea, without wavering in his heart, but firmly believing that everything he has said will happen, will indeed see it happen. (Saint Mark, ch. xi, vv. 12, 13, 14, and from 20 to 23.)

9 The withered fig tree is the symbol of people who have only the appearance of goodness, but in reality produce nothing good; of speakers who have more brilliance than substance; their words have a surface polish; they please the ears, but when examined closely, nothing substantial for the heart can be found in them; after hearing them, one wonders what benefit one has gained.

It is also the emblem of all people who have the means to be useful and are

not; of all utopias, all empty systems, all doctrines without a solid foundation. What is lacking, most of the time, is true faith, fruitful faith, faith that stirs the heartstrings, in a word, faith that moves mountains. These are trees that have leaves but no fruit; this is why Jesus condemns them to barrenness, for a day will come when they will be withered down to the root; that is to say, all systems and all doctrines that have produced no good for humanity will fall into nothingness; all people who are deliberately useless, having failed to put the resources within them to work, will be treated like the withered fig tree.

10 Mediums are the interpreters of the Spirits; they make up for the material organs that the Spirits lack for conveying their teachings to us; this is why they are endowed with faculties for this purpose.

10.2 In these times of social renewal, they have a particular mission; they are trees that must provide spiritual nourishment for their brothers; they are multiplied so that nourishment may be abundant; they are found everywhere, in every land, in every rank of society, among the rich and the poor, among the great and the humble, so that no one may be left deprived, and to prove to people that all are called.

10.3 But if they turn the precious faculty granted to them away from its providential purpose, if they use it for trivial or harmful things, if they place it at the service of worldly interests, if instead of wholesome fruit they bear unhealthy fruit, if they refuse to make it beneficial to others, if they do not benefit from it themselves by becoming better, they are like the barren fig tree; God will take from them a gift that becomes useless in their hands: the seed they do not know how to make fruitful, and will leave them to become the prey of evil Spirits.

11 Instructions of the Spirits. Faith, the mother of hope and charity

Faith, to be beneficial, must be active; it must not become dormant. The mother of all the virtues that lead to God, it must watch carefully over the development of the daughters it brings into being.

Hope and charity are a consequence of faith; these three virtues are an inseparable trinity. Is it not faith that gives the hope of seeing the Lord's promises fulfilled? For if you have no faith, what will you look forward to? Is it not faith that gives love? For if you have no faith, what gratitude will you have, and consequently what love?

Faith, a divine inspiration from God, awakens all the noble instincts that lead a person toward good; it is the foundation of regeneration. This foundation must therefore be strong and lasting, for if the slightest doubt shakes it, what becomes of the building you erect upon it? Raise this building, then, on unshakable foundations; let your faith be stronger than the sophisms and mockery of unbelievers, for faith that does not brave people's ridicule is not true faith.

Sincere faith is compelling and contagious; it spreads to those who did not have it, or who might not even wish to have it; it finds persuasive words that reach the soul, while merely outward faith has only resounding words that leave people cold and indifferent. Preach through the example of your faith to give it to others; preach through the example of your works to show them the merit of faith; preach through your unshakable hope to show them the confidence that strengthens and enables one to brave all the vicissitudes of life.

Have faith, then, in all its beauty and goodness, in its purity, in its reasoning. Do not accept faith without scrutiny, the blind daughter of blindness. Love God, but know why you love him; believe in his promises, but know

why you believe in them; follow our advice, but understand the goal we show you and the means we bring you to reach it. Believe and hope without ever faltering: miracles are the work of faith. (Joseph. A protecting Spirit. Bordeaux, 1862.) Divine faith and human faith.

12 Faith is a person's innate sense of his future destiny; it is his awareness of the immense faculties whose seed has been placed within him, at first in a latent state, and which he must cause to unfold and grow through his active will.

Until now, faith has been understood only from the religious side, because Christ advocated it as a powerful lever, and because people saw in him only the head of a religion. But Christ, who performed material miracles, showed through those very miracles what a person can do when he has faith, that is, the will to will, and the certainty that this will can be fulfilled. Did not the apostles, following his example, also perform miracles? Now, what were these miracles, if not natural effects whose cause was unknown to people at that time, but which can largely be explained today, and will be fully understood through the study of Spiritism and magnetism?

Faith is human or divine, depending on whether a person applies his faculties to earthly needs or to his heavenly and future aspirations. The person of genius who pursues the accomplishment of some great undertaking succeeds if he has faith, because he feels within himself that he can and must succeed, and this certainty gives him immense strength. The good person who, believing in his heavenly future, wishes to fill his life with noble and beautiful deeds draws the necessary strength from his faith, from the certainty of the happiness awaiting him, and here too miracles of char-

ity, devotion, and self-denial are accomplished. Finally, with faith, there are no evil tendencies that one cannot manage to overcome.

Magnetism is one of the greatest proofs of the power of faith put into action; it is through faith that it heals and produces those strange phenomena that were once called miracles.

I repeat, faith is human and divine; if all incarnate beings were fully convinced of the strength they have within them, and if they were willing to place their will at the service of this strength, they would be capable of accomplishing what, until now, has been called wonders, and which is simply a development of human faculties. (A protecting Spirit. Paris, 1863.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XX. THE WORKERS OF THE LAST HOUR

✦

1 The kingdom of heaven is like a father of a household who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard; — having agreed with the workers that they would receive a denarius for their day's work, he sent them to the vineyard. — He went out again about the third hour of the day, and seeing others standing idle in the marketplace, — he said to them: You too, go to my vineyard, and I will give you what is reasonable; — and they went. He went out again about the sixth and ninth hours of the day and did the same. — And going out about the eleventh hour, he found others standing there idle and said to them: Why do you stand here all day without working? — Because, they told him, no one has hired us. And he said to them: You too, go to my vineyard.

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to the man who managed his affairs: Call the workers and pay them, beginning with the last and ending with the first. — So those who had come to the vineyard only about the eleventh hour came forward and each received a denarius. — When those hired first came in their turn, they thought they would be given more, but they too received only a denarius each; — and as they received it, they grumbled against the father of the household, — saying: These last workers have worked only one hour, and you make them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the heat.

But he answered one of them: My friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me on a denarius for your day's work? Take what be-

longs to you and go; for my part, I wish to give this last worker as much as you. — Am I not allowed, then, to do what I wish? And is your eye evil because I am good?

Thus the last will be first, and the first will be last, because many are called and few are chosen. (Saint Matthew, ch. xx, vv. 1 to 16. See also: Parable of the Wedding Feast, ch. xviii, no. 1.)

[2] Instructions from the Spirits: The Last Will Be First

The worker of the last hour is entitled to his wages, but his goodwill must have kept him at the disposal of the master who was to employ him, and his delay must not have been the result of laziness or unwillingness. He is entitled to his wages because, since dawn, he had been waiting impatiently for someone finally to call him to work; he was hardworking and lacked only the work itself.

But if he had refused work at every hour of the day; if he had said: Let us be patient; rest is sweet to me; when the last hour strikes, it will be time to think about the day's wages. Why should I trouble myself for a master I do not know and do not love! The later, the better. That man, my friends, would have found the wages of laziness, rather than those of a worker.

What, then, will become of someone who, instead of simply remaining idle, has spent the hours intended for the day's labor committing guilty acts: who has blasphemed against God, shed his brothers' blood, brought turmoil into families, ruined trusting people, abused innocence, and finally wallowed in all the disgraceful deeds of humanity; what, then, will become of that man? Will it be enough for him to say at the last hour: Lord, I have made poor use of my time; take me on until the end of the day, so that I may do a little, a very little of my task, and give me the wages

of a willing worker? No, no; the master will say to him: I have no work for you at present; you have wasted your time; you have forgotten what you learned; you no longer know how to work in my vineyard. Begin learning again, then, and when you are better disposed, you will come to me; I will open my vast field to you, and you will be able to work in it at any hour of the day.

Good Spiritists, my beloved, you are all workers of the last hour. Very proud would be the person who said: I began the work at dawn and will finish it only at the close of day. You all came when you were called, a little earlier, a little later, for the incarnation whose chain you bear; but for how many centuries upon centuries has the master called you to his vineyard without your being willing to enter it! You are now about to receive your wages; make good use of this hour that remains to you, and never forget that your existence, however long it may seem to you, is only a fleeting moment in the immensity of the ages that make up eternity for you. (Constantine, Guardian Spirit. Bordeaux, 1863.)

[3] Jesus was fond of simple symbols, and in his vigorous language, the workers who arrived at the first hour are the prophets, Moses, and all the pioneers who marked the stages of progress, continued through the centuries by the apostles, the martyrs, the Fathers of the Church, the scholars, the philosophers, and finally the Spiritists. These last to arrive were announced and foretold from the dawn of the Messiah, and they will receive the same reward; what am I saying? A higher reward. As the last to arrive, Spiritists benefit from the intellectual labors of their predecessors, because humanity must inherit from humanity, and its labors and their results are collective: God blesses solidarity. Many of them, moreover, are living again

today, or will live again tomorrow, to finish the work they began long ago; more than one patriarch, more than one prophet, more than one disciple of Christ, more than one spreader of the Christian faith can be found among them, but more enlightened, more advanced, working no longer on the foundations but on the crowning of the building; their wages will therefore be proportionate to the merit of their work.

Reincarnation, that beautiful doctrine, makes spiritual lineage eternal and clearly defined. The Spirit, called to account for its earthly mission, understands the continuity of the task interrupted but always resumed; it sees, it feels that it has caught the thought of its predecessors as it passed; it enters the arena again, matured by experience, to advance further: and all, workers of the first and of the last hour, their eyes opened to the profound justice of God, no longer grumble but worship.

Such is one of the true meanings of this parable, which contains, like all those Jesus addressed to the people, the seed of the future, and also, in every form, in every image, the revelation of that magnificent unity which brings all things in the universe into harmony, of that solidarity which links all present beings to the past and to the future. (Heinrich Heine. Paris, mission of the Spiritists.

[4] Do you not already hear the storm brewing that is to sweep away the old world and engulf the sum of earthly injustices in nothingness? Ah! Bless the Lord, you who have placed your faith in his sovereign justice, and who, as new apostles of the belief revealed by higher prophetic voices, are going to preach the new doctrine of reincarnation and the elevation of Spirits, according to how well or badly they have fulfilled their missions and endured their earthly trials.

Tremble no more! The tongues of fire are upon your heads. O true followers of Spiritism, you are God's chosen ones! Go and preach the divine word. The hour has come when you must sacrifice your habits, your labors, your trivial occupations to spreading it. Go and preach: the Spirits above are with you. Certainly you will speak to people who will not wish to hear the voice of God, because that voice constantly calls them to self-denial; you will preach selflessness to misers, abstinence to the debauched, gentleness to domestic tyrants as well as to despots: wasted words, I know; but what does it matter! You must water with your sweat the ground you are to sow, for it will bear fruit and yield a harvest only through the repeated efforts of the Gospel's spade and plow. Go and preach!

Yes, all of you, people of good faith, who believe in your inferiority as you look at the worlds scattered through infinity, set out on a crusade against injustice and iniquity. Go and overthrow this worship of the golden calf, which grows more pervasive every day. Go, God is leading you! Simple and unlearned people, your tongues will be loosened, and you will speak as no orator speaks. Go and preach, and attentive crowds will gladly receive your words of comfort, brotherhood, hope, and peace.

What do the ambushes laid along your path matter! Only wolves will be caught in the wolf traps, for the shepherd will know how to defend his sheep against the slaughtering butchers.

Go, you who are great before God, who, more fortunate than Saint Thomas, believe without asking to see, and accept the facts of mediumship even though you have never succeeded in obtaining any yourselves; go, the Spirit of God is leading you.

March forward, then, you ranks made mighty by your faith! And the great battalions of unbelievers will vanish before you like the morning mists at

the first rays of the rising sun.

Faith is the virtue that will move mountains, Jesus told you; but heavier than the heaviest mountains, impurity and all the vices of impurity lie in human hearts. Set out courageously, then, to move this mountain of iniquities, which future generations should know only as a legend, just as you yourselves know only very imperfectly the period before pagan civilization.

Yes, moral and philosophical upheavals are about to break out across the globe; the hour is approaching when the divine light will appear over both worlds.

5 The Lord's Workers

You are nearing the time when the things foretold for the transformation of humanity will be fulfilled; happy will be those who have worked in the Lord's field with selflessness and with no motive other than charity! Their days of work will be paid a hundredfold beyond what they hoped for. Happy will be those who have said to their brothers: "Brothers, let us work together and unite our efforts so that the master finds the work finished when he arrives," for the master will say to them: "Come to me, you who are good servants, you who have silenced your jealousies and your quarrels so that the work would not be left neglected!" But woe to those who, through their dissensions, have delayed the hour of harvest, for the storm will come and they will be swept away by the whirlwind! They will cry: "Mercy 1 mercy!" But the Lord will say to them: "Why do you ask for mercy, you who had no pity on your brothers and refused to offer them a hand, you who crushed the weak instead of supporting them? Why do you ask for mercy, you who sought your reward in earthly pleasures and in the

satisfaction of your pride? You have already received your reward, just as you wanted it; ask for no more: heavenly rewards are for those who have not asked for earthly rewards."

God is now counting his faithful servants, and he has marked with his finger those who have only the appearance of devotion, so that they may not take the wages of courageous servants, for it is to those who will not shrink from their task that he is going to entrust the most difficult posts in the great work of regeneration through Spiritism, and these words will be fulfilled: "The first will be last, and the last will be first in the kingdom of heaven!" (The Spirit of Truth. Paris, 1862.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XXI. THERE WILL BE FALSE CHRISTS AND FALSE PROPHETS

✦

1 A tree is known by its fruit.
A tree that produces bad fruit is not good, and a tree that produces good fruit is not bad; — for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not picked from thorns, nor are bunches of grapes cut from brambles. — A good person draws good things from the good treasure of his heart, and an evil person draws evil things from the evil treasure of his heart; for the mouth speaks from the fullness of the heart. (Saint Luke, ch. vi, vv. 43, 44, 45.)

2 Beware of false prophets who come to you covered in sheepskins, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. — You will know them by their fruits. Can grapes be picked from thorns, or figs from brambles?

2.2 — Thus every good tree produces good fruit, and every bad tree produces bad fruit. — A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit.

2.3 — Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. — You will therefore know them by their fruits. (Saint Matthew, ch. vii, vv. 15 to 20.)

3 Take care that no one deceives you; — for many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Christ," and they will deceive many.
Many false prophets will arise and deceive many people; — and because wickedness will abound, the charity of many will grow cold. — But who-

ever perseveres to the end will be saved.

Then if anyone says to you, "The Christ is here," or "He is there," do not believe it; — for false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great wonders and astonishing things, enough to deceive, if it were possible, even the chosen ones. (Saint Matthew, ch. xxiv, vv. 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 23, 24. — Saint Mark, ch. xiii, vv. 5, 6, 21, 22.)

Mission of the prophets.

4 Prophets are commonly credited with the gift of revealing the future, so that the words prophecy and prediction have become synonymous. In the Gospel sense, the word prophet has a broader meaning; it refers to anyone sent by God with a mission to instruct humanity and reveal hidden things and the mysteries of spiritual life.

4.2 A man can therefore be a prophet without making predictions; this was the understanding of the Jews in the time of Jesus. That is why, when he was brought before the high priest Caiaphas, the Scribes and Elders, who had assembled, spat in his face, struck him with their fists, and slapped him, saying, "Christ, prophesy to us, and tell us who struck you."

4.3 However, prophets have sometimes had foreknowledge of the future, either through intuition or through providential revelation, in order to give people warnings. When these events came to pass, the gift of predicting the future came to be regarded as one of the attributes of a prophet.

5 Wonders performed by false prophets

"False christs and false prophets will arise and perform great wonders and astonishing things, enough to deceive even the chosen ones." These words give the true meaning of the word wonder. In the theological sense, won-

ders and miracles are exceptional phenomena outside the laws of nature. Since the laws of nature are the work of God alone, he can undoubtedly depart from them if he pleases, but simple common sense tells us that he cannot have given inferior and wicked beings a power equal to his own, still less the right to undo what he has done. Jesus cannot have endorsed such a principle. If, therefore, according to the meaning attached to these words, the Spirit of evil has the power to perform wonders such that even the chosen ones are deceived by them, it would follow that, since it can do what God does, wonders and miracles are not the exclusive privilege of God's messengers and prove nothing, since nothing distinguishes the miracles of saints from those of the devil. We must therefore seek a more rational meaning in these words.

In the eyes of the ignorant public, any phenomenon whose cause is unknown passes for something supernatural, marvelous, and miraculous; once the cause is known, it is recognized that the phenomenon, however extraordinary it may seem, is merely the application of a law of nature. Thus the range of supernatural events narrows as the range of science expands. Throughout history, people have exploited certain knowledge they possessed to serve their ambition, their interests, and their domination, in order to give themselves the prestige of a supposedly superhuman power or a claimed divine mission. These are false christs and false prophets; the spread of knowledge destroys their credibility, which is why their numbers decrease as people become more enlightened. Performing what some people regard as wonders is therefore no sign of a divine mission, since it may result from knowledge that anyone can acquire, or from special bodily fac-

ulties that the most unworthy may possess as readily as the most worthy. A true prophet is recognized by more substantial and exclusively moral characteristics.

6 Do not believe all Spirits
My beloved, do not believe every Spirit, but test whether the Spirits are from God, for many false prophets have arisen in the world. (Saint John, 1st epistle, ch. iv, v. 1.)

7 Spiritist phenomena, far from lending credibility to false christs and false prophets, as some pretend to claim, come instead to deal them a final blow. Do not ask Spiritism for miracles or wonders, for it formally declares that it produces none. Just as physics, chemistry, astronomy, and geology have revealed the laws of the material world, it comes to reveal other, unknown laws: those governing relations between the bodily world and the spiritual world, which, like the laws discovered earlier by science, are no less laws of nature. By explaining a certain category of phenomena that have remained misunderstood until now, it destroys what still remained in the realm of the marvelous. Those who might therefore be tempted to exploit these phenomena for their own benefit, by passing themselves off as messiahs from God, could not abuse people's credulity for long and would soon be unmasked. Besides, as has been said, these phenomena alone prove nothing: a mission is proven by moral effects that not just anyone can produce. This is one of the results of the development of Spiritist science; by examining the cause of certain phenomena, it lifts the veil from many mysteries. Only those who prefer darkness to light have an interest in opposing it; but truth is like the sun: it disperses the thickest fogs.
Spiritism comes to reveal another, far more dangerous category of false

Christs and false prophets, found not among human beings but among the disembodied: deceptive, hypocritical, proud, and falsely learned Spirits who have passed from the earth into the wandering state and adorn themselves with revered names, seeking, under the cover of their disguise, to lend credibility to ideas that are frequently the strangest and most absurd. Before mediumistic communication was known, they exerted their influence less openly, through inspiration and unconscious, hearing, or speaking mediumship. The number of those who, at various times, but especially in recent times, have passed themselves off as some of the ancient prophets, as Christ, as Mary, the mother of Christ, and even as God, is considerable. Saint John warns against them when he says, "My beloved, do not believe every Spirit, but test whether the Spirits are from God; for many false prophets have arisen in the world." Spiritism provides the means of testing them by indicating the characteristics by which good Spirits are recognized, characteristics that are always moral and never material. These words of Jesus may apply above all to distinguishing good Spirits from bad ones: "The quality of a tree is known by its fruit; a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit." Spirits are judged by the quality of their works, as a tree is judged by the quality of its fruit.

8 Instructions from the Spirits: False prophets

If you are told, "Christ is here," do not go there, but instead be on your guard, for false prophets will be numerous. But do you not see the leaves of the fig tree beginning to turn white; do you not see their many shoots awaiting the flowering season, and did Christ not tell you: A tree is known by its fruit? If, therefore, the fruits are bitter, you judge the tree to be bad;

but if they are sweet and wholesome, you say: Nothing pure can come from a bad stock.

This, my brothers, is how you must judge; it is the works that you must examine. If those who claim to be invested with divine power display all the signs of such a mission, that is to say, if they possess to the highest degree the Christian and eternal virtues: charity, love, forbearance, and the kindness that wins every heart; if they add deeds in support of their words, then you may say: These are truly God's messengers.

But beware of honeyed words, beware of the scribes and pharisees who pray in public squares, dressed in long robes. Beware of those who claim to hold the sole and exclusive monopoly on truth!

No, no, Christ is not there, for those he sends to spread his holy teaching and renew his people will, following the Master's example, be gentle and humble of heart above all else; those who, through their examples and advice, are to save humanity as it rushes toward ruin and wanders along winding roads will above all be modest and humble. Flee anything that reveals an atom of pride as you would a contagious leprosy that corrupts everything it touches. Remember that every creature bears on its brow, but above all in its deeds, the stamp of its greatness or its decline.

Go then, my beloved children, walk without hesitation or hidden motives along the blessed road you have set out upon. Go, keep going without fear; courageously remove everything that might hinder your progress toward the eternal goal. Travelers, you will remain only a very short time longer in the darkness and suffering of your trial if you open your hearts to this gentle teaching, which comes to reveal the eternal laws to you and satisfy all your soul's longings for the unknown. From this moment onward, you can give substance to those airy sylphs you saw passing through your dreams,

which, fleeting as they were, could only charm your mind but said nothing to your heart. Now, my beloved, death has disappeared to make way for the radiant angel you know, the angel of meeting again and reunion! Now, you who have faithfully fulfilled the task imposed by the Creator have nothing more to fear from his justice, for he is a father and always forgives his wayward children who cry out for mercy. Continue, then, advance without ceasing; let your motto be progress, continuous progress in all things, until you finally reach that happy destination where all those who have gone before you await you. (Louis. Bordeaux, 1861.)

(1) For the distinction between Spirits, see The Mediums' Book, ch. 24 and following.

9 Characteristics of the true prophet

Beware of false prophets. This advice is useful at all times, but especially in periods of transition when, as now, a transformation of humanity is taking shape, for then a host of ambitious people and schemers present themselves as reformers and messiahs. It is against these impostors that you must be on your guard, and it is the duty of every honest person to unmask them. You will no doubt ask how they can be recognized; here are their distinguishing features:

Command of an army is entrusted only to a general skilled and capable enough to lead it; do you then believe that God is less prudent than human beings? Be certain that he entrusts important missions only to those he knows are capable of fulfilling them, for great missions are heavy burdens that would crush anyone too weak to bear them. As in all things, the teacher must know more than the pupil; to advance humanity morally and intellectually, people of superior intelligence and morality are needed!

This is why it is always Spirits who are already very advanced, who have proved themselves in other lives, who incarnate for this purpose; for if they are not superior to the environment in which they must act, their action will have no effect.

With this established, conclude that God's true missionary must justify his mission through his superiority, his virtues, and the greatness, results, and moral influence of his works. Draw this further conclusion: if his character, virtues, and intelligence fall below the role he claims for himself, or the person whose name he shelters behind, he is merely a low-grade actor who does not even know how to copy his model.

Another consideration is that most of God's true missionaries are themselves unaware of what they are; they accomplish what they are called to do through the force of their genius, aided by the unseen power that inspires and guides them without their knowledge, but without any preconceived plan. In a word, true prophets reveal themselves through their deeds: others recognize them; whereas false prophets proclaim themselves God's messengers. The former is humble and modest; the latter is proud and full of himself; he speaks arrogantly and, like all liars, always seems afraid of not being believed.

Some of these impostors have been seen passing themselves off as Christ's apostles, others as Christ himself, and what brings shame upon humanity is that they have found people credulous enough to believe such disgraceful claims. Yet one very simple consideration should open the eyes of even the blindest: if Christ were to reincarnate on earth, he would come with all his power and all his virtues, unless we accept the absurd notion that he had degenerated. Now, just as removing a single one of God's attributes means you no longer have God, removing a single one of Christ's virtues

means you no longer have Christ. Do those who pass themselves off as Christ possess all his virtues? That is the question; look closely; examine their thoughts and deeds, and you will recognize that they lack above all Christ's distinguishing qualities: humility and charity, while possessing what he did not have: greed and pride. Notice, moreover, that at this moment, in different countries, there are several supposed Christs, just as there are several supposed Elijahs, Saint Johns, or Saint Peters, and necessarily they cannot all be genuine. Be certain that these are people who exploit credulity and find it convenient to live at the expense of those who listen to them.

Beware, then, of false prophets, especially in a time of renewal, because many impostors will call themselves God's messengers; they gain a vain satisfaction on earth, but terrible justice awaits them, you may be certain of that. (Erastus. Paris, 1862.)

10 False prophets in the wandering state

False prophets are found not only among the incarnate; they are also found, and in far greater numbers, among the proud Spirits who, under false appearances of love and charity, sow discord and delay the work of humanity's emancipation by placing in its path their absurd systems, which they persuade their mediums to accept; and to better captivate those they wish to deceive, to lend greater weight to their theories, they unscrupulously adorn themselves with names that people pronounce only with respect.

It is they who sow the seeds of antagonism between groups, who urge them to isolate themselves from one another and regard one another with distrust. This alone would be enough to unmask them; for by acting this

way, they themselves most emphatically contradict what they claim to be. Blind indeed are those who allow themselves to be caught in so crude a trap.

But there are many other ways to recognize them. Spirits of the order to which they claim to belong must be not only very good, but also eminently rational. Well then, sift their systems through reason and common sense, and you will see what remains. Agree with me, then, that whenever a Spirit proposes, as a remedy for humanity's ills or as a means of bringing about its transformation, utopian and impracticable things, childish and ridiculous measures; when he formulates a system contradicted by the most basic notions of science, he can only be an ignorant and lying Spirit.

On the other hand, be assured that although truth is not always appreciated by individuals, it is always appreciated by the common sense of the masses, and this too is a criterion. If two principles contradict each other, you will have a measure of their intrinsic worth by looking for the one that finds the greatest response and sympathy; it would indeed be illogical to accept that a doctrine whose followers were decreasing in number was truer than one whose followers were increasing. God, wishing truth to reach everyone, does not confine it to a narrow circle: he causes it to arise in different places, so that everywhere light may stand beside darkness.

Reject without mercy all those Spirits who present themselves as exclusive advisers while preaching division and isolation. They are almost always vain and mediocre Spirits who seek to impose themselves on weak and credulous people, lavishing exaggerated praise upon them in order to captivate them and keep them under their control. They are generally Spirits hungry for power who, having been public or private despots during their lives, still wish to have victims to tyrannize after their death. In general,

beware of communications marked by mysticism and strangeness, or prescribing ceremonies and bizarre acts; there is always legitimate cause for suspicion in such cases.

On the other hand, be assured that when a truth must be revealed to humanity, it is communicated almost instantaneously in all serious groups that have serious mediums, and not to certain ones to the exclusion of the others. No one is a perfect medium if subject to obsession, and obsession is evident when a medium is capable of receiving communications only from one particular Spirit, however highly that Spirit may seek to place himself. Consequently, any medium or group who believe themselves privileged by communications that they alone can receive, and who, moreover, are subjected to practices bordering on superstition, are undoubtedly suffering from a most clearly characterized obsession, especially when the dominating Spirit boasts a name that all of us, Spirits and incarnate alike, must honor and respect, and must not allow to be compromised on every occasion.

It is indisputable that by subjecting all the information and all the communications from Spirits to the crucible of reason and logic, it will be easy to reject absurdity and error. A medium may be captivated, a group deceived; but the strict scrutiny of other groups, acquired knowledge and the high moral authority of group leaders, and communications from the principal mediums that receive a stamp of logic and authenticity from our best Spirits, will quickly expose these lying and cunning messages dictated by a mob of deceitful or wicked Spirits. (Erastus, disciple of Saint Paul. Paris, 4 862.)

(See in the Introduction the paragraph: II. Universal verification of the teachings of the Spirits. — The Mediums' Book, chap. xxiii, On obsession.)

11 Jeremiah and the false prophets

This is what the Lord of hosts says: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you and deceive you. They proclaim the visions of their own hearts, and not what they have learned from the mouth of the Lord. — They say to those who blaspheme me: The Lord has said it, you will have peace; and to all those who walk in the corruption of their hearts: No harm will come to you. — But which of them has attended God's council; who has seen him and heard what he has said? — I did not send these prophets, and they ran of their own accord; I did not speak to them, and they prophesied out of their own heads. — I have heard what these prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying: I have dreamed, I have dreamed. — How long will this imagining remain in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy lies, whose prophecies are merely the deceptions of their own hearts? If, then, this people, or a prophet, or a priest questions you and says: What is the burden of the Lord? You shall tell him: You yourselves are the burden, and I will cast you far away from me, says the Lord. (Jeremiah, ch. xxiii, vv. 16, 17, 18, 21, 25, 26, 33.)

It is about this passage from the prophet Jeremiah that I am going to speak to you, my friends. God, speaking through his mouth, says: "It is the vision of their own hearts that makes them speak." These words clearly indicate that even at that time, charlatans and zealots were abusing the gift of prophecy and exploiting it. They were therefore abusing the simple and almost blind faith of the people by predicting good and pleasant things for money. This kind of deception was fairly widespread among the Jewish nation, and it is easy to understand that the poor people, in their ignorance, were unable to distinguish the good from the bad, and were always more or less duped by these so-called prophets who were merely impostors

or fanatics. Could anything be more telling than these words: “I did not send those prophets, and they ran of their own accord; I did not speak to them, and they prophesied”? Further on he says: “I have heard these prophets who prophesy lies in my name, saying: I have dreamed, I have dreamed”; he was thus pointing out one of the means used to exploit the trust placed in them. The multitude, always credulous, did not think to question the truth of their dreams or visions; they found it all quite natural and always invited these prophets to speak.

After the prophet's words, listen to the wise advice of the apostle Saint John when he says: “Do not believe every Spirit, but test whether the Spirits are from God”; for among the invisible ones there are also those who delight in deceiving people when they find the opportunity. Those deceived are, of course, mediums who do not take enough precautions. This is unquestionably one of the greatest pitfalls, on which many come to grief, especially when they are new to Spiritism. For them it is a trial they can overcome only through great prudence. Learn, then, above all else, to distinguish good Spirits from bad ones, so that you do not yourselves become false prophets. (Luoz, protective Spirit. Karlsruhe, 1861.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XXII. DO NOT SEPARATE WHAT GOD HAS JOINED

✦

1 Indissolubility of marriage. — Divorce.

Indissolubility of marriage.

The Pharisees also came to him to test him, and said to him: Is it lawful for a man to send his wife away for any reason whatsoever? — He answered them: Have you not read that he who created mankind from the beginning created them male and female, and that it is said: — For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and join himself to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? — Thus they shall no longer be two, but one flesh. Therefore let no one separate what God has joined.

But why, then, they said to him, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of separation and send her away? — He answered them: It is because of the hardness of your hearts that Moses allowed you to send your wives away; but it was not so from the beginning. — I therefore declare to you that whoever sends his wife away, except in cases of adultery, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries a woman whom another man has sent away also commits adultery. (Saint Matthew, ch. xix, vv. 3 to 9.)

2 Only what comes from God is unchanging; everything that is the work of human beings is subject to change. The laws of nature are the same at all times and in all countries; human laws change according to the times, places, and progress of intelligence.

2.2 In marriage, what belongs to the divine order is the union of the sexes to bring about the renewal of beings who die; but the conditions governing this union are so entirely human that throughout the whole world, and even within Christendom, there are no two countries where they are exactly the same, and not one where they have not undergone changes over time.

2.3 It follows that, in the eyes of civil law, what is legitimate in one country and at one time is adultery in another country and at another time; and this is because civil law aims to regulate the interests of families, and those interests vary according to local customs and needs.

2.4 Thus, for example, in certain countries religious marriage alone is legitimate; in others, civil marriage is also required; and in still others, civil marriage alone is sufficient.

3 But in the union of the sexes, alongside the material divine law common to all living beings, there is another divine law, unchanging like all the laws of God and exclusively moral: the law of love. God wished beings to be united not only by the bonds of the flesh, but also by those of the soul, so that the spouses' mutual affection would extend to their children, and there would be two, instead of one, to love them, care for them, and help them progress. In the ordinary conditions of marriage, is this law of love taken into account? Not at all; what is considered is not the affection of two beings drawn to each other by a mutual feeling, since this affection is most often broken; what is sought is not the satisfaction of the heart, but that of pride, vanity, greed—in a word, of all material interests. When everything is arranged as well as possible according to these interests, the marriage is said to be suitable; and when the purses are well matched, the

spouses are said to be equally so, and must be very happy.

But neither civil law nor the commitments it requires can take the place of the law of love if that law does not govern the union. It follows that what has been forcibly united often separates of its own accord; that the oath pronounced at the foot of the altar becomes perjury if spoken as a commonplace formula. Hence the unhappy unions that eventually become criminal—a double misfortune that could be avoided if, among the conditions of marriage, the only one that sanctions it in God's eyes were not disregarded: the law of love. When God said, "You shall be one flesh," and when Jesus said, "You shall not separate what God has united," this must be understood as referring to union according to the unchanging law of God, and not according to the changing law of human beings.

4 Is civil law therefore superfluous, and should we return to marriages according to nature? Certainly not; civil law aims to regulate social relations and the interests of families according to the requirements of civilization. This is why it is useful and necessary, but variable; it must make provision for the future, because civilized people cannot live like savages.

4.2 But nothing, absolutely nothing, prevents it from being the corollary of God's law; the obstacles to fulfilling divine law come from prejudices, not from civil law.

4.3 These prejudices, though still strong, have already lost some of their hold among enlightened peoples; they will disappear with moral progress, which will at last open people's eyes to the countless evils, the faults, and even the crimes that result from unions entered into solely for material interests.

4.4 And one day people will ask whether it is more humane, more charitable, and more moral to chain together beings who cannot live together than to restore their freedom; whether the prospect of an indissoluble chain does not increase the number of irregular unions. Divorce

5 Divorce is a human law whose purpose is to separate legally what is already separated in fact; it is not contrary to God's law, since it revises only what human beings have done, and applies only in cases where divine law has not been taken into account. If it were contrary to that law, the Church itself would be forced to regard as wrongdoers those of its leaders who, on their own authority and in the name of religion, have on more than one occasion imposed divorce; a double wrongdoing, then, since it was solely for the sake of temporal interests, and not to satisfy the law of love.

But Jesus himself does not establish the absolute indissolubility of marriage. Does he not say, "It is because of the hardness of your hearts that Moses allowed you to send your wives away"? This means that, even in the time of Moses, since mutual affection was not the sole purpose of marriage, separation could become necessary. But, he adds, "it was not so from the beginning"; that is, at the origin of humanity, when people had not yet been corrupted by selfishness and pride, and lived according to God's law, unions founded on sympathy, rather than vanity or ambition, gave no cause for repudiation.

He goes further: he specifies the case in which repudiation may take place, namely adultery; yet adultery does not exist where sincere mutual affection reigns. He does, it is true, forbid any man to marry the repudiated woman, but we must take into account the customs and character of the

people of his time. Mosaic law prescribed stoning in this case; in seeking to abolish a barbarous practice, a penalty was nevertheless needed, and he found it in the stigma that the prohibition of a second marriage would impose. It was, in a sense, one civil law substituted for another civil law, but one which, like all laws of this kind, had to undergo the test of time.

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XXIII. STRANGE MORALITY

✦

1 Whoever does not hate his father and mother.

A large crowd of people was walking with Jesus. He turned toward them and said: — If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. — And whoever does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. — Thus, whoever among you does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. (Saint Luke, ch. xiv, vv. 25, 26, 27, 33.)

2 Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; whoever loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Saint Matthew, ch. x, v. 37.)

3 Certain sayings, very rare indeed, sound so strangely out of place on Christ's lips that we instinctively reject their literal meaning, and the sublimity of his doctrine has suffered no harm from them. Since they were written after his death, as no Gospel was written during his lifetime, we may believe that, in this case, the substance of his thought was not properly conveyed, or, what is no less likely, that the original meaning may have undergone some alteration in passing from one language to another. An error needed only to be made once for it to be repeated by those who copied it, as so often happens with historical events.

The word hate, in this sentence from Saint Luke: If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, is such a case; no one has ever thought of attributing this idea to Jesus. It would therefore be unneces-

sary to discuss it, and still less to try to justify it. We would first need to know whether he uttered it and, if so, whether this word had the same force in the language he spoke as it does in ours. In this passage from Saint John: "Whoever hates his life in this world preserves it for eternal life," it certainly does not express the idea we attach to it.

The Hebrew language was not rich in vocabulary and had many words with several meanings. One example is the word that, in Genesis, designates the stages of creation and served to express both any period of time and the daily rotation; hence its later translation by the word day, and the belief that the world was the work of six times twenty-four hours. Another example is the word used for both a camel and a cable, because cables were made of camel hair, which was translated as camel in the allegory of the eye of a needle (ch. xvi, no. 2.)

1. Non odit in Latin, Kaï ou miseï in Greek, does not mean to hate, but to love less. What the Greek verb miseïn expresses is conveyed still better by the Hebrew verb Jesus must have used; it means not only to hate, but to love less, not to love as much as, as much as another. In the Syriac dialect, which Jesus is said to have used most often, this meaning is even more pronounced. It is in this sense that it is said in Genesis (ch. xxix, vv. 30, 31):

We must also take into account the customs and character of peoples, which influence the particular nature of their languages; without this knowledge, the true meaning of certain words escapes us. From one language to another, the same word has greater or lesser force; it may be an insult or blasphemy in one and insignificant in another, depending on the idea attached to it. Within the same language, certain words lose their force over the course of a few centuries. This is why a strictly literal translation does not always convey the thought perfectly, and why, to be accurate,

it is sometimes necessary to use equivalent words or paraphrases rather than corresponding words.

These observations apply especially to the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, and the Gospels in particular. If we do not take into account the setting in which Jesus lived, we risk misunderstanding the force of certain expressions and certain events, because of our habit of judging others by ourselves. In any case, we must therefore set aside the modern meaning of the word hate, as contrary to the spirit of Jesus' teaching (see also ch. xiv, nos. 5 and following).

4 Leaving one's father, mother, and children

Whoever has left for my name his house, or his "And Jacob also loved Rachel more than Leah, and Jehovah, seeing that Leah was hated..." It is clear that the true meaning is less loved: this is how it should be translated. In several other Hebrew passages, and especially Syriac ones, the same verb is used in the sense of not loving as much as another, and translating it as hate, which has another clearly defined meaning, would distort the sense. Saint Matthew's text, moreover, removes all difficulty.

(Note by Mr. Pezzani.) brothers, or his sisters, or his father, or his mother, or his wife, or his children, or his lands, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. (Saint Matthew, ch. xix, v. 29.)

5 Then Peter said to him: As for us, you see that we have left everything and followed you. — Jesus said to them: Truly I tell you, no one will leave for the kingdom of God either his house, or his father and mother, or his brothers, or his wife, or his children, — without receiving much more in this world, and eternal life in the age to come. (Saint Luke, ch. xviii, vv. 28, 29, 30.)

6 Another said to him: Lord, I will follow you; but first allow me to put my household affairs in order. — Jesus answered him: Whoever puts his hand to the plow and looks behind him is not fit for the kingdom of God. (Saint Luke, ch. ix, vv. 61, 62.)

Without debating the words, we must seek the thought here, which was clearly this: "The concerns of the future life outweigh all human concerns and considerations," because it agrees with the substance of Jesus' doctrine, whereas the idea of renouncing one's family would deny it.

Do we not, moreover, see these maxims applied before our eyes in the sacrifice of family interests and affections for one's homeland? Is a son blamed for leaving his father, mother, brothers, wife, and children to defend his country? On the contrary, is he not given credit for tearing himself away from the comforts of home and the embraces of friendship to fulfill a duty? There are therefore duties that outweigh other duties. Does not the law require a daughter to leave her parents to follow her husband? The world is full of cases in which the most painful separations are necessary; but affections are not broken by them. Distance diminishes neither the respect and care we owe our parents nor our tenderness for our children. We can therefore see that, even taken literally, except for the word hate, these sayings would not deny the commandment to honor one's father and mother, nor the feeling of fatherly tenderness, all the more so if we grasp their spirit. Their purpose was to show, through exaggeration, how pressing the duty to concern ourselves with the future life was. They must also have been less shocking among a people and at a time when, because of prevailing customs, family ties were less strong than in a civilization with more advanced morality. These ties, weaker among primitive peoples, grow stronger as sensitivity and moral awareness develop.

Separation itself is necessary for progress; families are like races: they degenerate if there is no intermingling, if they are not grafted onto one another. This is a law of nature, serving moral progress as much as physical progress.

Things are considered here only from an earthly point of view; Spiritism lets us see them from a higher perspective by showing us that the true bonds of affection are those of the Spirit and not those of the body; that these bonds are broken neither by separation nor even by the death of the body; and that they grow stronger in spiritual life through the purification of the Spirit. This consoling truth gives us great strength to endure the ups and downs of life. (Ch. iv, no. 18; ch. xiv, no. 8.)

7 Leave the dead to bury their dead

He said to another: Follow me; and he answered him: Lord, first allow me to go and bury my father. — Jesus answered him: Leave the dead to bury their dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. (Saint Luke, ch. ix, vv. 59, 60.)

8 What can these words mean: "Leave the dead to bury their dead"? The preceding considerations show, first of all, that in the circumstances in which they were spoken, they could not express blame toward someone who regarded going to bury his father as a duty of filial devotion; but they contain a profound meaning that only a fuller knowledge of spiritual life could make understandable.

Spiritual life is indeed the true life; it is the normal life of the Spirit. Its earthly existence is only temporary and fleeting; it is a kind of death compared with the splendor and activity of spiritual life. The body is merely a coarse garment that the Spirit wears for a moment, a veritable chain that

binds it to the soil of the earth and from which it is happy to be freed. Our respect for the dead is directed not toward matter, but, through remembrance, toward the absent Spirit; it is like the respect we have for objects that belonged to it, that it touched, and that those who love it keep as relics. This is what the man could not understand on his own; Jesus teaches it to him by saying: Do not worry about the body, but think instead of the Spirit; go and teach the kingdom of God; go and tell people that their homeland is not on earth, but in heaven, for there alone is true life.

[9] I have not come to bring peace, but division

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but the sword; — for I have come to separate a man from his father, a daughter from her mother, and a daughter-in-law from her mother-in-law; — and a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. (Saint Matthew, ch. x, v. 34, 35, 36.)

[10] I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire, except that it be kindled? — I must be baptized with a baptism, and how urgently I long for it to be accomplished!

Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I assure you, but on the contrary, division; — for from now on, if there are five people in a house, they will be divided against one another: three against two and two against three. — The father will be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law. (Saint Luke, ch. xii, vv. 49 to 53.)

11 Could it really be Jesus, the personification of gentleness and goodness, who never ceased to preach love of one's neighbor, who said: I have not come to bring peace, but the sword; I have come to separate son from father, husband from wife; I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and I long for it to be kindled!

11.2 Are these words not in flagrant contradiction with his teaching? Is it not blasphemy to attribute to him the language of a bloodthirsty and destructive conqueror?

11.3 No, there is neither blasphemy nor contradiction in these words, for it was indeed he who spoke them, and they bear witness to his great wisdom; only their somewhat ambiguous form does not convey his thought exactly, which has led to a misunderstanding of their true meaning; taken literally, they would tend to transform his wholly peaceful mission into a mission of turmoil and discord, an absurd consequence that common sense rules out, for Jesus could not contradict himself. (Ch. XIV, no. 6.)

12 Every new idea inevitably meets with opposition, and not a single one has become established without struggles; in such cases, resistance is always proportional to the importance of the expected results, because the greater that importance, the more interests it threatens. If it is clearly false, if it is considered inconsequential, no one is disturbed by it, and it is allowed to pass, since it is known to have no vitality. But if it is true, if it rests on a solid foundation, if a future can be foreseen for it, a secret intuition warns its opponents that it is a danger to them and to the order of things they have an interest in maintaining; that is why they strike at it and its supporters.

The measure of the importance and results of a new idea is thus found in the commotion it causes upon its appearance, in the violence of the opposition it arouses, and in the degree and persistence of its adversaries' anger.

13 Jesus came to proclaim a doctrine that undermined the very foundations of the abuses on which the Pharisees, the Scribes, and the priests of his time lived; so they had him put to death, believing they would kill the idea by killing the man; but the idea survived, because it was true; it grew, because it was part of God's design, and, emerging from an obscure village in Judea, it went on to plant its flag in the very capital of the pagan world, in the face of its fiercest enemies, those who had the greatest interest in fighting it, because it overthrew age-old beliefs to which many clung far more out of self-interest than conviction. There, more terrible struggles awaited its apostles; the victims were countless, but the idea continued to grow and emerged triumphant, because, as truth, it surpassed those that had preceded it.

14 It should be noted that Christianity arrived when Paganism was in decline and struggling against the light of reason. It was still practiced as a formality, but belief had disappeared, and self-interest alone sustained it. Now, self-interest is tenacious; it never yields to evidence; it becomes all the more irritated as the arguments set against it become more conclusive and demonstrate its error more clearly; it knows very well that it is in error, but that is not what concerns it, for true faith is not in its soul; what it fears most is the light that opens the eyes of the blind; this error benefits it, which is why it clings to it and defends it.

Had Socrates not also put forward a doctrine similar, to a certain extent, to that of Christ? Why, then, did it not prevail at that time among one of the

most intelligent peoples on earth? It was because the time had not come; he sowed in untilled ground; paganism had not yet worn itself out. Christ received his providential mission at the proper time. Far from all the people of his time were ready for Christian ideas, but there was a more general capacity to assimilate them, because people were beginning to feel the emptiness that common beliefs left in the soul. Socrates and Plato had opened the way and prepared people's minds. (See the Introduction, paragraph IV, Socrates and Plato, forerunners of the Christian idea and of Spiritism.)

15 Unfortunately, the followers of the new doctrine did not agree on the interpretation of the Master's words, most of which were veiled in allegory and figurative language; from this arose, from the very beginning, the many sects that all claimed to possess the truth exclusively, and that eighteen centuries have been unable to bring into agreement. Forgetting the most important of the divine precepts, the one Jesus had made the cornerstone of his edifice and the express condition of salvation: charity, brotherhood, and love of one's neighbor, these sects hurled anathemas at one another and fell upon each other, the strongest crushing the weakest, stifling them in blood, in torture, and in the flames of the stake. The Christians, having conquered Paganism, went from being persecuted to being persecutors; it was with sword and fire that they went to plant the cross of the spotless lamb in both worlds. It is an established fact that religious wars have been the cruelest and have claimed more victims than political wars, and that in no others have more acts of atrocity and barbarity been committed.

Is the doctrine of Christ to blame for this? Certainly not, for it explicitly

condemns all violence. Did he ever say to his disciples: Go, kill, massacre, burn those who do not believe as you do?

No, for on the contrary he told them: All people are brothers, and God is supremely merciful; love your neighbor; love your enemies; do good to those who persecute you. He also told them: Whoever kills by the sword will perish by the sword. The responsibility therefore lies not with the doctrine of Jesus, but with those who have misinterpreted it and made it an instrument to serve their passions; with those who have failed to understand these words: My kingdom is not of this world.

Jesus, in his profound wisdom, foresaw what was to happen; but these things were inevitable, because they stemmed from the inferiority of human nature, which could not be transformed all at once. Christianity had to pass through this long and cruel ordeal of eighteen centuries to show its full power; for, despite all the evil committed in its name, it emerged pure; it has never been held responsible; the blame has always fallen on those who abused it; at every act of intolerance, people have always said: If Christianity were better understood and better practiced, this would not happen.

16 When Jesus said: Do not believe that I have come to bring peace, but division, his thought was this:

"Do not believe that my doctrine will become established peacefully; it will bring about bloody struggles for which my name will be the pretext, because people will not have understood me, or will not have wished to understand me; brothers, separated by their beliefs, will draw the sword against one another, and division will reign among members of the same family who do not share the same faith.

I have come to cast fire upon the earth to cleanse it of errors and prejudices, as one sets fire to a field to destroy its weeds, and I long for it to be kindled so that the purification may be swifter, for truth will emerge triumphant from this conflict; war will be followed by peace; the hatred of factions, by universal brotherhood; the darkness of fanaticism, by the light of enlightened faith. Then, when the field is prepared, I will send you the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who will come to restore all things; that is to say, by making known the true meaning of my words, which more enlightened people will at last be able to understand, he will put an end to the fratricidal struggle that divides the children of the same God. Weary at last of a struggle with no way out, which brings nothing but desolation in its wake and carries turmoil into the very heart of families, people will recognize where their true interests lie, both for this world and for the next; they will see on which side stand the friends and the enemies of their peace. All will then come to shelter beneath the same flag: that of charity, and things will be restored on earth according to the truth and the principles I have taught you."

17 Spiritism comes at the appointed time to fulfill Christ's promises; yet it cannot do so without destroying abuses; like Jesus, it encounters along its path pride, selfishness, ambition, greed, and blind fanaticism, which, driven into their last strongholds, attempt to bar its way and raise obstacles and persecutions against it; that is why it too must fight; but the time of bloody struggles and persecutions is past; those it will have to endure will all be moral, and their end is near; the former lasted for centuries: these will last barely a few years, because the light, instead of coming from a single source, shines forth at every point on the globe and will open the

eyes of the blind sooner.

18. These words of Jesus must therefore be understood as referring to the anger he foresaw his doctrine would arouse, to the temporary conflicts that would result from it, to the struggles it would have to endure before becoming established, as was the case with the Hebrews before their entry into the Promised Land, and not to a premeditated intention on his part to sow disorder and confusion. The evil was to come from people, not from him. He was like the physician who comes to heal, but whose remedies bring on a beneficial crisis by stirring up the patient's unhealthy humors.

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XXIV. DO NOT PUT THE LAMP UNDER A BUSHEL

✦

1 Lamp under a bushel. Why Jesus speaks in parables.
A lamp is not lit to be put under a bushel; it is placed on a lampstand so that it may give light to everyone in the house. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, v. 15.)

2 No one, after lighting a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed; instead, it is placed on the lampstand so that those who enter may see the light; — for there is nothing secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and brought into public view. (Saint Luke, ch. viii, v. 16, 17.)

3 His disciples came to him and said: Why do you speak to them in parables? — And he answered them: Because you have been given the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but they have not been given it.

3.2 — I speak to them in parables because, seeing, they do not see, and hearing, they neither hear nor understand. — And in them the prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled when he says: You will listen with your ears, and you will not hear; you will look with your eyes, and you will not see.

3.3 — For the heart of this people has grown dull, and their ears have become deaf, and they have closed their eyes for fear that their eyes might see, their ears might hear, their hearts might understand, and that, having turned, I might heal them. (Saint Matthew, ch. xvi, v. 10 to 15.)

4 It is surprising to hear Jesus say that the light must not be put under a bushel, while he himself constantly hides the meaning of his words beneath the veil of allegory, which cannot be understood by everyone. He explains himself by saying to his apostles: I speak to them in parables because they are not able to understand certain things; they see, look, hear, and do not understand; telling them everything would therefore be useless for the moment; but I tell you because you have been given the ability to understand these mysteries. He therefore treated the people as one treats children whose ideas are not yet developed. In this way he indicates the true meaning of the maxim: "The lamp must not be put under a bushel, but on the lampstand, so that all who enter may see it." It does not mean that everything must be revealed without due thought; all teaching must be suited to the understanding of the person being addressed, for there are people whom too bright a light dazzles without enlightening them.

Humanity in general is like individuals; generations have their childhood, their youth, and their maturity; everything must come in its own time, and seed sown out of season bears no fruit. But what prudence requires us to keep silent about for a time must sooner or later be revealed, because, once people have reached a certain stage of development, they themselves seek the bright light; darkness weighs upon them. Since God has given them intelligence to understand and to guide themselves in the things of earth and heaven, they want to reason through their faith; it is then that the lamp must not be put under a bushel, for without the light of reason, faith grows weak. (Ch. xix, no. 7.)

5 Thus, if Providence, in its farseeing wisdom, reveals truths only gradually, it always discloses them as humanity becomes mature enough to receive them; it holds them in reserve, rather than under a bushel; but people who possess them usually hide them from the common people only in order to dominate them; it is they who truly put the light under a bushel. In this way all religions have had their mysteries, which they forbade people to examine; but while these religions lagged behind, science and intelligence advanced and tore away the mysterious veil; the common people, having reached adulthood, wanted to get to the bottom of things, and then rejected from their faith whatever was contrary to observation.

There can be no absolute mysteries, and Jesus speaks the truth when he says that there is nothing secret that will not be known. Everything hidden will one day be revealed, and what human beings cannot yet understand on earth will be disclosed to them in succession in more advanced worlds, and when they have been purified; here below, they are still in the fog.

6 One may ask what benefit the people could gain from this multitude of parables whose meaning remained hidden from them. It should be observed that Jesus expressed himself in parables only on the somewhat abstract parts of his doctrine; but, having made charity toward one's neighbor and humility the express condition of salvation, everything he said on this subject is perfectly clear, explicit, and unambiguous.

6.2 This had to be so, because it was the rule of conduct, a rule that everyone had to understand to observe it; it was what mattered most for the ignorant multitude, to whom he confined himself to saying: This is what you must do to gain the kingdom of heaven.

6.3 On the other parts, he explained his thought fully only to his disciples; as they were more advanced morally and intellectually, Jesus had been able to introduce them to more abstract truths; this is why he says: To those who already have, still more will be given. (Ch. xvni, no. 15.)

6.4 Yet even with his apostles, he remained vague on many points whose full understanding was reserved for later times. These are the points that gave rise to such varied interpretations, until science on the one hand, and Spiritism on the other, came to reveal the new laws of nature that made their true meaning understood.

7 Spiritism comes today to shed light on a host of obscure points; yet it does not do so without due thought. The Spirits proceed in their teachings with admirable prudence; they have addressed the various known parts of the doctrine only in succession and by degrees, and in this same way the other parts will be revealed as the time comes to bring them out of the shadows.

7.2 If they had presented it in full from the beginning, it would have been accessible only to a small number; it would even have frightened those who were not prepared for it, which would have hindered its spread.

7.3 Thus, if the Spirits do not yet say everything openly, it is not because the doctrine contains mysteries reserved for a privileged few, nor because they put the lamp under a bushel, but because everything must come at the proper time; they allow one idea time to mature and spread before presenting another, and allow events time to prepare the way for its acceptance.

[8] Do not go to the Gentiles

Jesus sent out his twelve (the apostles) after giving them the following instructions: Do not go to the Gentiles, and do not enter the towns of the Samaritans; — but go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; — and wherever you go, preach, saying that the kingdom of heaven is near. (Saint Matthew, ch. x, v. 5, 6, 7.)

[9] Jesus shows on many occasions that his aims are not confined to the Jewish people, but embrace all humanity. Thus, if he tells his apostles not to go among the pagans, it is not out of disdain for their conversion, which would have been uncharitable, but because the Jews, who believed in the unity of God and awaited the Messiah, had been prepared by the law of Moses and the prophets to receive his word.

[9.2] Among the pagans, the very foundation was lacking, everything remained to be done, and the apostles were not yet enlightened enough for so heavy a task; this is why he tells them: Go to the lost sheep of Israel; that is, go and sow in ground that has already been cleared, knowing full well that the conversion of the Gentiles would come in its own time; later, indeed, the apostles went to plant the cross at the very center of paganism.

[10] These words can be applied to the followers and promoters of Spiritism. Committed unbelievers, stubborn mockers, and opponents with vested interests are to them what the Gentiles were to the apostles. Following their example, let them first seek converts among people of goodwill, those who desire the light, in whom a fruitful seed can be found, and there are many of them, without wasting their time on those who refuse to see and hear, and who, out of pride, resist all the more strongly as greater value seems to be placed on their conversion. It is better to open the eyes of a

hundred blind people who wish to see clearly than those of a single person who delights in darkness, because this increases the number of supporters of the cause in a greater proportion. Leaving the others alone is not indifference, but sound policy; their turn will come when they are swayed by general opinion and hear the same thing repeated constantly around them; then they will believe they are accepting the idea willingly and of their own accord, without pressure from an individual. Moreover, ideas are like seeds: they cannot germinate before their season, and can do so only in prepared ground; this is why it is better to wait for the right time and first cultivate those that are sprouting, for fear of causing the others to fail by forcing them too much.

In the time of Jesus, owing to the narrow and material ideas of the age, everything was confined and localized; the house of Israel was a small people; the Gentiles were the small surrounding peoples; today ideas are becoming universal and spiritual. The new light is the privilege of no nation; for it, barriers no longer exist; its source is everywhere, and all people are brothers. But the Gentiles, too, are no longer a people; they are an opinion found everywhere, over which truth gradually triumphs, just as Christianity triumphed over paganism. They are no longer fought with weapons of war, but with the power of ideas.

It is not the healthy who need a physician.

11 While Jesus was at table in the house of this man (Matthew), many tax collectors and people of disreputable life came and sat at table with Jesus and his disciples; — when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples:

Why does your Master eat with tax collectors and people of disreputable life? — But Jesus, having heard them, said to them: It is not the healthy, but the sick who need a physician. (Saint Matthew, ch. ix, v. 10, 11, 12.)

12 Jesus spoke chiefly to the poor and the deprived, because they are the ones who most need comfort; to the blind who are willing to learn and sincere, because they ask to see, and not to the proud who believe they possess all light and need nothing (see Introduction, articles Publicans, Toll Collectors).

This saying, like so many others, finds its application in Spiritism. People are sometimes surprised that mediumship is granted to unworthy people capable of misusing it; it seems, they say, that so precious a faculty should be the exclusive attribute of the most deserving.

Let us first say that mediumship depends on a physical disposition with which anyone may be endowed, like the ability to see, hear, or speak. There is no faculty that human beings cannot abuse by virtue of their free will, and if God had granted speech, for example, only to those incapable of saying bad things, there would be more mute people than people who speak. God has given human beings faculties; he leaves them free to use them, but he always punishes those who abuse them.

If the power to communicate with the Spirits were given only to the most worthy, who would dare lay claim to it? Besides, where would the boundary between worthiness and unworthiness lie? Mediumship is given without distinction, so that the Spirits may bring light to every rank, to every class of society, to the poor as to the rich; to the wise to strengthen them in goodness, and to the wicked to correct them. Are the latter not the sick who need the physician? Why would God, who does not desire the sinner's

death, deprive him of the help that can draw him out of the mire? The good Spirits therefore come to his aid, and their advice, which he receives directly, is likely to affect him more deeply than if he received it through indirect channels. God, in his goodness, to spare him the trouble of seeking the light far away, places it in his hand; is he not far more guilty if he does not look at it? Will he be able to plead ignorance when he has himself written, seen with his eyes, heard with his ears, and spoken with his mouth his own condemnation? If he fails to benefit from it, he is then punished by the loss or the corruption of his faculty, which the evil Spirits seize upon to obsess and deceive him, in addition to the real afflictions with which God strikes his unworthy servants and hearts hardened by pride and selfishness.

Mediumship does not necessarily imply regular contact with higher Spirits; it is simply an aptitude for serving as a more or less flexible instrument for Spirits in general. A good medium is therefore not one who communicates easily, but one who has an affinity with good Spirits and is assisted only by them. It is in this sense alone that excellence in moral qualities has an all-powerful influence on mediumship.

13 The courage of faith

Whoever acknowledges me and declares his faith in me before others, I too will acknowledge him and declare my acceptance of him before my Father who is in heaven; — and whoever denies me before others, I too will deny him before my Father who is in heaven. (Saint Matthew, ch. x, v. 32, 33.)

14 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in that of his Father and the holy angels. (Saint Luke, ch. ix, v. 26.)

15 The courage to stand by one's convictions has always been held in esteem among people, because there is merit in facing the dangers, persecutions, opposition, and even mere sarcasm to which anyone who is not afraid to declare openly ideas that are not shared by everyone is almost always exposed. Here, as in everything, merit is proportional to the circumstances and the importance of the result. It is always a weakness to shrink from the consequences of one's opinion and to disown it, but there are cases in which it is as cowardly as fleeing at the moment of battle.

Jesus condemns this cowardice, with particular reference to his doctrine, by saying that if anyone is ashamed of his words, he too will be ashamed of that person; that he will deny whoever has denied him; that whoever acknowledges him before others, he will acknowledge before his Father who is in heaven; in other words: those who have feared to declare themselves disciples of truth are not worthy of being admitted into the kingdom of truth. They will lose the benefit of their faith, because it is a selfish faith, which they keep for themselves but hide for fear that it might harm them in this world, whereas those who place truth above their material interests and proclaim it openly work at the same time for their own future and that of others.

16. So it will be with the followers of Spiritism; since their doctrine is nothing other than the development and application of that of the Gospel, the words of Christ are addressed to them as well. They sow on earth what they will reap in spiritual life; there they will gather the fruits of their courage or their weakness.

[17] Carrying one's cross. Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it
Blessed are you when people hate you, exclude you, insult you, and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man. — Rejoice on that day and be filled with joy, because a great reward is reserved for you in heaven, for this is how their fathers treated the prophets. (Saint Luke, ch. vi, v. 22, 23.)

[18] Calling the people to him along with his disciples, he said to them: If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, carry his cross, and follow me; — for whoever wishes to save himself will lose himself; and whoever loses himself for the love of me and of the Gospel will save himself. — Indeed, what would it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose himself? (Saint Mark, ch. viii, v. 34 to 36. — Saint Luke, ch. ix, v. 23, 24, 25. — Saint Matthew, ch. x, v. 39. — Saint John, ch. xii, v. 24, 25.)

[19] Rejoice, says Jesus, when people hate you and persecute you because of me, because you will be rewarded for it in heaven. These words may be expressed as follows: Be happy when people, through their ill will toward you, give you the opportunity to prove the sincerity of your faith, for the harm they do you turns to your benefit. Pity them, then, for their blindness, and do not curse them.
Then he adds: “Let whoever wishes to follow me carry his cross,” that is, let him courageously bear the tribulations that his faith will bring upon him; for whoever wishes to save his life and possessions by denying me will lose the benefits of the kingdom of heaven, whereas those who have lost everything here below, even their lives, for the triumph of truth, will re-

ceive in the life to come the reward for their courage, perseverance, and self-denial; but to those who sacrifice heavenly treasures for earthly pleasures, God says: You have already received your reward.

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XXV. SEEK AND YOU WILL FIND

✦

1 Help yourself, and heaven will help you.
Ask and you will be given; seek and you will find; knock at the door and it will be opened to you; for whoever asks receives, and whoever seeks finds, and the door will be opened to whoever knocks.
Which of you would give his son a stone when he asks for bread? — Or if he asks for a fish, would he give him a snake? — If, then, evil as you are, you know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give true blessings to those who ask him for them. (Saint Matthew, ch. vii, vv. 7 to 11.)

2 From an earthly point of view, the maxim: Seek and you will find, is like this one: Help yourself, and heaven will help you. It is the principle of the law of work, and consequently of the law of progress, for progress is the child of work, because work brings the powers of intelligence into action.
In the infancy of humanity, people apply their intelligence only to finding food, ways of protecting themselves from harsh weather, and means of defending themselves against their enemies; but God has given them, beyond what he has given animals, an unceasing desire for something better; it is this desire for something better that drives them to seek ways of improving their situation, that leads them to discoveries, inventions, and the advancement of science, for science provides them with what they lack. Through their research, their intelligence grows and their moral character becomes purer; the needs of the body are followed by the needs of the spirit; after material nourishment, spiritual nourishment is needed, and

this is how humanity passes from savagery to civilization.

But the progress each person makes individually during life is very little, even imperceptible in a great many; how, then, could humanity progress without the preexistence and renewed existence of the soul? If souls departed every day never to return, humanity would constantly renew itself with primitive elements, having everything to do, everything to learn; there would therefore be no reason for people to be more advanced today than in the earliest ages of the world, since at every birth all intellectual work would have to begin again. The soul, on the contrary, returning with the progress it has already made and acquiring something more each time, thus passes gradually from barbarism to material civilization, and from there to moral civilization. (See ch. iv, no. 17.)

3 If God had freed people from bodily work, their limbs would have wasted away; if he had freed them from intellectual work, their minds would have remained in infancy, in a state of animal instinct; this is why he made work a necessity for them; he told them: Seek and you will find; work and you will produce; in this way you will be the child of your own works, you will deserve the credit for them, and you will be rewarded according to what you have done.

4 It is in keeping with this principle that the Spirits do not come to spare people the work of research by bringing them discoveries and inventions already completed and ready to produce results, so that they would only have to take what was placed in their hands, without having to bend down to pick it up, or even to think.

4.2 If this were so, the laziest person could become rich, and the most ignorant could become learned with little effort, and both could claim credit for what they had not done. No, the Spirits do not come to free people from the law of work, but to show them the goal they must reach and the road that leads to it, telling them: Walk and you will arrive.

4.3 You will find stones beneath your feet; look, and remove them yourself; we will give you the necessary strength if you are willing to use it. (The Mediums' Book, ch. xxvi, nos. 291 and following.)

5 From a moral point of view, these words of Jesus mean: Ask for the light that is to illuminate your path, and it will be given to you; ask for the strength to resist evil, and you will have it; ask for the help of the good Spirits, and they will come to accompany you, and like the angel of Tobias, they will serve as your guides; ask for good advice, and it will never be refused you; knock at our door, and it will be opened to you; but ask sincerely, with faith, fervor, and trust; come with humility and not with arrogance, otherwise you will be left to your own strength, and the very falls you suffer will be the punishment for your pride.
Such is the meaning of these words: Seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.

6 Consider the birds of the sky
Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where rust and worms consume them, and where thieves dig them up and steal them; — but store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither rust nor worms consume them; — for where your treasure is, there your heart is also.
That is why I tell you: Do not worry about where you will find food to sustain your life, or where you will get clothes to cover your body; is life not

more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Consider the birds of the sky: they do not sow, they do not reap, and they gather nothing into barns; but your heavenly Father feeds them; are you not worth much more than they? — And which of you, with all his care, can add a cubit to his height?

Why do you also worry about clothing? Consider how the lilies of the field grow; they do not work, they do not spin; — and yet I tell you that Solomon, even in all his glory, was never clothed like one of them. — If, then, God takes care to clothe in this way the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow will be thrown into the oven, how much more will he take care to clothe you, people of little faith!

So do not worry, saying: What will we eat, or what will we drink, or what will we wear? — as the pagans do, who seek all these things; for your Father knows that you need them.

Seek first, then, the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. — Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Saint Matthew, ch. vi, vv. 25 to 34.)

[7] Taken literally, these words would deny all foresight, all work, and consequently all progress. With such a principle, people would be reduced to passively waiting; their physical and intellectual powers would remain inactive; if this had been their normal condition on earth, they would never have emerged from the primitive state, and if they made it their rule today, they would have nothing left to do but live without doing anything. This cannot have been what Jesus meant, for it would contradict what he said elsewhere and the very laws of nature. God created people without

clothing and without shelter, but he gave them intelligence to make these for themselves. (Ch. xiv, no. 6; ch. xxv, no. 2.)

These words must therefore be seen only as a poetic allegory of Providence, which never abandons those who place their trust in it, but wants them to work on their part. If it does not always help through material assistance, it inspires ideas through which people find ways to get themselves out of difficulty. (Ch. xxvii, no. 8.)

God knows our needs, and he provides for them according to what is necessary; but people, insatiable in their desires, do not always know how to be content with what they have; necessities are not enough for them, they must have luxuries; it is then that Providence leaves them to themselves; often they are unhappy through their own fault and for having disregarded the voice that warned them through their conscience, and God lets them suffer the consequences, so that this may serve as a lesson for the future. (Ch. v, no. 4.)

8 The earth produces enough to feed all its inhabitants, when people know how to manage the goods it gives according to the laws of justice, charity, and love of their neighbor; when brotherhood reigns among the various peoples, as among the provinces of a single empire, the temporary surplus of one will make up for the temporary shortage of another, and everyone will have what they need.

8.2 The rich person will then see himself as someone with a great quantity of seeds; if he scatters them, they will yield a hundredfold for him and for others; but if he eats these seeds all by himself, and if he wastes and lets everything beyond what he eats go to ruin, they will produce nothing, and there will not be enough for everyone; if he shuts them away in his barn,

worms will eat them: this is why Jesus says: Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, which are perishable, but store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, because they are eternal.

8.3 In other words, do not attach more importance to material goods than to spiritual goods, and know how to sacrifice the former for the sake of the latter. (Ch. xvi, nos. 7 and following.) Charity and brotherhood cannot be decreed through laws; if they are not in the heart, selfishness will always stifle them; bringing them into the heart is the work of Spiritism.

9 Do not trouble yourselves about having gold

Do not trouble yourselves about having gold or silver, or other money in your purse. — Prepare neither a bag for the journey, nor two garments, nor shoes, nor staffs, for whoever works deserves to be fed.

10 Whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy to lodge you, and stay with him until you leave. — On entering the house, greet it by saying: May peace be in this house. — If this house is worthy of it, your peace will come upon it; and if it is not worthy of it, your peace will return to you.

When anyone will neither receive you nor listen to your words, shake the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. — Truly I tell you, on the day of judgment, Sodom and Gomorrah will be treated less severely than that town. (Saint Matthew, ch. x, vv.

41. These words, which Jesus addressed to his apostles when he sent them out for the first time to proclaim the good news, were not at all strange at that time; they were in keeping with the patriarchal customs of the East, where the traveler was always welcomed into the tent. But travelers were rare then; among modern peoples, increased travel has had to create new

customs; those of ancient times are found only in remote regions where the great movement has not yet reached; and if Jesus returned today, he could no longer say to his apostles: Set out without provisions.

Alongside their literal meaning, these words have a very deep moral meaning. Jesus was thus teaching his disciples to trust in Providence; furthermore, since they had nothing, they could not tempt the greed of those who received them; this was the way to distinguish the charitable from the selfish; that is why he tells them: "Find out who is worthy to lodge you;" that is, who is humane enough to shelter a traveler who has nothing with which to pay, for such people are worthy to hear your words; you will recognize them by their charity.

As for those who would neither receive them nor listen to them, does he tell his apostles to curse them, to impose themselves upon them, to use violence and coercion to convert them? No; he tells them simply to go elsewhere and seek people of goodwill.

Thus Spiritism says to its followers today: Do not violate anyone's conscience; do not force anyone to leave their belief to adopt yours; do not pronounce anathema upon those who do not think as you do; welcome those who come to you and leave in peace those who reject you. Remember the words of Christ; formerly heaven was taken by violence, today it is taken by gentleness. (Ch. iv, nos. 10, 11.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XXVI. GIVE FREELY WHAT YOU HAVE FREELY RECEIVED

✦

[1] Gift of healing,

Restore the sick to health, raise the dead, heal lepers, cast out demons. Give freely what you have freely received. (Saint Matthew, ch. x, v. 8.)

[2] "Give freely what you have freely received," Jesus says to his disciples; by this precept he commands them not to charge for what they themselves have not paid for. Now, what they had received freely was the ability to heal the sick and cast out demons, that is, evil Spirits; this gift had been freely given to them by God to relieve those who suffer and to help spread the faith, and he tells them not to make it a trade, an object of speculation, or a means of earning a living.

[3] Paid prayers

He then said to his disciples in the presence of all the people listening to him: — Beware of the scribes who make a show of walking about in long robes, who like to be greeted in public squares, to occupy the foremost seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts; — who, under the pretext of long prayers, devour widows' houses. These people will receive a more severe condemnation. (Saint Luke, ch. xx, v. 45, 46, 47. — Saint Mark, ch. xii, v. 38, 39, 40. — Saint Matthew, ch. xxiii, v. 14.)

[4] Jesus also says: Do not charge for your prayers; do not act like the scribes who, "under the pretext of long prayers, devour widows' houses," that is, seize their fortunes. Prayer is an act of charity, an outpouring of the heart;

to charge for a prayer addressed to God on behalf of another is to turn oneself into a paid intermediary; prayer then becomes a formula whose length is made proportional to the sum it brings in. Now, one of two things must be true: God either measures his graces by the number of words or he does not; if many are needed, why say few or none at all for someone who cannot pay? That is a lack of charity; if a single one is enough, the rest is useless; why, then, charge for it? That is a breach of trust.

God does not sell the blessings he grants; why, then, should someone who is not even their dispenser, who cannot guarantee that they will be obtained, charge for a request that may bring no result? God cannot make an act of mercy, goodness, or justice sought from his compassion depend on a sum of money; otherwise, it would follow that if the sum were not paid, or were insufficient, God's justice, goodness, and mercy would be suspended. Reason, common sense, and logic tell us that God, absolute perfection, cannot delegate to imperfect creatures the right to put a price on his justice. God's justice is like the sun; it is for everyone, for the poor as well as the rich. If trading in the favors of an earthly sovereign is considered immoral, is it any more lawful to sell those of the sovereign of the universe?

Paid prayers have another drawback: the person who buys them most often believes himself excused from praying, because he considers his obligation fulfilled once he has given his money. We know that Spirits are touched by the fervor of the thoughts of those who care about them; what fervor can there be in someone who pays a third party to pray for him? What fervor is there in that third party when he delegates his task to another, that person to another, and so on? Is this not reducing the effectiveness of prayer to the value of a common coin?

[5] Merchants driven from the temple

They then came to Jerusalem, and Jesus, having entered the temple, began by driving out those who were selling and buying there; he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; — and he would not allow anyone to carry any vessel through the temple. — He also taught them, saying: Is it not written: My house shall be called the house of prayer for all nations? And yet you have made it a den of thieves. — When the chief priests heard this, they sought a way to destroy him; for they feared him, because all the people were filled with admiration for his teaching. (Saint Mark, ch. xi, v. 15 to 48. — Saint Matthew, ch. xxi, v. 12, 13.)

[6] Jesus drove the merchants from the temple; by doing so he condemns trade in sacred things in whatever form it may take. God sells neither his blessing, nor his forgiveness, nor entry into the kingdom of heaven; therefore, no one has the right to charge for them.

[7] Free mediumship

Modern mediums—for the apostles also possessed mediumship—have likewise received a free gift from God: that of being the interpreters of Spirits for the instruction of humanity, to show people the path of goodness and lead them to faith, and not to sell them words that do not belong to them, because they are not the product of their own thought, research, or personal work. God wants the light to reach everyone; he does not want the poorest to be deprived of it and able to say: I have no faith because I could not pay for it; I have not had the consolation of receiving encourage-

ment and expressions of affection from those I mourn, because I am poor. That is why mediumship is not a privilege and is found everywhere; to charge for it would therefore divert it from its providential purpose.

8 Anyone who knows the conditions under which good Spirits communicate, their aversion to everything motivated by selfish interest, and who knows how little it takes to drive them away, can never accept that higher Spirits are at the disposal of anyone who happens to summon them at so much per session; simple common sense rejects such a thought.

8.2 Would it not also be a profanation to summon, for money, beings whom we respect or who are dear to us? Manifestations can undoubtedly be obtained in this way, but who could guarantee their sincerity?

8.3 Frivolous, lying, mischievous Spirits, and the whole crowd of inferior Spirits, with very few scruples, always come and are quite ready to answer whatever is asked without caring about the truth.

8.4 Anyone who wants serious communications must therefore first ask for them seriously, then learn about the nature of the medium's affinities with the beings of the spiritual world; now, the first condition for winning the goodwill of good Spirits is humility, devotion, self-denial, and the most absolute moral and material disinterestedness.

9 Alongside the moral question there is a practical consideration no less important, arising from the very nature of the faculty. Serious mediumship cannot and never will be a profession, not only because it would be morally discredited and soon placed on the same footing as fortune-telling, but because a material obstacle stands in the way; it is an essentially unstable, fleeting, and variable faculty, whose permanence no one can count on. For anyone exploiting it, it would therefore be a wholly un-

certain resource, which might fail at the very moment it was most needed. A talent acquired through study and work is another matter, and for that very reason it is a possession from which one may naturally derive a benefit. But mediumship is neither an art nor a talent, which is why it cannot become a profession; it exists only through the cooperation of Spirits; if those Spirits are absent, there is no longer any mediumship; the aptitude may remain, but its exercise is made impossible; thus there is not a single medium in the world who can guarantee that a spirit phenomenon will occur at a given moment. To exploit mediumship is therefore to dispose of something over which one has no real control; to claim otherwise is to deceive the person who pays; moreover, it is not oneself that one is placing at another's disposal, but the Spirits, the souls of the dead, whose cooperation is being given a price; this thought is instinctively repugnant. It was this trade, which degenerated into abuse and was exploited by charlatanism, ignorance, credulity, and superstition, that prompted Moses' prohibition. Modern Spiritism, understanding the serious side of the matter, has raised mediumship to the rank of a mission by discrediting this exploitation. (See The Mediums' Book, ch. xxviii, — Heaven and Hell, ch. xii.)

\ 0. Mediumship is a sacred thing that must be practiced in a sacred, religious manner. If there is a kind of mediumship that requires this condition even more absolutely, it is healing mediumship. The physician gives the fruit of his studies, pursued at the cost of often painful sacrifices; the magnetizer gives his own fluid, often even his health: they may put a price on these; the healing medium transmits the beneficial fluid of good Spirits: he has no right to sell it. Jesus and the apostles, though poor, did not charge for the cures they performed.

Let anyone, then, who lacks the means to live seek resources elsewhere than in mediumship; if necessary, let him devote to it only the time he can practically spare. The Spirits will give him credit for his devotion and sacrifices, whereas they withdraw from those who hope to make it a stepping stone.

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XXVII. ASK AND YOU WILL RECEIVE

✦

1 Qualities of prayer.
When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites who make a show of praying while standing in the synagogues and on street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. — But when you wish to pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret; and your Father, who sees what happens in secret, will reward you.
Do not make a show of praying at great length in your prayers, as the pagans do, who imagine that they are heard because of their many words. — So do not be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Saint Matthew, ch. vi, vv. 5 to 8.)

2 When you come to pray, if you have anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father, who is in heaven, may also forgive your sins. — If you do not forgive, your Father, who is in heaven, will not forgive your sins either. (Saint Mark, ch. xi, v. 25, 26.)

3 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves as righteous and despised others:
Two men went up to the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. — The Pharisee, standing, prayed this way within himself: My God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of men, who are thieves, unjust, and adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I possess.

The tax collector, on the contrary, standing at a distance, did not even dare to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast, saying: My God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

I tell you that this man went home justified, and the other did not; for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Saint Luke, ch. xviii, vv. 9

4 The qualities of prayer are clearly defined by Jesus; when you pray, he says, do not draw attention to yourselves, but pray in secret; do not make a show of praying at great length, for it is not through the abundance of your words that you will be heard, but through their sincerity; before praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive them, for prayer cannot be pleasing to God unless it comes from a heart purified of every feeling contrary to charity; finally, pray with humility, like the tax collector, and not with pride, like the Pharisee; examine your faults and not your qualities, and if you compare yourselves with others, look for what is wrong in yourselves. (Ch. x, nos. 7 and 8.)

5 Effectiveness of prayer

Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it, and it will be granted to you. (Saint Mark, ch. xi, v. 24.)

6 There are people who dispute the effectiveness of prayer, basing their argument on the principle that, since God knows our needs, it is unnecessary to tell him about them. They also add that, since everything in the universe is linked together by eternal laws, our wishes cannot change God's decrees.

Without doubt, there are natural and unchanging laws that God cannot repeal according to each person's whim; but there is a great distance be-

tween this and believing that all the circumstances of life are subject to fate. If that were so, a person would be merely a passive instrument, without free will or initiative. Under this assumption, all people could do would be to bow their heads under the blow of every event, without trying to avoid it; they should not have tried to divert lightning. God did not give them judgment and intelligence so that they would not use them, a will so that they would not exercise it, or the ability to act so that they would remain inactive. Since people are free to act in one way or another, their actions have consequences for themselves and for others that depend on what they do or do not do; through their initiative, there are therefore events that necessarily escape fate, and that no more destroy the harmony of universal laws than the advance or delay of a clock's hand destroys the law of motion on which its mechanism is based. God can therefore grant certain requests without departing from the unchanging nature of the laws that govern the whole, his consent always remaining subject to his will.

7 It would be illogical to conclude from this maxim: "Whatever you ask for through prayer will be granted to you," that asking is enough to receive, and unjust to accuse Providence if it does not grant every request made to it, for it knows better than we do what is for our good. So it is with a wise father who refuses his child things contrary to the child's interests. People generally see only the present; now, if suffering is useful to their future happiness, God will let them suffer, just as a surgeon lets a patient suffer from an operation that is to bring healing.

What God will grant those who turn to him with trust is courage, patience, and resignation. What he will also grant them is the means to get

themselves out of difficulty, through the ideas he has the good Spirits suggest to them, thus leaving them the credit: he assists those who help themselves, according to this maxim: "Help yourself, and heaven will help you," and not those who expect everything from outside help without using their own faculties; but most of the time people would prefer to be helped by a miracle without having to do anything. (Ch. xxv. no. 1 and following.)

8 Let us take an example. A man is lost in a desert; he is suffering terribly from thirst; he feels himself growing faint and lets himself fall to the ground; he prays to God to help him and waits: but no angel comes to bring him something to drink. However, a good Spirit suggests to him the thought of getting up and following one of the paths before him: then, with an automatic movement, gathering his strength, he gets up and walks at random. Reaching a height, he spots a stream in the distance; at this sight he regains his courage. If he has faith, he will cry out: "Thank you, my God, for the thought you inspired in me and the strength you gave me." If he has no faith, he will say: "What a good idea I had! How lucky I was to take the path on the right rather than the one on the left; chance really does serve us well sometimes! How pleased I am with my courage and with not having let myself become discouraged!"

But, some will say, why did the good Spirit not tell him clearly: "Follow this path, and at the end you will find what you need"? Why did he not appear to him to guide him and support him as he grew faint? In this way he would have convinced him of the intervention of Providence. First, it was to teach him that he must help himself and use his own strength. Then, through uncertainty, God tests trust in him and submission to his

will. This man was in the situation of a child who falls and, if he sees someone, cries and waits for someone to come and pick him up; if he sees no one, he makes an effort and gets up on his own.

If the angel who accompanied Tobias had told him: "I am sent by God to guide you on your journey and preserve you from all danger," Tobias would have deserved no credit; relying on his companion, he would not even have needed to think; that is why the angel made himself known only on their return.

[9] Action of prayer. Transmission of thought

Prayer is an invocation; through it we enter into a relationship of thought with the being we address. Its purpose may be a request, an expression of thanks, or glorification. We can pray for ourselves or for others, for the living or for the dead.

Prayers addressed to God are heard by the Spirits responsible for carrying out his will; those addressed to good Spirits are passed on to God. When we pray to beings other than God, it is only as intermediaries, as intercessors, for nothing can be done without God's will.

[10] Spiritism makes the action of prayer understandable by explaining how thought is transmitted, whether the being prayed to comes at our call or our thought reaches that being. To understand what happens in this circumstance, we must picture all incarnate and discarnate beings immersed in the universal fluid that fills space, just as we here below are immersed in the atmosphere. This fluid receives an impulse from the will; it is the vehicle of thought, just as air is the vehicle of sound, with this difference: the vibrations of air are confined, while those of the universal fluid extend to infinity. Thus, when thought is directed toward any being, on earth or in

space, from an incarnate being to a discarnate being, or from a discarnate being to an incarnate being, a fluid current is established from one to the other, transmitting thought as air transmits sound.

The strength of the current is proportional to that of the thought and the will. This is how prayer is heard by Spirits wherever they may be, how Spirits communicate with one another, how they transmit their inspirations to us, and how relationships are established at a distance between incarnate beings.

This explanation is intended especially for those who do not understand the usefulness of purely mystical prayer; its purpose is not to materialize prayer, but to make its effect understandable by showing that it can have a direct and effective action; it nevertheless remains subject to the will of God, the supreme judge in all things, who alone can make its action effective.

\ \. Through prayer, people call upon the assistance of good Spirits, who come to support them in their good resolutions and inspire good thoughts in them; they thus acquire the moral strength needed to overcome difficulties and return to the right path if they have strayed from it; and in this way they can also avert the troubles they would bring upon themselves through their own fault. A man, for example, sees his health ruined by the excesses he has indulged in and drags out a life of suffering until the end of his days; does he have the right to complain if he does not obtain healing? No, for he could have found in prayer the strength to resist temptation.

12 If we divide the troubles of life into two groups, one consisting of those that people cannot avoid, the other of the tribulations of which they themselves are the primary cause through their carelessness and excesses (chap. v, no. 4), we will see that the latter far outnumber the former. It is therefore quite clear that people are the authors of most of their afflictions, and that they would spare themselves these afflictions if they always acted wisely and prudently.

It is no less certain that these miseries result from our violations of God's laws, and that if we faithfully observed these laws, we would be perfectly happy. If we did not go beyond what is necessary in satisfying our needs, we would not have the illnesses that result from excesses, or the hardships those illnesses bring; if we set limits to our ambition, we would not fear ruin; if we did not wish to climb higher than we are able, we would not fear falling; if we were humble, we would not suffer the disappointments of wounded pride; if we practiced the law of charity, we would be neither slanderous, envious, nor jealous, and we would avoid quarrels and dissensions; if we harmed no one, we would not fear revenge, etc.

Let us grant that people can do nothing about other troubles, and that all prayer is useless in protecting them from these troubles: would it not already be a great deal to be freed from all those that arise from their own actions? Here, the action of prayer is easily understood, because its effect is to call upon the beneficial inspiration of good Spirits, to ask them for the strength to resist bad thoughts whose execution may prove disastrous for us. In this case, it is not the harm that they turn aside; it is us whom they turn away from the thought that may cause the harm. They in no way obstruct God's decrees; they do not suspend the course of the laws of nature. It is us whom they prevent from breaking these laws, by guiding our free

will; but they do so without our knowledge, in a hidden way, so as not to bind our will. People then find themselves in the position of someone who asks for good advice and puts it into practice, but who always remains free to follow it or not. God wills it to be so, so that they may be responsible for their actions and retain the merit of choosing between good and evil. This is what people are always certain to obtain if they ask for it fervently, and it is above all to this that these words may apply: "Ask and you will receive."

Would not the effectiveness of prayer, even reduced to this extent, have an immense result? It was left to Spiritism to prove its action to us by revealing the relationships that exist between the bodily world and the spiritual world. But its effects are not confined to this alone.

Prayer is recommended by all Spirits; to give up prayer is to fail to recognize God's goodness; it is to renounce their assistance for ourselves, and the good we can do for others.

13 In granting the request addressed to him, God often intends to reward the intention, devotion, and faith of the person who prays. That is why the prayer of a good person has greater merit in God's eyes, and is always more effective, for a vicious and wicked person cannot pray with the fervor and confidence that only the feeling of true piety can give. From the heart of a selfish person, of someone who prays with the lips alone, only words can come, but not the impulses of charity that give prayer all its power. This is so well understood that, by an instinctive impulse, we prefer to entrust ourselves to the prayers of those whose conduct we feel must be pleasing to God, because he listens to them more favorably.

\ 4. If prayer exerts a kind of magnetic action, one might believe that its ef-

fect depends on fluidic power; yet this is not so. Since Spirits exert this action upon people, they make up, when necessary, for the inadequacy of the person praying, either by acting directly in that person's name, or by temporarily giving that person exceptional strength, when they are judged worthy of this favor, or when it may serve a useful purpose.

Those who do not consider themselves good enough to exert a beneficial influence should not refrain from praying for others because they think themselves unworthy of being heard. Awareness of their inferiority is proof of humility, which is always pleasing to God, who takes account of the charitable intention that inspires them. Their fervor and trust in God are a first step toward a return to goodness, in which good Spirits are happy to encourage them. The prayer that is rejected is that of the proud person who has faith in their own power and merits, and believes they can take the place of the will of the Eternal.

15 The power of prayer lies in thought; it depends neither on the words, nor on the place, nor on the time at which it is offered. We can therefore pray everywhere and at any hour, alone or together. The influence of place or time depends on circumstances that may encourage inward reflection.

15.2 Prayer offered together has a more powerful effect when all those praying unite their hearts in the same thought and have the same purpose, for it is as though many voices were calling out together in unison; but what does it matter if large numbers gather when each acts alone and for their own personal benefit!

15.3 A hundred people gathered together may pray like selfish people, while two or three, united in a common aspiration, will pray like true brothers in God, and their prayer will have more power than that of the

hundred others. (Ch. xxviii, Intelligible prayers.

16 If I do not understand what the words mean, I will be a foreigner to the person to whom I speak, and the person speaking to me will be a foreigner to me. — If I pray in a language I do not understand, my heart prays, but my understanding bears no fruit.

16.2 — If you praise God only with your heart, how will someone among those who understand only their own language answer amen at the end of your thanksgiving, since they do not understand what you are saying?

16.3 — It is not that your action is not good, but others are not edified. (Saint Paul, 1st Corinthians, ch. xiv, vv. 11, 14, 16, 17.)

17 Prayer has value only through the thought attached to it; yet it is impossible to attach a thought to what we do not understand, for what we do not understand cannot touch the heart. For the vast majority, prayers in a language they do not understand are merely collections of words that say nothing to the mind.

17.2 For prayer to move us, each word must awaken an idea, and if we do not understand it, it cannot awaken any. We repeat it like a mere formula that has more or less virtue according to the number of times it is repeated; many pray out of duty, some even to conform to custom.

17.3 That is why they believe they have fulfilled their obligation when they have said a prayer a set number of times and in a particular order. God reads the depths of our hearts; he sees our thought and sincerity, and it is to belittle him to believe that he is more sensitive to form than to substance. (Ch. xxviii, no. 2.) On prayer for the dead and suffering Spirits.

18 Suffering Spirits ask for prayer; it is useful to them because, seeing that others are thinking of them, they feel less abandoned and are less unhappy. But prayer has a more direct effect upon them: it restores their courage, awakens in them the desire to rise through repentance and reparation, and can turn them away from thoughts of evil. It is in this sense that it can not only alleviate but shorten their sufferings. (See: Heaven and Hell, 2nd part: Examples.)

19 Some people do not accept prayer for the dead because, in their belief, there are only two alternatives for the soul: to be saved or condemned to eternal punishment, and in either case prayer is useless.

19.2 Without discussing the value of this belief, let us admit for a moment the reality of eternal and irrevocable punishment, and that our prayers are powerless to bring it to an end. We ask whether, on this assumption, it is logical, charitable, or Christian to reject prayer for the damned?

19.3 However powerless these prayers might be to deliver them, are they not a sign of pity that may soften their suffering? On earth, when a man is sentenced to life imprisonment, even if there were no hope of obtaining a pardon, is a charitable person forbidden to help support his chains to lighten their weight for him?

19.4 When someone suffers from an incurable illness, must we abandon them without any relief because there is no hope of recovery? Consider that among the damned there may be someone who was dear to you, a friend, perhaps a father, a mother, or a son, and because, according to you, they could not hope for pardon, would you refuse them a glass of water to quench their thirst?

19.5 A balm to dry their wounds? Would you not do for them what you would do for a galley convict? Would you not give them a sign of love, a consolation? No, that would not be Christian. A belief that dries up the heart cannot be reconciled with belief in a God who places love of one's neighbor first among our duties.

19.6 The fact that punishment is not eternal does not imply a denial of temporary punishment, for God, in his justice, cannot treat good and evil alike. To deny the effectiveness of prayer in this case would be to deny the effectiveness of consolation, encouragement, and good advice; it would be to deny the strength we draw from the moral support of those who wish us well.

20 Others base their objections on a more plausible reason: the immutability of divine decrees. God, they say, cannot change his decisions at the request of his creatures; otherwise nothing in the world would be stable. People therefore have nothing to ask of God; they need only submit to him and worship him.

This idea contains a false application of the immutability of divine law, or rather, ignorance of that law as it concerns future punishment. This law is revealed by the Spirits of the Lord, now that humanity is mature enough to understand what, in faith, agrees with or contradicts the divine attributes.

According to the dogma of the absolute eternity of punishment, no account is taken of the guilty person's regrets or repentance; for them, any desire to improve is useless: they are condemned to remain in evil forever. If they are condemned for a fixed time, the punishment will cease when that time has expired; but who can say that by then they will have re-

turned to better feelings? Who can say that, like many convicts on earth when they leave prison, they will not be as wicked as before? In the first case, it would mean keeping a person who has returned to goodness in the pain of punishment; in the second, pardoning someone who has remained guilty. God's law is more farsighted than that; always just, fair, and merciful, it sets no duration for punishment, whatever it may be; it can be summed up as follows:

21 "A person always suffers the consequences of their faults; there is not a single violation of God's law that does not have its punishment.

"The severity of the punishment is proportionate to the seriousness of the fault.

"The duration of the punishment for any fault is indefinite; it depends on the guilty person's repentance and return to goodness; the punishment lasts as long as persistence in evil; it would be everlasting if that persistence were everlasting; it is brief if repentance is prompt.

"As soon as the guilty person cries out for mercy, God hears them and sends them hope. But simply regretting the evil is not enough: amends must be made; this is why the guilty person undergoes new trials in which, always through their own will, they can do good to make amends for the evil they have done.

"A person is thus constantly the arbiter of their own fate; they can shorten their torment or prolong it indefinitely; their happiness or unhappiness depends on their willingness to do good."

Such is the law; an unchanging law consistent with God's goodness and justice.

The guilty and unhappy Spirit can therefore always save itself: God's law

tells it under what condition it can do so. What it most often lacks is the will, the strength, the courage; if, through our prayers, we inspire it with that will, if we support and encourage it; if, through our advice, we give it the understanding it lacks, instead of asking God to depart from his law, we become instruments for carrying out his law of love and charity, in which he thus allows us to take part by ourselves giving proof of charity. (See Heaven and Hell, Part 1, ch. iv, vii, viii.)

22 Instructions from the Spirits: How to pray

The first duty of every human creature, the first act that should mark their return to the active life of each day, is prayer. Almost all of you pray, but how few know how to pray! What do the phrases you mechanically string together matter to the Lord, when you do so because you are used to them, because it is a duty you perform, and because, like every duty, it weighs on you?

The prayer of the Christian, of the Spiritist of whatever faith, should be offered as soon as the spirit has again taken on the yoke of the flesh; it should rise to the feet of the divine majesty with humility, with depth, in an outpouring of gratitude for all the blessings granted up to this day: for the night just passed, during which you were allowed, although without your knowledge, to return to your friends and guides, to draw greater strength and perseverance from contact with them. It should rise humbly to the Lord's feet, to entrust your weakness to him and ask for his support, his indulgence, his mercy. It should be profound, for it is your soul that must rise toward the Creator, that must be transfigured like Jesus on Tabor, and arrive white and radiant with hope and love.

Your prayer should include a request for the graces you need, but truly

need. It is therefore useless to ask the Lord to shorten your trials, to give you joys and wealth; ask him to grant you the more precious gifts of patience, resignation, and faith. Do not say, as so many of you do: "There is no point in praying, since God does not answer me." What do you ask God for most of the time? Have you often thought of asking him for your moral improvement? Oh, no, very rarely; instead, you think of asking him for success in your earthly undertakings, and you have cried out: "God does not concern himself with us; if he did, there would not be so much injustice." Foolish people! Ungrateful people! If you searched the depths of your conscience, you would almost always find within yourselves the starting point of the troubles you complain of; therefore, before all else, ask for your improvement, and you will see what a torrent of graces and consolations will pour over you. (Ch. v, no. 4.)

You must pray without ceasing, without having to withdraw to your prayer room or fall to your knees in public squares. The prayer of the day is the fulfillment of your duties, all your duties without exception, whatever their nature. Is it not an act of love toward the Lord to help your brothers and sisters in any need, moral or physical? Is it not an act of gratitude to raise your thoughts to him when something happy happens to you, when an accident is avoided, when even a difficulty merely brushes past you, if you say in your thoughts: Blessed be you, my Father! Is it not an act of contrition to humble yourself before the supreme judge when you feel you have done wrong, even if only through a fleeting thought, and to say to him: Forgive me, my God, for I have sinned through pride, selfishness, or lack of charity; give me the strength to do wrong no more and the courage to make amends?

This is separate from the regular prayers of morning and evening, and of

days set aside for worship; but, as you see, prayer can belong to every moment without interrupting your work; offered in this way, it sanctifies it instead. And be assured that a single one of these thoughts coming from the heart is more readily heard by your heavenly Father than long prayers said out of habit, often without any particular reason, and to which the appointed hour mechanically calls you back. (V. Monod. Bordeaux, 1862.)

23 The joy of prayer

Come, you who wish to believe: the heavenly Spirits hasten to you and come to announce great things; God, my children, opens his treasures to give you all his blessings. Unbelieving people! If you knew how much good faith does the heart, and how it leads the soul to repentance and prayer! Prayer! Ah, how touching are the words that come from the mouth at the hour of prayer! Prayer is the divine dew that dispels the excessive heat of the passions; the eldest daughter of faith, it leads us along the path that brings us to God. In contemplation and solitude, you are with God; for you, there is no more mystery: he reveals himself to you. Apostles of thought, for you this is life; your soul frees itself from matter and moves through those infinite, ethereal worlds that poor human beings fail to understand. Walk, walk along the paths of prayer, and you will hear the voices of angels. What harmony! It is no longer the confused noise and shrill sounds of the earth; it is the lyres of the archangels; it is the gentle, sweet voices of the seraphim, lighter than the morning breezes as they play in the foliage of your great woods. Through what delights you will walk! Your tongues will be unable to describe this happiness, so fully will it enter through every pore, so fresh and refreshing is the spring from which we drink in prayer! Sweet voices, intoxicating fragrances that the soul hears

and savors when it soars into those unknown spheres inhabited through prayer! Unmixed with fleshly desires, all aspirations are divine. You too, pray! Like Christ carrying his cross from Golgotha to Calvary, carry your cross, and you will feel the gentle emotions that passed through his soul, though he was burdened with a shameful piece of wood; he was going to die, but to live the heavenly life in his Father's dwelling. (Saint Augustine. Paris, 1861.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

XXVIII. COLLECTION OF SPIRITIST PRAYERS

✦

[1] Preamble.

The Spirits have always said: “Form is nothing, thought is everything. Let each of you pray according to your convictions and in the way that moves you most; a good thought is worth more than many words in which the heart plays no part.”

The Spirits prescribe no fixed formula for prayers; when they provide one, it is to focus people's thoughts, and above all to draw attention to certain principles of Spiritist doctrine. It is also to help people who find it difficult to express their ideas, for some would not believe they had truly prayed unless their thoughts were put into words.

The collection of prayers contained in this chapter is a selection from those dictated by the Spirits on different occasions; they may have dictated others, in other words, suited to certain ideas or particular cases, but the form matters little if the underlying thought is the same. The purpose of prayer is to raise our soul to God; the diversity of formulas should create no distinction between those who believe in him, and still less between followers of Spiritism, for God accepts them all when they are sincere.

This collection should therefore be regarded not as a fixed prayer book, but as one variety of the instructions given by the Spirits. It is an application of the principles of Gospel morality developed in this book, a supplement to their dictated teachings on duties toward God and our neighbor, recalling all the principles of the doctrine.

Spiritism recognizes the prayers of all faiths as good when they are spoken from the heart and not merely with the lips; it imposes none and condemns none. In its view, God is too great to reject a voice that implores him or sings his praises because it does so in one way rather than another. Anyone who condemned prayers that were not in their own prayer book would show that they failed to understand God's greatness. To believe that God insists on a formula is to attribute to him the pettiness and passions of humanity.

An essential condition of prayer, according to Saint Paul (ch. xxvii, no. 4 6), is that it be intelligible, so that it may speak to our mind; for this, it is not enough that it be spoken in a language understood by the person praying. There are prayers in the common language that convey little more to the mind than if they were in a foreign language, and for that very reason do not reach the heart; the few ideas they contain are often smothered beneath an excess of words and the mysticism of the language.

The chief quality of prayer is to be clear, simple, and concise, without needless phrasing or lavish epithets that are merely glittering ornaments; every word should carry meaning, awaken an idea, stir a feeling: in a word, it should make us reflect. Only on this condition can prayer achieve its purpose; otherwise it is merely noise. Notice, then, how distractedly and rapidly prayers are usually said; we see the lips moving, but the facial expression and even the sound of the voice reveal a mechanical, purely outward act to which the soul remains indifferent.

The prayers brought together in this collection are divided into five categories: 1° General prayers; 2° Prayers for oneself; 3° Prayers for the living; 4° Prayers for the dead; 5° Special prayers for the sick and those under spirit obsession.

To draw particular attention to the purpose of each prayer and make its meaning better understood, each is preceded by a preliminary instruction, a kind of statement of reasons, under the title of preface.

[2] I. General Prayers. The Lord's Prayer

Preface. The Spirits have recommended placing the Lord's Prayer at the beginning of this collection, not only as a prayer, but also as a statement of faith. Of all prayers, this is the one they rank first, both because it comes from Jesus himself (Saint Matthew, ch. v, vv. 9 to 13) and because it can take the place of all others, according to the thought attached to it; it is the most perfect model of conciseness, a true masterpiece of sublimity in its simplicity. Indeed, in the briefest form, it sums up all of humanity's duties toward God, toward oneself, and towards one's neighbor; it contains a profession of faith, an act of worship and submission, a request for life's necessities, and the principle of charity. To say it on someone's behalf is to ask for them what one would ask for oneself.

Yet precisely because of its brevity, the profound meaning contained in the few words that compose it escapes most people; this is why it is generally said without directing one's thoughts to the applications of each of its parts. It is said as a formula whose effectiveness is proportional to the number of times it is repeated; and this is almost always one of the cabalistic numbers three, seven, or nine, drawn from the ancient superstitious belief in the power of numbers and used in magical practices.

To remedy the vagueness that this prayer's conciseness leaves in the mind, on the advice and with the assistance of the good Spirits, a commentary

has been added to each statement, expanding its meaning and showing its applications. Depending on the circumstances and the time available, the Lord's Prayer may therefore be said in its simple or expanded form.

[3] Prayer. (1).

— I. Our Father, who are in heaven, may your name be hallowed!

We believe in you, Lord, because everything reveals your power and your goodness. The harmony of the universe bears witness to a wisdom, a prudence and a foresight that surpass all human faculties; the name of a supremely great and wise being is inscribed in all the works of creation, from the blade of grass and the smallest insect to the stars that move through space; everywhere we see proof of fatherly care; therefore blind is the one who does not recognize you in your works, proud is the one who does not glorify you, and ungrateful is the one who does not give you thanks.

II. May your kingdom come!

Lord, you have given human beings laws full of wisdom, which would bring them happiness if they observed them. With these laws, they would establish peace and justice among themselves; they would help one another instead of harming one another as they do; the strong would support the weak instead of crushing them; they would avoid the evils caused by abuses and excesses of every kind. All the miseries of this world come from the violation of your laws, for there is not a single transgression that does not have its fatal consequences.

You have given the animal the instinct that marks out the limits of its needs, and it follows this instinct mechanically; but to human beings, besides this instinct, you have given intelligence and reason; you have also

given them the freedom to observe or break those of your laws that concern them personally, that is, to choose between good and evil, so that they may have the merit and responsibility for their actions.

No one can plead ignorance of your laws, for in your fatherly foresight you have willed that they should be engraved in everyone's conscience, without distinction of religion or nation; those who violate them do so because they fail to recognize you.

A day will come when, according to your promise, everyone will practice them; then unbelief will have disappeared; everyone will recognize you as the sovereign Master of all things, and the reign of your laws will be your reign on earth.

May you, Lord, hasten its coming by giving human beings the light they need to guide them along the path of truth.

III. May your will be done on earth as in heaven!

If submission is a son's duty toward his father, and a subordinate's toward a superior, how much greater must be that of the creature toward its Creator! To do your will, Lord, is to observe your laws and submit without complaint to your divine decrees; human beings will submit to them when they understand that you are the source of all wisdom, and that without you they can do nothing; then they will do your will on earth as the chosen do in heaven.

IV. Give us our daily bread.

Give us food to maintain the strength of the body; give us also spiritual food for the development of our Spirit.

The animal finds its food, but human beings owe theirs to their own activity and the resources of their intelligence, because you created them free.

You told them: “You shall draw your food from the earth by the sweat of

your brow;" in this way, you made work an obligation for them, so that they might exercise their intelligence by seeking ways to provide for their needs and well-being, some through physical work, others through intellectual work; without work, they would remain at a standstill and could not aspire to the happiness of higher Spirits.

You assist the person of goodwill who trusts in you for necessities, but not the one who delights in idleness and would like to obtain everything without effort, nor the one who seeks what is superfluous. (Ch. xxv.)

How many succumb through their own fault, through their carelessness, their lack of foresight or their ambition, and because they would not be content with what you had given them! They are the makers of their own misfortune and have no right to complain, for they are punished through the very things in which they sinned. Yet even these you do not abandon, because you are infinitely merciful; you extend a helping hand to them as soon as, like the prodigal child, they sincerely return to you. (Ch. v, no. 4.)

Before complaining of our lot, let us ask ourselves whether it is our own doing; with every misfortune that befalls us, let us ask ourselves whether we could have prevented it; but let us also say that God has given us intelligence to pull ourselves out of the mire, and that it is up to us to use it.

Since the law of work is the condition of human life on earth, give us the courage and strength to fulfill it; give us also prudence, foresight and moderation, so that we may not lose its fruits.

Give us, then, Lord, our daily bread, that is, the means to acquire through work the things necessary for life, for no one has the right to demand what is superfluous.

If we are unable to work, we trust in your divine providence.

If it is part of your purposes to test us through the harshest privations de-

spite our efforts, we accept them as a just atonement for the faults we may have committed in this life or in a previous life, for you are just; we know that no suffering is undeserved, and that you never punish without cause.

Keep us, O my God, from feeling envy toward those who possess what we do not have, or even toward those who have more than they need while we lack necessities. Forgive them if they forget the law of charity and love of one's neighbor that you have taught them. (Ch. xvi, no. 8.)

Banish also from our minds the thought of denying your justice when we see the prosperity of the wicked and the misfortune that sometimes overwhelms the good. We now know, thanks to the new light you have been pleased to give us, that your justice is always fulfilled and fails no one; that the material prosperity of the wicked is as fleeting as their bodily existence, and that it will bring terrible reversals, while the joy reserved for those who suffer with resignation will be eternal. (Ch. v, nos. 7, 9,

V. Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who owe us, — Forgive us our offenses, as we forgive those who have offended us.

Each of our transgressions against your laws, Lord, is an offense against you and a debt incurred that we shall sooner or later have to repay. We ask your infinite mercy to forgive it, promising to make every effort not to incur new ones.

You have made charity an express law for us; but charity consists not only in helping our fellow beings in need; it also lies in forgetting and forgiving offenses. By what right could we ask for your indulgence if we ourselves fail to show it toward those of whom we have reason to complain?

Give us, O my God, the strength to stifle in our souls all resentment, all hatred and all bitterness; let death not take us by surprise with a desire for revenge in our hearts. If it pleases you to take us from this world this very

day, let us present ourselves before you free of all animosity, following the example of Christ, whose last words were for his executioners. (Ch. x.)

The persecutions the wicked make us endure are part of our earthly trials; we must accept them without complaint, like all other trials, and refrain from cursing those who, through their wickedness, open the path to eternal happiness for us, for you have told us through the mouth of Jesus: "Blessed are those who suffer for righteousness!" Let us therefore bless the hand that strikes and humbles us, for the wounds of the body strengthen our souls, and we shall be raised from our lowliness. (Ch. xii, Blessed be your name, Lord, for teaching us that our fate is not irrevocably fixed after death; that in other existences we shall find the means to atone for and repair our past faults, to accomplish in a new life what we cannot do in this one for our advancement. (Ch. iv; ch. v, no. 5.)

This at last explains all the apparent anomalies of life; it is the light cast upon our past and our future, the radiant sign of your sovereign justice and your infinite goodness.

VI. Do not abandon us to temptation, but deliver us from evil \ Give us, Lord, the strength to resist the suggestions of evil Spirits who might try to turn us away from the path of goodness by inspiring evil thoughts in us.

But we ourselves are imperfect Spirits, incarnated on this earth to atone and improve ourselves. The primary cause of evil is within us, and evil Spirits merely take advantage of our vicious inclinations, which they foster in us, to tempt us.

Each imperfection is an open door to their influence, while they are powerless against perfect beings and abandon every attempt against them. Everything we might do to drive them away is useless unless we oppose them with an unwavering will for good and an absolute renunciation of

evil. It is therefore against ourselves that we must direct our efforts, and then evil Spirits will naturally withdraw, for evil attracts them, while good repels them. (See below, Prayers for Those Under Obsession.)

Lord, support us in our weakness; inspire in us, through the voice of our guardian angels and good Spirits, the will to correct our imperfections, so as to close off access to our souls to impure Spirits. (See below, no. II.)

Evil is not your work, Lord, for the source of all good can bring forth nothing evil; we ourselves create it by breaking your laws, and through the misuse we make of the freedom you have given us. When human beings observe your laws, evil will disappear from the earth, as it has already disappeared from more advanced worlds. Evil is not an inevitable necessity for anyone, and it seems irresistible only to those who willingly surrender to it. If we have the will to do evil, we can also have the will to do good; that is why, 6 my God, we ask for your assistance and that of good Spirits to resist temptation.

VII. So be it.

May it please you, Lord, that our wishes be fulfilled! But we bow before your infinite wisdom. In all things that we are not granted to understand, let it be done according to your holy will and not our own, for you desire only our good, and you know better than we do what is useful to us.

We address this prayer to you, O my God, for ourselves; we also address it to you for all suffering souls, incarnate or discarnate, for our friends and our enemies, for all those who ask for our assistance, and in particular for N....

We call down your mercy and your blessing upon all.

Note. Here one may state what one thanks God for, and what one asks for oneself or for others. (See below, prayers nos. 26, 27.)

(1) Some translations read: Do not lead us into temptation (et ne nos inducas in tentationem); this expression would suggest that temptation comes from God, that he deliberately drives human beings to evil, a blasphemous thought that would equate God with Satan, and cannot have been that of Jesus. It is, moreover, consistent with the common doctrine concerning the role of demons. (See Heaven and Hell, ch. x, Demons.)

[4] Spiritist Meetings

Wherever two or three people are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (Saint Matthew, ch. xviii, v. 20.)

[5] Preface. To be gathered in the name of Jesus does not mean that it is enough to be physically together, but that we must be united spiritually, through a shared intention and thoughts directed toward good; then Jesus is in the midst of the assembly, either himself or through the pure Spirits who represent him. Spiritism helps us understand how Spirits can be among us. They are there with their fluidic or spiritual bodies, and with the appearance by which we would recognize them if they made themselves visible. The higher they stand in the hierarchy, the greater their power to radiate outward; this is how they possess the gift of ubiquity and can be in several places at once: a ray of their thought is enough for this.

Through these words, Jesus wished to show the effect of unity and fellowship; it is not the greater or smaller number that draws him, since, instead of two or three people, he could have said ten or twenty, but the feeling of charity that inspires them towards one another; for this, two are enough. But if these two people each pray separately, although they address Jesus, there is no communion of thought between them, especially if they are not moved by a feeling of mutual goodwill; if they even regard each other

with hostility, hatred, envy, or jealousy, the fluidic currents of their thoughts repel one another instead of joining in a shared impulse of sympathy, and then they are not gathered in the name of Jesus; Jesus is merely the pretext for the gathering, and not its true motive. (Ch. xxvii, no. 9.)

This does not imply that he is deaf to the voice of a single person; if he did not say, "I will come to whoever calls upon me," it is because he requires above all love of one's neighbor, of which greater proof can be given when several people are together than in isolation, and because every selfish feeling drives him away; it follows that if, in a large assembly, only two or three people unite in heart through a feeling of true charity, while the others isolate themselves and concentrate on selfish or worldly thoughts, he will be with the former and not with the others. It is therefore not the simultaneous utterance of words, singing, or outward actions that constitutes a gathering in the name of Jesus, but the communion of thoughts in keeping with the spirit of charity personified in Jesus. (Ch. x, nos. 7, 8; ch. xxvii, nos. 2, 3, 4.)

Such must be the character of serious Spiritist gatherings, those in which the assistance of good Spirits is sincerely desired.

6 Prayer. (At the beginning of the gathering). — We pray to the Lord God Almighty to send us good Spirits to assist us, to keep away those who might lead us into error, and to give us the light we need to distinguish truth from deception.

Keep away also the ill-intentioned Spirits, incarnate or discarnate, who might try to sow discord among us and turn us away from charity and love of our neighbor. If any should seek to enter here, let them find no access to the heart of any one of us.

Good Spirits who graciously come to instruct us, make us receptive to your counsel; turn us away from every thought of selfishness, pride, envy, and jealousy; inspire us with forbearance and goodwill toward our fellow beings, present or absent, friends or enemies; finally, let us recognize your beneficial influence through the feelings that inspire us.

Give the mediums whom you will entrust with conveying your teachings to us an awareness of the holiness of the mission entrusted to them and the seriousness of the act they are about to perform, so that they may bring to it the necessary fervor and inner composure.

If there should be people in the assembly drawn here by feelings other than a desire for good, open their eyes to the light, and forgive them, as we forgive them if they come with ill intentions.

We pray especially to the Spirit of N..., our spiritual guide, to assist us and watch over us.

7 (At the end of the gathering.) — We thank the good Spirits who have kindly come to communicate with us; we ask them to help us put into practice the instructions they have given us, and to grant that, upon leaving here, each of us may feel strengthened in the practice of goodness and love of our neighbor.

We also wish these instructions to benefit the suffering, ignorant, or morally corrupt Spirits who may have attended this gathering, and upon whom we call down God's mercy.

For mediums.

8 In the last days, says the Lord, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; your sons and your daughters will prophesy; your young men will have visions, and your old men dreams. — In those days I will pour out my Spirit

upon my menservants and my maidservants, and they will prophesy. (Acts, ch. ii, v. 17, 18.)

9 Preface. The Lord wished light to shine for all people and to reach everywhere through the voice of the Spirits, so that everyone might obtain proof of immortality; it is for this purpose that Spirits manifest themselves today in every part of the earth, and mediumship, which appears in people of all ages and walks of life, in men and women, in children and the elderly, is one of the signs that the foretold times are being fulfilled.

To understand the things of the visible world and discover the secrets of material nature, God gave human beings bodily sight, the senses, and special instruments; with the telescope they gaze into the depths of space, and with the microscope they have discovered the world of infinitely small things. To penetrate the invisible world, he gave them mediumship.

Mediums are the interpreters entrusted with conveying the teachings of the Spirits to humanity; or, better still, they are the material organs through which Spirits express themselves to make themselves understood by human beings. Their mission is holy, for its purpose is to open up the horizons of eternal life.

Spirits come to instruct human beings about their future destinies, in order to bring them back to the path of goodness, and not to spare them the material work they must accomplish here on earth for their advancement, nor to further their ambition and greed. Mediums must thoroughly understand this, so as not to misuse their faculty. Those who understand the seriousness of the mission entrusted to them carry it out with reverence; their conscience would reproach them, as for an act of sacrilege, if they turned into amusement and entertainment, for themselves or others, a fac-

ulty given for so serious a purpose, which brings them into contact with beings beyond the grave.

As interpreters of the teachings of the Spirits, mediums have an important role to play in the moral transformation taking place; the services they can render depend on the proper direction they give their faculty, for those who follow a wrong path do more harm than good to the cause of Spiritism; through the bad impressions they create, they delay many a conversion. This is why they will be called to account for the use they have made of a faculty given to them for the good of their fellow beings.

Mediums who wish to retain the assistance of good Spirits must work to improve themselves; those who wish to see their faculty grow and develop must themselves grow morally, and refrain from anything that might divert it from its providential purpose.

If good Spirits sometimes use imperfect instruments, it is to give them good advice and try to bring them back to goodness; but if they find hardened hearts, and if their advice goes unheeded, they withdraw, and the evil Spirits then have free rein. (Ch. xxiv, nos. 1 1, 12.)

Experience proves that, among those who fail to benefit from the advice they receive from good Spirits, communications, after shining with some brilliance for a time, gradually deteriorate and finally lapse into error, empty talk, or absurdity, an unmistakable sign that the good Spirits have withdrawn.

To obtain the assistance of good Spirits and keep away frivolous and deceitful Spirits must be the object of the constant efforts of all serious mediums; without this, mediumship is a barren faculty that may even harm the person who possesses it, for it can degenerate into dangerous obsession.

Mediums who understand their duty, instead of taking pride in a faculty

that does not belong to them, since it can be taken away, attribute to God the good things they obtain. If their communications deserve praise, they take no vanity in them, because they know that these are independent of their personal merit, and they thank God for allowing good Spirits to come and manifest themselves to them. If the communications give rise to criticism, they take no offense, because these are not the work of their own Spirit; they tell themselves that they have not been a good instrument, and that they do not possess all the qualities needed to resist the interference of evil Spirits; this is why they strive to acquire these qualities and ask, through prayer, for the strength they lack.

10 Prayer. — Almighty God, allow the good Spirits to assist me in the communication I seek. Protect me from the presumption of believing myself safe from evil Spirits; from the pride that might mislead me about the value of what I receive; from every feeling contrary to charity toward other mediums. If I am led into error, inspire someone to warn me, and inspire in me the humility that will enable me to accept criticism with gratitude and to apply to myself, and not to others, the advice the good Spirits may be kind enough to give me. If I should be tempted to misuse in any way, or to take pride in, the faculty you have been pleased to grant me, I ask you to take it away from me rather than allow it to be diverted from its providential purpose, which is the good of all and my own moral advancement.

IL Prayers for oneself. To Guardian Angels and Protective Spirits.

1 i. Preface. We all have a good Spirit who has attached himself to us from birth and taken us under his protection. He fulfills toward us the mission of a father toward his child: to lead us along the path of goodness and progress through the trials of life. He is happy when we respond to his

care; he grieves when he sees us fall.

His name matters little to us, for he may have no name known on earth; we then invoke him as our guardian angel, our good spirit; we may even invoke him under the name of any higher Spirit for whom we feel a particular affinity.

Besides our guardian angel, who is always a higher Spirit, we have protective Spirits who, though less elevated, are no less good and benevolent; they are relatives, friends, or sometimes people we have not known in our present existence. They assist us through their advice, and often through their intervention in the actions of our lives.

Kindred Spirits are those who attach themselves to us through a certain similarity of tastes and inclinations; they may be good or evil, according to the nature of the inclinations that draw them to us.

Tempting Spirits strive to turn us away from the path of goodness by suggesting evil thoughts to us. They take advantage of all our weaknesses as so many open doors giving them access to our souls. Some pursue us relentlessly as though we were prey, but they withdraw when they recognize their powerlessness to contend with our will.

God has given us a principal and higher guide in our guardian angel, and secondary guides in our protective and familiar Spirits; but it is a mistake to believe that we necessarily have an evil spirit placed near us to counterbalance good influences. Evil Spirits come of their own accord, according to the hold they find upon us through our weakness or our neglect in following the inspirations of good Spirits; it is therefore we who attract them. It follows that we are never deprived of the assistance of good Spirits, and that it is up to us to keep the evil ones away. Through his imperfections, man, being the primary cause of the miseries he endures, is most often his

own evil spirit. (Ch. v, no. 4.) Prayer to guardian angels and protective Spirits should aim to seek their intercession with God, to ask them for the strength to resist evil suggestions, and for their assistance in the needs of life.

12 Prayer. — Wise and benevolent Spirits, messengers of God, whose mission is to assist human beings and lead them along the right path, sustain me through the trials of this life; give me the strength to endure them without complaint; turn evil thoughts away from me, and grant that I may give access to none of the evil Spirits who might try to lead me into evil. Enlighten my conscience about my faults, and lift from my eyes the veil of pride that might prevent me from seeing them and admitting them to myself.

You especially, N..., my guardian angel, who watch over me with particular care, and all you protective Spirits who take an interest in me, help me to make myself worthy of your benevolence. You know my needs; may they be met according to God's will.

13 (Another). — My God, allow the good Spirits who surround me to come to my aid when I am in distress, and to support me if I falter. Grant, Lord, that they may inspire me with faith, hope, and charity; that they may be a support, a hope, and a proof of your mercy to me; grant, finally, that I may find with them the strength I lack in the trials of life, and, to resist the suggestions of evil, the faith that saves and the love that comforts.

14. (Another). — Beloved Spirits, guardian angels, you whom God, in his infinite mercy, allows to watch over human beings, be our protectors in the trials of our earthly life. Give us strength, courage, and resignation; inspire us with all that is good, hold us back on the slope toward evil; may

your gentle influence penetrate our souls; let us feel that a devoted friend is there, near us, who sees our sufferings and shares our joys.

And you, my good angel, do not abandon me; I need all your protection to bear with faith and love the trials that God may be pleased to send me.

To keep evil Spirits away,

lo. Woe to you, hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees, because you clean the outside of the cup and the dish, while within you are full of plunder and impurities. — Blind Pharisees, first clean the inside of the cup and the dish, so that the outside may also be clean. — Woe to you, hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful in human eyes, but within are full of every kind of decay. — So you outwardly appear righteous in human eyes, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquities. (Saint Matthew, ch. xxiii, vv. 25 to 28.)

16 Preface. Evil Spirits go only where they find something to satisfy their perversity; to keep them away, it is not enough to ask, or even to command them: we must remove from ourselves whatever attracts them.

16.2 Evil Spirits scent the wounds of the soul as flies scent the wounds of the body; just as you clean the body to avoid vermin, also cleanse the soul of its impurities to avoid evil Spirits. As we live in a world teeming with evil Spirits, the good qualities of the heart do not always protect us from their attempts, but they give us the strength to resist them.

17 Prayer. — In the name of Almighty God, may evil Spirits withdraw from me, and may good Spirits serve as my shield against them!

Malicious Spirits who inspire evil thoughts in human beings; deceitful and lying Spirits who mislead them; mocking Spirits who play upon their

credulity, I reject you with all the strength of my soul and close my ears to your suggestions; but I call down God's mercy upon you.
Good Spirits who deign to assist me, give me the strength to resist the influence of evil Spirits, and the understanding needed to avoid being deceived by their tricks. Protect me from pride and presumption; remove from my heart jealousy, hatred, ill will, and every feeling contrary to charity, which are so many open doors to the Spirit of evil.

18 To ask for help in correcting a fault
Preface. Our evil instincts result from the imperfection of our own Spirit, and not from our bodily constitution; otherwise, human beings would escape every kind of responsibility. Our improvement depends on us, for every person in possession of their faculties has, in all things, the freedom to act or not to act; all they lack to do good is the will. (Ch. xv, no. 10; ch. xix, no. 12.)

19 Prayer. — You have given me, O my God, the intelligence needed to distinguish good from evil; therefore, once I recognize that something is evil, I am guilty if I do not strive to resist it.
Protect me from the pride that might prevent me from noticing my faults, and from the evil Spirits who might urge me to persist in them.
Among my imperfections, I recognize that I am particularly inclined to..., and if I do not resist this impulse, it is because of the habit I have acquired of yielding to it.
You did not create me guilty, because you are just, but with an equal capacity for good and for evil; if I have followed the wrong path, it is through the exercise of my free will. But because I have had the freedom to do evil, I have the freedom to do good, and consequently the freedom to change

course.

My present faults are remnants of the imperfections I have retained from my previous existences; this is my original sin, which I can rid myself of through my will and with the assistance of good Spirits.

Good Spirits who protect me, and especially you, my guardian angel, give me the strength to resist evil suggestions and to emerge victorious from the struggle.

Faults are the barriers that separate us from God, and every fault overcome is a step along the path of advancement that must bring me closer to him.

The Lord, in his infinite mercy, has deigned to grant me this present existence so that it might serve my advancement; good Spirits, help me to make use of it, so that it may not be wasted on me, and so that, when God is pleased to take me from it, I may leave it better than I entered it (Ch. v, no. 5; ch. xvii, To ask for help in resisting a temptation.

20 Preface. Every evil thought can have two sources: the imperfection of our own soul, or a harmful influence acting upon it; in the latter case, it always indicates a weakness that makes us susceptible to this influence, and consequently an imperfect soul; thus, someone who does wrong cannot invoke the influence of another Spirit as an excuse, since that Spirit would not have urged them toward evil if he had judged them beyond temptation.

When an evil thought arises within us, we can therefore picture a malevolent Spirit urging us toward evil, whose urging we are just as free to yield to or resist as if it came from a living person. At the same time, we must picture our guardian angel, or protective Spirit, who, for his part, combats the evil influence within us and anxiously awaits the decision we are about

to make. Our hesitation to do evil is the voice of the good Spirit making itself heard through our conscience.

We recognize that a thought is evil when it departs from charity, which is the foundation of all true morality; when it springs from pride, vanity, or selfishness; when carrying it out may cause any harm to others; when, finally, it urges us to do to others what we would not wish to have done to us. (Ch. xxviii, no. 15; ch. xv, no. 10.)

21 Prayer. — Almighty God, do not let me succumb to the temptation to do wrong. Benevolent Spirits who protect me, turn this evil thought away from me, and give me the strength to resist the suggestion of evil. If I succumb, I will have deserved to atone for my fault in this life and the next, because I am free to choose.

22 Thanksgiving for a victory over temptation

Preface. Whoever has resisted a temptation owes it to the assistance of the good Spirits whose voice they have heeded. They must thank God and their guardian angel for it.

23 Prayer. — My God, I thank you for allowing me to emerge victorious from the struggle I have just endured against evil; may this victory give me the strength to resist new temptations.

And you, my guardian angel, I thank you for the help you have given me. May my obedience to your advice make me worthy of your protection once again!

24 To ask for advice

Preface. When we are undecided whether or not to do something, we must first ask ourselves the following questions:

1° Could the thing I hesitate to do cause any harm to others? 2° Could it be useful to anyone?

3° If someone did this to me, would I be pleased?

If the matter concerns only ourselves, we may weigh the personal advantages and disadvantages that may result from it.

If it concerns others, and doing good to one person might harm another, we must likewise weigh the good and the harm before deciding whether to refrain or act.

Finally, even with the best things, we must also consider the right moment and the surrounding circumstances, for something good in itself can have bad results in unskilled hands, and if it is not carried out with prudence and care. Before undertaking it, we should consider our strength and our means of carrying it out.

In all cases, we can always call upon the help of our protecting Spirits, remembering this wise saying: When in doubt, refrain. (Ch.xxvii, no. 38.)

25 Prayer. — In the name of Almighty God, good Spirits who protect me, inspire me with the best decision to make in my uncertainty. Guide my thoughts towards good, and turn away the influence of those who would try to lead me astray.

26 In the afflictions of life

Preface. We may ask God for earthly favors, and he may grant them when they serve a useful and serious purpose; but as we judge the usefulness of things from our own point of view, and our sight is limited to the present, we do not always see the bad side of what we wish for. God, who sees better than we do and desires only our good, may therefore refuse us, just as a father refuses his child something that could cause harm. If what we ask

for is not granted, we must not become discouraged; instead, we must consider that being deprived of what we desire is imposed upon us as a trial or an expiation, and that our reward will be in proportion to the resignation with which we have borne it. (Ch.xxvii, no.6; ch. 2, nos. 5, 6, 7.)

27 Prayer. — Almighty God, who see our miseries, graciously hear the wishes I address to you at this moment. If my request is ill-considered, forgive me; if it is just and useful in your eyes, may the good Spirits who carry out your will come to my aid in fulfilling it.

Whatever happens, my God, may your will be done. If my desires are not fulfilled, it is because your plans include putting me to the test, and I submit without complaint. Grant that I may not become discouraged, and that neither my faith nor my resignation may be shaken.

(State your request.)

28 Thanksgiving for a favor received

Preface. We must not regard only things of great importance as happy events; those that seem smallest are often the ones that most influence our destiny. People easily forget the good and are more likely to remember what afflicts them. If we recorded day by day the blessings we receive without having asked for them, we would often be astonished to have received so many that have faded from our memory, and humbled by our ingratitude.

Each evening, as we raise our souls to God, we should recall the favors he has granted us during the day and thank him for them. Above all, at the very moment when we experience the effects of his goodness and protection, we should spontaneously express our gratitude to him; a thought that acknowledges him as the source of the blessing is enough, without

any need to turn away from our work.

God's blessings do not consist only of material things; we must also thank him for the good ideas and happy inspirations suggested to us. While the proud take credit for them and unbelievers attribute them to chance, those who have faith give thanks for them to God and the good Spirits. Long phrases are unnecessary for this: "Thank you, my God, for the good thought inspired in me," says more than many words. The spontaneous impulse that leads us to attribute the good that happens to us to God shows a habit of gratitude and humility that wins us the sympathy of the good Spirits. (Gh, xxvn, nos. 7, 8.)

29 Prayer. — God of infinite goodness, may your name be blessed for the favors you have granted me; I would be unworthy of them if I attributed them to the chance of events or to my own merit.

Good Spirits who have carried out God's will, and you especially, my guardian angel, I thank you. Turn away from me the thought of taking pride in these favors, and of using them for anything other than good.

I thank you especially for...

30 Act of submission and resignation

Preface. When something afflicts us, if we look for its cause, we will often find that it is the consequence of our imprudence, our lack of foresight, or a previous action; in this case, we must blame only ourselves. If the cause of a misfortune is independent of anything we have done, it is either a trial for this life or an expiation for a past existence, and in the latter case, the nature of the expiation may reveal the nature of the fault, for we are always punished through that by which we have sinned. (Gh. v, nos. 4, 6 and following.)

In what afflicts us, we generally see only the present harm, and not the favorable consequences it may have later. Good often follows a passing evil, just as a sick person's recovery results from the painful means used to bring it about. In all cases, we must submit to God's will and courageously bear the tribulations of life, if we wish to be given credit for them and to have these words of Christ applied to us: Blessed are those who suffer. (Ch. v.)

31 Prayer. — My God, you are supremely just; all suffering here below must therefore have its cause and its purpose. I accept the affliction I have just experienced as an expiation for my past faults and a trial for the future. Good Spirits who protect me, give me the strength to bear it without complaint; may it be a salutary warning to me; may it increase my experience; may it combat pride, ambition, foolish vanity, and selfishness within me, and thus contribute to my advancement.

32 (Another.) — I feel, O my God, the need to pray to you to give me the strength to bear the trials you have been pleased to send me. Allow the light in my mind to grow bright enough for me to appreciate the full extent of a love that afflicts me in its desire to save me. I submit with resignation, O my God; but alas, your creature is so weak that, unless you sustain me, I fear I will succumb. Do not abandon me, Lord, for without you I can do nothing.

33 (Another.) — I raised my eyes to you, O Eternal One, and I felt strengthened. You are my strength, do not abandon me; O God! I am crushed beneath the weight of my iniquities! Help me; you know the weakness of my flesh, and you do not turn your eyes away from me!
I am consumed by a burning thirst; make the spring of living water flow,

and my thirst will be quenched. May my mouth open only to sing your praises and never to complain amid the afflictions of my life. I am weak, Lord, but your love will sustain me.

O Eternal One! You alone are great, you alone are the end and purpose of my life. May your name be blessed if you strike me, for you are the master and I the unfaithful servant; I will bow my head without complaint, for you alone are great, you alone are the goal.

34 In imminent danger

Preface. Through the dangers we face, God reminds us of our weakness and the fragility of our existence. He shows us that our life is in his hands, and that it hangs by a thread that may break when we least expect it. In this respect, no one is privileged, for the great and the humble are subject to the same possibilities.

If we examine the nature and consequences of the danger, we will see that most often these consequences, had they occurred, would have been the punishment for a fault committed or a duty neglected.

35 Prayer. — Almighty God, and you, my guardian angel, help me! If I must perish, may God's will be done. If I am saved, may the rest of my life make amends for the harm I may have done and for which I repent.

36 Thanksgiving after escaping danger

Preface. Through the danger we have faced, God shows us that at any moment we may be called to account for the use we have made of our lives; he thus warns us to look within ourselves and mend our ways.

37 Prayer. — My God, and you, my guardian angel, I thank you for the help you sent me in the danger that threatened me. May this danger be a warning to me, and may it enlighten me about the faults that may have brought it upon me. I understand, Lord, that my life is in your hands, and that you may take it from me whenever you please. Through the good Spirits who assist me, inspire me with the thought of making useful use of the time you still grant me here below.

My guardian angel, sustain me in my resolve to make amends for my wrongs and to do all the good within my power, so that I may enter the world of Spirits burdened with fewer imperfections when God is pleased to call me there.

38 At the moment of falling asleep

Preface. Sleep is rest for the body, but the Spirit has no need of rest. While the senses are numbed, the soul partly frees itself from matter and enjoys its faculties as a Spirit. Sleep was given to human beings to restore both their bodily and their moral strength. While the body recovers the elements it has lost through the activity of waking life, the Spirit goes to renew itself among other Spirits; from what it sees, what it hears, and the advice it is given, it draws ideas that it finds again upon waking in the form of intuition; it is the exile's temporary return to the true homeland; it is the prisoner briefly restored to freedom.

But, as with the wicked prisoner, the Spirit does not always use this moment of freedom for its advancement; if it has bad instincts, instead of seeking the company of good Spirits, it seeks that of its own kind and visits places where it can give free rein to its inclinations.

Let those who are deeply aware of this truth raise their thoughts as they

feel sleep approaching; let them call upon the counsel of the good Spirits and of those whose memory they cherish, so that these may come and join them during the short interval granted to them, and upon waking they will feel greater strength against evil and greater courage in adversity.

39 Prayer. — My soul is about to spend a moment with the other Spirits. May those who are good come to help me with their advice. My guardian angel, grant that upon waking I may retain a lasting and beneficial impression of it.

40 In anticipation of one's approaching death

Preface. Faith in the future and the elevation of thought during life toward future destinies help the Spirit to free itself swiftly by weakening the bonds that hold it to the body, and often bodily life has not yet ended when the impatient soul has already taken flight into the immensity. In a person, on the contrary, who concentrates all his thoughts on material things, these bonds are stronger, the separation is difficult and painful, and the awakening beyond the grave is full of confusion and anxiety.

41 Prayer. — My God, I believe in you and in your infinite goodness; that is why I cannot believe that you gave humanity the intelligence to know you and the longing for the future only to plunge it into nothingness.

I believe that my body is only the perishable covering of my soul, and that, when it has ceased to live, I shall awaken in the world of Spirits.

Almighty God, I feel the bonds that unite my soul to my body breaking, and soon I shall have to account for the use I have made of the life I am leaving.

I shall face the consequences of the good and evil I have done; there, no illusion or evasion is possible any longer; my entire past will unfold before

me, and I shall be judged according to my deeds.

I shall take none of the possessions of the earth with me; honors, riches, the satisfactions of vanity and pride, everything, in short, that belongs to the body will remain here below; not the smallest part will follow me, and none of it will be of the slightest help to me in the world of Spirits. I shall take with me only what belongs to the soul, that is, the good and bad qualities that will be weighed in the scales of strict justice, and I shall be judged all the more severely if my position on earth has given me more opportunities to do the good I have left undone. (Ch. xvi, no. 9.)

God of mercy, may my repentance reach you! Be pleased to extend your leniency to me.

If it should please you to prolong my existence, may the time that remains be spent repairing, as far as I am able, the harm I may have done. If my hour has struck beyond recall, I take with me the comforting thought that I shall be allowed to redeem myself through new trials, so that one day I may deserve the happiness of the elect.

If I am not granted the immediate enjoyment of that unalloyed bliss which belongs only to the supremely righteous, I know that hope is not forever denied me, and that through work I shall reach the goal, sooner or later, according to my efforts.

I know that good Spirits and my guardian angel are here, near me, to receive me; soon I shall see them as they see me. I know that I shall find again those I have loved on earth, if I have deserved it, and that those I leave behind will come to join me, so that one day we may all be reunited forever, and that meanwhile I shall be able to visit them.

I also know that I shall find again those I have wronged; may they forgive me for whatever they may have to reproach me for: my pride, my harsh-

ness, my injustices, and may they not overwhelm me with shame by their presence!

I forgive those who have harmed me or wished me harm on earth; I take no hatred toward them with me, and I pray to God to forgive them.

Lord, give me the strength to leave without regret the coarse joys of this world, which are nothing beside the pure joys of the world I am about to enter. There, for the righteous, there are no more torments, no more sufferings, no more miseries; only the guilty suffer, but hope remains for them.

Good Spirits, and you, my guardian angel, do not let me falter at this supreme moment; let the divine light shine before my eyes, to revive my faith if it should begin to waver.

Note. — See paragraph V below: Prayers for the sick and those under spiritual obsession.

III. Prayers for others.

For someone in affliction

42 If it is in the afflicted person's interest that his trial should run its course, it will not be shortened at our request; but it would be an act of impiety to become discouraged because the request is not granted; besides, if the trial does not end, we may hope to obtain some other consolation that will soften its bitterness.

42.2 What is truly useful to someone in distress is courage and resignation, without which what he endures brings him no benefit, because he will be obliged to begin the trial again.

42.3 It is therefore towards this goal that we must chiefly direct our efforts, whether by calling upon good Spirits to help him, by lifting the afflicted person's spirits ourselves through advice and encouragement, or, fi-

nally, by giving him material assistance, if possible.

42.4 Prayer, in this case, may also have a direct effect by directing a fluidic current toward the person to strengthen his morale. (Ch. v, nos. 5, 27; ch. xxvii, nos. 6, 40.)

43 Prayer. — My God, whose goodness is infinite, be pleased to soften the bitterness of N...'s situation, if such may be your will.
Good Spirits, in the name of Almighty God, I beg you to assist him in his afflictions. If, in his own interest, he cannot be spared them, help him understand that they are necessary for his advancement. Give him the trust in God and in the future that will make them less bitter for him. Give him also the strength not to succumb to despair, which would rob him of their benefit and make his future situation even more painful. Guide my thoughts toward him, and may they help sustain his courage.

44 Thanksgiving for a blessing granted to another
Preface. A person who is not ruled by selfishness rejoices in the good that comes to his neighbor, even when he has not asked for it through prayer.

45 Prayer. — My God, be blessed for the happiness that has come to N...
Good Spirits, help him see in it an effect of God's goodness. If the good that comes to him is a trial, inspire him with the thought of making good use of it and taking no vain pride in it, so that this good may not turn to his detriment in the future.
You, my good guiding spirit, who protect me and desire my happiness, keep every feeling of envy and jealousy from my thoughts.

46 For our enemies and those who wish us harm

Preface. Jesus said: Love even your enemies. This maxim is the highest expression of Christian charity; but by this Jesus does not mean that we should feel for our enemies the tenderness we feel for our friends; through these words he tells us to forget their offenses, to forgive them for the harm they do us, and to return good for evil. Besides the merit this brings in God's eyes, it shows true superiority in the eyes of others. (Ch. xii, nos. 3, 4.)

47 Prayer. — My God, I forgive N... for the harm he has done me and for the harm he wished to do me, just as I desire you to forgive me and him to forgive me himself for any wrongs I may have committed. If you have placed him on my path as a trial, may your will be done.

Turn away from me, O my God, the thought of cursing him and every malicious wish against him. Grant that I may feel no joy at the misfortunes that might befall him, nor any sorrow at the blessings that may be granted him, so that I may not stain my soul with thoughts unworthy of a Christian.

May your goodness, Lord, as it extends over him, bring him back to better feelings toward me!

Good Spirits, inspire me to forget evil and remember good. May neither hatred, nor resentment, nor the desire to return evil for evil enter my heart, for hatred and revenge belong only to evil Spirits, incarnate and disincarnate! May I, on the contrary, be ready to extend a brotherly hand to him, to return good for evil, and to come to his aid if it is in my power!

To test the sincerity of my words, I desire to be offered an opportunity to be of service to him; but above all, O my God, keep me from doing so out

of pride or ostentation, overwhelming him with a humiliating generosity that would rob me of the benefit of my action, for then I would deserve to have these words of Christ applied to me: You have already received your reward. (Ch. xiii, nos. 1 and following.)

48 Thanksgiving for the good granted to our enemies

Preface. Not wishing harm to one's enemies is only half of charity; true charity requires that we wish them well, and that we be happy about the good that comes to them. (Ch. xii, nos. 7, 8.)

49 Prayer. — My God, in your justice, you have seen fit to gladden the heart of N... I thank you on his behalf, despite the harm he has done me or has sought to do me. If he were to use it to humiliate me, I would accept it as a trial of my charity.

Good Spirits who protect me, do not allow me to feel any regret over this; turn away from me the envy and jealousy that debase; inspire me, on the contrary, with the generosity that elevates. Humiliation lies in evil and not in good, and we know that, sooner or later, justice will be done to each according to his deeds.

50 For the enemies of Spiritism

Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

You will be blessed when people heap curses upon you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. — Rejoice then, because a great reward is reserved for you in heaven, for this is how they persecuted the prophets who came before you. (Saint Matthew, ch. v, vv. 6, 10, 11, 12.)

Do not fear those who kill the body and cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Saint Matthew, ch. x, v. 28.)

51 Preface. Of all freedoms, the most inviolable is freedom of thought, which also includes freedom of conscience. To condemn those who do not think as we do is to claim this freedom for ourselves and deny it to others; it is to violate the first commandment of Jesus: charity and love of one's neighbor. To persecute them for their beliefs is to violate the most sacred right every person has: to believe what they see fit and to worship God as they understand him. To force them to perform outward acts like ours is to show that we value form more than substance, appearances more than conviction. Forced renunciation has never given anyone faith: it can only make hypocrites; it is an abuse of physical force that does not prove the truth; truth is sure of itself: it convinces and does not persecute, because it has no need to do so.

Spiritism is an opinion, a belief; even if it were a religion, why should people not have the freedom to call themselves Spiritists, just as they have the freedom to call themselves Catholics, Jews, or Protestants, followers of this or that philosophical doctrine, of this or that economic system? This belief is either false or true; if it is false, it will fall of its own accord, because error cannot prevail against truth when light dawns in people's minds; if it is true, persecution will not make it false.

Persecution is the baptism of every great and just new idea; it grows with the greatness and importance of the idea. The fierceness and anger of the idea's enemies are proportional to the fear it inspires in them. This is why Christianity was persecuted in the past and Spiritism is persecuted today,

with this difference, however: Christianity was persecuted by Pagans, while Spiritism is persecuted by Christians. The time of bloody persecutions has passed, it is true, but although people no longer kill the body, they torture the soul; they attack its most intimate feelings, its dearest affections; they divide families, stir up mothers against daughters, wives against husbands; they even attack the body's material needs by taking away a person's livelihood to subdue them through starvation. (Ch. xxiii, nos. 9 and following.)

Spiritists, do not be distressed by the blows dealt to you, for they prove that you stand in the truth; otherwise, you would be left in peace and would not be struck. This is a test of your faith, for it is by your courage, your resignation, and your perseverance that God will recognize you among his faithful servants, whom he is counting today in order to give each the share due according to their deeds.

Following the example of the first Christians, be proud, then, to carry your cross. Believe in the word of Christ, who said: “Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” He also said: “Love your enemies, do good to those who harm you, and pray for those who persecute you.” Show that you are his true disciples and that your doctrine is good by doing what he says and what he himself did.

Persecution will last only for a time; wait patiently, then, for the dawn to break, for the morning star is already appearing on the horizon. (Ch. xxiv, nos. 13 and following.)

52 Prayer. — Lord, through the mouth of Jesus, your Messiah, you have told us: “Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness; forgive your enemies; pray for those who persecute you”; and he himself showed us the way by praying for his executioners.

Following his example, my God, we call upon your mercy for those who disregard your divine precepts, the only ones that can ensure peace in this world and the next. Like Christ, we say to you: “Forgive them, my Father, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Give us the strength to bear with patience and resignation their mockery, insults, slander, and persecution, as tests of our faith and humility; turn us away from every thought of retaliation, for the hour of your justice will strike for everyone, and we await it in submission to your holy will.

53 Prayer for a Newborn Child

Preface. Spirits attain perfection only after passing through the trials of bodily life; those who are wandering await God's permission to take up another existence that will provide them with a means of advancement, either by atoning for their past faults through the hardships to which they are subjected, or by fulfilling a mission useful to humanity. Their advancement and future happiness will be proportional to the way they have used the time they must spend on earth. The responsibility of guiding their first steps and directing them toward goodness is entrusted to their parents, who will answer before God for the way they have fulfilled their charge. To make this task easier, God has made parental love and filial love a law of nature, a law that is never violated with impunity.

54 Prayer. (By the parents.) — Spirit who has become incarnate in the body of our child, welcome among us. Almighty God, who sent this spirit, blessed be you.

This is a trust placed in our care, for which we must one day give an account. If this spirit belongs to the new generation of good Spirits who are to populate the earth, thank you, O my God, for this favor! If it is an imperfect soul, our duty is to help it progress along the path of goodness through our advice and our good examples; if it falls into evil through our fault, we will answer for it before you, for we will not have fulfilled our mission toward it.

Lord, sustain us in our task, and give us the strength and the will to fulfill it. If this child is to be a source of trials for us, your will be done! Good Spirits who have come to preside over this child's birth and who are to accompany this child throughout life, do not abandon this child. Keep away the evil Spirits who might try to lead this child into evil; give this child the strength to resist their suggestions and the courage to endure with patience and resignation the trials that await on earth. (Ch. xiv, no. 9.)

55 Another. — My God, you have entrusted to me the fate of one of your Spirits; grant, Lord, that I may be worthy of the task laid upon me; grant me your protection; enlighten my understanding, so that I may discern early the tendencies of the one whom I must prepare to enter into your peace.

56 Another. — Most good God, since it has pleased you to allow the Spirit of this child to come once more to undergo the earthly trials intended to bring about its progress, give it light, so that it may learn to know you, love you, and worship you. Through your almighty power, let this soul be

renewed at the source of your divine teachings; under the protection of its guardian angel, may its understanding grow and develop, inspiring it to draw ever closer to you; may the science of Spiritism be the brilliant light that guides it through the perils of life; may it finally learn to appreciate the full extent of your love, which tests us in order to purify us.

Lord, cast a fatherly glance upon the family to whom you have entrusted this soul; may they understand the importance of their mission and nurture the good seeds in this child until the day when, through its own aspirations, it can rise toward you on its own.

Deign, O my God, to hear this humble prayer in the name and through the merits of Him who said: "Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like them."

For a Dying Person

57 Preface. The final struggle of dying is the prelude to the separation of soul and body; one might say that at this moment a person has only one foot left in this world and already has the other in the next.

57.2 This passage is sometimes painful for those who cling to matter and have lived more for the possessions of this world than for those of the next, or whose conscience is troubled by regret and remorse; for those, on the contrary, whose thoughts have risen toward the infinite and become detached from matter, the bonds are less difficult to break, and the final moments hold no pain; the soul then holds to the body by only a thread, whereas in the other condition it holds to it by deep roots; in every case, prayer has a powerful effect on the process of separation. (See below, Prayers for the Sick. — Heaven and Hell, part 2, ch. i, The Passage.)

58 Prayer. — Mighty and merciful God, here is a soul leaving its earthly covering to return to the world of Spirits, its true homeland; may it return there in peace, and may your mercy extend over it.

Good Spirits who have accompanied it on earth, do not abandon it at this supreme moment; give it the strength to bear the final sufferings it must endure here below for its future advancement; inspire it to devote the last glimmers of understanding that remain to it, or that might momentarily return, to repentance for its faults.

Guide my thought, so that its action may make the process of separation less painful and bring the consolations of hope into this soul at the moment of leaving the earth.

IV. Prayers for Those Who Are No Longer with Us For Someone Who Has Just Died.

59 Preface. Prayers for Spirits who have just left the earth are intended not only to offer them a token of sympathy, but also to help them free themselves and thereby shorten the confusion that always follows separation and make their awakening calmer. But here again, as in every other circumstance, their effectiveness lies in the sincerity of thought, and not in an abundance of words spoken with more or less pomp, in which the heart most often has no part.

Prayers that come from the heart resound around the Spirit, whose thoughts are still confused, like friendly voices that come to awaken us from sleep. (Ch. xxvii, no. 10.)

60 Prayer. — Almighty God, may your mercy extend to the soul of N..., whom you have just called back to you. May the trials he (or she) endured on earth be counted in his favor, and may our prayers ease and shorten the

suffering he may still endure as a Spirit!

Good Spirits who have come to receive him, and especially you, his guardian angel, assist him and help him free himself from matter; give him light and self-awareness, to draw him out of the confusion that accompanies the passage from bodily life to spiritual life. Inspire in him repentance for the faults he may have committed, and the desire to be allowed to make amends for them, to hasten his progress toward a blessed eternal life.

N..., you have just returned to the world of Spirits, and yet you are here among us; you see and hear us, for the only thing that now separates you from us is the perishable body you have just left, which will soon be reduced to dust.

You have left the coarse covering subject to the changes of life and to death, and have kept only the ethereal covering, imperishable and beyond the reach of suffering. Though you no longer live through the body, you live the life of Spirits, and that life is free from the miseries that afflict humanity.

You no longer have the veil that hides the splendors of the life to come from our eyes; from now on you will be able to contemplate new wonders, while we are still plunged in darkness.

You will travel through space and visit worlds in complete freedom, while we crawl painfully along the earth, where our material bodies hold us, like a heavy burden.

The horizon of infinity will unfold before you, and in the presence of such grandeur you will understand the vanity of our earthly desires, our worldly ambitions, and the fleeting pleasures in which people delight.

Death is only a brief material separation between people. From this place

of exile, where God's will still holds us, along with the duties we must fulfill here below, we will follow you in thought until we are allowed to join you, as you have joined those who went before you.

If we cannot come to you, you can come to us. Come, then, among those who love you and whom you have loved; support them through life's trials; watch over those dear to you; protect them as far as you can, and ease their sorrow with the thought that you are happier now, and with the comforting certainty that they will one day be reunited with you in a better world.

In the world where you are, all earthly resentments must fade away. For the sake of your future happiness, may you be beyond their reach from now on! Forgive, then, those who may have wronged you, as they forgive the wrongs you may have done them.

Note. — To this prayer, which applies to everyone, a few special words may be added according to particular family circumstances or relationships and the situation of the deceased.

If the deceased is a child, Spiritism teaches us that this is not a newly created Spirit, but one who has already lived and may already be very advanced. If the last existence was short, it was because it was only the completion of a trial, or was meant to be a trial for the parents. (Ch. v, no. 21.)

61 Another. — Almighty Lord, may your mercy extend to our brothers who have just left the earth! May your light shine before their eyes! Bring them out of darkness; open their eyes and ears! May your good Spirits surround them and let them hear words of peace and hope!

Lord, however unworthy we may be, we dare to implore your merciful indulgence for our brother who has just been called back from exile; let his

return be that of the prodigal child. Forget, O my God, the faults he may have committed, and remember the good he may have done. Your justice is unchanging, we know, but your love is immense; we beg you to temper your justice with that fountain of goodness that flows from you.

May there be light for you, my brother, who have just left the earth! May the good Spirits of the Lord come down to you, surround you, and help you shake off your earthly chains! Understand and behold the greatness of our master; submit without complaint to his justice, but never despair of his mercy. Brother! May earnest reflection on your past open the doors of the future to you by helping you understand the faults you leave behind you, and the work that remains for you to do to make amends for them! May God forgive you, and may his good Spirits support and encourage you! Your brothers on earth will pray for you and ask you to pray for them.

(1) This prayer was dictated to a medium in Bordeaux as the funeral procession of a stranger passed beneath his windows.

62 For Those We Have Loved

Preface. How dreadful is the thought of nothingness! How pitiful are those who believe that the voice of a friend mourning a friend is lost in the void and finds no echo to answer it! Those who think that everything dies with the body have never known pure and holy affection; that the genius who enlightened the world with his vast intelligence is a play of matter extinguished forever like a breath; that of the dearest being, a father, a mother, or a beloved child, nothing remains but a little dust that time scatters beyond recall!

How can a person with a heart remain unmoved by this thought? How can the idea of absolute annihilation fail to chill him with dread and make

him at least wish it were otherwise? If until now his reason has not been enough to dispel his doubts, Spiritism now comes to remove all uncertainty about the future through the material proofs it gives of the soul's survival and the existence of beings beyond the grave. These proofs are therefore welcomed with joy everywhere; confidence is reborn, for people now know that earthly life is only a short passage leading to a better life; that their labors here below are not lost to them, and that the holiest bonds of affection are not broken without hope. (Ch. iv, no. 18; ch. v, no. 21.)

63 Prayer. — O my God, graciously receive the prayer I offer you for the Spirit of N...; let him glimpse your divine light, and make the path to eternal happiness easy for him. Allow the good Spirits to carry my words and thoughts to him.

You who were dear to me in this world, hear my voice calling to you to give you a new pledge of my affection. God has allowed you to be freed first: I could not complain of this without selfishness, for that would be to wish the pains and sufferings of life back upon you. I therefore wait with resignation for the moment of our reunion in the happier world where you have gone before me. I know that our separation is only temporary, and that, however long it may seem to me, its duration fades before the eternity of happiness God promises his chosen ones. May his goodness keep me from doing anything that could delay that longed-for moment, and may he thus spare me the pain of failing to find you when I leave my earthly captivity.

Oh, how sweet and comforting is the certainty that there is only a material veil between us, hiding you from my sight! That you can be here beside

me, see and hear me as before, and even better than before; that you no more forget me than I forget you; that our thoughts never cease to mingle, and that yours follows and supports me always.
May the peace of the Lord be with you.

64 For Suffering Souls Who Ask for Prayers
Preface. To understand the relief that prayer can bring to suffering Spirits, we must refer to the way it acts, as explained above. (Ch. xxvii, nos. 9, 18 and following.) Anyone deeply convinced of this truth prays with greater fervor, certain of not praying in vain.

65 Prayer. — Gracious and merciful God, may your goodness extend to all the Spirits who commend themselves to our prayers, and especially to the soul of N...
Good Spirits, whose sole occupation is doing good, intercede with me for their relief. Let a ray of hope shine before their eyes, and may the divine light reveal to them the imperfections that keep them far from the dwelling of the blessed. Open their hearts to repentance and to the desire to purify themselves, to hasten their progress. Help them understand that through their efforts they can shorten the time of their trials.
May God, in his goodness, give them the strength to persevere in their good resolutions!
May these kindly words ease their suffering by showing them that there are beings on earth who can sympathize with it and who desire their happiness.

66 Another. — We pray to you, Lord, to pour the grace of your love and mercy upon all who suffer, whether in space as wandering Spirits or among us as incarnate Spirits. Have pity on our weaknesses. You have

made us fallible, but you have given us the strength to resist evil and overcome it. May your mercy extend to all those who have been unable to resist their evil inclinations and are still being drawn down a wrongful path. May your good Spirits surround them; may your light shine before their eyes, and, drawn by its life-giving warmth, may they come to bow at your feet, humble, repentant, and submissive.

We also pray to you, Father of mercy, for those of our brothers who did not have the strength to bear their earthly trials. You give us a burden to carry, Lord, and we must lay it down only at your feet; but our weakness is great, and sometimes our courage fails us along the way. Have pity on these indolent servants who abandoned their work before the appointed time; may your justice spare them and allow your good Spirits to bring them relief, comfort, and hope for the future. The prospect of forgiveness strengthens the soul; show it, Lord, to the guilty who despair, and, sustained by this hope, they will draw strength from the very magnitude of their faults and sufferings to redeem their past and prepare to win their future.

67 For a Deceased Enemy

Preface. Charity toward our enemies must follow them beyond the grave. We must remember that the harm they did us was a trial that may have helped our progress, if we knew how to benefit from it. It may have been even more beneficial to us than purely material afflictions, in that it allowed us to add charity and the forgetting of offenses to courage and resignation. (Ch. x, no. 6; ch. xii, nos. 5, 6.)

68 Prayer. — Lord, it has pleased you to call the soul of N... back before mine. I forgive him the harm he did me and his evil intentions toward me; may he regret them, now that he no longer has the illusions of this world.
May your mercy, my God, extend to him, and keep from me the thought of rejoicing at his death. If I have wronged him, may he forgive me, as I forget the wrongs he did me.

69 For a Criminal
Preface. If the effectiveness of prayers were proportional to their length, the longest should be reserved for the most guilty, because they need them more than those who have lived holy lives. To deny them to criminals is to lack charity and fail to recognize God's mercy; to believe them useless because a person has committed this or that fault is to prejudge the justice of the Most High. (Ch. xi, no. 14.)

70 Prayer. — Lord, God of mercy, do not turn away this criminal who has just left the earth; human justice may have struck him, but it does not free him from your justice if his heart has not been touched by remorse.
Lift the blindfold that hides the seriousness of his faults from him; may his repentance find favor before you and ease the sufferings of his soul! May our prayers and the intercession of the good Spirits also bring him hope and consolation; inspire in him the desire to make amends for his evil deeds in a new existence, and give him the strength not to succumb in the new struggles he will undertake!
Lord, have pity on him!

71 For Someone Who Has Died by Suicide
Preface. A person never has the right to dispose of his own life, for God alone has the right to release him from earthly captivity when he sees fit.

Nevertheless, divine justice may soften its rigor in consideration of the circumstances, but it reserves its full severity for anyone who has sought to evade the trials of life. Someone who dies by suicide is like a prisoner who escapes from prison before his sentence has ended and who, when recaptured, is held more strictly. So it is with someone who dies by suicide, believing he is escaping present miseries and plunging into greater misfortunes. (Ch. v, nos. 44 and following.)

72 Prayer. — We know, O my God, the fate reserved for those who violate your laws by voluntarily cutting their lives short; but we also know that your mercy is infinite: deign to extend it to the soul of N... May our prayers and your compassion ease the bitterness of the sufferings he endures for not having had the courage to await the end of his trials!

Good Spirits, whose mission is to help the unfortunate, take him under your protection; inspire in him regret for his fault, and may your help give him the strength to bear with greater resignation the new trials he will have to undergo to make amends for it. Keep away from him the evil Spirits who might again lead him into evil and prolong his sufferings by causing him to lose the benefit of his future trials.

You whose misfortune is the subject of our prayers, may our compassion ease its bitterness and awaken in you the hope of a better future!

73 For Repentant Spirits

Preface. It would be unjust to place suffering and repentant Spirits who ask for prayers in the category of evil Spirits; they may once have been evil, but they cease to be so as soon as they acknowledge their faults and regret them: they are merely unfortunate; some are even beginning to enjoy a measure of happiness.

74 Prayer. — God of mercy, who accept the sincere repentance of the sinner, whether incarnate or discarnate, here is a Spirit who once delighted in evil, but who acknowledges his wrongs and is entering the right path; deign, O my God, to receive him as a prodigal child and forgive him.

Good Spirits whose voices he disregarded, he wishes to listen to you from now on; allow him to glimpse the bliss of the Lord's chosen ones, so that he may persist in his desire to purify himself and attain it; support him in his good resolutions, and give him the strength to resist his evil instincts.

Spirit of N..., we congratulate you on your change and thank the good Spirits who have helped you!

If you once delighted in doing evil, it was because you did not understand how sweet the pleasure of doing good is; you also felt too low to hope to attain it. But from the moment you set foot on the right path, a new light dawned for you; you began to taste an unknown happiness, and hope entered your heart. This is because God always listens to the prayer of the repentant sinner; he turns away none of those who come to him.

To return fully to his favor, devote yourself from now on not only to doing no more evil, but to doing good, and above all to making amends for the evil you have done; then you will have satisfied God's justice; each good deed will erase one of your past faults.

The first step has been taken; now, the farther you advance, the easier and more pleasant the path will seem. Persevere, then, and one day you will have the glory of being counted among the good Spirits and the blessed Spirits.

75 For Hardened Spirits

Preface. Evil Spirits are those whom repentance has not yet touched; who delight in evil and feel no regret for it; who are unmoved by reproaches, reject prayer, and often blaspheme the name of God. These are the hardened souls who, after death, take revenge on human beings for the sufferings they endure, and pursue with their hatred those against whom they bore a grudge during their lives, either through obsession or through some other harmful influence. (Ch. x, no. 6; ch. xii, nos. 5, 6.)

Among perverse Spirits, there are two quite distinct categories: those who are openly evil and those who are hypocrites. The former are infinitely easier to bring back to goodness than the latter; they are most often rough and coarse natures, such as we see among human beings, who do evil more by instinct than by calculation and do not try to pass themselves off as better than they are; but within them there is a dormant seed that must be brought to life, and this can nearly always be achieved through perseverance, firmness joined with kindness, advice, reasoning, and prayer. In mediumship, the difficulty they have in writing the name of God is the sign of an instinctive fear, an inner voice of conscience telling them that they are unworthy of it; anyone who has reached this point is on the threshold of conversion, and there is every reason to hope for him: one need only find the vulnerable point in his heart.

Hypocritical Spirits are almost always very intelligent, but they have no sensitive chord in their hearts; nothing touches them; they feign every good feeling to win trust, and they are happy when they find gullible people who accept them as holy Spirits and whom they can control as they please. The name of God, far from inspiring the slightest fear in them, serves as a mask to cover their depravity. In the invisible world, as in the

visible world, hypocrites are the most dangerous beings, because they act in the shadows and people do not distrust them. They have only the appearance of faith, but no sincere faith.

76 Prayer. — Lord, deign to look kindly upon the imperfect Spirits who are still in the darkness of ignorance and do not acknowledge you, and especially upon the Spirit of N....

Good Spirits, help us make him understand that by leading people into evil, obsessing them, and tormenting them, he prolongs his own sufferings; let the example of the happiness you enjoy be an encouragement to him.

Spirit who still delights in evil, you have just heard the prayer we offer for you; it should prove to you that we wish to do you good, though you do evil.

You are unhappy, for it is impossible to be happy while doing evil; why, then, remain in suffering when it is in your power to escape it? Look at the good Spirits around you; see how happy they are, and would it not be more pleasant for you to enjoy the same happiness?

You will say that this is impossible for you; but nothing is impossible for someone who has the will, for God has given you, like all his creatures, the freedom to choose between good and evil, that is, between happiness and unhappiness, and no one is condemned to do evil. If you have the will to do it, you can have the will to do good and be happy.

Turn your gaze toward God; lift yourself toward him in thought for a single moment, and a ray of his divine light will come to enlighten you. Say these simple words with us: My God, I repent, forgive me. Try repentance and doing good instead of doing evil, and you will see that his mercy will

immediately extend over you, and an unknown sense of well-being will replace the anguish you endure.

Once you have taken a step along the right path, the rest of the way will seem easy to you. You will then understand how much time you have lost through your own fault in attaining your happiness; but a radiant future full of hope will open before you and make you forget your miserable past, full of turmoil and mental torments that would be hell for you if they were to last forever. A day will come when these torments will be such that you will want to end them at any cost; but the longer you wait, the harder this will be for you.

Do not believe that you will always remain in your present state; no, that is impossible; you have two prospects before you: one is to suffer much more than you do now, the other is to be happy like the good Spirits around you: the first is inevitable if you persist in your obstinacy; a simple effort of your will is enough to free you from your predicament. Hurry, then, for every day of delay is a day lost to your happiness.

Good Spirits, let these words find their way into this soul that is still backward, so that they may help it draw closer to God. We ask this of you in the name of Jesus Christ, who had such great power over evil Spirits.

77 V. For the Sick and Those Afflicted by Obsession. For the Sick

Preface. Illnesses are among the trials and vicissitudes of earthly life; they are inherent in the coarseness of our material nature and the inferiority of the world we inhabit. Passions and excesses of every kind sow unhealthy seeds within us, often hereditary. In worlds that are more advanced physically or morally, the human organism, more refined and less material, is not subject to the same infirmities, and the body is not silently under-

mined by the ravages of the passions (ch. iii, no. 9). We must therefore resign ourselves to undergoing the consequences of the environment in which our inferiority places us, until we have earned the right to change it. In the meantime, this should not prevent us from doing what is within our power to improve our present situation; but if, despite our efforts, we cannot succeed, Spiritism teaches us to bear our passing ills with resignation.

If God had not wished bodily sufferings to be dispelled or eased in certain cases, he would not have placed means of healing at our disposal. His provident care in this regard, in agreement with the instinct for self-preservation, indicates that it is our duty to seek them out and apply them.

Alongside ordinary medical treatment, developed by science, magnetism has made us aware of the power of fluidic action; then Spiritism came to reveal another force to us in healing mediumship and the influence of prayer. (See the note on healing mediumship below.)

78 Prayer. (By the sick person.) — Lord, you are perfect justice; I must have deserved the illness you have seen fit to send me, because you never afflict without cause. I entrust my healing to your infinite mercy; if it pleases you to restore my health, may your holy name be blessed; if, on the contrary, I must still suffer, may it be blessed all the same; I submit without complaint to your divine decrees, for everything you do can have no purpose but the good of your creatures.

Grant, O my God, that this illness may be a salutary warning to me and lead me to examine myself; I accept it as an expiation for the past and as a trial of my faith and my submission to your holy will. (See prayer no. 40.)

79 Prayer. (For the sick person.) — My God, your purposes are beyond understanding, and in your wisdom you have thought it necessary to afflict N... with illness. Cast, I implore you, a compassionate glance upon his suffering, and graciously bring it to an end.
Good Spirits, ministers of the Almighty, please support my desire to relieve him; guide my thoughts so that they may pour a healing balm upon his body and consolation into his soul.
Inspire him with patience and submission to God's will; give him the strength to bear his pain with Christian resignation, so that he may not lose the benefit of this trial. (See prayer no. 57.)

80 Prayer. (By the healing medium.) — My God, if you graciously choose to use me, unworthy though I am, I can heal this suffering, if such is your will, because I have faith in you; but without you I can do nothing. Allow good Spirits to fill me with their healing fluid, so that I may transmit it to this sick person, and turn away from me every thought of pride and selfishness that might impair its purity.

81 For Those Under Obsession
Preface. Obsession is the persistent action that an evil Spirit exerts upon an individual. It takes very different forms, ranging from a simple moral influence, without perceptible outward signs, to the complete disruption of the body and the mental faculties. It impairs all mediumistic faculties; in writing mediumship, it takes the form of a Spirit's insistence on manifesting itself to the exclusion of all others.
Evil Spirits swarm around the earth because of the moral inferiority of its inhabitants. Their harmful action is among the scourges to which humanity is exposed in this world. Obsession, like illness and all the tribulations

of life, must therefore be regarded as a trial or an expiation, and accepted as such.

Just as illnesses result from physical imperfections that leave the body open to harmful external influences, obsession always results from a moral imperfection that gives an evil Spirit a hold. A physical cause is opposed with a physical force; a moral cause must be opposed with a moral force. To protect against illness, the body is strengthened; to guard against obsession, the soul must be strengthened. Hence the need for the person under obsession to work toward his own improvement, which is usually enough to free him from the obsessing Spirit without help from others. Such help becomes necessary when obsession develops into subjugation and possession, for then the sufferer sometimes loses his will and his free choice.

Obsession is almost always an act of revenge by a Spirit, and most often originates in the relations that the person under obsession had with that Spirit in a previous existence. (See ch. x, no. 6; ch. xii, nos. S, 6.)

In cases of severe obsession, the person is as though enveloped and permeated by a harmful fluid that neutralizes the action of beneficial fluids and repels them. It is this fluid that he must be freed from; yet a harmful fluid cannot be repelled by another harmful fluid. Through an action identical to that of the healing medium in cases of illness, the harmful fluid must be expelled with the help of a better fluid, which produces something like the effect of a reagent. This is the mechanical action, but it is not enough; it is also necessary, and above all, to act upon the intelligent being, whom one must have the right to address with authority, and this authority is granted only to moral superiority. The greater that superiority, the greater the authority. Nor is this all; to ensure deliverance, the perverse Spirit must be led to abandon his evil intentions. Repentance and a desire for

good must be awakened in him through skillfully directed instruction, during special evocations held for his moral education. Then one may have the double satisfaction of freeing an incarnate being and converting an imperfect Spirit.

The task is made easier when the person under obsession understands his situation and contributes his will and his prayers. This is not so when, seduced by the deceitful Spirit, he deceives himself about the qualities of the one who dominates him and takes pleasure in the error into which that Spirit plunges him; for then, far from cooperating, he rejects all assistance. This is the case with fascination, which is always infinitely more resistant than the most violent subjugation. (The Mediums' Book, ch. xxiii.)

In all cases of obsession, prayer is the most powerful aid in acting against the obsessing Spirit.

82 Prayer. (By the person under obsession.) — My God, allow the good Spirits to free me from the harmful Spirit who has attached himself to me. If he is taking revenge for wrongs I may once have done him, you allow it, my God, as my punishment, and I suffer the consequence of my fault. May my repentance earn me your forgiveness and my deliverance! But whatever his motive, I call down your mercy upon him; graciously ease his path toward progress, which will turn him away from the thought of doing evil. May I, for my part, lead him to better feelings by returning good for evil.

But I also know, O my God, that it is my imperfections that leave me open to the influence of imperfect Spirits. Give me the light I need to recognize them; above all, combat within me the pride that blinds me to my faults. How great my unworthiness must be, since a harmful being can overpower me!

Grant, O my God, that this blow to my vanity may serve as a lesson for the future; may it strengthen me in my resolve to purify myself through the practice of goodness, charity, and humility, so that I may henceforth raise a barrier against evil influences.

Lord, give me the strength to bear this trial with patience and resignation; I understand that, like all other trials, it must help my advancement if I do not lose its benefit through my complaints, since it gives me an opportunity to show my submission and to exercise charity toward an unfortunate brother by forgiving him for the harm he does me. (Ch. xii, nos. 5,6; ch. xxviii, nos. 15 and following, 46, 47.)

83 Prayer. (For the person under obsession.) — Almighty God, graciously give me the power to free N... from the Spirit who obsesses him; if it is within your purposes to bring this trial to an end, grant me the grace to speak to this Spirit with authority.

Good Spirits who assist me, and you, his guardian angel, lend me your support; help me free him from the impure fluid that envelops him.

In the name of Almighty God, I solemnly command the harmful Spirit who torments him to withdraw.

84 Prayer. (For the obsessing Spirit.) — God of infinite goodness, I implore your mercy for the Spirit who obsesses N...; let him glimpse the divine light, so that he may see the false path he has taken. Good Spirits, help me make him understand that he has everything to lose by doing evil, and everything to gain by doing good.

Spirit who takes pleasure in tormenting N..., listen to me, for I speak to you in the name of God. If you are willing to reflect, you will understand that evil cannot prevail over good, and that you cannot be stronger than

God and the good Spirits.

They could have protected N... from any attack on your part; if they have not done so, it is because he (or she) had a trial to undergo. But when this trial is over, they will take away all your power over him; the evil you have done him, instead of harming him, will have served his advancement, and he will be all the happier for it. Thus your wickedness will have been entirely wasted, and will turn against you.

God, who is almighty, and the higher Spirits, his delegates, who are more powerful than you, will therefore be able to put an end to this obsession whenever they wish, and your persistence will break before this supreme authority. But precisely because God is good, he is willing to leave you the merit of stopping of your own free will. This is a respite granted to you; if you do not take advantage of it, you will suffer its deplorable consequences. Great punishments and cruel sufferings await you; you will be forced to implore their pity and the prayers of your victim, who already forgives you and prays for you, which is a great merit in God's eyes and will hasten his deliverance.

Reflect, then, while there is still time, for God's justice will weigh heavily upon you as upon all rebellious Spirits. Consider that the evil you are doing now must inevitably come to an end, whereas, if you persist in your hardheartedness, your sufferings will continually increase.

When you were on earth, would you not have thought it foolish to sacrifice a great good for a small, momentary satisfaction? It is the same now that you are a Spirit. What do you gain from what you are doing? The sad pleasure of tormenting someone, which does not keep you from being unhappy, whatever you may say, and will make you unhappier still.

Alongside this, see what you are losing; look at the good Spirits around

you, and see whether their lot is not preferable to yours. The happiness they enjoy will be yours whenever you wish. What is needed for this? To implore God and do good instead of evil. I know that you cannot transform yourself all at once; but God does not ask the impossible. What he wants is goodwill. Try, then, and we will help you. Let us soon be able to say the prayer for repentant Spirits (no. 73) on your behalf, and no longer rank you among the evil Spirits, while awaiting the time when you may be counted among the good.

(See also, above, no. 75, the prayer for hardened Spirits.)

Note. The cure of severe obsessions requires much patience, perseverance, and devotion; it also demands tact and skill to lead towards goodness Spirits who are often very perverse, hardened, and cunning, for some are rebellious to the utmost degree. In most cases, one must be guided by the circumstances; but whatever the Spirit's character, one thing is certain: nothing is achieved through coercion or threats; all influence lies in moral ascendancy. Another truth, equally established by experience and by logic, is the complete ineffectiveness of exorcisms, formulas, sacramental words, amulets, talismans, outward practices, or material signs of any kind.

Prolonged obsession can cause pathological disorders, and sometimes requires simultaneous or subsequent treatment, either magnetic or medical, to restore the body. Once the cause has been removed, its effects must still be treated. (See The Mediums' Book, ch. xxiii, on obsession. — Spiritist Review, February and March 1864; April 1865: examples of cures of obsession.)

Une Sacra · edition 1.3 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0