

# St. Robert Bellarmine's Spirituality

## Introduction

St. Robert's sermons were so powerful that people thought he was a huge man. The spiritual force of his personality seemed very muscular, because his sanctity engulfed everyone. He was morally large, even vast. His intellectual ability stretched way beyond his slight height. His holy life radiated profound spiritual knowing and loving. He inspired people because his vibrant soul overcame both his short stature, and his crippling illness. He thrived, not in spite of hardship, but because of it. He grew through disasters that destroyed taller men. He excelled against challenges that crushed stronger men. How did he flourish through exceptionally hard times? Fr. James Broderick's biography: *Robert Bellarmine, Saint and Scholar*, reveals his inner strength growing through trials. St. Robert's book: *The Mind's Ascent to God by the Ladder of Created Things* summarizes his superlative spirituality. We learn his keen spirituality by liberally quoting this book.

### Highlights of His Life: 1542-1621

St. Robert was born October 4, 1542 in the small hill town of Montepulciano in Tuscany, thirty miles south of Siena. His family was noble, but poor, because wars with Florence and Siena bled them dry. They strove for independence from several city-states whose armies stormed through Montepulciano, impoverishing everyone. In spite of material poverty, Robert's parents were pious, and generous to people less fortunate. Vincenzo and Cynthia raised five boys and seven girls. Robert was the third son. Life was hard, food was scarce, but God supported the struggling Bellarmine family.

Robert loved Latin, which was still a living language, the key to all knowledge. Cicero set the ultimate linguistic standard, but Virgil captivated Robert. His academic success inspired his uncle to offer a free ticket to medical school at the University of Padua. But when the Jesuits opened a school in Montepulciano, his parents enrolled him there. Robert so admired his teachers that he yearned to join them. They liked this high-spirited and profoundly pious young man, and foresaw that he would help many people as a Jesuit. His father resisted Robert's vocational choice, hoping instead that his brilliant son would make the family rich. After months of argument, Vincenzo finally agreed, for his wife's sake.

In 1560 Robert began his novitiate in Rome on the site of the present Gesu church. While other young Jesuits slept, Robert worked through the night, perfecting his knowledge, but wrecking his health. Exhaustion provoked intense headaches and lung congestion, which led doctors to diagnose tuberculosis. While studying at Louvain, in rainy Belgium, he also taught Greek, until his health failed in 1576. Then his superior assigned him to sunny Rome, expecting him to die in the near future. He lived another 45 years, most of them in Rome. His brilliance naturally fitted him to serve the Pope, especially to correct the various heresies raging at the time. His popular catechism attracted thousands of people to the truth. His book *The Controversies* was the most frequently consulted work to defend the faith against rabid heresies. Because Robert saw Jesus even in his adversaries, he listened to them attentively, and lavished exquisite kindness upon them. Often, he supported their errors with better reasons than they could devise, so they read his reasoning avidly, and set up squads of university professors to refute him. But they failed because errors contradict themselves.

Another reason for their failure was that Robert understood what they were doing better than they did. Yet he respected them all, and charitably assisted them toward truth. His intense charity enabled him to preach effectively, and to convince many heretics to accept truth. Here is his insightful key to effective preaching: "Three things are necessary to preach well; three qualities of the soul without which the preacher will fail. They are: 1) great, vehement zeal for the honor of God, 2) wisdom, and 3) eloquence. The fiery tongues above the apostles, when God made them the first preachers of His Gospel, are the symbols of these things. The burning fire betokens zeal, the light symbolizes wisdom, and the shape of a tongue denotes eloquence. Eloquence without charity and wisdom is only empty chattering. Wisdom and eloquence without charity are dead. And charity without wisdom and eloquence is like a brave man unarmed."<sup>1</sup>

Robert begged God for these three qualities, accepted them as precious gifts, and used them exclusively to serve God's people. His intense exercise of these abilities enabled him to encourage and inspire thousands of

people by his remarkable preaching. He saw many people fall into suffering so intense and pervasive that they lost hope of ever emerging. So he encouraged them to use the supernatural gift of Hope that God provided in Baptism. One of his favorite phrases was: “Lady Tribulation is love knocking at the door, trying to get in, an inexorable, patient, love, that sees our eternal destiny, and aims to purify, enlighten, and perfect us.”<sup>2</sup> But we distracted ourselves from Love’s knock, even though all that nagging sorrow counseled us, and taught us that our sins were vain, that is, utterly useless.

Though sorrow devastated us, Robert thanked God for dividing sorrow into separate instants: “The just man’s present sufferings cannot pass with him to the life beyond the grave. In this life they are permitted to come to him only one at a time, and for the briefest space. ... We never endure at once the pains of a year, or a month, or a day, or an hour. As in time, nothing is present but a brief indivisible now, so the burden we bear can never in a true sense be more than momentary. We sip our chalice slowly and gradually, God putting the tiny drops of its sufferings to our lips one by one. But in the life to come, how different will the process be! There we shall drink the torrent of bliss at one great drought, and hold all the riches of eternity in a present without future or past.”<sup>3</sup>

From his loving care, eloquently expressed here, we learned that Robert lived in God’s gift of Himself, which is Love everlasting. From that perspective, Robert loved his enemies, no matter how unjust their attacks. He recognized their torment, and strove to assist them through their horrifying moments, into the “torrent of eternal bliss”. God’s gift also accounted for this physically small and weak man’s moral strength. Tormented by illness, he lived through intense sufferings for half a century, so that he could serve God’s people. No doubt, his continuous pain inspired him to deal with it as it came to him: one instant at a time.

As rector in charge of the Roman College from 1592 to 1594, Robert strengthened the curriculum, and led his fellow Jesuit teachers to excel. His leaders promoted him to supervise all the Jesuits in Naples. Then the Pope created Robert a cardinal in 1599, to elevate him to exalted leadership in the Church. He accepted this dignity as he received the others, in profound poverty. He lived in utter simplicity, giving his revenue away to the poor who are “always with us”, Mk 14:7. His excessive daily activities astound us, especially in spite of his several life-threatening ailments.

When the Pope appointed him archbishop of Capua, in Sicily, Robert renewed his diocese, and wrote a book about guiding his flock in the way Jesus did. When the new Pope, Paul V, assigned him more Cardinal duties, Robert resigned his Capua office, and immersed himself in helping the Pope govern the Church. He quelled rebellious clergy like Fra Paolo Sarpi, Prior of the Servites in Venice. All of his efforts encouraged everyone to advance toward God. In the book *Apologia*, Robert argued with King James I of England, correcting many of his errors by his characteristic kindly dialog. Robert edited the Latin version of the Bible so well that his translation remained popular for three hundred years. His final book, on Papal Power, roused the Gallican Church in France to publicly burn a copy in Paris. When Robert’s health failed, he asked to retire, so that he could prepare for death, to practice what he preached in his *Art of Dying Well*.

Perhaps he is best known to us as the Church official who condemned Galileo. As we shall see, this never happened. Instead, Robert advised Galileo to moderate his anger before he aroused serious opposition. Most significantly, Galileo should claim proof only when he could demonstrate that the earth moved around the sun. That proof was two centuries away when Galileo claimed that the ocean tides proved the earth’s motion. Though Galileo appreciated Robert’s wise and gentle council, he ignored it. That led to two appearances before the Holy Office in Rome. The first case came ultimately to Robert, who dismissed the wild accusations. Galileo’s second case, heard after Robert died, resulted in condemnation because Galileo claimed proof that the earth moved, but had none. He also broke his word to teach the Copernican theory as mere theory. Robert was not alive to help Galileo to retract his lie that he had proved the earth’s motion. The authorities at the time humiliated Galileo, but did him no bodily harm, as our last investigation will specify.

Robert used a long list of controversies to deepen his wisdom, and extend his kindness. Therefore, his holiness illuminated his intellect, enabling his love of neighbor to outshine all his other holy qualities. He exerted every effort to discover what each person held dear. From that solid starting point, Robert offered each

person the truth he so ardently desired. The quotes noted above clarify that he saw Jesus in every neighbor, and approached each one with the love that Christ gives us. This is why even his bitterest foes admired his loving interaction with them. True, some of his enemies spread scurrilous slanders against him. But the light of his holy life bleached all these lies of their feeble effect. His Christ-like behavior proved how false their slanders were. In the crucible of controversy, Robert flourished by radiating Christ. His scintillating spiritual life inspires us to follow his lead. Now we will read his words in the light of his valiant imitation of Our Lord. By loving Him, Robert let Him shine through Robert's pain-racked life.

### **Spirituality of St. Robert Bellarmine**

Robert wrote so clearly that English translations of his Latin words need hardly any interpretation. Now and then, we may profit from some reflections that update his terms and turns of phrase, to better apply his spiritual advice to our daily life. Here, then, are quotations from his major book on spirituality, with occasional reflections.

#### **The Mind's Ascent to God by the Ladder of Created Things**

"Holy Scripture frequently warns us to seek God diligently. Although God 'is not far from any one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being', Acts 17:27-28, still we are far from God. Unless we carefully set our hearts on rising up, and build ourselves a ladder to heaven, and seek God with great effort, we feed the swine with the prodigal son, in a distant land, far from our Father and fatherland, Lk 15:11-31."<sup>4</sup>

*Reflection:* Naturally, the ladder we build is spiritual. It is a set of small decisions to love God by obeying His commands, because He loves us. We strive to love Him in return by choosing to step up to Him. These moral decisions improve our loving union with God, so that we increasingly do what He wants us to do, for love of Him. Robert calls distractions with ever-changing things "feeding the swine". That's a striking picture of wasting time by doing something filthy that we regret. Such useless activities keep us from using our "ladder" to rise to God. Then Robert shows us how.

"So that I can briefly explain how it is not contradictory that God is not far from us, and we are, nevertheless, distant from Him, I answer that God is not far from us since He sees us continually, because all things are present to His eyes. Likewise He thinks about us continually 'because He cares for' us, 1 Pt 5:7. He is in contact with us continually because 'He upholds all things by His mighty word', Heb 1:3. On the other hand, we are distant from God because we do not see God, and cannot see him, because 'He dwells in light inaccessible', 1 Tim 6:16. 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything, as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God', 2 Cor 3:5. Far less can we touch Him and cleave to Him with holy affection. unless His right hand grasps us and draws us to Himself. This is why when David said, 'My soul has stuck close to you', he immediately added, 'Your right hand has received me', Ps 63:9. Not only are we far from God because we can neither see nor easily think about Him, nor cleave [stick] to Him in affection, but being worried about worldly goods which surround us, and overwhelm us from all sides, we easily forget God, and can scarcely bring our tongue and dried-up heart to speak God's name in psalms and holy prayers. This is the reason why the Holy Spirit in Sacred Scripture, as we just said, urges us so often to seek God. 'Seek God, and your soul shall live', Ps 68:33. 'See His face evermore', Ps 104:4. 'The Lord is good to them who hope in Him, to the soul that seeks Him', Lam 3:25. 'Seek the Lord while He may be found', Is 55:6. 'Seek Him in simplicity of heart', Wis 1:1. 'When you shall seek there the Lord your God, you will find Him, if you seek Him with all your heart', Dt 4:29."<sup>5</sup>

*Reflection:* Robert shows us how to reconcile two facts: 1) God is very close to us, but 2) we are still far apart. Material creatures cannot be simultaneously near to and far from each other, because they are stuck in space. They will be equally distant from each other. Instead, these facts apply to spiritual activities. Consider a full-throated meadowlark calling to her chicks. Each lark calls, but the mother lark's call is much louder and fuller than the chicks' immature cheeps. This analogy approximates our spiritual efforts to match God's complete nearness to our incomplete nearness.

In His life, Jesus reveals to us that God is intimate to us, but we are far from Him. Scripture echoes His life. Obviously the near and far describe different things, both of them spiritual acts. Robert offers biblical

references to clarify this difficulty. Personal experience ratifies these references. At times we experience God's delicious presence, but at other times, we long for Him, as if He had totally abandoned us. To help focus more clearly, Robert reminds us that worries about worldly goods absorb our attention, and overwhelm us from all sides. Then we do not converse with God; we do not pray. Therefore, we lose His comforting company. We must often exert ourselves to attend to God. Our effort is worth it, because no one is as worth loving as God. Robert recommends that we relate to our beloved through His creatures.

“For us mortal men, it seems that no ladder of ascent to God can be open, except through the works of God. Those who by a singular gift of God are admitted to paradise by a different road, and hear mysteries of God which it is not lawful for man to utter, are better said not to have ascended, but to have been lifted up. Blessed Paul openly admits this of himself when he says: ‘I was caught up into paradise hearing secret words that man may not repeat’, 2 Cor 12:4. The Book of Wisdom (13:1-5) and the Apostle's letter to the Romans (1:19-20) teach that man can ascend through the works of God, i.e. creatures, to a knowledge and love of the Creator. Reason itself confirms this well enough because an efficient cause can be known from its effects, as can an exemplar from its images. There can be no doubt that all created things are the works of God, and the Holy Scriptures teach us that a man and an angel are not only works, but also images of God.

“These arguments moved me, as did the example of St. Bonaventure, who wrote his *Journey of the Mind to God* during his leisure time. During the short vacation granted me from public business, I tried to build a ladder by considering creatures to somehow ascend to God. I divided it into fifteen steps to correspond with the fifteen steps by which people ascended to Solomon's temple, and with the fifteen psalms which are called the Gradual Psalms.”<sup>6</sup>

*Reflection:* Robert noted that God suddenly lifted up a few people to very exalted heights (e.g. St. Paul). But most of our struggles were slow, laborious, weighted down by worldly concerns. Earnestly devoted to help us along, Robert followed Scriptural inspiration, and Bonaventure's encouraging book, to construct a ladder for himself. He then described how we can construct ours. He matched his fifteen spiritual steps to Solomon's fifteen material steps up the temple to the holy of holies. All fifteen psalms that the Church used for intercession days opened with the same words “song of the ascents”, and employed creatures to help us rise to God. These “Gradual”, or “ascent”, Psalms launched Robert on his ascent into chapter one. In his time, everyone who prayed the liturgy knew these psalms, because the Church prescribed them for the old familiar Rogation Days. Next, Robert describes the causes that motivate us to construct a ladder to God.

### **Chapter 1: General Causes Under Consideration**

“Anyone who wishes to build a ladder to God should start by considering himself. Each of us is a creature, and an image of God. Nothing is closer to us than ourselves. Therefore, Moses says: ‘Consider yourself’, Dt 4:9. Basil the Great wrote a superb sermon on these two words. Whoever examines his whole self, and considers what lies hidden within, will find the whole world in shortened form. From this he will ascend without difficulty to the maker of all things.

“I will use the usual four causes: 1) Who is my maker? 2. From what material did he make me? 3. What nature did he give me? For what end did he create me?

“If I seek my maker, I find God alone. If I seek the material from which he made me, I find absolutely nothing. From this you can conclude that whatever is in me was made by God, and wholly belongs to God. If I ask about my nature, I find that I am the image of God. If I ask about my end, I find God himself, who is my supreme and total good. Therefore, I will recognize that I have a great bond with, and need for, God, as he alone is my creator, my maker, my father, my exemplar, my happiness, my all. If I understand this, what can happen except that I seek him ardently, that I think of him, that I yearn for him, desire to see and embrace Him? Should I not be horrified at the dense darkness of my heart, which for so long has considered, desired, and sought things other than God, who alone is my all?”<sup>7</sup>

*Reflection:* This presentation utterly convinced the people of his time. Educated people back then devoted themselves to Scripture, and to reasoning as Aristotle reasoned. Around 350 BC, Aristotle invented Logic,

and used it to organize sciences, to maximize learning. His work enlightened those who know. All solid knowledge applied Aristotle's principles. But today our training differs significantly, so we may not know causes. Here's a review of the "usual four causes".

The efficient cause activates the effect, to make it exist, as when you make a plan, or plant a garden. The material cause is the stuff activated to make the effect be. Your plan is a set of images in your mind. Your garden is material stuff: dirt seeds... The formal cause is the intrinsic activity that makes the effect be what it is (its nature). Your plan is your thinking it. Your garden is your arranging it. The final cause is the purpose or end for which the efficient cause made the effect. Your plan's final cause is to make a garden. Your garden's final cause is to make tomatoes, etc. As soon as we hear these descriptions, we recognize these natural causes. Robert expresses clearly what we all discover ourselves. These causes make things happen. All creatures that exist have these "usual" causes. When we know these causes, we understand the effect's sources. Robert considers God as our ultimate Cause. The more we dwell on His causing us, the more we realize that he is super-important. Though our sins of neglecting God are horrifying, God loves us. We long with all our hearts to return to God as to our perfect home. God's love makes us great. How can that be? The next chapter examines details showing the reality of human excellence, as it reflects God. So we explore by diving in to Robert's reasons.

## Chapter 2: God Our Creator

"But let us look a little more closely at the individual points. I ask you, my soul, who gave you your existence, since a little time ago you were nothing? Certainly the parents of your flesh did not beget you, because 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh', Jn 3:6. But you are a spirit. Neither did heaven, nor earth, the sun, nor the stars make you. They are bodies, and you are immaterial. Neither the angels nor archangels, nor any other spiritual creature could have been the creator of your existence, because you are not created out of any material, but out of absolutely nothing. Only almighty God can make something from nothing. When he wanted to, he alone, without assistant or helper, created you by his own hands, which are his intellect and will. But perhaps not God himself, but created things, produced your body, so that your soul should acknowledge God as its maker, but your body should acknowledge your parents? That's not true. Although he used human parents to bring forth flesh, as one uses lowly workers to build a house, still he wishes to be and to be called the architect, the maker, the true father, not only of the soul, but also of the body, and therefore of the whole man. For if the producers of your flesh were the real makers and quasi-architects of your body, they would surely know how many muscles you have, how many veins and sinews, how many bones, how many fluids... But they are wholly ignorant, unless they learn about them in anatomical studies. Moreover, when the body becomes sick, or a limb dries up, or is cut off, certainly they could use that skill, by which they first produced it, to restore it... just as watchmakers modify or restore watches. But your parents cannot do these things, and know nothing about them. In addition, the union of the soul with the body, which is the main part of the making of human nature, could be achieved by nobody except a craftsman of infinite power. By what skill, except God's, could spirit be joined to flesh by such a close bond that they make up one substance? Body has no similarity or proportion with spirit. Therefore he made it 'who alone does great wonders', Ps 135:4."<sup>8</sup>

*Reflection:* Robert talks to his soul, to his deepest being, about who made him. Robert's intense concentration and insistent investigation provide essential reasons that God alone makes us. From common observations, Robert offers us convincing conclusions. After these observable reasons, he turns to Scripture, to show that God reveals His creation.

"Truly then does the Spirit of God speak through Moses in Deuteronomy: 'Is not he your father, who possessed you, and made you, and created you', Dt 32:6. So also through Job: 'You clothed me with skin and flesh. You put me together with bones and sinew', Jb 10-11. The Royal Prophet [David] acclaims: 'Your hands made me and formed me', Ps 119:3, and again: 'You formed me and laid your hand upon me', Ps 138:5. The mother of the Maccabee brothers: 'I know not how you were formed in my womb, for I neither gave you breath nor soul nor life, neither did I frame the limbs of every one of you. But the Creator of the world, who formed the nativity of man, and who found out the origin of all', 2 Mc 7:22-23. Hence, Christ our Lord, the Wisdom of God, said: 'Call no one on earth your father, for one is your Father who is in heaven', Mt 23:9. With this in mind, St. Augustine spoke to God about his son, Adeodatus, whom he begot by fornication: 'You made him

well, for I had no part in the boy except my sin', Confessions 9, c.6."<sup>9</sup>

*Reflection:* Scriptural speech communicates across thousands of years, even if it differs from our daily speech. If we stretch beyond our daily speech, we gain God's profound meaning, lovingly expressed. Advancing by these thoughts, we listen to God speaking through inspired writers, telling us His thoughts, which soar beyond His creation. Each of His messages expresses His infinite love for us. If we listen with mind and heart, we hear His love. Robert listened carefully, as his sweet blend of reason and belief show us. This savory blend unfolds as Robert continues his dialog with his soul.

"Consider now, my soul, if God is the maker of your body and your soul, if he was father to you, carried and nourished you, then whatever you are, you are his. Whatever you have, you have from him. Whatever you hope for, you hope for from him. Why then do you not boast of such a great parent? Why do you not love him with your whole heart? Why do you not hold in contempt all earthly things for his sake? Why do you let vain desires become your master? Lift up your eyes to him. Fear not what your enemy on earth may do to you, since you have an almighty Father in heaven. With how much confidence and feeling David used to say: 'I am yours, save me', Ps 118:94? O my soul, if you would consider that the almighty and eternal God, who does not need your goods, and loses nothing if you perish, still does not turn his eyes away from you. He so loves, so protects, so directs, and so nurtures you, that you must be his great treasure. [That's why] you would put all your trust in him. You would fear him as Lord, love him as Father, and let no temporal good or evil pull you away from his love."<sup>10</sup>

*Reflection:* Robert tells us that God's love inspired Robert to return love. We can see that Robert's love was very passionate. He accepted God's love, thanked Him for it, and shared it with his neighbors. Moreover, he balanced his acceptance of God's love with urgent efforts to love Him more. After all God did for him, he asked himself why he did not love God with his whole heart. What a fine climax to the evidence that is right in front of us. His next chapter returns to the individual causes, and considers the stuff out of which God made him.

### **Chapter 3: God Created Man From Nothing**

"We now turn to the material from which man is formed. It is base indeed, but the more base it is, the better foundation it gives us for building up the virtue of humility in ourselves. No virtue is more useful in our life than this, none more rare, and therefore more precious, and to be sought with greater eagerness.

"As for the material of the soul, there can be no doubt. It is nothingness itself, than which nothing lower or more worthless can be imagined or thought. What is closest to the material of the body if not the menstrual blood? [Yet it is] a thing so vile that the eyes avoid looking at it, and the hands refuse to touch it, and even the mind shudders to think about it. What was the material from which the first man was formed? Sterile clay, or dust, or mud. 'God formed man of the slime of the earth', Gen 2:7. God told man: 'You are dust, and unto dust you shall return', Gen 3:19. Hence, Abraham, aware of his lowliness, said to God: 'Seeing I have once begun, I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes', Gen 18:27. But this is not the end of the baseness of human material, for the slime was not formed out of some other material, but out of nothing. In the beginning God created heaven and earth, and he clearly made them, not out of some other heaven and earth, but from nothing. Therefore, the origin of this proud animal called man goes back to nothingness, [both of] his soul and his body. There is nothing in man that he can boast about, as if he had not received it from God. The works of man, whatever they are, whether they come from his genius or labor, always have something from themselves, so that, had they understanding, they would boast against their maker. For example, a golden bowl, a wooden chest, and an ivory or marble house, if they could speak, would say to their craftsman: 'I owe my shape to you, but not my material. What I have of myself is more precious than what I received from you.' But man, who has nothing from himself, and who in himself is absolutely nothing, has nothing to boast about. The Apostle says very rightly: 'For if anyone thinks himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself', Gal 6:3. 'What have you that you did not receive? But if you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received in?', 1 Cor 4:7. St. Cyprian agrees with this in saying 'There is nothing to boast about when there is nothing of your own', *Testamonium Adversus Judaeos*, III c. 4."<sup>11</sup>

*Reflection:* Perhaps we are shocked that Robert rated our matter so low. He contradicts the self-exaltation so popular these days. But when we reflect, we notice that Robert is exactly right. In fact, these remarks can ease us into reality. When we adjust to what is real, we relax. If we quit fighting what is happening, we can go with the flow that all honest and thoughtful people see. Because we really are nothing of ourselves, we can rest in God's loving care. When we tell the truth about ourselves, God's creative love replaces our frustrating lies. We can stop trying to dominate everything before it dominates us. Instead of anxiously aggravating our adversaries, we can relax in God's tender love. His creative love pervades everything so thoroughly that, like Robert, we can face the facts about our intrinsic nothingness. Scripture bolsters our reasoning by its absolute authority. But we rebel, striving to preserve our vanity, as Robert describes next.

“But, you say, men do many outstanding deeds for which they are rightly praised, so that praise may increase virtue. It is true that men do many outstanding deeds for which they are praised and honored, but in the Lord, and not in themselves. It is written: ‘But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord’, 2 Cor 10:17. ‘My soul finds praise in the Lord’, Ps 34:2. For I ask, when a man makes something notable, from what material does he make it, or by whose power, or with whose guidance and help? Certainly, he does it from material created by God, and not by man himself. The power by which he acts is given him by God, and is not something he produced. God guides and helps what man does, and without his guidance and help, man would accomplish nothing good. God accomplishes many good things in man without man, but man does nothing good which God does not bring about... Therefore, God deigns to use man's help in doing good works, which he could do by himself, so that man might more [clearly acknowledge his debt to God]. It is not in order that man grow proud of himself, but that he glory in the Lord.

“Therefore, my soul, if you are wise, always take the last place. Do not steal the glory of God either in the smallest or in the greatest matter. Go down to your own nothingness – that alone is yours – and the whole world will not be able to lift you up to pride. The Teacher of humility came down from heaven because this precious virtue of true humility had already disappeared from the world, and could not be found either in the books of the philosophers, or in the customs of the nations. Though he was by nature God, equal to the Father, he ‘emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave ... humbled himself, becoming obedient to death’, Phil 2:6-8. He said to the human race: ‘Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your soul’, Mt 11:29. Therefore my soul, if perhaps you are ashamed to imitate the lowliness of men, you will not be ashamed to imitate the lowliness of God. He can neither deceive nor be deceived, and he ‘resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble, Jas 4:6.’<sup>12</sup>

*Reflection:* See how seamlessly Robert fits his words with God's. Made of nothing, Robert brings nothing to his interaction with God. But God gives him more blessings than he can count. One of God's most outstanding gifts is Robert's clear thinking. Another is his convincing expression, so simple that his words remind us of friendly conversation. Almost everything he says is so commonsense that we could say it ourselves. Even our hardened conceit that we “create” falls as we ponder his words. They make so many practical points! For example, a liar must remember his lies, to protect them from the additional errors that each lie imposes on the world. The liar opposed our God-given ability to speak the truth. Because the liar contradicts himself, honest people catch him lying, and cease to believe him. An honest man saves himself all that straining. Finally, Robert reminds us that Jesus teaches us humility by giving us the Perfect Example of Truth Himself. Because humility is truth, Christ is Humility Himself. Robert then notes that we are God's image.

#### **Chapter 4: Man Was Created in the Image of God**

“We next examine the form, which is the third of the causes. Though the material from which man is made is base, the form which man is given appears precious and excellent. I pass over the external form of the body, its shape, even though it is superior to all other animal shapes, because this is not the substance, but rather the accidental form. The substantial form of man, which makes him a man distinct from other animals, is his immortal soul, endowed with reason and free choice. It is the image of God modeled on the pattern of the supreme Godhead. Thus we read that God said when he wanted to form man, ‘Let us make man in our image and likeness. Let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and the beast of the earth, and every creeping creature that moves upon the earth’, Gen 1:26. Man is the image of God not because of his body, but

because of his spirit, since God is a spirit, not a body. St. Basil says: ‘The image of God lies in that which commands the other animals’, homily 10 of *The Six Creation Days*. Man commands the beasts, not by his body’s limbs, which are stronger in many beasts, but by his mind... Man has charge of the other animals, not by what he shares with them, but by that which distinguishes him from them, and makes him similar to God.

“Lift up your mind, my soul, to your exemplar, and consider that the whole excellence of an image lies in its similarity to its exemplar. ... If the exemplar is beautiful, the image will be very precious, if it imitates the beauty of the exemplar. If the image has understanding, it will hope for nothing more than to always gaze at its exemplar, and perfect its imitation, and become as similar to it as it can.

“Your exemplar, O soul, is God: infinite beauty, light, ‘in whom there is no darkness’, 1 Jn 1:5. The sun and moon gaze at his beauty in awe. So that you may more easily imitate the beauty of such an exemplar, and desire to mirror it, and achieve this by every means ... consider that God’s beauty consists in wisdom and holiness. Just as the beauty of a body arises from the proportion of its parts, and the harmony of its color, so in a spiritual substance, the harmony of color is the light of wisdom, and the proportion of the parts is justice. Here justice means that universal virtue which includes all the virtues. That spirit is most beautiful whose mind glows with the light of wisdom, and whose will is strong with the fullness of perfect justice. I say, my soul, that God, your exemplar, is wisdom itself, is justice itself, and is thereby beauty itself. Since the Scriptures designate both these goods by the name ‘holiness’, in Isaiah the angels praise God as ‘Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts’, Is 6:3. God says to his images: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy’, Lv 11:44. In the Gospel, Our Lord says; ‘Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’, Mt 5:48. If you, my soul, wish to be a true image of God, as close to your exemplar as possible, you must love wisdom and justice above all things. True wisdom consists in judging everything by its higher causes. The highest cause is the divine will, or the law which makes the will of God clear to men. Therefore, if you love wisdom, you must not listen ... to what the law of the flesh dictates, or what the senses judge good, or what the world approves, or your relatives urge, much less to what flatterers propose. Turn a deaf ear to all these, and give all your attention to the will of the Lord your God. You must regard as useful, glorious, desirable, and good for you in every respect, that which agrees with the will and law of God. This is the wisdom of the saints, about which the Wise Man writes: ‘I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of [sun] light, because her light cannot be extinguished. All good things come to me together with her’, Wis 7:19-11.”<sup>13</sup>

*Reflection:* It is sad, but true, that we seldom consider the soul or the human spirit. Yet our spiritual soul makes us what we are. Soul is the intrinsic activity that we summarize by the word “life”. This activity ceases in a most dramatic way when we die. Death stops all human activity. When the dying process is complete, the remains are quite different from the living body. That’s why we call the remains a “corpse”. It decomposes because its soul ceases to renew its life. Therefore, our soul is our vital activity. Our soul makes our body live; it is our formal cause.

In Robert’s time, people considered their souls more frequently and more completely. They were quite familiar with their soul, and often dialoged with it, as Robert does here. It was a very old tradition, memorably advanced by St. Augustine’s book *Soliloquies*. Jesus came to us in the flesh, to speak to our deepest personal experience, to engage us in the conversation which totally engages our soul. If we take Christ’s invitation seriously, we unite our soul with His by pondering what He does for us. This internal conversation with Jesus opens us to more profound thinking and loving.

If we think deeper, we can recognize our intrinsic activity. It radiates throughout us, from vitalizing every single cell, to knowing and loving God. Our knowing and loving are most like God. When we understand what is true, and give ourselves to what is good, we imitate God. His knowing and loving are infinitely perfect. Still, ours are chips off the old block. Our deepest being is what Robert calls our substance, our fundamental activity. Basically, each of us is a rational animal. This spirited flesh, or incarnate spirit, is so common to every human that it defines us. Our shape and size change throughout life from our original microscopic single cell to our full body. These modifications of our substance are changes that come and go. Their instability makes them incidental modifications, called “accidents”. Meanwhile, our substance stays consistent. The person is the same, no matter how many accidents change, from the womb to the tomb, and beyond.

Beneath all the observable changes is the core activity, or the soul, which resembles God's activity most intimately. For example, whether our hair grows or falls out is not essential. It is far from our essential activity of identifying with truth by thinking, and identifying with good by loving. These thinking/loving activities are fine examples of God's creative power. God is the exemplar because He is the origin of all created good. In His infinite simplicity, He is Perfection Himself. He is, perfectly, everything that creatures are imperfectly, and more. As exemplar, He is the original infinite act which expands into the universe, and all its changing creatures. He is the perfect original which each of us imperfectly imitates. By His merciful love, we come to be. Then we strive to improve our image and likeness to Him by imitating His perfect acts. Yes, our imitations are imperfect, but they strive toward perfection, to become closer images and likenesses. Thus we obey Christ's commandment: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect", Mt 5:48. Nothing is more lovable than this integrated act: knowing love and loving knowledge. During the last four thousand years, from Abraham to now, we have striven to attain this brilliant charity, called wisdom. Then we put it into action, as Robert explains next.

"Next, justice, which is the second part of spiritual beauty, embraces all the virtues which adorn and perfect the will, but especially charity, which is the mother and root of all virtues. St. Augustine says in the last book of his *On Nature and Grace*: 'Once charity begins, justice begins. As charity increases, justice increases. When charity is perfect, justice is perfect'. For 'He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law', because 'love does no evil', and therefore 'love is the fulfillment of the law', Rom 13:8-10. Conversely, 'he who keeps his word', i.e. his commandments, 'in him the love of God is truly perfected', 1 Jn 2:5. Those who wish to become like their divine exemplar must obey him who says: 'Be you, therefore, imitators of God, as very dear children, and walk in love', Eph 5: 1-2. A child is the image of his Father, and the perfection of an image, as we said above, consists in being just like the exemplar.

"O my soul, if you had fully understood this, and if, having become like your exemplar by the beauty of true wisdom and true justice, you had been pleasing to the eyes of the supreme king, how much peace would you have enjoyed! How you would have exulted in joy! How easily you would have spurned all the enticements of the world! In contrast, think how terribly angry God becomes when he sees his image stripped of the light of wisdom and the splendor of justice, defiled, disfigured, and darkened, and man, established in such honor that he was like God, now 'is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like them', Ps 48:13. Certainly you would shudder and quake, and you could find no way to rest until you had washed away your stains with rivers of tears flowing from bitter contrition, until you had recovered the likeness of your beautiful exemplar. Because you are a pilgrim away from God, 'for we walk by faith and not by sight', 2 Cor 5:6-7, you always need God's help, both to retain the likeness you have acquired, and to make yourself daily more like him, i.e. more beautiful and shining. Cry to God with all your heart, and tell him: 'O holy and merciful Lord, who was pleased to make my soul after your image, I beg you: improve your faint likeness, increase my wisdom, increase my justice, hide my soul in your hidden tabernacle, so that the mud of fleshly desire, and the smoke of worldly honor, and the dust of earthly thoughts may not defile her'. So much for the formal cause."<sup>14</sup>

*Reflection* The beauty of this word-painting inspires us. No doubt, Robert learned from St. Augustine how to clothe his statements with glints of God's own beauty. By dwelling in divine splendor during prayer, Robert absorbed such divine luster that it enlivened his speech. Our image/likeness to God establishes our spiritual beauty. Robert considered first the beauty of our simple being, then the beauty of our activity. Because Love made us, Love is our basic motivation. With practice, we become more powerfully loving, rich in charity. This increases our image and likeness to Love, our Creator. Power is virtue, actualizing God's creative love in our loving actions. Our loving activity vibrates in harmony with Love Himself. God is the perfect exemplar of Self-giving. Therefore we unite more closely with Him when we give ourselves in love. Because God is love, and we are in His image/likeness, we are love. Self-giving love is our foundation. But we inherit Adam's anti-loving rebellion. Therefore, we must strive to stop this hatred-in-action. The more we overcome hatred, the more we become human love, the image and likeness of Love divine. With Jesus urging us along, our human love becomes ever more divine. Thus we unite ever more with Love Himself.

Along the way, we obey the law, and gradually grow into God. Jesus clears the way, and carries us across infinity into eternity. He forgives us again and again, washing us clean in His blood, so that we can enter God's perfect presence. Robert refers us to St. John's first epistle, which is a hymn to love by obedience. If we

keep God's word, He perfects His love in us. Isn't it amazing that we have heard all these excellent recommendations before, but Robert weaves them together into a lovely unity? Isn't it inspiring? He touches our heart by reminding us that we children are the Father's image. Robert encourages us to advance from visible human loving activities to our invisible loving relations with God.

Robert gives us good example by reminding his soul to increase faithful understanding of God's love. Likewise, if we take Jesus seriously, and strive to understand more fully, we fall madly in love with "the beauty of true wisdom and true justice". We seldom speak of beauty in this way. Spiritual beauty of wisdom and justice may be foreign to us. But if we consider them just a little bit, we begin to gain glints of God's beauty in the wisdom manifest in His creation. His justice is likewise beautiful, giving to each creature its due. If we pay more attention to God's beauty in sunsets and the justice of rewarding faithful souls, we extensively expand our image and likeness to God. Nothing pleases God more than our imitating Him more fully, so that we can be His likeness more entirely. Nothing calms us more than coming home to God by increasing our image and likeness to Him. When we dwell on his beauty, expressed in wisdom and justice, we do what He does. The Father admires the wisdom and justice of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and each of them admire the wisdom and justice of the other two Trinitarian Persons. When we join in this symphony of admiring the beauty of each Divine Person, we at last do what God created us to do, and find the peace He intends for us. His profound unity with God reminds Robert how well he harmonizes with God. This perfectly balanced symphony of souls is the ecstasy God created us to enjoy. It's like sailing with the wind. Nothing else matters. We enjoy a preview of coming heavenly attractions.

Yet, we fall away from this peaceful bliss, into sin. Then God is "angry" in the sense that He urges us to repent. This repentance is a drastic change for us, but tremendously rewarding. It's like surviving a storm that sinks our ship. We climb once more onto Peter's boat, to sail with the wind again. Of course, this sailing analogy is a weak representation of spiritual ecstasy. Because we invent words to express what we see, we don't have words for our more important spiritual experiences. Robert dramatized the sinful storm so well that we remember our own personal experience of sin.

Robert summarizes our sin and repentance by St. Paul's words "we walk in faith, and not by sight". We stumble along in darkness, ever seeking God. Christ guides us if we allow Him, but we often reject His guidance, by striving to do our will our way. This choice rips our peace, producing turmoil, like a ship in a storm. So the prayer that Robert provides suits us perfectly because it invokes God's infinite mercy to heal our sin. This is how our intrinsic formal cause should act, uniting us ever more firmly with God. Robert then describes the result that we obtain, if we persevere unto the end.

### **Chapter 5: Man's Intrinsic End is the Blessed Vision of God**

"There remains the last of the causes, called the final cause. The end for which man was created is none other than God himself. But there is a twofold end: one intrinsic, the other extrinsic. We will examine both briefly, one at a time. The intrinsic end of each thing is the perfect state which the thing can attain. The intrinsic end of a palace is to be a complete and perfect palace. It is then said to have achieved its end when it lacks nothing that the building of a palace requires. The intrinsic end of a tree is the perfect state which its nature requires. A tree can be said to have attained its end when it has stretched out its branches and produced leaves, and is covered with blossoms, and a little later is laden with ripe fruit. Man who is created for the most lofty end, can be said to have attained his end when his mind sees God as he is. This vision brings with it the knowledge of all things, and the will enjoys the supreme good, which it has ardently loved and desired, and the body endowed with immortality and impassibility, and other glorious gifts, possesses eternal peace and happiness. The essence of this final beatitude is the vision of God by which the images of God, we ourselves, attain our perfect state, and perfect similarity to our divine exemplar. For this reason, Blessed John writes: 'Now we are the children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him just as he is', I Jn 3:2.

"O my soul, if you could imagine what this means: 'We shall be like him because we shall see him as he is', how quickly all the clouds of worldly desires would disappear. God is completely happy, and completely

happy because he always sees himself as he is, and enjoys himself, the supreme good, clearly seen and ardently loved from all eternity without any interruption. He wanted to make you, together with the holy angels, a partaker of this priceless good. For this sublime and lofty end he created you. The verse: ‘enter into the joy of your master’, Mt 25:21, means that you partake of the joy by which God himself rejoices. ‘I appoint to you a kingdom, even as my Father has appointed to me, that you may eat and drink at the table in my kingdom’, Lk 22:29-30, means that I will make you participants in my kingdom and royal table, so that you may enjoy the honor, the power, and the pleasure which I enjoy, and which God my Father enjoys. Who can imagine the greatness of this honor, this power, this pleasure, and this happiness of the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Lord our God? Surely the person who has raised his thought and hope to the great height of our end would be absolutely ashamed to quarrel over the ownership of the earth, or be downcast by any loss of temporal things, or rejoice over temporal gains. He would be ashamed, I say, to covet the pleasures that cattle covet, who has been made the companion of angels, and a partaker of God’s friendship, and of his priceless goods, since friends share all in common.”<sup>15</sup>

*Reflection* When Robert wrote this, every educated person knew the four causes, and the importance of the final cause. We may not be so fortunate. Perhaps it helps us to consider that the final cause is the goal or purpose for which some efficient cause makes something to be. The full-blooded purpose for which God creates man is God Himself. We can identify smaller purposes, like: loving Him now, safely passing through today’s temptation, serving the Church... The list is long. But our main reason to exist is to unite with God, to be one with Him. In this unity, we will see God as He is. There will be no more cloudy, vague, shifting images of God. He will be present to us perfectly clearly.

That is the knowing side of our divine union. As soon as we know God’s perfect Truth, we see how good He is. We recognize that He is perfect Goodness. So we unite with him by loving Him with our entire being. This loving side of our divine union integrates with our knowing side in perfect unity. Robert distinguishes this finality, or purpose, into intrinsic and extrinsic parts. We attain our intrinsic end when we unite with God. In that union, we finally become what we ought to be. After many failed attempts here on earth, we succeed in heaven. So all the hints of happiness we enjoyed here grow into perfect happiness up there. All our peaceful moments fuse into perfect peace. All the passing joys of life unite into the perfect joy of heaven. Our defective struggling finally finishes by perfect knowing and loving of God Himself.

Robert is right that we can’t imagine what our perfect union with God will be. So he gives examples from the Bible to show us that our greatest earthly experiences are faint echoes of heavenly bliss. Robert reminds us that God’s happiness is perfect knowing and loving of His three Persons, and all His creation. Scripture expresses this perfection as “seeing Himself as He is”. When we see Him as He is, we participate in His perfect bliss. Because God created us for this divine perfection, why do we waste time on creatures? How can we bear to distract ourselves from real goodness with the fake goods all around us? Robert urges us to use what we know about creatures to love God our Creator. Even though He is far superior to all creatures, God made us to be one with Him. To be one with One is the very best destiny, and it is ours. If we remind ourselves of this reality, created goods fade into proper perspective. They are steps on a ladder to God.

Digging deeper, we realize that our final end of uniting with God returns us to our source. Because God made us, we complete the circle when we return to Him. If we remain faithful, we cycle from our Source to our Destiny, and each is God. Jesus taught us this great circle by His life, death and resurrection. He came from eternal life and emerged into life eternal through death. Peace envelopes us when we realize that our struggle returns us to our Source. God creates us to include us in His most enjoyable love. He is the very Love which loved us into existence. He is our Destiny, our final resting place. The complexity of our confusing lives evaporates in this simple unification with our Source. No wonder Robert presents this joyful final cause to us so clearly. His explanation of our intrinsic end consoles us, and strengthens us along the way to God. Robert now considers our extrinsic end, which is personal for God and for us.

## **Chapter 6: Man’s Extrinsic End Is God’s Glory, and Man’s Own Eternal Salvation**

“The extrinsic end of each thing is the person for whose sake a thing is made. The end of a palace is its

inhabitant. The end of a tree is its owner. The end of man is the Lord his God alone. He made man for Himself. He conserves him, feeds him, and pays his salary. Therefore, he rightly commands: 'You shall fear the Lord your God, and serve him only', Dt 6:13. Note carefully, my soul, that other things which were made for man's sake are useful for man, but not for God. Beasts of burden work for man, not for God. The fields, vineyards, and gardens fill man's storehouse, barn, and purse, not God's. Finally, labor, sweat, and weariness belong to servants. To the master belongs profit, rent, and pleasure. But the Lord your God, who lacks nothing, does indeed want man to serve him, but wants the use, gain, and reward to belong not to Himself, but to man, His servant.

“O Lord, sweet and mild, and plenteous in mercy’, Ps 85:5. Who will not serve you with his whole heart, if he begins to taste only a little of the sweetness of your fatherly rule? What, Lord, do you command your servants? ‘Take my yoke upon you’. What is your yoke? ‘My yoke is easy, and my burden light’, Mt 11:29-30. Who would not gladly bear a yoke that does not press down, but lifts up, and a burden that does not weigh down, but refreshes? Rightly then, you add: ‘and you will find rest for your souls’, Mt 11:30. What is your yoke which does not weary, but gives rest? Surely it is the first and greatest commandment: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart’. What is easier, gentler, and sweeter than to love goodness, beauty, and love, all that you are, Lord my God? Your servant David was right in judging when he concluded that your commandments are ‘more desirable than gold and many precious stones, and sweeter than honey’, Ps 18:11-12. He added that ‘in keeping them, the reward is great’. How is this, Lord, that you promise a reward to those who keep commandments which are more desirable than much gold, and sweeter than honeycomb? You absolutely promise a reward, and an extremely rich reward. Your apostle James says that God has prepared ‘the crown of life for those who love him’, Jas 1:12. What is this crown of life? A greater good than we can conceive or desire. Thus Blessed Paul quotes Isaiah, ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love him’, 1 Cor 2:9; Is 64:4. Truly rich is the reward for those who keep the commandments. Not only is the first and greatest commandment useful for the man who obeys it, rather than for God who commands it, but also the other commandments of God perfect, enhance, teach, enlighten, and make good and happy, the man who obeys them. If you would be wise, recognize that you were created for God's glory and your eternal salvation. This is your end. This is the center of your soul. This is the treasure of your heart. If you reach this end, you will be happy. If you fall short of it, you will be wretched. Judge therefore that your true good is whatever leads to your end. Whatever hinders your advance to God is true evil. Wealth and poverty, abundance and shortage, health and sickness, honor and dishonor, life and death, are not of themselves worth seeking or avoiding by the wise man. If they lead to God's glory, and to your eternal happiness, they are good and desirable. If they hinder that, they are evil, and must be avoided.’<sup>16</sup>

*Reflection* Because we didn't learn about causes, we probably never heard that God instilled this marvelous blend of intrinsic and extrinsic purposes in us. Too often, we focus on one fragment of reality at a time. So we miss the big picture, the integrity, or the unity of the universe. We don't see God's overall work as we should. But we can improve. We can even approach His very own view, because we are His image and likeness. Robert leads us into this more complete view. His simple example of the king's palace reminds us that we know somehow that each purpose has two sides, one for the thing itself, and the other for the person who will use the thing. Intrinsic completion of the palace finishes its internal construction. But the extrinsic purpose is to accommodate the king. He will live in it. Intrinsic and extrinsic purposes blend to round out the final cause. Robert clarifies this arrangement for us. The integrity of intrinsic and extrinsic purposes of the king's palace is fairly obvious. The two meanings complement each other, and integrate beautifully.

Robert gives us lots of examples of God's gifts sustaining us through life. Then he reminds us that God doesn't need any of these. They are all for us. They brilliantly illustrate God's generosity. They teach us His infinite love. We may distract ourselves from this ultimate glorification of God's love, but it's the reliable reality behind the shifting appearances. God demonstrates His glory by explaining all this for us in Scripture. St. Paul and the psalmists break into song over God's glory. It shines through all His creation: “The heavens declare the glory of God”, Ps 19:2. A word-search of the Bible will provide 1152 references to “the glory of God”, from Genesis through Revelation. God shows His glory to Abraham, intensifies His manifestation to Moses, leads Israel through the desert by His glory visible in the pillar of cloud and the column of fire. God's generosity is indeed glorious. He does so much for us, deserve it or not.

What does He ask us to do? Robert reminds us that Jesus, Who is God the Son, tells us to love God and our neighbor. This yoke is easy, and this burden is light. If we glimpse God's gracious mercy, we delight in our yoke/burden. Robert gives us lots of Biblical examples to help us hear witnesses proclaim how delightful it is to serve God. When Jesus saves us from our wretched yoke/burden of sin, He frees us into heavenly bliss. This bliss grows ever more complete as we stumble toward Him on earth, and explodes into perfect joy in heaven. Meanwhile, we refer to it as gold, jewels, and honey. These are the most precious creatures we can grab, so they are good examples of the surpassing good that St. James calls "the crown of life for those who love" God.

This lively crown is beyond words, as St. Paul says so well: "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man". God has prepared perfect delight for us. As Robert noted in the previous chapter, this perfect delight is God Himself. If we like any of God's many creatures, we will love God. After all, He is the source of all the good that the universe displays. And all this good is integrated into one God. In Him there are none of the gaps we encounter here below between scattered goods. Instead, God is One Perfect Good. He created us to be one with His One.

That's why Robert says that if we reach this end, we will be happy. If we fail to reach it, we will be wretched. Our decision determines the difference. The results are ours to choose. If we follow Christ's lead, love God and our neighbor, then we advance through all difficulties to union with God. If we follow our own agenda, serving ourselves, then we wallow in wretchedness. Such superficial conditions as wealth/poverty, sickness/health... do not matter. How we use them matters. Do we use our wealth to serve the poor? Do we accept poverty to serve God? Do we endure sickness to serve God? Do we employ health to help our neighbor? These are the important questions. Robert gives us great examples to clarify our choices. If we use events to make things better, we advance toward God. If we use events to make things worse, we advance toward misery. So Robert ends his first review of creatures with a clear call to God, Who is our natural cause and destiny. Now the second part of his book begins with the second kind of step up the ladder to God.

## **II Step Two: The Consideration of the Macrocosm**

### **Chapter 1: The World's Greatness and God's Greatness**

"We build the first step in our ladder of ascent to God by considering human nature, which is called the microcosm. We now plan to add the second stop by reflecting on that enormous mass that is commonly called the macrocosm. In his Second Sermon for Easter, St. Gregory Nazianzen wrote that God created man as the macrocosm in miniature. That is true if we separate the angels from the world, for man is greater than the corporeal world, not in his mass, but in his power. If, however, the angels are included in the world, as we include them here, then man is the microcosm set in the macrocosm. In this macrocosm, which includes all things, many objects are clearly wonderful, especially their size, number, variety, power, and beauty. If we reflect carefully under God's enlightenment, these creatures will powerfully raise up our heart so that it will be overcome in admiration at their [outstanding qualities]. Returning to itself, [our heart] will despise whatever it sees, outside of God, as nothing and worthless."<sup>17</sup>

*Reflection* Robert uses terms that were well known in his time, but not in ours. Therefore, a word or two about the terms may help us. The cosmos is the universe, including everything but God. As creator, God exists before creation, and cannot be confined in it. All created things constitute the cosmos. Because we are created, but can know all things, created and uncreated, we are unique. Though we don't yet know everything in the cosmos, we can eventually know everything. Above all, we know God, Who created everything. When we know, we become whatever we know. Our expanding identity with the macrocosm inspired St. Gregory to identify each of us as miniature macrocosms: for short: microcosms.

Robert notes that angels are creatures, therefore part of the cosmos. But they are invisible, so we tend to forget them, especially when our senses fill up with intriguing visible creatures. Robert lists some of the good qualities of creatures that attract our rapt attention. We can easily attain a cosmos-wide admiration of God's handiwork. Each good created quality itself arouses us to dwell in it in a rapt attention that we call wonder. Under God's enlightened guidance, we maintain perspective, so that after ecstatic wonder about creatures, we return to our innermost realization (heart). Then we hear these magnificent creatures speaking God's glory to

us. Then we compare creatures to Creator. Then we realize that God's being far surpasses His creatures, taken individually, in groups, or as a unified cosmos. Though wonderful, all creatures are nothing of themselves. Therefore, by comparison to God they are "nothing and worthless". No wonder that, in God's perfect light, we despise whatever falls short of God.

This reflection may help us catch up with the educated people for whom Robert wrote this book. By filling in a few of our blanks, we attain the common understanding that cultured folks achieved at the turn of the sixteenth century. By penetrating surface distractions, they saw that God outshines the entire cosmos. In the 1500's Protestants and Catholics alike loved to read Robert's words, to be inspired to pursue their quest for God. Robert enriches his view with Scripture.

"The earth is surely great, so great that Ecclesiasticus says: 'Who has measured the breadth of the earth, and the depth of the abyss?' Sir 1-2. This can also be seen from the fact that in the many thousands of years which have flowed by since the foundation of the earth, the whole surface of the earth (its breadth) has not yet become known to us men, despite our careful explorations. And what is the size of the earth in comparison with the vastness of the heavens above? Astronomers claim that it is like a mere point, and they are right. We see that even when the earth comes in between the sun's rays [and the other heavenly bodies]. [These other bodies remain lit] as if the earth were nothing at all. [Moreover] if every star in the firmament is greater than the whole earth, as scholars generally believe, and still these stars seem tiny specks to us because of the almost infinite distance, who can think the size of the heavens where so many thousands of stars shine? Therefore if Ecclesiasticus [Sirach] says 'who has measured...', what should be said about the outside surface of the heavens, and the depth of the whole universe from the top of heaven down to hell? The size of the material universe is absolutely so great that no mind or thought can grasp it.

"Please consider now, my soul, if the world is so great, how great is he who made the world? 'Great is the Lord, and of his greatness there is no end', Ps 155:3. Listen to Isaiah: 'who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and weighed the heavens with his palm? Who has poised [held] with three fingers the bulk of the earth?' Is 40:12. Following Aquila's translation, St. Jerome says the 'hollow of his hand' means his little finger. So that it really means that all the waters, which are less than the land, are measured by the little finger of God, the weight of the earth by three fingers, and heaven, which is greater than the waters and the earth combined, is weighed by the palm. But this is metaphorical, since God is a spirit, and strictly speaking has neither fingers nor palms. But Scripture still shows clearly enough by these comparisons that God is much greater than his creation.

"Solomon indicates this more precisely when he says: 'heaven and the heaven of the heavens do not contain you', 2 Chr 6:18. This is so true that, if another world were created, God would fill it too, and if there were many worlds, or even an infinite number of worlds, God would fill them all. Do not think, my soul, that your God fills the world so that part of God is in part of the world, and that he is complete in the whole world. God does not have parts. He is complete in the whole world, and complete in every part of the world. Therefore, he is present everywhere by his omnipotence and his wisdom. Hence, if you are faithful to him, even if an armed camp lies against you, your heart will not fear. What should it fear, when it has with it an almighty Father, friend, and spouse who sees all, and is aflame with love? But if God is your wrathful judge, rightfully because of your guilt, and your almighty enemy, who sees all and detests sin with an implacable hatred, then you ought to fear with dread and terror, and give no rest to your eyes and your feet until you appease him through true penitence, and breathe again in the light of his mercies."<sup>18</sup>

*Reflection* Robert quotes several striking Scriptural statements expressing the size of creation. He provides recent astronomical observations to boot. Each fit well with enlightened understanding common to his time. We can achieve similar awareness while wondering at the night sky, full of uncounted stars. Each star is another sun. Robert uses an earth-centered model to estimate the size of the earth, and to show that the earth does not significantly impede our sun from lighting heavenly bodies. In his time, many astronomers abandoned that geo-centric model, but the relative sizes of the earth and the sun are similar enough that his presentation resonates with us. Because God creates all these splendors, he is obviously greater than they are. His perfect spirit transcends all limits, so nothing can restrict his activity. He created space and time to enable his material

creatures to move from one space to another, in the time it takes to achieve that movement. Space and time are possibilities for space-occupiers to activate. As pure spirit, God occupies no space. Therefore, neither space nor time can confine Him. That realization propels Robert into profound awe.

All these remarks fit perfectly with the cultivated people of Robert's age. They followed right along, enjoying every step. Uneducated people would find it hard to follow, and might go to sleep. So Robert would prepare a different presentation for them. Though today's interests differ somewhat, we can follow Robert's presentation of creation's wonders. But when he moves from God's greatness to his punishing power, we probably reject this image. We do not think that way today. Instead, we emphasize God's infinite mercy and love. After the trauma of World War II, we want to avoid all "dread and terror". We emphasize instead Robert's "Father, friend, and spouse, Who sees all, and is aflame with love". Perhaps we can work toward the balance that Robert expresses, because our sins do need appeasement "through true penitence". We long to "breathe again in the light of his mercies". This fine chapter helps us contemplate the immense size of the cosmos, and God's care of it and us. Then Robert advances to the astounding number of amazing creatures.

## **Chapter 2: The Multitude of Created things and the Infinity of God's Perfection**

"Who shall count the multitude of creatures of our God, who alone is creator of heaven and earth? Ecclesiasticus says: 'Who has numbered the sand of the sea, and the drops of rain?' Sir 1:2. But putting aside all these minute things, how many metals, gold and silver, brass and lead, precious stones, gems and pearls, are found on land and sea? How many types and species and individual grains, shrubs, and plants are there on earth? How many parts in each of them? How many types, species, and individual animals ... which run, crawl, and fly? How many types and species, and individual fish in the sea? Who can count them? What about the races of men, of which it is written: 'According to your highness, you have multiplied the children of men', Ps 11:9. Finally, how many are the stars in the sky? How many angels above the heavens? As we read of the stars in the trustworthy Scriptures: 'Number the stars if you can', Gn 15:5. Elsewhere Scripture compares the number of the stars with the number of the sands of the sea, which everybody agrees are uncountable, Jer 33:22. Rightly does Daniel say of the angels: 'Thousands of thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him', Dn 7:10. St Thomas agrees with St. Dionysius that the number of the angels is so great that it surpasses the number of all material creatures. Consequently, this nearly infinite number of things which our almighty God alone has created shows that the perfections of the divine essence are completely infinite.

"God wanted man to know him somehow through his creatures, and since no creature could fittingly reflect the infinite perfection of the Creator, he multiplied his creatures, and gave a certain goodness and perfection to each of them, so that from them we could judge the goodness and perfection of the Creator. He embraces infinite perfection in the perfection of his one and utterly simple essence, just as a gold coin contains the value of many copper coins. My soul, when anything which seems wonderful strikes your eye or your thought, make it a ladder to recognize the Creator's perfection, which is incomparably greater and more wonderful. This way, created objects, which have become a 'snare to the feet of the unwise', Wis 14:11, will not mislead you, but will teach you. They will not cast you down, but direct you upward toward better things. Therefore, if you encounter gold or silver or jewels, you will say in your heart: 'My God is more precious, who promised to give me himself, if I despise these things'. If you marvel at kingdoms and earthly empires, say in your heart: 'How much greater is the kingdom of heaven, which endures forever, and which God, who does not lie, promised to those who love him'. If pleasures and delights begin to titillate your sensuality, say in your heart: 'The pleasure of the spirit is much more enjoyable than the pleasure of the flesh, and intellectual delights are much more enjoyable than those of the belly'. The first come from a perishable creature, the second come from the God of all consolation. He who tastes the latter can say with the Apostle: 'I am filled with comfort, and I overflow with joy in all our troubles', 2 Cor 7:4. Finally, if you are offered something beautiful, new, unusual, great, or wonderful, on condition that you desert your God, answer serenely: 'Whatever good they possess, and much more and better, are beyond doubt found in God.' Therefore, it would be useless to trade a gold-plated coin for solid gold, glass for a precious gem, little for much, the uncertain for the certain, and the temporal for the eternal."<sup>19</sup>

*Reflection* Here you have Robert's ecstatic description of God's marvels. We vibrate in harmony with

this review of God's created wonders. We delight in wondering about what God made. Robert soars from personal experience to Scripture's poetic expression. Between the two, God's glory shines through His artistry. The sheer volume of God's creatures overwhelms us. Robert gives us examples that spark us to remember our wonder about many other things. God made more than we can experience, so Robert repeats "who can count?"

But we all can build from the many creatures we see, as we reach out toward God's infinity. The uncountable creatures we see around us point to a Creator Who must entirely surpass our counting. God must be actually infinite. He is definitely "something else", way beyond creatures. Visible creatures are uncountable, but so are invisible angels. God reveals their multiplicity. From this nearly infinite number, we recognize the necessity of a truly infinite Creator. God gives us the mental power to zoom from one likeness to another. That is why we enjoy reading Robert words which zoom from one gold coin, worth many copper ones, to one God, worth the astounding wealth of creatures in His creation. This analogy is the springboard we use to zoom past the multitude to the One Who creates them all.

Robert then reminds us that we never want to distract ourselves with mere creatures, because the Creator is so much more valuable. God is the value we would miss if we pay too much attention to any creature. However dazzling, a creature may be, like gold plated lead, we seek to avoid that distraction, and strive for God's pure gold. Similarly, glinting glass should not separate us from God's diamond. Naturally, God is infinitely more valuable than gold or diamond. But this analogy launches us into the more intense reality of God's infinite Goodness.

This goodness provides infinite pleasure to the Trinity, and proportionate pleasure to us when we choose creatures. When Robert considers our pleasure, he reminds us that thinking is more delightful than eating. We all enjoy pleasures from both these acts. Our experience shows clearly that spiritual joy far surpasses any material joy. We know that spiritual acts are more intensely pleasurable than sensory acts. So Robert urges us to rise further up the ladder from creatures to Creator by resisting temptations to wallow in material pleasures. These pleasures, limited to sensations, disappoint us almost immediately, leaving us tired, but unfulfilled. In sharp contrast, spiritual pleasures fulfill us more completely, without tiring us. Thinking is instantaneous delight, while eating takes a while. When we pursue sensual pleasures, our material effort exhausts us without fulfilling us. All too often, we are disgusted for expending so much effort for such puny results. Too frequently, we berate ourselves for making the same stupid mistake again. So Robert recommends that we "answer serenely" that God is more pleasurable than creatures, and thus avoid falling for creatures again.

How practical Robert is. He gets right down to brass tacks, to what is most important for us. He provides both brass tacks and celestial visions, balancing practicality with spirituality. That's why reading Robert is more rewarding than many other efforts we could expend. If we reread our favorite parts of his book, we invite him to inspire us again and again. He is a wonderfully reliable friend, helping us up the ladder to God. Now he examines many varieties of creatures.

### **Chapter 3: The Variety of Created Things, and God as Infinite Font of All Good**

"The multitude of creatures is wonderful, and suggests the manifold perfection of the one God. But much more wonderful is the variety of things which are seen in that multiplication, and which more easily lead us to the knowledge of God. For it is not difficult for one sign to express many numbers which are identical, and for countless letters to be printed from the same type, but to vary natures in the almost infinite way that God has done in his creation of things is clearly a divine work, worthy of wonder. I pass over the genera and species of things which are commonly agreed to be extremely different and varied. How much variety there is in the individual grains, plants, flowers, and fruits! Do not their shapes, colors, odors, and tastes differ in almost infinite ways? Is this not equally true among the animals? But what can I say about men, when you can hardly find two men in a vast army really alike? The same is found among the stars and the angels. Every 'star differs from other stars in glory', 1 Cor 15:41. St. Thomas asserts that the angels, even though they are more numerous than material beings, differ not only individually, but also in species.

"My soul, raise the eyes of your mind to God, in whom are the patterns of all things, and from whom, as from a font of infinite richness, that nearly infinite variety flows. Even God could not have endowed created

things with their countless natures unless he contained in the breast of his being their natures in a most high and exalted way. Rightly the apostle cries out: 'Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God', Rom 11:33. Truly it is a well of infinite depth, hiding the treasures of riches, the wisdom, and the knowledge which was able to produce such a variety of things. Rightly again St. Francis, illumined by divine light, used to say to the Lord: 'My God and my all', because the various goods which are found scattered and divided in creatures are found collected in one God, in a higher and better way. My soul, you may object: 'These assertions seem true, but we see created goods with our eyes, touch them with our hands, taste them with our mouth, possess them physically, and enjoy them. We do not see God, touch him, taste him, or possess him. We can barely apprehend him in thought as a faraway object. So it is no wonder if created things touch us more than God.' But, my soul, if your faith is strong and vigilant, you cannot deny that this life flits away like a shadow. If you remain firm in faith, hope, and love, you will see God clearly and truly as he is in himself, and you will possess him, and enjoy him far better, and more intimately, than you now enjoy created things.

"Hear the Lord himself: 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God', Mt 5:8. Hear the Apostle Paul: 'We see now through a glass obscurely, but then face to face', 1 Cor 13:12. Hear St. John: 'We shall be like to him, for we shall see him just as he is', 1 Jn 3:2. Moreover, how much of the world, I ask you, is yours? Certainly not the whole world, nor half, nor a third, nor a fourth. Barely a particle is yours, and you will be forced to surrender it after a short time, whether you like it or not. But you will totally possess God, in whom are all things, and you will possess him forever. For the saints and blessed, 'God will be all in all', 1 Cor 15:28, without any end. He will be your life, food, clothing, housing, honor, riches, delight, and all else.

"In addition, your God is gentle and mild. He does not command that while you are a pilgrim on earth you must utterly forgo creaturely consolations. Indeed he created all things to serve you. But he did command that you use them with moderation, sobriety, and temperance, that you share them cheerfully with the needy, that your possessions be not your master, but you theirs, and that you use them to attain God. Think carefully then: isn't it better for you to have created things in this life, as much as necessary, and to enjoy in the other life the Creator himself, in whom are all things. Or is it better to strive mightily in this life to acquire temporal possessions, never to be satisfied with their amount, and in the next life suddenly to be stripped of all your temporal goods, and never attain eternal goods? Moreover, God is not far from those who love him, so that even in this life he gives them great joys, greater joys than lovers of the world find in created things. The Scripture speaks the truth: 'I remembered God, and was delighted', Ps 76:4. 'Delight in the Lord, and he will give you the requests of your heart', Ps 36:4. 'I will take delight in the Lord', Ps 103:34. 'Give joy to the soul of your servant, for to you O Lord I have lifted up my soul', Ps 85:4. I can skip other passages, since the Apostle says: 'I am filled with comfort, I overflow with you in all your troubles', 2 Cor 7:4. Certainly he does not mean that tribulation gives birth to consolation, or suffering to joy, for thorns do not produce grapes, nor thistles produce figs. Rather, he means that to ease tribulation, God fills his friends with such pure, clear, and solid consolations that worldly joys cannot be compared with them. Make this your firm conviction, my soul: Whoever finds God, finds all; whoever loses God, loses all."<sup>20</sup>

*Reflection* Robert soars into heavenly contemplation here. He can't contain his wonder and awe at God's various creatures. Clearly, he is a very happy man. His happiness shines through his descriptions of creatures, and his quotes of Scripture. How attractive his happiness is. He describes his enjoyment of creatures, in all their variation. Then he explains many of our experiences. For example, though a sign, like 100, can include a hundred numerical units, each unit is the same. So each unit is merely a repeat, and we shift our attention to something worth considering. Similarly, the 26 letters of the alphabet can be repeated on many pages, so we shift again, searching for something more meaningful. Mere mechanical repetition is nothing compared to God's creation of many different kinds of things. Consider the difference between apples and oranges, cats and dogs, stars and stripes. They propel us into "a divine work worthy of wonder". There are too many differences for us to mention. But even a few examples show how vast these variations are.

They all flow from God, their ultimate source. So all the variations we see illustrate the variety in God. He is the prime source. Each variation is an example of God's infinite variety. So God is the exemplar, or defining source, of each variation we find in the universe. Thus, nature's variation is our ladder leading to God. Whether we start from physical things, down in the dust, or from increasingly spiritual things, higher into

heaven, the fabulous variation in creation reveals God's infinite variety. God's variety is much higher and more exalted than nature's. Why? Because the universe is so full of limits that they characterize creation, but God is so free of limits that infinity characterizes Him.

This infinite reality inspires St. Paul's ecstatic outbursts. For example: "the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God". Robert quotes Scripture because it is loaded with magnificent words that point effectively to God's glory. No words can express this divine glory, but biblical words suggest it better than others.

Robert gives us the usual excuse that most people repeat for resisting this rising into God. It is easier to sink into the unavoidable sensations that bombard us, than to think past them into spiritual reality. Robert agrees that it is easier to slide into sensations. But Jesus provides supernatural assistance to overcome this inertia. By Baptism, Christ joins us to Himself. This union delivers to us His divine life, the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If we exercise this Trinitarian life, we transcend sticky sensations, and soar into God's spiritual delight. Faith is our specific activation to emerge from cloying matter into exalting spirit. Therefore, Robert recommends strong and vigilant faith to overcome sensory limits. If we decide to believe what Jesus tells us, then we see beyond physical limits into limitless divinity. Christ tells us that we will unite with the Father, through the Holy Spirit. So we believe, and look beyond sensations toward God.

Robert reminds us to exercise hope and charity, as well as faith. Each decision to believe, to hope, and to love, clarifies the reality behind slippery sensations. As Robert says, life itself "flits away like a shadow". If all of life passes so quickly, what can we say of individual sensations? They are even less stable than life. They are gone quicker, slip and slide more slyly, making them utterly unreliable. They attune us to the stable act behind them. For example, the universal "apple" sustains the shifting sensations of individual apples. "Apple" is the **one** around which its **many** variations turn. That's why ancient philosophers called it the universal (*uni* is Latin for "one"; *verso* is Latin for "turn".) This universal is so stable that it would remain what it is, even after all apples became extinct. That's why we can meaningfully discuss dinosaurs, even though they became extinct 60 million years ago. The stable, reliable, part of reality is spiritual. Sensations change so often, and so drastically, that we rightly distrust them. We can take these small steps up the ladder to God, rejecting unreliable and unsatisfying sensations, and accepting spiritual acts of knowing and loving.

Robert provides several scriptural quotes to bolster our weak faith. Each quote addresses one of our common experiences. If we ponder these biblical recommendations, we increase our faith, hope, and charity. Why? The main reason is that God inspires us by His Biblical messages. Another significant reason is that the human authors faced the same difficulties we face, and emerged into increased faith in the way we want to emerge, by believing and following faithfully. They passed this way, and moved on to God, just as we want to progress. Their encouragement is just what we need. They remind us that others have struggled, decided to believe, and passed through temptation to attain God.

Along the way, Robert reminds us, God enables us to enjoy many good creatures, because he "is gentle and mild". Here below, he gives us pleasurable creatures, so that our enjoyment will sustain us through hard times. But Robert recommends that we follow Christ's command to get along with a few created pleasures, to assure that we attain Uncreated God. At the opposite extreme, Robert notes that we could devote ourselves to pleasures and possessions, while ignoring God. That's stupid, because we quickly lose those creatures, like it or not. We also miss the one and only Great Good.

But if we put God first, and use His creatures moderately, then we ascend the ladder into God. Our real delight is taking each step, even if we step through suffering. Robert quickly adds that suffering does not produce joy, "for thorns do not produce grapes". Instead, people who love God, love pleasing Him, even if those people must slog through suffering. God sustains them in their pain. He provides consolation. God's love of us, and our return love of God, is our main drive to carry us through suffering. That's why God reveals Himself most clearly in suffering on the cross. His Passion shows Love in action. Robert ends with the blockbuster: "Whoever finds God, finds all; whoever loses God, loses all." Then he's ready to contemplate the power of creatures, revealing Power Himself.

## Chapter 4: The Power Implanted in Created Things, and God's Omnipotence

“Our next task is to ascend from the strength that God has given creatures, to an understanding of the infinite strength of the Creator. There is no creature, without exception, which does not have wonderful strength, power, or efficacy. Earth, or a lump of mud, if it falls from on high, crushes with great impact. Is there anything it cannot break? What can resist it? When the Holy Spirit, in the Book of Revelation, wishes to describe the tremendous force with which Babylon the great, i.e. all of the damned, will be hurled into the deep abyss on Judgement Day, he speaks thus: ‘A strong angel took up a stone, as it were, a great mill-stone, and cast it into the sea, saying: “With this violence will Babylon, the great city, be overthrown, and will not be found any more”’, Rev 18:21.

“Water, when soft and smooth, flows gently over the face of the earth. When it swells wrathfully in rivers and torrents, it smashes down and destroys everything in its path. We have seen it demolish not only the houses of country folk, but also the gates and walls of cities, and marble bridges. Next the winds. Sometimes they blow very gently, but they also smash great ships against the rocks, and root up and knock down aged oak trees. I myself saw something that I would never have believed unless I had seen it: a great mass of earth dug up by a tremendous wind, and dumped on a village so that a deep crevice could be inspected where the earth had been ripped out. The whole village was covered; the earth had buried it. What will we say about fire? How rapidly a little fire spreads into a conflagration, destroying homes and forests in minutes. ‘Behold how small a fire burns a great forest’, Jas 3:5.

“What various powers lie hidden in plants! What strange powers are found in stones, especially magnetic stones and amber. What strength do we see in animals like lions, bears, bulls, and elephants? How clever, though tiny, are ants, spiders, bees, and flies. I pass over the power of the angels, and the might of the sun and stars, which are far from us. Finally, how great is human genius, which has invented skills that make us wonder whether nature surpasses art, or art surpasses nature! Now lift up your eyes to God, my soul, and reflect on how great is the strength, efficacy, and power of the Lord your God. Scripture truthfully says: ‘Who is like you among the strong?’ Ex 15:11. ‘You alone perform great wonders’, Ps 135:4. ‘The blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords’, 1 Tim 6:15. All creatures’ powers come from God. They possess them only as long as God pleases. Who, except God, kept Jonah, shut up in the belly of a whale, unharmed by the waters of the sea or the teeth of the whale, Jon 2:1-10? Who, except God, closed the mouths of hungry lions, so that they touched not Daniel, Dan 6:16? Who, except God, kept unharmed the three young men in the fiery furnace, Dan 3:33? Who said to the raging wind and the seething sea: ‘Peace, be still’, Mk 4:39. Who, except Christ, who is true God? God does not have his strength and power from another, but his will is power; nothing can resist it. He has infinite power, and has it always and everywhere. All human power compared to God’s is not just small or puny, but nothing whatsoever. ‘All nations are before him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to him as nothing and vanity’, Is 40:17. Are they not silly who fear created things, but do not fear almighty God? Likewise, those who trust in their own strength, and that of their friends, and do not trust in almighty God? ‘If God is for us, who is against us?’ Rom 8:31. And if God is against us, who is for us?

“If you are wise, my soul, ‘Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God’, 1 Pt 5:6. Cleave to him in true devotion, and you will not fear what man or demon, or other creature may do to you. But if you have fallen away from devotion, and provoked God to wrath, give your days no rest until you make peace with your God, for it is an exceedingly ‘fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God’, Heb 10:31.”<sup>21</sup>

*Reflection* Many people today exalt their power beyond its actuality. Therefore, we need to replace ourselves into proper perspective. Above all, we need to ponder God’s power, partially expressed in creatures. Honest observation of our power reveals its variation: up then down. This change reveals how fleeting it is, and how dependent upon its Source. We can add to Robert’s examples of power those that impress us. Then we can work our way up to acknowledge the necessity of Power Himself. If we do, we can relax in Him. Robert next considers created beauty, leading to Uncreated Beauty.

## Chapter 5: The Beauty of Created Things, and the Uncreated Beauty of God

“The last subject we will examine [in this part] is the beauty of created things. On this, the Prophet said:

‘You have given me, O Lord, a delight in your doing’, Ps 91:5. Certainly, everything that God has made is beautiful, as well as good, if we rightly reflect on it. Passing over other things, let us consider those which everyone judges and agrees are beautiful. Certainly, there is great beauty in a green pasture, a well-kept garden, a pleasant wood, a tranquil sea, a serene sky, fountains, streams, cities, and the heavens adorned and glittering with countless jewel-like stars. How much do we delight in the beauty of a tree clothed in blossoms, or laden with apples? Or the beauty of the shapely bodies of the different four-footed animals, in the flight of birds, the darting of fish? What shall I say of the beauty of the stars and moon, and especially the great and brilliant light of the sun, whose rising delights the whole world? It is human beings that we are really talking to, and nothing gives them more pleasure than their own beauty and appearance. ‘Many have perished by the beauty of a woman’, Sir 9:9. Often we have seen with sorrow, men, otherwise wise, so captivated by love for the beauty of women, and serious and conversely, honored women, reduced to such madness by the beauty of men, that they prefer the love of human beauty to their family life, their dignity, their children, their parents, even to life itself, and their eternal salvation. The stories of David, Solomon, and Samson are well known. History is full of similar examples.

“So, my soul, if the Creator has lavished such beauty on created things, how great and marvelous do you think is the beauty of the all-beautiful Creator? No one can give what he does not have. If the appearance of the sun and the stars has so enchanted men that ‘they took (these luminous bodies) to be gods, the Wise man said ‘let them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they, because the first author of beauty made all those things’, Wis 13:3. We know the greatness of God’s beauty with certainty from the fact that the beauty of all creatures is gathered together and found on a higher level in Him. Since He is invisible to us while we are pilgrims far from Him, we know Him only by the testimony of Scripture, and the evidence of His creatures. Still many saints hid themselves in desert places to devote themselves entirely to contemplation. For example: St. Mary Magdalene, Paul the first hermit, Anthony the Great... Others, giving up wives, children, and all earthly possessions, chose to live in monasteries, under the command of others, so that they could enjoy God’s friendship. Others yearned to risk freely their lives amid bitter suffering, in order that they could merit... the vision of infinite beauty. Listen to St. Ignatius the Martyr: ‘May I endure fire, the cross, beasts, broken bones, dismemberment, crushing the whole body, and all the torments of the devil, if only I can enjoy Christ’.

“If, therefore, the divine beauty, not yet seen, but only believed in, and hoped for, stirs such fiery desire, what will happen when the veil is removed, and He is seen as He is in Himself? Then He will establish ‘a torrent of pleasure [like intoxication]’, Ps 35:9. We will neither wish to, nor be able to, switch our eyes, even for an instant, from His beauty. It is not surprising that the angels and blessed souls always look on the face of the Father, who is in heaven, without finding any tedium or surfeit. For God is himself always gazing on his beauty from eternity, and finds total peace in that vision, and is happy from it, and wishes nothing else. He is like someone who has entered a wine cellar, or a garden of all delights, which he never leaves, not even for all eternity.

“My soul, seek this beauty, and aspire to it day and night. Say with the Prophet: ‘My soul has thirsted after the living God. When shall I come and appear before the face of God’, Ps 41:3. Say with the Apostle: ‘We even have the courage to prefer to be exiled from the body, to be at home with the Lord’, 2 Cor 5:8. Do not fear that the mighty love of this beauty will defile you. Love of the divine beauty perfects the heart without wounding. It sanctifies without defiling. The holy virgin and martyr Agnes rightly said: ‘I love Christ, whose mother is a virgin, whose Father knows not woman. When I love him, I am chaste. When I touch him, I am pure. When I receive him, I remain a virgin’, [from the Roman Breviary for St. Agnes’ feast]. If you really desire the uncreated beauty of the Lord, you ought to fulfil what the Apostle adds in that passage: ‘Therefore we strive, whether in the body or out of it, to be pleasing to him’, 2 Cor 5:9. If God is pleasing to you, you ought also to be pleasing to God. Beyond doubt, we will please him in the land of the living where we shall be present to, and illuminated by, his brightness, as the Prophet sings: ‘I will please the Lord in the land of the living’, Ps 114:9. But in this pilgrimage, we so easily soil ourselves, and defile ourselves with the dirt of sin, as the Apostle James said: ‘in many things we all offend’, Jas 3:2. The prophet David, to show how few remain stainless on the way, claimed that this was part of beatitude: ‘Blessed are the undefiled in the way’, Ps 118:1. If you desire, my soul, to please your loved one even while you are distant on pilgrimage, it is not enough to desire to please him, but you must strive to please him by constant and intense work to avoid sins which make the face of the soul ugly. If some stains cling there, you must strive to cleanse them with no less effort and work. Do you not see how many hours

young women who want to please their husbands spend in setting their hair, putting on makeup, and removing stains from their clothes? [They do] this to please the eyes of mortal man, who in a little while must turn to dust and ashes. What then should you do to please the eyes of your immortal spouse, who sees you always, and wants to find you without spot or wrinkle? Certainly, you must work at it with all your strength, so that you may walk ‘in holiness and justice before him’, Lk 1:75. You must energetically remove, or cut out, everything that blocks true holiness and true justice. Pay no attention to flesh and blood, and ignore what men say and judge, since you cannot please both God and the [people in the] world. “If I were still trying to please men, I should not be a servant of Christ’, Gal 1:10.”<sup>22</sup>

*Reflection* Ah beauty, how beguiling, bewitching, and bewildering thou art! Naturally Robert soars into ecstasy here. His enjoyment of created beauty exceeds his words. But he sets the stage with Scripture: “delight in God’s doing”. We need that foundation because, after Adam sinned, beauty is too hot to handle. In our sinful state, crippled by Adam’s inherited defects, beauty drives us wild. Robert, in spite of his great discipline, loses his ordinarily orderly stepwise advance to a conclusion when he examines beauty. Instead of orderly steps, he yields to delighted leaps. So some leaps seem to be disconnected from others. We can fill in some of the gaps in his joyful presentation of these lovely expressions of beauty. The pure eye sees beauty in all the examples that Robert provides. Each beautiful creature somehow reflects the Beautiful Creator. Beauty excites Robert, as well it should. In God’s image and likeness, Robert is beautiful because Beauty created him. Robert’s limited beauty reminds him of God’s perfect beauty. We too experience these steps up the ladder of beauty. We hope to enjoy Beauty Himself for all eternity. Perfect Beauty will so fascinate us that nothing can distract us from enjoying Him. His Beauty will absorb us into its delight, forever inflaming us with Love.

But there’s a worm in the apple. All too frequently, here below beauty is so desirable that we grab it, take it for ourselves, try to capture it. Naturally, this violence kills beauty. Robert gives outstanding Scriptural examples of this violent attack of beauty. Even such exalted servants of God as David, can fall by ripping off the beautiful Bathsheba. On the opposite side, St. Agnes gave herself to God’s beauty. Then beauty flourished in her, as it will flourish in us, with inexpressible delight. St. Agnes points so perfectly to ecstatic beauty that her words inspire us. To follow her lead, we must give ourselves to beauty instead of grabbing it. We must accept it instead of trapping it. It’s the difference between rising into beauty by yielding to it, and tearing it down by forcing it flat.

As St. Ignatius Martyr affirms, Christ is the utmost beauty, well worth all suffering. This fiery desire even in earth’s darkness, energized all the saints. There are too few saints, and too many drunks. That’s why Robert uses drunken abandon to remind us of saintly abandon. When saints abandon themselves to Beauty, they become more satisfied than the rest of us. But even we sinners can abandon ourselves to Beauty, and enjoy satisfaction in proportion to our abandonment. The more we give ourselves to Christ, the more we attach ourselves to Beauty. Because Jesus is God incarnate, He is Perfect Beauty. When Beauty absorbs us, we delight so completely that nothing can distract us from Beauty. All goodness unites in God. He is Beauty. He is Good. He is Happiness. He is Love. Therefore, union with God is perfect pleasure, happiness, satisfaction, and ultimate peace. We call it heaven because it is such perfect activity. Heaven is our total commitment to Total Good. That ultimate commitment banishes boredom. Actually, boredom is realizing that we are unsatisfied because we are isolated from God. When we are absorbed in Beauty, boredom evaporates. Robert puts it this way “no part of God is tedious”. In complete opposition to Beauty’s delight, stuffing ourselves with creatures tires with our tedious effort. The ultimate boredom-effect is recognizing that that exhaustive effort did not satisfy us at all. Robert shows us the proper balance of effort and joy. He delighted in beautiful creatures because they led him to Beauty. By filling Robert up with Beauty, God expanded him toward perfect excitement. On earth, this excitement slipped away. In heaven it’s eternal.

Robert gives us several steps toward this divinely-inspired heaven, but many steps disappear into the ecstasy of giving himself to Beauty. Therefore, do not find a complete set of steps here. A more basic reason for missing steps is that God raises us up the final distance to Perfect Beauty. It’s a good thing that He raises us, because we can’t go far alone. We are like the baby at the bottom of the steps. He can’t climb the steps to his mother, but she sees his outreach to her. Stirred by love, she rushes down to sweep him into her arms, and carry him upstairs. St. Therese of Lisieux gives us this parable to suggest God’s loving lifting us up to Himself. Rob-

ert tells us the same thing, indirectly. He uses the example of the lady who works hard to make herself beautiful to please her beloved husband. We should work harder to please God. He is Beauty Himself, so all His creations are intrinsically beautiful. We want to beautify ourselves for Him by being more like Him. This process finishes Step Two of Robert's ladder. He now moves on to Step Three.

### **Step Three: Consideration of the Earth**

#### **Chapter 1: As Our Body Rests on Earth, So Our Mind Can Rest in God Alone**

"We have examined the physical world as a whole. Now we come to consider its principal parts, so that we can build from them a ladder for us to contemplate the builder, as far as we can.

"The first subject is earth, which, although it lies in the lowest place, and seems less important than the other elements, in fact is not less important than water, and surpasses all the other elements in dignity and value. Throughout the Holy Scriptures, we read that God made the heavens and the earth as the principal parts of the world, to which the other parts are subordinated. He made heaven as a sort of palace for God and the angels. Earth he made as a palace for men. 'The heaven of heavens is for God, but the earth he gave to the sons of men', Ps 113:24. This is the reason why heaven is full of glittering stars, and the earth abounds with the kinds of animals. Water has only fishes. Air and fire are barren and almost empty elements. Let us pass over these. Three aspects of the earthly globe are most worthy of consideration. If our mind is alert, we can ascend from them to God without difficulty. [Back then the elements were earth, air, fire, & water.]

"First, earth is the firm foundation of the whole world, and if we did not have it, man could neither walk nor rest nor work nor live at all. 'He has established the earth, which will not be moved', Ps 93:2. 'You have founded the earth upon its own bases, and it shall not be moved forever and ever', Ps 10:35. Second, earth is a good nurse for men ... steadily producing grain, crops, fruit, herbs, apples, and countless other products. Thus God speaks: 'Behold I have given you every herb-bearing seed upon the earth, and all trees that have in themselves seed of their own, to be your food, and to all the beasts of the earth', Gen 1:29-30. Third, earth produces stone and wood for building homes, and copper and iron for various uses, and gold and silver to mint coins. In short, the instruments for procuring all the things needed for human life.

"The first value of earth is obviously its location, in which our bodies find rest, since they cannot rest in water, air, or fire. It is a symbol of the Creator, in which alone the human soul can find rest. 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you', St. Augustine, *Confessions*. If anyone found rest in power, riches, and pleasure, it was King Solomon. He possessed a vast and peaceful kingdom, so that the Scripture testifies that he 'had under him all the kingdoms from the river to the land of the Philistines, even to the border of Egypt. They brought him presents, and served him all the days of his life', 1 Kgs 4:21. He had incomparable wealth, keeping up forty thousand stalls for his chariot horses, and twelve thousand riding horses. ... Solomon's fleet brought gold and precious gems from Ophir in such quantity that silver was considered as worthless as cobblestones, 1 Kgs 4:24; 9:28; 10:27. He indulged himself in pleasures that seem incredible. In his lust for women, he took seventy wives as queens, and three hundred concubines, 1 Kgs 11:3. He described himself: 'I made great works, building houses, planting vineyards, making gardens and orchards, and setting them with trees of all kinds. I made ponds of water for the young trees. I got menservants, maidservants, and a great family, with herds of oxen, flocks of sheep, above all that were before in Jerusalem. I heaped up silver and gold, the wealth of kings and countries. I made singing men and women, and delights of the sons of men, cups and vessels to pour out wine. I surpassed in riches all before me in Jerusalem. My wisdom was with me. Whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not. I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure, delighting myself in the things I had prepared. I esteemed this my portion, to make use of my own labor', Ecc 2:4-10. He certainly had complete satisfaction, if it can be found in created things. He lacked nothing, not kingdom, not riches, not the human wisdom, which is the greatest worth, not peace and tranquility to possess them for a long time.

"Let us ask whether he found rest in all these goods, and whether they could fill the capacity of his soul. 'When I turned myself to all the works which my hands had wrought, and to all the labors wherein I had labored in vain, I saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind; nothing lasts under the sun', Eccl 2:11. There-

fore, Solomon did not find peace in his many riches and pleasures, and wisdom and honors. Nor could he have, even if they had been much more and greater, because the human spirit is immortal, and such things are mortal. They cannot last long under the sun. It is impossible for the human spirit, which is open to infinite goodness, to be satisfied with finite goods, just as the human body cannot find rest in the air ... nor in water ..., because its center is the earth ... Thus the human spirit can never find rest in airy dignities, or watery riches, that is, soft and filthy pleasures, or in the false glitter of human knowledge, but only in God. He is the center of our souls, and their true and only resting place. How truly and wisely did David say: 'What have I in heaven, and, besides you, what do I desire upon earth? You are the God of my heart, and the God who is my portion forever', Ps 72: 25-26. David is trying to say: 'I find nothing either in heaven or on earth, or in any other created thing under heaven, or on earth, that can bring me true rest. You alone are the solid rock for my heart'. The Hebrew word for God also stands for rock. Therefore, you alone are the most solid rock for my heart. I rest only in you. You alone are my portion, my inheritance, all my good. Everything else is nothing, and can do nothing to fill and satisfy me, not merely for a day or two, or a year, but for eternity. Only you satisfy me for eternity, while all other things fail to satisfy, even for one day.

"My soul, have you finally recognized that God alone is your rock to rest on? All other things are vanity and trouble for your spirit, and have no real existence, but are phantoms. They bring not solace, but trouble, because they are acquired with labor, held with fear, and lost with sorrow. Be wise, and spurn all things that are passing, lest they snatch you away with them. Stay with him, chain yourself to him by love. He remains forever. Lift your heart to God in heaven, lest it grow rotten upon earth. Learn that true wisdom which is folly to the multitude. The Wise Man says: 'We have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice has not shined unto us. We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known. What has pride profited us? Or what advantage has the boasting of riches brought us? All those things passed away like shadows, but we are consumed by our wickedness', Wis 5: 6-9, 13.<sup>23</sup>

*Reflection* Perhaps Robert's view of the world bothers us. The elements he mentions are not our elements. He situates himself in the world in quite a different way than we do. It will help us to remember that he begins from personal experience, and adds the scientific research available to him at the time. Galileo had just made his measurements, so only a few Jesuits followed his process. Robert grasped how measurement is useful, but most thinkers had not yet adopted the process of reducing outward limits of bodies to numbers, and relating them in formulas. Today, science is firmly established in our belief system. So we no longer believe in the four famous elements of Robert's day. Instead we believe in the ninety-two naturally occurring elements. We have not experienced them, but we learn about them in school. Because scientific research requires long and dreary labor, hardly anyone actually does all that work. Instead, we eagerly repeat what scientists tell us. So scientific results are revelations to us. Therefore, we must believe science, almost in the same way that we believe Scripture. Some people even believe science instead of Scripture. The difference between these beliefs is that science changes rapidly, even regularly reversing itself. For example, we first heard that cholesterol was bad; then that some of it was good. We did not experience the research ourselves. We believed what scientists said. Meanwhile, Scripture is constant, always reliable, and more applicable the more we mature. The Bible is about our experience. For example, we often say: know I understand what that sentence from Scripture meant. Our personal experience that Holy Writ says it best does not make reading it easy. But at least we don't mistake scientific conclusions for Gospel.

In fact, our maximum achievement is to ponder our personal experiences, and conclude from them the best guess we can make. Along the way, we rely upon people who maximize their achievements. None maximizes them better than God. So we refer to God's revelation for ultimate guidance. Other social agreements, including science, come and go, changing often, and sometimes drastically. Meanwhile, God's revelation, lots of it expressed in Scripture, remains steadfast. That's why Robert utilizes God's Word so often, and so effectively. In this section, Robert builds from his personal experience of three indisputable facts: 1) earth is our stable dwelling place; 2) it nourishes us by food and medicine, and 3) it shelters us with material to build houses, and to construct society. He then gives many examples from holy men, and from Holy Writ. Robert's many examples assure us that he was a keen observer, and pondered his experience, to draw the most likely conclusions.

Then he selects some Scriptural riches to bolster his personal experience. He notes that this straggling advance echoes St. Augustine's most helpful expression: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in God".

Robert quotes abundantly from Solomon's experience, kept in Scripture for our instruction. If creatures could satisfy anyone, they would have satisfied Solomon. But they didn't. Solomon himself calls them vanity, gone like shadows. So all three witnesses: Robert, Augustine, and Solomon, agree that creatures, however arranged, sustain our life, but fail to satisfy us. Robert reveals why: because we are immortal, and these other creatures are mortal. It is impossible that a mortal creature could satisfy us, because its mortality eventually eliminates itself. We go on without it. So our satisfaction can only exist in union with an immortal being, ultimately with the Immortal.

Therefore, only the Ultimate Stability, the Unending Good, the Entire Truth, alias God, can satisfy us. Robert asks his soul if he finally accepts that truth. Plenty evidence leads to that conclusion. Our personal experience of frustration with creatures is the most stinging reminder that creatures fail to satisfy us. The more luminous witness of Solomon, David, and all the saints, supports the same conclusion from outside us. Jesus, Who is God in the flesh, the living Revelation, shows us how to use creatures to attain God. Then He summarizes his life and teaching with the command: "Love God with your whole heart, whole soul, and whole mind, and your neighbor as yourself", Mt 22:37; Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27. Each of us has various personal experiences which initiate our thought. Each, likewise, has different ways to express our experience. Robert expresses his significant experiences quite effectively, as we can see. He grounds us firmly on our launch pad, then urges us to lift off into God, Who is beyond us. All along our pilgrimage, God is our secure support, foundation, or ground. Robert will develop that theme in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 2: We are Securely Grounded in God**

"There is another reason why a solid rock is a symbol of the Lord our God. The wisdom of God explains this symbol to us in his Gospel, where he said that the house build on solid rock remains unmoved when the rains fall from above, and the winds rush in from the side, or streams strike it from below. But the house build on sand cannot stand up to any of these, but collapses at the first attack of rain or wind or stream, and great is the ruin of that house. See Mt 7:24-27.

"O soul, your home has its various powers and virtues as its rooms and halls. It will be secure if it is based on God as on a rock. If you trust God absolutely, if all your confidence is in God, if rooted and based on the love of God, you can say: 'who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' Rom 8:35. Then neither wicked spirits who are above us, nor carnal desires which are within us, nor the enemies of our own household who attack us from the side ... will ever prevail against you in their machinations. Great indeed are the forces, and great is the cleverness of the spiritual powers, but greater is the power, and greater the wisdom, of the Holy Spirit, who presides over the house based on God. The flesh fights most stubbornly against the spirit, and carnal desires usually subdue even the strongest souls, but the love of God easily conquers the love of the flesh, and the fear of God easily casts down the fear of the world.

"Finally, 'a man's enemies are those of his own household', Mi 7:6; Mt 10:36. They try by evil suggestions to draw souls to their sinful fellowship. But the soul who trusts that she has her Lord and Father, and her brother and spouse in heaven, knows without great effort not only how to condemn her fleshy friends and relatives, but how to hate them, accepting: 'For I am sure that neither death nor life nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord', Rom 8:38-39. But it is truly an unhappy soul whose house is founded on sand, and cannot last long. It will soon utterly collapse, since she believes in a lie, and relies on a reed for a staff, and has either her belly, or money, or the smoke of honor for her idol. All these pass away, and perish very quickly, and drag the soul clinging to them down to eternal destruction."<sup>24</sup>

*Reflection* Robert's second chapter is quite clear. Perhaps only the word "hate" requires a comment. Presently we avoid the word "hate". Among the reasons to retire the work is that we have worn ourselves out trying to overcome racial hatred. Our intention is good, but our success rate of eliminating hate is ragged at best. Actual hatred is alive and well, expressed most egregiously in killing over a million innocent babies every year. We are right to reject hatred of different colored people, and of all other hatreds that plague us. For example, ter-

rorist hate us unto death, if not contained. But banishing the word does not help reduce hateful acts. Robert was not tangled in our troubles, so he could safely use the word “hate” to mean react with all your strength against evil. If we consider “hate” in that context, we will understand what he says here. God reaches out to us, sharing His infinite love. He necessarily shares because He is Love. He is our loving creator: the Father Almighty. He is our savior: the Son All-Merciful. He is our hope and inspiration: the Spirit All-Comforting. No wonder we ground ourselves securely in Him. From this foundation, Robert considers the earth nourishing us.

### **Chapter 3: The Earth Nourishes Our Body by God’s Power, Nourishing the Whole Man**

“Another property of the earth lies in the fact that the earth, like a good nurse, pours forth grain and other crops abundantly to feed man and the other animals. But this property leads us to the Creator as the true nourisher, for it is God, not the earth, who produces all the good things on earth, as the Holy Spirit says through the mouth of David: ‘He makes grass to grow on the mountains, and herbs for the service of men’, Ps 147:8. Again, ‘all expect of you that you give them food in season. What you give to them, they shall gather up. When you open your hand, they shall all be filled with good’, Ps 104:27-28. Our Lord in the Gospel says: ‘Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them’, Mt 6:26. Likewise, ... God ‘did not leave himself without testimony, bestowing blessings, giving rains from heaven and fruitful seasons ... filling our hearts with food and gladness’, Ac 14:17. Also true is the statement at the beginning of Genesis: ‘let the earth bring forth the green herb, and such as may seed, and the fruit tree yield fruit after its kind’, Gen 1:11. The earth does produce grass and fruit, but by the power God gave them, while God himself produces and conserves, and gives the increase through that power. Hence, when he invited all creatures to praise the Creator, David added ‘fruit trees and all cedars’ ... (Ps 148:9.) The three young men in Daniel urged all things that grow in the earth to join the other creatures in blessing the Lord, and praising and exalting him forever, Dan 3:51-90.

“Since all things praise God in their own way, with what intensity should you, my soul, bless and praise him for all the benefits you continually enjoy? You should acknowledge in them God’s hidden hand which gives everything [to us], and the fatherly and pure love of your God showing itself, not as something hidden, but clear and manifest. He never ceases to benefit you from heaven, and provide you with everything! But in the eyes of the Lord your God, this is too little. He it is who produces in you, as in his spiritual field, the noble shoots of love. Love comes not from the world, but from God, as the beloved disciple says in his letter (1 Jn 4:7). From love as from a divine and heavenly tree, there spring forth bright flowers, fragrant with holy thoughts, green leaves useful for the salvation of the nations, and the fruits of good works which glorify God, help the neighbor, gather merit, and remain unto eternal life.

“Woe to those who, like stupid oxen, try to satisfy themselves with the fruits of the earth. [They] eagerly collect and hide them away without thinking of the Creator, or giving him thanks. Their souls are like the earth, cursed by God, which gives forth thorns and thistles. What fills the mind of those [in whom] God does not sow chaste thoughts? Nothing but fornication, adultery, murder, sacrilege, theft, treachery, and the like. What do they speak about except blasphemies, perjuries, curses, heresies, abuse, insults, false testimonies, lies, and the like? These they learned from their father, the devil. Finally, what fruits do they produce except the poisoned fruits which, we have said, they continually think, and which the Apostle Paul calls the works of the flesh? (Gal 6:7). These indeed are the thorns which first pierce the souls who nurture them with the bitter punctures of fears and cares, then pierce the reputation, bodies, and spirits of their neighbors with serious and often incurable wounds, which later inflict much grievous harm on others.

“But passing over this, my soul, if you are the little garden of the heavenly farmer, take care that thorns and thistles are never found in you, but that you foster with great care the tree of love, the lily of chastity, and the nard plant of humility. Keep watch so that the conviction never creeps into you that these buds spring from you, instead of from the Lord your God. He is the Lord of virtues, the sower of chaste thoughts. Do not attribute to yourself the conservation, growth, and ripening of the fruits of good works. Entrust them to him, and may your strength always be in him.”<sup>25</sup>

*Reflection* Bellarmine waxes eloquent here, listing observations we ourselves have made, linked to appli-

cable Bible quotes. Our personal experiences are necessary launching points into improved thoughts, which enable better decisions, which improve our acts, which benefit both us and our neighbor. Robert does not mention these underlying steps because, back then, most people understood them quite well. Perhaps we need reminders of this basic dynamic. We start from creatures which actually nourish us, like wheat. Then we see how flimsy these creatures are. Their frailty shows us how much they need God, their Creator, to create and sustain them. That dependence makes Him our Ultimate Nurse, nourishing us with creatures that come and go, develop and spoil. An example of that change is refrigerating milk to keep it fresh for a few days.

Robert uses Scriptural expressions to bolster our personal experiences. These snatches from the Bible are lovely examples of a treasure trove of poetic statements which praise God's creation for its glorious proliferation. We can enjoy them all, and add our favorites. They remind us that dumb creatures praise God without knowing they achieve it. We know that we praise, so our praise is much more valuable to God. Glorifying Him also benefits us, because we enjoy offering praise to the most praiseworthy of all beings. We reflect upon our praise, strive to improve it, and rejoice in our improvements. Dumb creatures can't help praising God. But we are free, and can choose whether to praise or not. That freedom makes our praise more valuable still.

We also look beyond the visible gifts that God provides, into the invisible love that He showers upon us. At this point, Robert reminds us that we often reject God's invisible love. God made us to love him. Therefore, when we reject His love, we frustrate ourselves. The violence of this frustration erupts into more drastic rejections. We can work ourselves into frenzies of self-destruction. Robert lists some of the common sins that we commit when we attack ourselves by turning ourselves away from our Source and Destiny. When we reject His love, we rip holes in ourselves. We impose a vacuum where God should be. Our most common explosion of frustration is sex abuse. When we exaggerate the goodness of sex, we idolize it. However much we excite ourselves to make sex into a splendid idol, our construction crashes of its own weight. Then we become furiously frustrated that sex is not God. We are even more disappointed with ourselves for making such a stupid mistake. If we persist in imposing our idol upon ourselves and everyone around us, we become increasingly angry. This anger easily escalates into more passionate aggression, often culminating in murder.

In Robert's time, murder was the worst sin that occurred often. The more evil tragedy of suicide was so rare that people could not deal with it. They thought that the devil possessed the one who killed himself. That's why they wouldn't bury suicides in holy ground. Today, we have collapsed into a suicide epidemic, stemming primarily from sex-abuse. No doubt, our condition would shock Robert. Fatal frustration kills, unless we repent, and return to God. But we will join Robert in passing over the crash landing in sin, and repentance into grace.

He passes directly to our unified life with God. The closer we are to God, the more love flows between us, and the more love flows among us pilgrims here on earth. Because God's love is invisible, Robert uses symbols to express it. Each of us is in the "little garden of the heavenly Farmer". We should cultivate that garden, removing the inevitable weeds and thorns, to improve the garden, so that the tree of love can expand fully, the lily of chastity can bloom, and the nard plant of humility flourish. Nard is a flowering plant of the Valerian family (*nardostachys jatamansi*). People press its root, or rhizome, for oil, and process that into an expensive perfumed ointment, a favorite of kings and queens. Imported from the Far East, it delighted the few people who could afford it. Its soothing effect reminded Robert of humility, which calms us, relaxes us, and improves our peaceful disposition by systematically replacing fantasies with truth. This is the delightful result that we earnestly seek: strength in God, Who creates and guides us, if we freely agree. Robert then considers earth's treasures.

#### **Chapter 4: The Treasures of the Earth: a Shadow of God's Eternal Goods**

"The last glory of the earth that remains is the gold, silver, and precious stones which it contains in its lap. Earth certainly does not produce such a precious variety of things by its own power. Rather, as Haggi says: 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine', [i.e. God's] Hg 2:9. O lover of men, did it also please your sweetness that you provide the human race not only with stone and wood, copper and iron, and all other such materials needed for constructing houses and ships, and making various tools, but also with gold, silver, and precious stones for ornament and decoration? And if you gave this to earthly pilgrims, and often even to your enemies who blaspheme your name, what will you give to your loved ones who will bless you, and reign with you in

heaven? You will give them not a crust of gold and silver, or a few precious gems, but the city about which John the apostle spoke in revelation: ‘All the material of its walls was jasper. But the city itself was pure gold, and the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every precious stone. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls’, Rv 21: 18-21. But let us not imagine that supernal city, the heavenly Jerusalem, [to be] built and decorated ... as cities are here. We know that the Holy Spirit uses these words because he speaks to us who have seen nothing better or greater. Beyond any doubt, that city, which is the fatherland of God’s elect, will be much more splendid than all the cities of this pilgrimage, even as a city of gold and gems surpasses all peasant villages which are made of mud and straw.

“Raise the eyes of your mind to heaven, my soul, and mull over how greatly the blessings given there should be esteemed, since the luster of gold, silver and precious stones, which here count for so much, when compared with those goods, will hardly be granted the name of mud and straw. Moreover, gold, silver, and pearls, which are here considered valuable, are perishable. But those that shine in the heavenly city are imperishable: eternal. But if you want to transfer to the heavenly city, through the hands of the poor, the same perishable gold and silver that you have here ... then they would become imperishable, and remain yours for eternity. For the Truth cannot lie. He says: ‘Sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven’, Mt 19:21. Elsewhere: ‘Sell what you have and give alms. Make for yourselves purses that do not grow old, a treasure unfailing in heaven, where neither thief draws near, nor moth destroys’, Lk 12:33.

“Oh the unbelief of the sons of men! A liar who promises to give 10% interest, and to return the whole capital to the lender, is believed. God, who cannot lie, promises that he will return to the almsgiver treasure in heaven, and a hundredfold besides, and life everlasting. But the greedy man is fearful, and cannot be brought to believe, and prefers to hide his treasure where rust corrodes, and thieves break in and steal, rather than lay up his treasure in heaven [where it’s safe]. Even if your [hoarded treasures survive], whose will they be, O unhappy man? They certainly will not be yours. But they could have been yours if you had transferred them to the heavenly treasures through the hands of the poor. Experience indeed teaches that possessions heaped up by greedy rich men go to their prodigal heirs, who quickly run through what their greedy parents gathered. Meanwhile, the sin of avarice remains, and will remain forever, and the worm of conscience will not die, nor with the fire of hell be extinguished.

“Let the folly of others teach you, my soul, and listen to your Lord and Teacher, who cries out: ‘Take heed and guard yourselves from all covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’, Lk 12:15. The greedy man gathers and guards, so that he can have possessions with which to live a long life. But the opposite happens. He dies when he least expects it, and the possessions that he greedily gathered and guarded beget the worm that dies not, and feed the fire which is not extinguished. O unhappy miser, did you heap up money with such care to prepare fuel for the fire of hell, so that it will never go out? Listen to St. James: ‘Come now, you rich, weep and howl over your miseries which will come upon you. Your riches have rotted, and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold will devour your flesh as fire does’, Jas 5:1-3. Because you are rich, St. James says, you are considered and called happy, but in truth you are wretched, more wretched than all the needy. You have great cause for weeping and wailing over the enormous misery which will certainly overtake you. Your superfluous wealth which you have hoarded, and which you allowed to rot, when you ought to have given it to the poor, and your superfluous clothing ... that you allowed the moths to eat rather than allow the poor to [wear], and the gold and silver which you prefer to rust or corrode rather than give it away [to buy] food for the poor, will all give witness against you on the day of judgment, and the moths and rust from your riches will become a burning fire which will eat your flesh through endless time, and never finish. The fire will not go out, nor the pain cease. Therefore, we close with the Royal Prophet: the foolish ‘called people who had these things “happy”, but happy are those people whose God is the Lord’, Ps 144:15.<sup>26</sup>

*Reflections* As usual, Robert is so clear that hardly anything needs comment. He uses a fine analogy, relating things which are different, but similar. Just as gold and silver exceed the value of mud and straw, so heaven will exceed the value of gold and silver. Our spiritual riches are far and away more satisfying than material riches could ever be. Then Robert drives home the key difference: material riches deteriorate to dust, while spiritual riches survive to satisfy us forever. The Holy Spirit, speaking through St. John in the book of Revelation, uses that analogy, so that we can begin with visible, tangible gold, and leap up into spiritual satisfaction. In

Scripture, the Holy Spirit comforts us with visible earthly reminders of invisible heavenly realities. That's why we can start by reading the Bible, and advance higher up into heaven. Scripture is much more than words. It is the living Word, come to us, to take us to Him. If we open ourselves to Him in Holy Writ, He comes into our hearts. Robert's lovely Bible quotes illustrate this loving union of the Word with man through Scripture.

For emphasis, Robert reminds us that greedy people close in upon themselves by hoarding material wealth. Gold glides away no matter how hard they grab it. Death ultimately separates possessor from possessed. All too often, spoiled rich kids waste the riches their greedy parents amassed. Material possessions dissipate and disappear in many ways. But the spiritual sins a person commits to acquire these possessions remain as holes in his soul. Whoever rejects the poor rejects all good spiritual things. We can't see these spiritual things, so Robert uses striking images: the choice to hoard treasure turns into soul-devouring fire. The very same process of preferring self to others empties the soul of love, which is its real wealth. Love gives; greed takes. So the greedy person strives to gobble up all those material goodies. But they turn sour in his mouth, and sicken his stomach because to choose them is to lose God's love. Grabbing outer material gold can't satisfy. The result is self-imposed emptiness. This hole in the soul burns like fire. Robert delivers the message we need to hear. To hoard treasure is to lose it. When the visible wealth rots, it represents the rotten soul of the person who devoted himself to amassing material treasure. Soul-rot symbolizes the loss of every spiritual value. In direct contrast, to give treasure away is to gain it, plus everything else worth having. Robert highlights the simple process: give treasure to the poor, so that they can deposit it in heaven for you to enjoy forever. The material treasure given away becomes the spiritual treasure enjoyed eternally. Robert describes the basic process which benefits us all. Now he's ready for step four up the ladder to God.

#### **Step Four: The Consideration of Waters, Especially Fountains**

##### **Chapter 1: Water Cleanses Bodily Stains, but God Cleanses Spiritual Stains**

"The second of the world's elements is water. Rightly considered, it can provide a step in our ascent to God. We will consider water in general, then that special ascent of God that we draw from fountains.

"Water is moist and cool, and therefore has five characteristics. It washes and cleans away stains, it puts out fires, it refreshes and restrains burning thirst, it brings together many diverse things into one, and finally it descends to the depths just as it ascends on high. All these are clear symbols, or footprints, of God, the Creator of all things. Water washes away physical stains. God washes away spiritual stains. 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow', Ps 51:7. Although contrition, the sacraments, priests, almsgiving, and other works of piety all wash away the stains of the heart, our sins, still all these are instruments or predispositions. It is God alone who really does the cleansing. 'I am he that blots out your iniquities for my own sake', Is 43:25. Therefore, the Pharisees who murmured against Christ kept saying: 'Who can forgive sins but God alone', Lk 5:21. They were not wrong in attributing supreme power to forgive sin to God alone. [They were wrong when they failed to] believe that Christ was God. For this reason they were blaspheming, and telling the truth at the same time.

"Not only does God wash away the stains of the heart in a way similar to water, but he also wanted to be called water. Thus St. John writes: 'He who believes in me, as Scripture says, from him there shall flow rivers of living water. He said this of the Spirit, whom they who believed in her were to receive. The Spirit had not yet been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified', Jn 7:38. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, who is indeed God, is living water. It is of this water that Ezekiel speaks: 'I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness', Ez 36:25. Since this heavenly uncreated water far surpasses earthly created water in power, we should note 3 differences in cleansing power of created & uncreated water. Created water cleans physical stains, but not all kinds. It cannot remove many stains without soap... Uncreated water cleans away absolutely every stain. Thus we read: 'And you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness', Ez 36:25.

"Created water rarely gets out all stains without leaving some trace, or sort of shadow, from the stain. Uncreated water washes so that it leaves the object cleansed brighter and more beautiful than before it was dirtied. 'You shall wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow', Ps 51:7. 'If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow. If they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool', Is 1:18.

“Lastly, created water cleans natural stains which do not resist the cleaner. Uncreated water cleans voluntary stains, which cannot be washed away unless the soul itself wishes it, and freely consents to the cleaner. But the power of this water is so great and wonderful that it gently penetrates even stony hearts. Therefore, it is not rejected by a hard heart because it brings it about that it is not rejected, as St. Augustine rightly tells us. Lord, who can grasp the wonderful way you inspire faith in faithless hearts, and pour humility into proud hearts, and instill love into the hearts of your enemies, so that those who were moments before breathing out threats and slaughter, and persecuting you in your disciples, suddenly change, and gladly bear threats and slaughter for the sake of you and your Church? (See acts 9:1) It is too much for me to penetrate these secrets of yours. I would rather experience than delve into the efficacy of your grace. Since I know that your grace is a voluntary rain, restricted to your inheritance (Ps 68:9), I humbly beg and plead what I may have part in your inheritance, and may it be pleasing for your grace to come down upon the soil of my heart, lest it remain for you like waterless soil, baked and sterile, for it has not power of itself even to think of anything good. Let us move on to remaining considerations.”<sup>27</sup>

*Reflections* Robert developing popular ideas to connect directly with his audience. In this chapter, he reflects upon the well-known element water. He integrates water with divine forgiveness. Advancing quickly from the visible external sign of the sacrament, Robert considers the invisible internal act of forgiving. God alone forgives, in His invisible way. We can't see God wash sins away. But Jesus tells us that it happens. Therefore we believe. Scripture records Christ's forgiving acts. Always urging us forward into Pure Love, Jesus uses springboards like water to vault us into Infinite Mercy. From familiar every-day water, Christ pulls us into Living Water, Himself. He expresses this reality when he speaks with the woman at the well, Jn 4:7-15. Jesus communicates effectively by springing from well-known water into brand-new divine life. The water that makes us live forever is God's own life. Christ offers this gift to unite us eternally with Him in heaven.

Because divine life is new to us, and beyond our natural understanding, Jesus must relate it to everyday water. If we accept Christ's gift of divine life, He lives inside us, renewing us forever. This is indeed living water. The Samaritan woman at the well did not understand how Jesus forgave her, but she did experience His forgiveness. After that renewal of God's life in her soul, she shared her peace with the people in her village. When the Apostles returned to the well, they did not understand how Jesus could even speak to a Samaritan, much less to a Samaritan woman, much less to a public sinner. After the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, they came fully alive in Christ, and understood God's unlimited love. Robert's account teaches us to grow in God's life, so that we can learn more next time. Just reading Robert again, rewards us with increased understanding.

That's why Robert compares created to uncreated water, to help us advance from familiar water into less familiar divine forgiveness. When we compare the differences between created and uncreated cleansing, we detach our attention from water, and attach it to God's merciful remission of our sins. Robert paraphrases St. Augustine's expression of his own famous conversion. Both St. Paul and St. Augustine were more famous sinners than Robert, so they provide fine examples of outstanding forgiveness, familiar to his audience. These examples encourage us to accept God's mercy, and to experience forgiveness directly. If we volunteer to let Christ take our sins away, we experience complete cleaning, making us cleaner than before we sinned. No matter how dirty and dry we may be, living water cleanses and vivifies us. Robert presents this option clearly, and invites us to accept graciously. Then he advances to water's fire-quenching ability.

## **Chapter 2: Water Puts Out Fire, But God Extinguishes the Blaze of Concupiscence**

“Water puts out fire, and heavenly water [grace from the Holy Spirit] puts out the fire of carnal desires in a wonderful way. Fasts and bodily austerities help greatly to restrict the blaze, but only as auxiliaries for the Holy Spirit's grace. Otherwise, by themselves they help very little. Love controls the affections, and spiritual drives, ruling all... Love cannot be forced, and if its way is blocked in one direction, love breaks out in another. Love fears nothing, and dares all, conquering all and thinking that nothing is hard or impossible. Finally, a lesser love yields only to a greater and stronger love. Thus a completely fleshly love, whether it seeks riches or the pleasures of the world, yields only to the love of God. As soon as the water of the Holy Spirit begins to enter into the human heart, fleshly love immediately begins to grow cold. A good example for us is St. Augustine, who was accustomed to give in to lust, and thought that he could not [live] without ... a woman. But when he

began to taste the grace of the Holy Spirit, he exclaimed: ‘How sweet it suddenly became for me to do without the pleasures of those playthings, and what I had feared to leave was now a joy to dismiss. You cast it out of me, you true and highest sweetness. You cast it out, and you, sweeter than all pleasures, though not to flesh and blood, entered in their place. You are brighter than any light, but more inward than any secret. You are higher than any honor, but not to those who are high in their own esteem,’ *Confessions*, book 9, 1.”<sup>28</sup>

*Reflection* Robert describes that Living Water extinguishes lust. God’s love, freely given to volunteers who freely accept it, quenches the raging moral disease of lust. Perhaps our easiest description of lust is “disordered sex-drive”. Properly-ordered sex-drive is self-donation, or entire giving of self to a beloved person who entirely gives self in return. This entire self-giving expresses our image and likeness to God. His Persons give themselves without reserve to each other, overflowing with infinite love. God is the greatest Gift of Self. He is the Self Who gives Himself away, the Ultimate Gift. Therefore, our sexuality is properly ordered if it is self-donation. When we give ourselves away, we work towards the ideal that God is. He calls us to give entirely.

Real love creates because it is unrestricted. God is the ultimate model of Creator, because He is Love. God’s personal love creates the wonders of the universe, which Robert enjoys throughout this book. Human sexual love is creative opening to babies. We poor creatures have only partial control of our sexual drives. But we can manage at least the intention to give ourselves totally to give life. God completes our intention by actually creating the life in the single cell formed by the sperm giving itself totally to the ovum, which gives itself totally to receive the sperm. The very biology of sex reflects the ultimate Spirit Who infuses the human soul in the zygote. When father, mother, and God cooperate, the parents pro-create, to join God’s ultimate creation.

On the opposite side of this creative process, lust takes instead of giving, dominates instead of loving. Lust locks the person in himself, treating the other person as merely a means toward pleasure. If it can, lust closes off God’s creation of the next generation, precisely because lust takes instead of giving. Lust depersonalizes the interaction which should be supremely personal. St. Augustine called it “muddy carnal concupiscence; whirlpool of vice”, *Confessions*, p 24 of Chadwick’s translation. Robert understands that Augustine experienced turmoil from disordered emotions, set upon pumping pleasure from any woman. Therefore, his emotions raged against orderly love. This self-imposed disturbance of Augustine’s peace mired him in misery. God’s gift of true love relieved him of his profound misery. So he gratefully accepted this grace. Then Augustine achieved that peace which he so desperately desired. Beyond peace, he achieved the only satisfactory love, “sweeter than any pleasures”. Throughout the *Confessions*, Augustine swells with satisfaction, and excels at expressing it, as this quote illustrates. Robert now considers the closely related process of filling desires.

### **Chapter 3: Water Alleviates Thirst, but God Satisfies the Heart’s Desires**

“Water also alleviates thirst, and heavenly water alone can put an end to the varied, vexing, and nearly infinite desires of the human heart. Truth taught this to the Samaritan woman when he said: ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again. He, however, who drinks of the water I will give him, shall never thirst’, Jn 4:13. That is exactly the way things are. ‘The eye is not filled by seeing, neither is the ear filled by hearing’, Eccl 1:8. Nothing man encounters can satisfy his desire, since he has a capacity for infinite good, and all created goods have their set limits. But the person who begins to drink heavenly water, which contains all things, looks for nothing more, and needs nothing more. We have talked about this above, when we were speaking about the spirit’s rest in God alone, as its true center.”<sup>29</sup>

*Reflection* Robert assures us that God gives us a taste of Living Water, i.e. Himself. Though this gift is more than we can understand, it is exactly what we need. God fills the God-sized hole in our heart. So our heart’s desires are satisfied, for the moment. As Robert reminds us, our desires increase, like a feed-back dynamic. We obtain more satisfaction than ever before, and are content for a while. But this satisfaction stretches our capacity, so to speak, so that we desire more. God fills that increased desire, providing more peace and contentment, momentarily. This give and take continues, approaching God ever more closely because He is our true satisfactory center. This naturally fulfills His purpose: creating us to be one with Him. We are one with him rather like water joins wheat grains to make dough, to bake into bread. Robert delves into uniting spirits next.

### **Chapter 4: Water Joins Material Things Together, but God Establishes a Union of Spirits**

“Water simultaneously joins things that seem hardly unite-able, but become one. Thus many grains of flour are made into one loaf of bread by mixing with water. Bricks are made by adding water to many particles of earth. Much more easily and permanently does the Holy Spirit cause many men to be ‘one heart and one soul’, as the first Christians were (Acts 4:32). . . . This unity, which the water of the Holy Spirit brings about, was predicted and praised by the Lord when he was about to go to the Father: ‘Yet not for these only do I pray, but for those also who through their word are to believe in me, that all may be one, even as you Father in me and I in you’, Jn 17:20-21. Later: ‘That they also may be one even as we are one: I in them and you in me, that they may be perfected in unity’, Jn 17:22-23. St. Paul: ‘Careful to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: one body and one spirit, even as you were called in the one hope of your calling’, Eph 4:3-4.

“O happy union which makes many men into the one body of Christ, which is ruled by its one heart (1 Cor 10:16), eats one bread, drinks one chalice, and lives by one spirit, clinging to God to become one spirit with him. What more can a servant desire than to be not only a partaker in all his master’s goods, but also to be united indissolubly by a bond of love to his all-powerful, all-wise, and all-beautiful Lord? Like living and life giving water, the grace of the Holy Spirit achieves all this, when it is devoutly received into the heart, and is guarded with all diligence and care.”<sup>30</sup>

*Reflection* What can anyone add to this fine description, bolstered by Scripture quotes so powerful?

### **Chapter 5: Water Comes Down & Goes Up; God’s Grace-Fountain Springs Up to Life Everlasting**

“Lastly, water ascends on high, just as it falls from on high. Since the Holy Spirit comes to earth from the height of heaven, he becomes, for the man who receives him into his heart, ‘a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting’, Jn 4:14. In other words, man is reborn by water and the Holy Spirit, and he who bears the same Spirit dwelling in his heart builds up merit toward the goal whence grace came down to him.

“Taught and moved by the words of Scripture, my soul, tell your Father again and again with unutterable groans: Give me this water which cleans away every stain, which quenches the heat of passion, and satisfies all thirst and all desires, which makes you one spirit with your God, which becomes in you a fountain of water springing up to eternal life, so that you may send merits before you to the place where you hope to dwell forever. With good reason the Son of God said: ‘If you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the good Spirit to those who ask him?’, Lk 11:13. He did not say that he would give bread, or clothing, or wisdom, or the kingdom of heaven, or life everlasting. Rather he said ‘I will give you the good Spirit’ because everything is contained in him. Do not stop reminding the Father daily about the promise of his Son, and tell him with great love, and the certain hope of being answered: ‘Holy Father, I pour out my prayers to you, not because of my merits, but because of the promise of your only begotten Son. He said to us: ‘How much more will your Father give the good Spirit to those who ask him?’ Your Son is assuredly the Truth who does not deceive us. Therefore, fulfill the promise of your Son who glorified you on earth, and was obedient to you even to death, death on a cross. Give the good Spirit to one who begs you, give the Spirit of fear and love of you so that your servant may fear nothing except offending you, and love nothing except you and his neighbor in you. ‘Create a clean heart in me, God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your face, and take not your holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit’, Ps 51:10-12.”<sup>31</sup>

*Reflection* Here Robert describes the natural cycle of evaporation and rain. We see water vapor rise into heaven, condense, and fall as rain from heaven upon earth. Immediately, Robert vaults from this observable cycle into the invisible spiritual cycle of grace. We experience grace less clearly, but more emphatically. God starts the cycle by showering divine gifts upon us. We accept them, and, by giving thanks, we rise up to heaven. We also request more gifts in our prayerful rise unto God, so we can distribute them here on earth. This cycle continues as long as we respond to God’s generosity. Because of our direct experience of rain, water is the perfect symbol for free gifts falling from heaven. Fog rising into heaven represents our grateful thanks for God’s water-gift. Baptism cleanses us more completely than water. Familiar water represents less-familiar grace.

Robert describes this gift/thanksgiving cycle by quoting the best-known Bible passages that express it. Both Hebrew and Christian Scripture emphasize our prayer life so well that we rise from requesting bread to

begging for the Holy Spirit. This third Person of the Blessed Trinity completes the revelation which God first gave to Abraham. Robert concludes with a fine expression of our ultimate blessing. The Spirit blesses us better than all other people. Robert bears witness to His work in his soul, flooding it with blessings. Every one of Robert's statements express his extensive spiritual experience. They are like treasure that we can unpack.

Because God's blessings surpass our comprehension, we are like children lost in wonder at their immense value. If we sputter some words about them, then other children can catch an inkling of their own treasure-seeking, and identify with our delight at finding something exceptionally exciting. Robert is the child sputtering about God's gift, and we are the children flocking around him, to follow his directions to uncover riches from God. We step up the ladder that he constructs with creatures if we compare our treasure-seeking to his. He is much more experienced at finding God's riches, poured out for us all. He has found more treasure than we have, and has pondered its value more intensely than we have. So he is an excellent guide into God, the Great Treasure, the Ultimate Gift. Now Robert is ready to explain how fountains of water express God's creativity.

### **Chapter 6: A Fountain of Water Reflects God as the Fountain of Being**

"Now I come to the analogy which fountains have with God. From this analogy, the spirit can be raised to contemplate the wonderful excellence of the Creator. With good reason the Holy Scriptures call God 'the fountain of life', Ps 36:9; 'the fountain of wisdom', Sir 1:5, and 'fountain of living water', Jer 2:13. God's words to Moses suggest that He is the fount of being: 'I am who am', Ex 3:14... The Apostle sums this up: 'In him we live and move and have our being', Acts 17:28. For in him we have our being as in a fountain of being, and in him we live as in a fountain of life, and in him we move as in a fountain of wisdom, because 'wisdom is more active than all active things, and reaches everywhere by reason of her purity', Wis 7:24. ...

"In our passing world, a fountain of water characteristically gives birth to streams, and if the fountain stops flowing, they immediately dry up. Obviously, the fountain does not depend upon the streams, because it does not get its water from them, but possesses water in itself, and gives it to others. This is a true symbol and trace of the divinity. God is the truest fountain of being, since he receives being from no other being, and all receive from him. No being gives anything to God. Instead, all God gives existence to all other beings. His very essence is his existence, so that it cannot be, or be thought, that God has not always existed, or does not always exist. Other beings can exist for a time, or fail to exist for a time, because existence is not necessarily part of their essence. As an example, it is part of man's essence to be a rational animal. Therefore, a man cannot be without being a rational animal. If it were also part of man's essence to exist, he could not fail to exist forever. But because it is not part of his essence to exist, he can exist [or] not exist. God is, therefore, the fountain of being because he includes in his essence actual existence, forever. This is the meaning of the words 'I am who am': I am existence itself. I do not receive existence from outside, but have it in myself. The property: that my essence is to exist, belongs to me alone. For the same reason, eternity and immortality are also properties of God. As the Apostle says: 'To the King of the ages, who is immortal, the one God', 1 Tim 1:17. [Further on, it is God] 'Who alone has immortality', 1 Tim 6:16. Thus all other things truly receive their existence from God, so that unless they always depend upon him, and are conserved by a certain influx from him, they at once cease to exist. Hence, the Apostle says: 'He upholds all things by the word of his power', Heb 1:3. Unless created things are sustained by God, they indeed stop existing.

"Look up in wonder, my soul, at the infinite goodness of your Creator, who carries and conserves all things so lovingly, [even though he does] not need their works. No less should you admire and imitate the patience of your same Creator, who 'is kind toward the ungrateful and evil', Lk 6:35. He bears with those who blaspheme him, and conserves them who [deserve] annihilation. Nor should you consider it a heavy burden if sometimes you are commanded to bear the weakness of your brothers, and do good to those who hate you.

"The greatness of the fountain of being does not consist only in the fact that it receives being from no other fountain, and communicates being to other things. Among us water from fountains and water from streams are basically the same. Even though the waters in fountains do not take water from other fountains, they still have a cause for their being, namely mists. For these, there are other causes, and so on, until we reach the first cause, which is God. God your Creator, O soul, is not of the same kind as created things, but stands apart from

them by an infinite distance of dignity, nobility, and excellence. He is the true and proper fountain of being because he alone does not receive his being from another fountain of being, but knows no cause whatsoever. The fountain of created waters . . . derives not from other waters, but from other causes. The uncreated fountain of being has nothing prior to itself, depends on nothing else, and lacks nothing else. Nothing can harm it, but all things depend on it. It can utterly destroy the whole world at a wave of his hand', 2 Mc 8:18. Marvel, my soul, at this loftiness, this beginning without beginning, cause without cause, infinite being, limitless, immense, absolutely necessary. Everything else is contingent by comparison. Perhaps it was of this that Truth said: 'but one thing is necessary', Lk 10:42. Therefore, cling to him alone, serve him alone, delight in the love and desire of him alone. Despise everything else in comparison with him, or certainly do not worry yourself too much about many things. Only one thing is necessary, and it alone is enough for you and mankind. Let your one worry be that you never fall away from his grace, and that you try to please him alone, always and everywhere."<sup>32</sup>

*Reflection* Robert loses himself in the immensity of God's creation. God's works surpass our comprehension. Therefore, their immensity stuns us. Their greatness strikes us dumb. But God calls us beyond this stupor. He calls us into His own infinite life. His life surpasses His creation, so we are stunned again. But Robert recalls that God enables us to receive what He gives. Robert describes God in philosophically as the being whose essence is His existence. While inspiring to philosophers, this may be too abstract for other people.

So Robert asks us to rejoice that God provides His gifts as a fountain provides water. Fountains provide more water than we can capture, so they represent God's overflowing gifts. Naturally, God and water are quite different, but they are similar in many ways. Robert examines the way that God's creation resembles a fountain. God has absolutely no source, while the fountain has an underground source. The created fountain depends on no other visible source. So it is not caused by other streams of water. Robert notes that it has invisible causes, in fact a chain of causes. But God is beyond the chain of causes. God is the ultimate Source of every existing thing. Robert bears witness to this reality. As we read his words, we recognize that we figured this out long ago, around age seven. We did not use Robert's words, but we thought his thoughts. We and Robert crystalize our thoughts with the inspiring expression, like one of these: God is His existence; His essence is to exist; His essence is His existence. God's simple Being always was and always will be. He is Necessity Himself. That's why we understand that He is the Source and Destiny of all creatures.

A created, visible, fountain is both a symbol and a trace of God's uncreated, invisible Source. We eagerly agree that the fountain symbolizes God's Source. But we may wonder how the fountain is a trace. How does it resemble God's fingerprints or footprints? It visibly does what He invisibly does. Therefore its activity reflects His activity so well that it traces in a minor key what He does in a major key. Once Robert says it, we recognize it. Throughout this book, Robert shows God's traces. As we follow this process, we find God's footprints all over the world. They encourage us to relax in the universe that sparkles with God's love for us.

Moses saw God's traces throughout the universe, and summarized God's being magnificently: "I am who am". God reveals His name in the burning bush that kept burning for hours, but also in every aspect of creation. Just as bushes burn, and the universe churns away in ceaseless activity, so does God initiate these motions. But Robert reminds us that all this created change would cease, if God quit activating it. It dries up like the stream once its fountain stops flowing. The visible stream depends upon its fountain, so it is contingent (dependent). The very existence of a contingent being manifests the Necessary Being which causes it. What a huge difference between the contingent and the Necessary. But what a reassuring difference! We can rest in God's providential love, and obey His commands to love God and our neighbor. Thus Robert concludes "please him alone, always, and everywhere". Now Robert expands this fountain of being, showing it to be the source of life.

### **Chapter 7: God Is the Fountain of Being with Life in Himself**

"God is rightly called the fountain of life because he lives, and has life in himself. Indeed, he is eternal life. 'He is the true God and eternal life', 1 Jn 5:20. All living things receive life from him, and should he cease to supply life, they would fail and would turn back to dust (Ps 104:29). It is the property of living things to beget offspring similar to themselves. God begets a Son similar to himself; God begets God. The living God begets living God. 'As the Father has life in himself, even so he gave the Son also to have life in himself', Jn

5:26. But the Father has life in himself because he is the fountain of life, and does not receive life from another. He gave the Son to have life in himself because he gave the same life that he himself has. Through this, the Son is also the fountain of life, but a fountain of life from the fountain of life, just as he is God from God and light from light. Who will explain, or even understand, what the life of God is, and how he is the fountain of life from which all living things, on earth or in the sky, draw their little drops? Realize that our life in this exile is nothing but having an internal principle of motion. We say things are alive which move themselves in some way. Thus by analogy we commonly call living waters those [flowing] in streams, and dead waters those in ponds, because the first seems to move itself, and the second cannot move unless stirred by the wind of some outside force.

“Your God, my soul, truly lives, and is the author and fountain of life. He teaches this himself throughout Scripture. “As I live, says the Lord’, Num 14:28. The prophets frequently repeat: ‘The Lord lives, the Lord lives’, 2 Kgs 3:14; Jer 4:2. In Jeremiah God complains about the people: ‘They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water’, Jer 2:13. Still he is not moved either by himself or by another. ‘I am the Lord, and I change not, Mal 3:6. ‘God is not a son of man that he should be changed’, Num 23:19. Daily we sing in the Church’s hymn: ‘O God, Strength who holds all things, remaining in yourself unmoved, You nonetheless mark off the times, by the succession of the light of day’, Roman Breviary, in the hour of Nones.

“When God begets a son, he does so without changing. If he sees, hears, speaks, loves, has mercy, and judges, he does all these without change. Even if he creates and conserves things, then destroys and disperses them, and then again renews and changes them, he himself works while at rest, and changes without changing. How is he living if he cannot move? How can he not be alive if he is the fountain and author of life? This problem is easily solved. Strictly speaking, it is enough for a living thing to be alive if it acts of itself, and is not moved from outside. At most, life in creatures is an internal principle of motion, because creatures are imperfect, and need many things to actually live. But God is infinite perfection, and needs nothing outside himself. Therefore, he acts by himself, and not by a push from another. He has no need for a push or a change. Creatures need to change in order to beget and be begotten, because they beget outside themselves. The thing that is begotten has to change from nonbeing to being. God, however, begets his Son within himself, and produces the Holy Spirit within himself. The Son and Holy Spirit do not have to change from nonbeing to being, because the being that they receive has always existed. They received it, not in time, but in eternity. Creatures need the change of growth because they are born imperfect. God the Son, in contrast, is born absolutely perfect, and God the Spirit is spirated and produced absolutely perfect. Creatures need to be changed or modified so that they may acquire the various qualities that they need. God, in contrast, needs nothing, since he has a nature of infinite perfection. Creatures need a change of place since they are not everywhere. God is totally present everywhere. Creatures need many things so that they can see, hear, speak, and work, because, while they have life, it is an imperfect and impoverished life. God, in contrast, needs nothing outside himself in order to see everything, hear everything, speak to everybody, and work everything in all things, because he not only has life, but life in utter abundance and happiness, and is life itself, and the fountain of life.

“Let us give one example from the act of seeing. For a man to see, he needs the power of sight, which is distinct from the soul which, properly speaking, lives. He needs an object, i.e. a colored body existing outside himself. He needs the light of the sun, or some other luminous body. He needs a medium, i.e. a transparent body [usually air, but occasionally water]. He needs a sensible species which comes from the object to his eyes. He needs the bodily organ, i.e. the eye, complete with its various liquids and covering membranes. He needs sensitive spirits and optic nerves, by which the spirits are transferred to him. He needs a proportional distance, and he has to apply his faculties. Behold all the little instruments men and the other animals need so that they can carry out a simple action of life! God, in contrast, who has life complete in himself, needs nothing. His infinite essence supplies him with faculty, object, species, light, and everything else. By himself, through himself, and in himself, God sees all things that are, that were, and that will be. He clearly knows all that could be. Before the world existed, God was seeing all things, and nothing new has come before his sight or knowledge from the creation of things. What will you be, my soul, when you become a partaker of his life? Does God ask something great of you when he asks you to sacrifice this corporeal and animal life, actually this imperfect and impoverished life, for your brothers, and for God himself, so that you may become a partaker in an eternal life which is very rich and happy? If he does not command something great, when he commands you to despise life, how

little and light ought it to seem when he orders you to give generously your dead wealth to the poor, and to abstain from fleshly desires, and to renounce in earnest the devil and his pomps, and to yearn with your whole heart for that life which alone is true life.”<sup>33</sup>

*Reflection* Robert launches into the high heavens here by considering rather abstract things. Most of what he says is new to us. If we think twice about what he says, it begins to sound familiar. If thinking about it gives us a headache, we are thinking about God indeed. God disturbs us; He rattles us; He upsets us. But then He comforts us. Robert gives witness to his profound prayer in this lovely expression of divine mystery. God’s being is beyond our understanding. Yet we love to probe Him, because he loves us. Remember when we were young, gazing into our mother’s eyes. We never understood her, but we never wanted to stop gazing.

It’s that way, in spades, with God. At the risk of getting a headache, we investigate Robert’s gazing at God. Merely saying what he says in different words can help us deepen our approach to God. We move joyfully from gazing to wondering, to opening, and to uniting with the Trinity of Persons Who love us completely. It’s true that we can’t comprehend such love. But our mothers are also beyond our comprehension. We are sure that God’s life is way beyond creatures. We can’t pretend to understand, but we can’t deny that God’s life fascinates us. It is undeniable that we yearn for life much more complete than we now live. The clear and present evidence that we yearn for God is that we want to live more! We want to life fully! In many ways, Jesus promises us more abundant life. “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.” Jn 6:27. Similar messages are: Jn 5:39, Jn 17:2, Rom 8:11, Rev 2:10, and Rev 2:10. Our deepest drive is for life eternal. We dare to drive for divine life. God made us to yearn for His Everlasting Life. How glorious is our destiny!

Robert revels in this glory. He devotes himself to studying what Christ said and did to prepare us for this Eternal Life. It is necessary that the Source of changing things never change. Change is intrinsically unstable. So whatever changes needs a stable source which is beyond change. Robert refers to this unchanging source as the fountain, not dependent on any other flow of water. Life is so amazing that it is a wonderful way into wondering about Life Everlasting. Scripture is full of revelations, giving us glimpses of Life Everlasting. Robert refers to some of them. So we accept Biblical aid for our weak thoughts about this world. When we think along with Scripture, we follow Jesus toward Everlasting Life.

But along the way, words fail us. So Robert must stretch words into phrases like “God changes without changing”. Robert’s expressions are well considered, and better than ours. However they are still full of unexpressed assumptions. He relies upon us to fill them in. For example he assumes that we realize that the “changes” are what we see, like sunrise. These visible created changes occur in nature, but not in God. What is an un-changing being like? How can this being create changing things? We can’t fathom how, but we can see the necessity of the fact. Beyond doubt the Creator creates. Through creation, the most exciting of God’s masterpieces is life, enticing Robert to soar up toward the unchanging Life which causes changing life. We see that our universe is squirming with life. God can’t give what He doesn’t have. So it is obvious that God is Life in the primary sense, creating life in the derivative, or secondary, sense. These creatures are amazing, but severely limited. These limitations convince us that such restricted life depends upon Life himself. Contingent life could not exist without Necessary Life. This truth is so massively present to us that our measly words about it fail to adequately express it. Our words faintly approximate our knowledge of it. Our knowledge of it is another faint approximation to the fact that Life Lives in utter simplicity, but produces created life that acts amazingly within its limits.

Massive truths lift us beyond daily drudgery. Up in the stratosphere of massive truths, we lose our way. Massive truths disorient us. This confusion is necessary because, below this massive level, we navigate by comparing one end of our travel to the other. We make our way from one limit to the other. Solid restrictions guide our travel here below. But massive truths are unlimited. Without limits to see or touch, we lose our way. No landmarks guide us, because all landmarks are restrictions, and there are no restrictions in these upper levels of life. This lack of support confuses us with massive freedom. If we learn to live fully, we relax in peace. All these factors, and more, induce the delight we experience when we read Robert’s description of massive truths.

These massive truths are so good that they invoke massive loves. Our mother's love sets the standard for human love in our life. For most people, her love is the greatest ever experienced. But Christ's love surpasses mother's love. When the love that Jesus gives resonates through us, it amplifies all the love that we bring to community. Growing both in extension and intensity, God's love through Jesus, lifts us toward our destiny in Love Himself. Christ becomes our landmark and our guide. We notice His massive love, perhaps in stages, as we interact more intensely with love. Then we recognize it sooner and better. When we participate in divine love as it flows in the Church, we find more loving people to love. Robert is a fine example of a friend who loves us with Christ's love, leading us on to Love. This loving life is the way we want to live.

Jesus reveals the secret of life's Source. For two thousand years the remnant (faithful few) of Israel struggled to worship one God. Christ affirms the oneness of God, but reveals three Persons so superlatively in love with each other that their love overflows into creation. Robert describes how this divine fountain surges. All our descriptions approximate God's love for us. Because He is total simplicity, He has no limits at all. As their Creator, He is beyond space and time. They are external to him, though He is internal to them. Without His presence, creation could not exist. In a sense, creation is His presence, but not in the way we exist inside created restrictions. Since we make words to express these restrictions, words fail to express God's superlative transcendence beyond all limits. Yet the analogy works across the differences, because of the similarities.

So God is more like a Father than any created father. Jesus is more like a Son than any created son. The Holy Spirit is more like a Spirit than any created spirit. We invent words to express creatures, but we stretch them toward the Creator. Robert speaks of God with words, even though they are only analogous approximations. We know that God is completely different from His creatures, but somehow similar. When God knows Himself, He does something completely different from when we know ourselves, but similar in some ways. For example, one similarity is that His perfect knowledge identifies with what He knows. His knowledge is so perfect that what He knows comes to be. In our imperfect way, we identify with what we know, but we become what we know. The difference is in the knowledge. His is perfect, while ours is not. His perfect knowledge of apple makes an apple exist in nature. Our imperfect knowledge of an apple makes an apple exist in our mind. Jesus tells us that there are three Persons in the one God. That revelation enables us to imitate God's knowledge of Himself, in our imperfect way. The Father's knowledge of Himself is a perfect self, called the Son. By knowing, God replicates Himself. The Father and the Son mutually love each other so perfectly that they replicate themselves in the Spirit. This massive truth surpasses our comprehension, but fascinates us, nourishes us, and welcomes us into our heavenly home. Because we are God's image and likeness, we recognize God as our ultimate Home. Like children, we marvel at the contents of our home. Therefore, we love to repeat our partial descriptions of all the Persons Who live there.

As Robert affirms, God knows from eternity, so He "fathers" the Son forever. The Father and the Son love each other, identifying with each other by loving. This identity is also perfect, so their love breathes (spirates) the Holy Spirit. These words are inadequate to God's activity, but they partially relate our approximation to God's Fountain of Life. Robert learned this description from St. Thomas Aquinas, who developed this analogy in the 1200's. St. Augustine, in his book on the Trinity, says similar things. Though all we say is inadequate, everything we say helps us approach God's Perfect Life. So we thank Robert for his presentation, and we prepare for his view of God's fountain of wisdom in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 8: God is the Fountain of Wisdom**

"Now is the time for us to go up as well as we can to the fountain of wisdom. 'The word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom', Sir 1:5. He rightly says 'on high' because the fountain of wisdom richly and profusely flows out, not only to the holy angels and to the souls of the blessed in heaven. But to us who are engaged as pilgrims in this desert, there comes not wisdom, but a certain mist or scent of wisdom.

"For this reason, my soul, do not for now seek higher than you should. Do not be a 'searcher of majesty' lest you 'be overwhelmed by glory', Prv 25:27. Wonder about wisdom. 'God alone is wise', Rom 16:27. Congratulate the blessed spirits who drink from the fountain of wisdom, and although they cannot fully grasp God, which is [an achievement] restricted to the very fountain of wisdom itself, still they look into the face of God,

the first cause, not covered by any veil, and understand correctly all things in the flashes of his splendor. In that noonday light of wisdom, they don't fear the darkness of error, obscurity of ignorance, or the fog of opinions.

“Aspire after this happiness. To obtain it with certainty, love with your whole heart the Lord Jesus Christ, ‘in whom are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God’, Col 2:3. [As He said] ‘He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him’, Jn 14:21. What does ‘I will manifest myself to him’ mean except that ‘I will manifest all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God which lie within me’? Certainly every man by nature desires to know. Although many people put this desire to sleep with fleshly concupiscence, still when we shall have put aside our body which decays, and which now weighs down the soul, then the fire of this desire will blaze out beyond all other desires. How great will be your happiness, O soul, when Christ your beloved and lover shows you all the treasures of the knowledge and wisdom of God? Strive to keep the commandments of Christ, so that you do not cheat yourself of this great hope. ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; he who does not love, does not keep my word’, Jn 14:23-24. Meantime, let your wisdom be that which holy Job describes when he says: ‘The fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding’, Jb 28:28. Recognize that any good you see in creatures flows from God, who is the fountain of goodness, so that you can learn with Blessed Francis to taste that fountain of goodness as it flows in individual creatures in streamlets. On this point, see chapter nine of St. Bonaventure’s *Life of St. Francis*.”<sup>34</sup>

*Reflection* Robert could hardly conclude his review of God’s Fountain without considering wisdom, the divine fullness of knowledge. We seldom consider wisdom, because we devote ourselves to daily struggles, distract ourselves by details, and stick to sensations. Far beyond these flitting fancies, stable reality remains reliable. Above all created stability, God is Perfect Stability, because He is the only being Who properly exists. As Robert recalls, God is Existence. In His Simplicity, He is All that exists independently. Later, in the order of causes, He creates secondary beings which depend for their existence upon Him. All other existing beings exist because of God’s creative love. So they come into existence when He loves them, and go away when He finishes loving them. No creature can determine for itself to be or not be. Each depends for existence on some cause beyond itself. Only God is in and of Himself. We know all these facts, but seldom consider them. The person who considers all that is, as it is, is wise. The wise person sees the whole whole-ly. Within that complete context, the wise person knows how each part does its partial bit for the whole. We see how superior this holistic view is to seeing only a part, partially. Most people are stuck in some partial view, terrified by its rapid change, and frustrated by its unreliability. We can emerge from this horror of constant disappointment by individual parts, if we move toward wisdom, to focus on the whole. We must struggle, but “Wisdom comes with age”.

With effort, we can penetrate the swirl of sensations, to find stable wisdom. God is ultimate wisdom because He sees all that is, and sees it unified in His creative love. Here “see” means “know”. Our seeing and knowing are so close that we use the terms interchangeably. We praise Him as the God of wisdom and power, because no creature sees as much as He sees. However much wisdom we have, we strive for more, even though the mist of daily life obscures it. Robert reminds us to accept God’s gift of wisdom, use it, and pray for more. Thus he concludes his review of water in step three, and advances to step five, to consider the element air.

## **Step Five: The Consideration of Air**

### **Chapter 1: The Body Lives by Breathing Air; the Soul Lives by Praying**

“The element of air can be an outstanding teacher of behavior for men, if its nature is considered. It proves very effective, not only in teaching moral philosophy, but also in revealing the mysteries of sacred theology, and in raising our minds to God, if we are willing to examine the various services which, under divine guidance, the air continually provides the human race.

“First, in providing breath, the air preserves the life of the animals of the earth, and of man himself. Second, it is crucial for the working of our eyes, ears, and tongues. If it were taken away, we would all immediately be struck blind, deaf, and dumb, even though all our other needs were provided for. Finally, air is so necessary for the movement of men and other animals that without it, all movement would be blocked, and all the arts and almost all human activity would be forced to stop. Let us start with the first point.

“If men realized that their souls need to breathe, no less than their bodies, many people who are now perishing would be saved. The body needs constant breathing because our natural heat, which causes our heart to beat through the lungs sucking in cool air, and breathing out warm air, is controlled so that it preserves our life, which cannot be preserved without breathing. This is why living and breathing are commonly considered the same thing. Everyone is alive who is breathing, and anybody who has stopped breathing has also stopped living. You, my soul, need the continual breath which is God’s grace, to live a spiritual life. You do this by emitting sighs to God in prayer, and receiving from God the fresh grace of the Holy Spirit. What else do the words of your Lord mean, that you ‘must pray always, and not lose heart’, Lk 18:1, except that you ought always to be sighing out and receiving in fresh breath, so that your spiritual life is not suffocated. The Lord repeats this when he says: ‘Watch, then, praying at all times’, Lk 21:36. ... The Apostle reinforces this: ‘Pray without ceasing’, 1 Ths 5:17. The Apostle Peter: ‘Be prudent therefore, and watchful in prayers’, 1 Pt 4:7. True prudence implies that we who are always in need of God’s help should always be asking for it. True, our Father knows what we need, and is prepared to supply it generously, especially everything that relates to our eternal salvation. But he wants to give it by means of prayer, since this does him more honor, and is more useful for us than if he were to give everything to us while we slept and did nothing. Our generous Lord begs and urges us to ask him...: ‘I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; everyone who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it shall be opened’, Lk 11:9. ... he explains what we should especially seek, and what he will give without hesitation. ‘If you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the good Spirit to those who ask him?’ Lk 11:13

“The good spirit is the most important thing for us to keep praying for, and it will be given to us without hesitation if we ask in the right way. This is the Spirit by which we breathe in God, preserving our spiritual life by this breathing. Holy David ... said: ‘I opened my mouth and I drew breath’, Ps 119:131. That [means] I opened my mouth in desire, in sighing, in demanding with indescribable groans, and I drew in the gentle air of God’s Spirit. It cooled my seething passion, and strengthened me in all good deeds. Given this, who would claim that they are living according to God, who throughout whole days, or even months and years, do not sigh out to God, and do not aspire to God? A clear sign of death is not breathing. If this breathing is prayer, not to pray is a sign of death. The spiritual life, by which we are children of God, is rooted in love. St. John says ... ‘Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are’, 1 Jn 3:1. Who loves without wanting to see the person he loves? Who desires something without asking for what he wants from the person who he knows will give it if asked? Hence, anyone who does not ask regularly to see the face of his God does not desire to see him. Anyone who does not desire him does not love him, and anyone who does not love is not alive. Therefore it follows that we must consider those people dead to God even if they are alive to the world, since they do not seriously devote themselves to prayer. A person should not be said to pray, [therefore] to breathe and live, who pours forth prayers with only his physical voice. Wise men define prayer as the raising of the mind to God, not raising the voice to the sky.

“Do not fool yourself, my soul, into thinking that you are living for God, if you do not earnestly seek God with your whole heart, and sigh after him day and night. Do not say that your other business prevents your taking time for prayer and conversation with God. The holy Apostles were extremely busy precisely in working for God and the salvation of souls, so much so that one of them said: ‘Besides those outer things, there is my daily pressing anxiety, the care of all the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak. Who is made to stumble, and I am not in flames?’ 2 Cor 11:28. Still it was he who besides noting his frequent prayers, wrote to the Philippians: ‘Our citizenship is in heaven’, Phil 3:20. That means that even in the midst of business, he was living in heaven in his desire. Nor did he ever forget his beloved. [So he said:] ‘With Christ I am nailed to the cross. It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me’, Gal 2:20.”<sup>35</sup>

*Reflection* Robert reinforces his readers’ resolve by returning to his basic organization of steps on the ladder, inspired by the four elements. We are so easily distracted, that regular order like this supports our thought. Besides, we know air very well, inhaling and exhaling it regularly. So this familiar process reassures us to probe into spiritual processes that require more effort to learn. Robert leaps up from ordinary experience into its spiritual equivalent. In our present condition, we often consider material breathing, but tend to ignore spiri-

tual breathing. We can live materially while dying spiritually. The equivalent of inhaling and exhaling material air is inhaling and exhaling spiritual air, i.e. acts of receiving and reciprocating God's love.

We identify our spiritual air with our prayer. Somehow we inhale God's life by accepting His blessings. We exhale God's life by asking for more. In a way similar to breathing material air, spiritual air enables us to function. So when we accept spiritual air, we use it to request more. Robert describes this process rather well. We can examine a different dimension of prayer because he has done such a fine job with this dimension.

Our new dimension is that God invites us to pray because He made us like Him. In His image and likeness, we know and love. These are our vital activities. They are limited imitations of God's infinite knowing and loving, but they are the same kind of acts. When we think and decide, we please God by acting as He acts. We figure out how to pray in a way that pleases God, then we choose to pray that way. By using God's gifts, we honor Him, improve our ability to pray, and "breathe" spiritually. The air we breathe is God's very life of love. When we accept God's very life, He invigorates us, advancing our life toward Him. When we use His life, just received, to expand our love, we naturally want to love Him more. This feedback operation resembles breathing in air to invigorate our bodies, and breathing it out to cleanse our bodies, getting healthier with each breath.

While honoring God, we practice to be more perfect, and become healthier in God's life. Breathing spiritually is so simple, that words complicate it. This dimension fits beautifully into Robert's Scriptural selections. Most striking is the gift of the Spirit, the Person that Jesus introduces to us as the culmination of Christ's ministry on earth. The Spirit does greater things than Jesus did, and rounds out the revelation of the Trinity of loving Persons. These are the Three Persons present during creation, as "us & our" makes clear. "Then God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...'", Gen 1:26. From Scripture's start, God gave us some hints of His Trinity. Jesus is the fullness of revelation because He teaches us that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three Persons in one God. Just as they "spirate = breathe" perfectly, we spirate imperfectly, within our created limits.

God created us to be like Him Who is Love. If we inhale and exhale Love, we live fully. Loving is as natural and necessary to our soul as breathing air is to our body. We die if we quit praying, because we suffocate spiritually. Robert warns us that we should not mistake vocal prayer for spiritual prayer, nor should we use work as an excuse to avoid prayer. From this fine introduction, Robert advances to air allowing us to see.

## **Chapter 2: The Air considered as a Means of Seeing, Hearing, and Speaking**

"The second property of air is ... medium through which colors reach our eyes, and sounds reach our ears. [Medium means medium of exchange, or foundation for transmission. E. g. sound vibrates through air.] Without vibrating colors and sounds, we could neither see nor hear, nor even speak. So we ought to first thank God that He bestowed such an outstanding benefit on our nature. Then it is right for us to admire the wisdom of our Creator in a creature so subtle and delicate, since the air is a true body. But it is so large that it fills an almost measureless space, yet so unbelievably fine that it cannot be seen or felt. Antiquity admires the subtlety of a single line that Apelles Painted with his brush. But that line was seen and touched, and therefore, could in no way be compared with the fineness of the subtle veil that wraps and touches us all, but that nobody notices because of its marvelous subtlety. Our admiration is increased by the fact that, although air is a most subtle and fine body, when it is cut, it comes back together, and closes up as if it had never been cut. No craftsman could sew back together a spider's web, or a cut in a very thin veil, so that the previous cut would not show.

"Besides that, there is something worthy of all admiration, and characteristic of God's wisdom alone, namely that the countless kinds of colors are mixed and transmitted together through the same body of air. A person who stands by night in the moonlight in an open and elevated spot, and surveys the stars of the sky, the fields on earth full of flowers, and at the same time the homes, trees, animals, and many other similar things, could not deny that the air next to him contains... the colors (species) of all these things, intermixed. Who can understand this? Who does this, my soul, except your Creator, 'who alone does great wonders', Ps 136:4. If his works are so marvelous, how much more so is he himself?

"There is another advantage to the wondrous fineness of the air: it does not hinder, but helps, the motion of all things that move from place to place. We all know how much effort goes into moving a ship through

water, even though it is liquid, and easily cut. Sometimes, neither wind nor oars are enough, and the strength of horses and oxen must be added. If perchance a path has to be opened through mountains or hills, how much sweat and how much time it takes to cut even a short roadway! But horses run, birds fly, and spears and missiles are thrown through the air without effort, and with the greatest ease, and extreme swiftness. Men go up and down in performing their various jobs. They walk, they run, they move their feet, arms, and hands up and down, to right and left. The air is diffused everywhere, but it blocks them no more than if it had a spiritual, rather than a corporeal nature, or than if it were nothing at all."<sup>36</sup>

*Reflection* Robert shares his profound wonder about air, listing its many amazing properties. He uses the word "species" to stand for the kind of thing, as one species of color is green, another red. He also uses the word to stand for the activity. He knows that green-act differs from red-act. That we can see both green and red in the same glance illustrates both colors interacting in the air that surrounds their source, like a rose bush. Between us and the bush is space, full of air in the middle between the bush and our eyes. So there is a "medium" through which the color of the bush and rose travels to our eyes. Robert does not mention light. Today, we still believe that vibrations are somehow transmitted through air. If the medium is water instead of air, then the colored light dims considerably over the same transmission distance.

Whatever scientific model we use, we wonder with Robert at the transmission of color from rose to eye. After intense pondering of this phenomenon, most of our questions unanswered. We wonder still, as God's creation continues doing its thing. If air is so strikingly astounding, how much more so is God? Robert goes from the mysterious acts of air into the more mysterious acts of God. We follow, and find that we're much more at home with God than with air. True, we are more familiar with air than with God. We interact directly with air by sensing it, and cannot sense God. But all our sensations swirl around without settling down. God is the most settled of all, the rock which sustains the shifting sensations. So Robert directs us to our destination in God.

But he returns to air because he has not exhausted its wonders, and because most of us can't continue to contemplate God for very long. We tire easily, and fall back to familiar sensory reception. After we advance from sensations to meanings, we rest a while, then strive to advance again. This process enables us to learn more, and to appreciate more of what God has done. This is why Robert steps up the ladder from familiar sensations of material things toward less-familiar meanings of spiritual things, ultimately to the Spirit of God.

We fluctuate up and down, advancing then retreating, but striving ever upward on the average. Our successive approximations toward total ascent strive for God consistently. Thereby, we show our constant will and determination to unite with God. Robert does not mention it here, but God will eventually take us the total distance across infinity to our home in Him. Each review of our sensory experience provides more wonders.

Robert wonders how the air flows around his hand moving through it without leaving a trace of its passing. His hand cuts through air effortlessly, leaving no scar, no line, no sign of the cut. He compares this to more material fine things like spider webs and thin veils. Air is much too subtle to show wear and tear. Therefore, less-subtle things like our hand can move freely about in the vast ocean of air.

Robert provides several examples of air's amazing properties. Each example lifts us up toward God. When we tire of this upward effort, we relax into another marvelous property, or activity, of air, which also prompts us to rise again. Overall, the wonders of air carry us ever upwards toward Him Who created air so that we could breathe, see, hear and move. In passing, Robert mentions that air enables us to speak. He does not develop this feature, but we can fill in that blank. We inhale air, then exhale it through our throat, vibrating our vocal chords, modulating the passing air with tongue and lips, producing sounds which we combine into words, to finally communicate many things, culminating in meaning. In this way, we imitate God, Who speaks the Word. God speaks perfectly, so the Word replicates the Father as another Person. Then They speak the Spirit. All Three accompany us intimately, urging us up the ladder to eternal union with Them. This dynamic process inspires Robert to see how air symbolizes God's sweetness. Robert invites us to relax into Sweetness Himself.

### **Chapter 3: How Air Symbolizes God's Sweetness and Kindness**

"Last is the reflection that the nature of air makes way for everything, and changes itself into any shape,

and allows itself to be cut and torn apart, so that it serves human needs, and seems to be a gift to teach men humility, patience, and love. What ought greatly to ignite and inflame the love of your Creator in you, my soul, is the fact that here the air itself represents the unbelievable gentleness and enormous kindness of the Creator to men. Reflect on, and think over carefully, I beg you, my soul, how your Lord is always present in all his creatures, how he is always working, and, as a mark of infinite gentleness, how he adapts his cooperation to the nature of each of them, as if he were saying with the Apostle: 'I became all things to all men', 1 Cor 9:22, so that I might help and perfect all. He cooperates with necessary agents, so that they act with necessity, with voluntary agents so that they act voluntarily, and with free agents so that they act freely. He helps and moves fire to move upward, earth to tend downward, water to flow to low spots, air to move wherever it is driven, stars to turn forever in a circle, grains, bushes, and plants to bear fruit according to their natures, land animals, fish, and birds to act as their nature demands.

"If the gentleness of God is so clear in his cooperation with his creatures in the works of nature, how should we regard it in the works of grace? God gave man freedom of the will, but in such a way that he could rule him by command, terrify him by destruction, and allure him by benefits. God wills all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4), but he wills it in such a way that he wants them to will it too. Therefore, he gently anticipates them, urges them on, leads and conducts them in a quite wonderful way. These are the works of God's wisdom, of which Isaiah says: 'Make his words known among the people', Is 32:4. Now he indeed utterly terrifies the wicked, now he encourages them lovingly, now he warns them in a kindly way, now he mercifully corrects them, judging what is best suited to their individuality and behavior. Listen how gently the Lord dealt with the first sinner: 'Adam, where are you? He answered: "I heard your voice in paradise, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself". God continues with equal kindness: "Who told you that you were naked, unless you have eaten of the tree whereof I commanded you that you should not eat?"', Gen 3:9-11. Warned by this correction, Adam repented without hesitation, as the Scriptures indicate. "She [the Wisdom of God] preserved him who was first formed by God the father of the world, and she brought him out of his sin', Wis 10:1.

"Listen again how gently and kindly, through his angel, he corrected and urged all the children of Israel to repent. 'An angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to the place of weepers, and said: "I made you go out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land that I swore to your fathers, and I promised that I would not make void my covenant with you forever, on condition that you should not make a league with the inhabitants of this land, instead throw down their altars, but you would not hear my voice. Why have you done this? When the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, they lifted up their voice and wept. That place was called the place of weepers, or of tears. And there they offered sacrifices to the Lord', Jgs 2:105. The new name given the place bears witness to the massive weeping and unanimous sign of true repentance, so that posterity will remember it forever. Hence the place was called 'the place of weepers or of tears'.

"What shall I say now about the prophets? They certainly teach this in all their sermons, and cry out that God does not want the death of sinners, but that they turn from their ways, and live, Ex 18:23. The Lord says through Jeremiah: 'It is commonly said: "If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and marry another man, shall he return to her any more?" "You have prostituted yourselves with many lovers. Nonetheless, return to me", says the Lord "and I will receive you", Jer 3:1. Likewise in Ezekiel: 'thus have you spoken: "Our iniquities and our sins are upon us, and we pine away in them. How then can we live?" Say to them: "As I live says the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that they wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn, from your evil ways. Why should you die, O house of Israel?"', Ex 33:10-11. Let us now leave sinners aside.

"There is no way to explain how great is the goodness and kindness of the Lord our God towards those who fear him and trust in him. ... 'According to the height of the heaven above the earth, he strengthened his mercy toward them that fear him. As a father has compassion on his children, so has the Lord compassion on them that fear him. The mercy of the Lord is from eternity unto eternity upon them that fear him', Ps 102: 11, 13, 17. 'Taste and see that the Lord is sweet. Blessed is the man who hopes in him', Ps 34:8. 'How good is the God of Israel to those who are of upright heart', Ps 73:1. Who will explain the greatness of the Lord's goodness, gentleness and sweetness to devout and upright souls? The Lord also says through Isaiah: 'Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she did forget, yet I will not forget you', Is 49:15. ... 'The Lord is my portion ... therefore I will wait for him. The Lord is good to them who hope in him,

to the soul that seeks him. It is good to wait with silence for the salvation of God', Lam 3:24-26.

“Should I wish to add the apostles’ preaching ... about the fatherly mercy of the Lord our God for devout men, I would never find an end. Let what ... Paul wrote ... stand for them all. ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we also may be able to comfort those who are in any distress’, 2 Cor 1:3. He does not describe God attribute comfort, but all comfort. He does not say that he consoles us in some affliction, but in all afflictions. He could not have emphasized more, how gentle and sweet God is to those he loves, and who love him.

“It is appropriate to conclude with the words of St. Prosper, who explains that God is kind, not only to good men, but also to bad ones, so that he can make them good. He says: ‘Grace mainly stands out amid all his justifications in persuading by exhortations, warning by example, terrifying by dangers, urging by miracles, giving understanding, inspiring counsel, enlightening the heart, and encouraging a mentality of faith. The human will is subordinated and joined to grace. The will is stirred to this task by the aids just mentioned, to cooperate with God’s work within it, and to begin to work toward the reward which it began to seek by a heavenly inspiration. If it fails, it attributes this to its own inconstancy. But if it succeeds, it [attributes it] to the help of grace. This help is employed by all in countless ways, some hidden, some clear. It is due to their own wickedness that many are refused. It is due to divine grace, and the human will, if many accepted it’, St. Prosper of Aquitaine; *On the Vocation of all the Nations*; 2, c, 26.”<sup>37</sup>

*Reflection* As usual, Robert vaults from visible caring experience into God’s invisible care. Robert affirms that God moves all His creatures. Eroding rocks which must erode, He moves by necessity. Stalking cats which instinctively hunt, He moves by instinct to sense objects and pursue them. Those free humans who figure out and decide, He moves by allowing their freedom to understand and choose values. Once God makes a person free, He keeps that person free. Similarly with lesser beings, God keeps sensory animals doing their thing to select objects, and keeps rocks necessarily doing what rocks do, without either sensory or rational knowledge. Everything follows its appointed order, because God never contradicts Himself.

We accept Robert’s witness to the heartbeat of God’s love. We remind ourselves that Robert shares his loving interaction with God for our benefit. We recognize his ardent flights up into Love Himself. God inspires this Love by treating His creatures so gently and kindly. God could have made us mechanical, like clocks, so that we would necessarily tick away. But He loved us so much that He made us free like Himself. To use our freedom well, He made us intelligent like Himself. Once we ponder those gifts, we see His gentle kindness, His sweetness. Our misuse of these gifts often terrorizes us, because we self-inflict awful pains and sorrows.

In our sinful mess, God shows still more gentle kindness by forgiving us. Robert gives several examples to highlight how merciful God is to us sinners. In spite of our repeated revolts, He takes us back into His enduring Love. All these “works of grace” inspire us to return to God, described so well in such fitting Bible-quotes. They make Robert’s point, especially quotes from Paul. Nothing is more emphatic than God taking flesh, living among us, and dying on the cross for us. Jesus manifests love, mercy, and gentle kindness more completely. Christ’s life, death, and resurrection emphatically prove God’s tender love for us, His infinite sweetness.

Robert then quotes St. Prosper’s fine summary of God’s merciful mission to sinners, closing with an elegant statement balancing human freedom and divine inspiration through freely given and freely accepted grace. Robert now urges us to strive to cooperate as St. Prosper describes, by imitating God’s kindness.

#### **Chapter 4: The Soul is Urged to Imitate God’s Kindness**

“Ah, my soul, if your Creator is so gentle and meek to his servants, so incredibly good in tolerating sinners, in order to convert them, and consoles the upright, so that they can make progress in justice and holiness, should you not deal kindly with your neighbors, and become all things to all, to win all to your God and Lord? Mull over within yourself the lofty excellence to which the apostle Paul urges you: ‘Be imitators of God as very dear children, and walk in his love, as Christ also loved us and delivered himself up for us as an offering and sacrifice in fragrant odor’, Ep 5:1. Imitate God the Father, ‘who makes his sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust’, Mt 5:45. Imitate God the son, who, after assuming human nature for

us, did not spare his own life to rescue us from the power of darkness and from eternal death. Imitate God the Holy Spirit, who pours forth abundantly his precious gifts to change us from carnal to spiritual men.”<sup>38</sup>

*Reflection* Robert exhorts us to be kind like God. There is no greater exhortation, as Jesus so neatly summarizes in His commandment: “Love God above all, and love your neighbor as yourself”, Lk 10:27. Then Robert concisely reviews God’s gifts, and urges us to share them with our neighbors. After all, God starts this generous flow, and we want to imitate Him. If we accept His gifts, thank Him, and distribute them to our neighbors, we improve the world around us. Emphasizing Jesus and the Trinity, Robert helps us to appreciate how widespread God’s gifts are, and how we should become ever more God’s image and likeness by imitating the works of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Bellarmine is ready for step six, about the primary element fire.

## **Step Six: the Consideration of Fire**

### **Chapter 1: God’s Hatred of Sin Is like a Consuming Fire**

“Fire is an element so pure and noble that God wanted to be called a fire: ‘Our God is a consuming fire’, Dt 4:24; Heb 12:29. When God first appeared to Moses, he wanted to be seen in a fire that filled, but did not destroy, a bush. ‘The Lord appeared in the flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he saw that the bush was on fire, and was not burnt up’, Ex 3:21. When God came to give his law to the people, he came in the form of fire. ‘All mount Zion was smoking because the Lord had come down upon it in fire’, Ex 19:18. The proclamation of the new law resembled this [old law] mystery [of the burning bush], because the Holy Spirit appeared in tongues of fire. Lastly, those closest to God in heaven, the Seraphim, are called the fiery ones because they take their fervor and ardor from the intense fire of God. Given all this, it is not difficult for us to build a step from the element of fire, by which to ascend to God in meditation and prayer. Certainly, it will be less difficult to go upward with Elijah in a fiery chariot, than to build a ladder with earth, water, or air.

“Let us proceed to examine the properties of fire. It is the nature of fire to work in different and opposite ways on different materials. It immediately burns up wood, hay, and stubble. It makes gold, silver, and precious stones more pure and beautiful. Iron by nature is black, cold, hard and heavy. But fire changes it into the opposite, so that it is quickly made clear, hot, soft, and light, shining like a star, burning like fire, liquid like water, and light enough for the blacksmith to lift and move about easily.

“It is fairly obvious how all this applies to God. First the Apostle uses wood, hay and stubble to signify evil deeds, which cannot withstand the fire of divine judgment (1 Cor 3:12-13). It is indeed unbelievable how tremendously all sins displease God. He is fire most pure. So how zealously he burns up and destroys sins if they cannot be destroyed by repentance, if the person who sins is in a state allowing him to repent. Repentance destroys all sin. But if the sinner is incapable of repentance, e.g. demons and men after death, then the divine wrath turns against these sinners. As the Wise man says: ‘But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike’, Wis 14:9. The devil bears witness to how great and severe is this hatred. He sinned once. According to St. Gregory, he was the noblest of angels, the leader of the first choir of angels, and God’s most outstanding creature, *Moral Commentary on Job*, 23, c, 24. He was immediately cast down from heaven, stripped of all beauty and supernatural grace, and transformed into a hideous monster, enslaved in eternal ruin.

“Christ is a witness. He came down from heaven to destroy sin, the work of the devil (1 Jn 3:8). That is why he is called the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world’, Jn 1:29. Who can explain, or even imagine, all that Christ suffered to destroy the work of the devil, and to satisfy perfectly the justice of God? ‘Though he was by nature God, he emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave’, Phl 2<sup>6</sup>. ‘Being rich, he became poor for our sakes’, 2 Cor 8:9. He ‘had nowhere to lay his head’, Lk 9:58, though he made heaven and earth. ‘He came unto his own, and his own received him not’, Jn 1:11. ‘When he was reviled, he did not revile; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but yielded himself up to him who judged him unjustly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree’, 1 Pt 2:23-24. ‘He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross’, Phl 2:8. ‘By his stripes we were healed’, 1 Pt 2:24. At last mocked, spit upon, scourged, crowned with thorns, crucified in complete shame and excruciating pain, he poured out all his blood and his life. He bore all this to destroy the works of the devil, and wipe out our sin.

“The law of God is witness, forbidding and punishing every sin. It does not leave unpunished even an idle word (Mt 12:36). How much does he hate crimes and wicked deeds if he cannot allow an idle word? The law of the Lord is spotless, and the precept of the Lord is bright, and they oppose stains and darkness (Ps 19:8). There can be no union of light with darkness, or of justice with sin (2 Cor 6:14). The final witness is hell itself, which God has prepared for the wicked and sinners who could have washed themselves in the blood of the Lamb, but refused or neglected to do so. It is quite right that those whose sin will last forever should be punished forever. The nature and amount of punishment in hell is terrible even to think about. We will say more about this in our last step.

“Since God hates sin so much, my soul, if you love God above all things, you ought to hate sin more than anything else. Be careful that they do not lead you astray who explain away or excuse sin. Take care that you do not deceive yourself with false arguments. If sin does not displease you, whether in yourself or others, you do not love God. If you do not love God, you are lost. Moreover, if you are not displeasing to Christ, how much do you think you owe to his love? To his labors? To his blood and death? He washed you from sin, and reconciled you to his Father. Will it be hard for you in turn to suffer something for Christ, or to resist sin unto blood for his grace, with his grace? Finally, if you cannot bear patiently a hell of eternal fire, neither should you, under any conditions, bear sin patiently. Rather step aside from sin as from a snake (Sir 21:2). [Step aside] from the occasion, even the slightest suspicion, of sin. Therefore, you ought to have a firm and determined hatred of sin, joined to a total love of God.”<sup>39</sup>

*Reflection* In Robert’s day, fire was much more important to daily life than today. People used it all day, to cook and warm, and more dramatically at night, to light the way, to see family and friends, and to read and write. In our day, fire is much less important because electric devices often replace it. Still, fire impresses us by burning many things. Its flickering flames entrance us, capturing our attention in campfires. So we can see why fire impressed Robert. We easily follow him from fire into God’s activity.

Even in our vague way, we know that God is overflowing Goodness. Evil opposes Goodness. So we imagine God flaming up against evil. Above all we can grasp why God “wanted to be called fire”. From Hebrew Scripture, Robert gives us excellent examples of God symbolizing Himself with fire. At all times, fire inspires people to raise their thoughts to God. Robert selects visible attractive creatures to remind us of God’s invisible love, and our invisible loving response. We follow easily as Robert describes how to rise to God by fire. Sometimes we need added push from these impressive examples. Fire impels our attention up toward God, just as the continuing fire attracted Moses.

Fire consumes some things, and purifies others. Robert shows examples of each. Fire does more than we can grasp. Its mystery remains after wise men strove for thousands of years to explain it. We love to gaze on fire in awe and wonder. Thus we let fire teach us what it is, what it does, and how it points to its Creator. Robert derives great benefit by wondering consistently about fire. He shares some of that wondering with us by building a fire-ladder to God. Fire reminds us of God’s different effects upon people who love or hate Him.

Obviously wood, hay, and stubble flare up and burn away quickly. So they represent unworthy moral choices, especially sin. God’s flames consume them because good completely opposes evil. We recall that evil is the absence of a good which should be there. The good which belongs is missing. Like a hole in our shirt, evil is not something. Instead, it is a privation. In this case, the shirt is deprived of that part of the shirt which should be there. Too often, we mistake evil for something. After all, the hole in the shirt seems to be something because we can see it. But do we see the hole? Do we not see a white undershirt where the blue shirt should be? Because evil is not something, it’s tricky to track. Because we lose track of it, we too often try to impose on evil its very opposite. We try to impose “something” on the very lack of “something”. If we make that mistake, then we try to eliminate the something that we mistake for evil. In the case of the hole in the shirt, we try to eliminate the white part of the blue shirt. That white part is part of our undershirt. If we try to eliminate the white, then we rip a hole in our undershirt.

Sadly, when we eliminate this existing white something, we cause more evil. Now part of the white undershirt which belonged there is absent. Robert does not examine this topic, but we can profit from getting it

straight. This difference is especially important because wood, hay, and stubble are definite things. Each is good in its own way. We must be careful of our symbols, lest we mistakenly apply them to important real beings. The example of the hole in the blue shirt is trivial. We can afford to replace both the blue shirt and the white undershirt. But we too frequently insist that the person who commits the evil is himself evil. Then, to eliminate the evil, we eliminate the person. Say that Ed kills Mo. That's terrible. The absence of Mo's life shocks us. Stupefied by this shock, we might declare that Ed is evil. We fail to distinguish between the sinner and the sin. If we impose this error, we may kill Ed. We tell ourselves that killing Ed will correct the evil he committed by killing Mo. When we come to our senses, after killing Ed, we notice that we have doubled the destruction.

God does the opposite of destroying. He fills up the missing good with newly-present good. God is the only being Who can replace the missing good seamlessly, so that His repaired product is better than the original. Jesus showed us exactly that when he cured the blind man of Bethsaida in Mark 8:22-26. His replaced vision was better than his previous vision. If we were to test it, it would be 20/20. Similarly, the nerves, blood vessels, and muscles that Christ replaced in a cripple were better than his original equipment. His wine is a fine example of the best instead of just better. These material miracles show us the pattern that Jesus follows to cure sin.

When we sin, we eliminate spiritual good inside us, and usually some material good outside us. If we decide to reject our sinful decision, then we beseech God to repair the spiritual gap, and we try to repair the material hole our sin caused. For example, we make restitution by repaying what we stole, repairing what we damaged... God eagerly forgives, and completely restores our spiritual integrity. He also aids us to repair material damage we did. God's eagerness is so emphatic, that fire represents it well. Like a raging furnace, He burns to replace the evil gap with the good that belongs there. Unfortunately, material fire does not repair. Similarly, washing our sins away neglects God's unique creativity of restoring good. He burns to restore good where we destroyed it. When we become enthusiastic to repair, we burn with His fire. Remember that He burns to repair.

Old Testament quotes usually emphasize God's hatred for evil, and His destruction of enemies, particularly pagans who worship false Gods. As we grow to understand God better, we see His fiery zeal really means replacing good where we have evacuated it. Robert calls biblical witnesses to testify that God is the opposite of sin. He is fullness, while sin is emptiness. God pursues His people through the desert of their evil decisions. In that wasteland, He provides food, water, and comfort for the misery Israel causes itself. Jesus is even more emphatically zealous to repair our defects. He shows His zeal by taking all sins upon His innocent self, to pay our sin-debt. Robert provides the important Scriptural quotes to show that Christ is the main witness against evil, and for good. His witness is acting out salvation, redeeming us from all trace of sin, reconstituting us in purity that surpasses our original innocence. The law also witnesses, identifying each sin, prohibiting it, and providing punishment. Another striking witness is hell itself, showing us the supreme misery of self-imposed evil.

Robert skims over people damning themselves, because no one doubted it. Amidst today's doubts we review Ladislaus Boros' book *The Mystery of Death*, to fill in some of the blanks. It's rather obvious to us that our daily decisions are quite limited to short-term benefits. Near-death experiences include seeing our entire life pass before our eyes. This is a way to say that we see our life as a whole. Finally, at the moment of death, we can make our complete decision, because we consider our complete life. At death's moment, there is no tomorrow, no emotional pressure, and no outside influence. In short, we are completely free for the first time. Now we can make our first fully informed and free choice. We can decide for or against God.

If we choose to reject God, we condemn ourselves to empty eternity, without God, our Source and Destiny. Built for God, we agonize without Him. All our vivid images of suffering fall short of hell's torments. We can add to Robert's fine description that we freely reject All Good; All Truth; All Beauty; All Unity. Hell is eternal absence of all that we need. Our decision rejects all that we really want. We forever frustrate our desires, and rage against all that we miss. Especially we hate people who enjoy anything. Robert assures us that God is perfectly right to leave us in hell. After all, we choose it. God respects our freedom and our intelligence. If we use them against Him, the everlasting consequence is eternal ache for Him. It is what we want; we got it.

So Robert urges us to love God, cling to Him. When we abandon Him by sin, we should hasten to repent. Call upon His infinite mercy to heal us. He will make us better than we were before we sinned. No wonder

Robert warns us to avoid sin more than we avoid snakes. Not even the hint of sin is worth our time. To continue our fire analogy, only God's blazing love counts. Our entire being yearns and longs for God, so we ache for union with Him in heaven. Now Robert is ready to consider how God's fire purifies us.

## Chapter 2: Fire Purifies Metals; God Crowns Human Good Works

"The same fire does not destroy, but perfects, and makes gold, silver, and precious stones shine brighter because . . . these metals symbolize good and perfect works which come through the fire of divine judgment successfully, and will receive a great reward. God tests these works because they are his gifts, as St. Augustine says: 'When he crowns our merits, he crowns his own gifts', *Homilies on the Psalms*, Ps 70, 2<sup>nd</sup> sermon, 5. They were done at his command and with his help. He gave us the power to perform them, and he guided us by the law he gave and the rules he established. Gold symbolizes the works of love. How can the works of love fail to please God, when God himself is love (1 Jn 4:8)? Silver symbolizes the works of wisdom of those people 'who instruct many to justice, Dt 12:3. God greatly approves, and is pleased with these works . . . 'Whoever carries them out, and teaches them, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven', Mt 5:19. Precious stones are the works of the chaste soul: . . . 'No price is worthy of a continent soul', Sir 26:15. This is the reason why the Gospel read at Lauds in the Office for Holy Virgins is about finding a single precious pearl. The Prophet Isaiah suggests how pleased God is by virginal purity, when he speaks in God's name to eunuchs, those who have castrated themselves for the kingdom of heaven: 'I will give them a place in my house . . . and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name which shall never perish', Is 56:5. St. Augustine . . . in *On Holy Virginitly* writes a magnificent passage applying this text to holy virgins, men and women. The doctors agree that there are three works which merit a golden crown in the kingdom of heaven. Golden crowns [symbolize additional blessings] beyond life everlasting for martyrs, doctors, and virgins. [These belong] to martyrs for their outstanding love. 'Greater love than this no one has that one lay down his life for his friends', Jn 15:13. Doctors [deserve crowns] because of their outstanding wisdom, 'They that instruct many to justice, shall shine as stars for all eternity', Dan 12:3. Virgins [deserve crowns] because of the matchless price of purity . . . 'These are they who were not defiled with women, virgins who follow the lamb wherever he goes', Rev 12:4.

"...the love of martyrs, the wisdom of doctors, and the purity of virgins will be tested by fire of divine judgment, and will receive full reward. Good works of all kinds, as long as they are done in love, will be counted among the golden vessels, and undergo the divine fire, and will receive their reward. The Lord will say to them at the last judgment: 'Come blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world', Mt 25:34. These are the people who offered bread to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, hospitality to travelers, clothing to the naked, and encouragement to the sick and to prisoners. The Lord also promised that no one would be deprived of this reward who gave even a glass of cold water out of charity to someone because he was a disciple (Mt 10:42).

"Do you understand, my soul, how much difference there is between different works? What is more foolish and wretched than to gather dry wood, hay, and stubble, with considerable effort, when you could easily acquire gold, silver, and precious stones? May you be wise and intelligent, and provide for the last times (Dt 32:29). When [death] comes, all things will be examined and tested in the fire of God's judgment. The first [type of person] will earn praise and reward. The second type will be burned to ashes and smoke. Why do you now choose what you will surely regret having chosen? Why not condemn now, while it is to your advantage, what you will condemn shortly, to no advantage? If perhaps you do not see this now, because a veil of present things cloaks your eyes, [obscuring] the pure and obvious truth, pray to God, joining the blind man in the Gospel: 'Lord that I may see', Lk 18:41. 'Open my eyes, and I will consider the wondrous things of your law, Ps 119:18. It is absolutely wonderful that works done out of love become gold, silver, and precious stones, while those not done out of love are changed into wood, hay, and stubble."<sup>40</sup>

*Reflection* Because spiritual realities are not visible, and we are submerged in visible sensations, Robert uses visual symbols to keep our attention. Wood, hay, and stubble are obviously less valuable than gold, silver, and precious stones. Robert relates these symbols to spiritual realities in us. Clearly, fire burns away impurities in gold and silver. Similar spiritual purification occurs after we die, during God's divine judgment, as if God's fire evaporated our sin. Before death, we can hide from God amid abundant distractions. He preserves our free-

dom by allowing us millions of options. Most of these options lead nowhere, definitely making them distractions. But God wants us to choose increasingly better ambiguous things. Somehow, we can resolve ambiguity positively by turning them into service of God. Repeated positive resolutions strengthen our character.

On the other hand, we can resolve ambiguity negatively by solidifying our choice into self-service. Repeated negative resolution weakens our character. For example, among many statements we could make, some are true, and some false. If we settle our decision by lying, we become liars. This unhappy resolution of ambiguous options fixes our freedom into sin. By contrast, if we decide to tell the truth, we resolve ambiguities into positive truth-telling. Truth perfectly coordinates with reality, the way God made it. Simultaneously, we serve God, and our power to tell the truth grows. Our decision more completely convinces us of the truth. We become more united with truth. Our moral character is more integrated; we are more integral, less split by lies. Naturally, this positive development is progressive improvement.

During divine judgment, our truthful statements integrate like a pool of pure gold. Lies, by contrast, contaminate the gold like dirt. Robert's symbols provide a visible structure hinting at the invisible spiritual progress. This hint is so helpful that we become more familiar with our spiritual progress, and find better ways to improve it. We begin to understand that gold, which is most precious to us, is like spiritual love, because that is most precious to God. Because He is Love, all loving interaction is bound to be precious to Him, and to us.

Robert relates silver to spiritual wisdom, precious to God because He is Wisdom. Somehow, we know that Love is more intrinsically God than is Wisdom. Each is identical with God, but the quality of that identity is more perfect for Love than for Wisdom. But these considerations flow past Robert's main points. When we dwell with God by reading Robert's words, He invites us ever forward. So there is no end to the loving path that God prepares for us. There is no end to the truth that He provides. There is no end to the good that he pours upon us. Naturally, these approaches to God fit beautifully with the Scripture that Robert quotes. Somehow, by the Bible, God speaks His Love to us. It definitely is His love-letter to us, full of wisdom beyond our wildest dreams. When we read Scripture, God's blessings urge us on toward full life.

Robert reminds us that precious stones stand for the diamond of purity. As a diamond has high material value, so virginity has high spiritual value. "No price is worthy of a continent soul", Sir 26:15. John, in Revelation praises virginity even more profusely. The value of purity is its total gift to God alone. Delightful total personal gifts of self to other people (husband and wife) within holy marriage are extremely valuable. But the direct gift of self to God is even more so. Because God is invisible and intangible, He cannot provide the visible and tangible interaction that a husband or wife provides. So the virgin gift of self to God requires more spiritual strength, especially more faith. This is the spiritual achievement that Isaiah praises. He points to it with a striking term: "castration" for the kingdom of heaven. Isaiah reminds us that true religious devotion is total giving.

This totality has several degrees. Martyrs, doctors, and virgins live out the highest degrees, represented by golden crowns. Notice that golden crowns are much more interesting to us than degrees of totality. That's why Scripture and great spiritual books, like this one by Robert, communicate with symbols, like golden crowns. Love, wisdom, and purity grow in us by purification, so effectively symbolized by fire.

Robert notes that lower degrees of total gift also please God, who says: "Come blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you" because they offered bread to the hungry, drink to the thirsty... even a glass of cold water. Robert emphasizes the difference between these varying works, particularly the difference between trying to keep self for ourselves, and striving to give self away for others. The difference between keeping self and giving self is greater than the difference between stubble and gold. Robert reminds us that if we choose ourselves we disgust ourselves. The most striking reason for this self-disgust is that we are nothing. God's personal love for us creates us. We exist because of His personal interaction. If we reject His love, to center ourselves on ourselves, we gather stubble instead of gold; we get nothing instead of God. Why choose what we regret choosing? In this time of trial, our good choices garner rewards. At the last judgment, it's too late to derive benefit from our choices, but we do have to face up to our sins, and condemn them.

If we are too blind to see what Robert says, then we can pray "Lord that I may see", Lk 18:41. Here, during our probation, we can improve our sight. The better we see, the better we choose, and the more likely we

are to select gold instead of stubble. If we select gold, standing for real value, we fulfill ourselves. If we select stubble, or fake value, we frustrate ourselves. During our lifetime, we mix our choices, getting mixed results: some fulfillment and some frustration. Hopefully, we learn from our mistakes, and increase our fulfillment, thereby decreasing frustration. Decreasing our selfishness increased our love. We give more and take less. When we give more, represented by gold, we gain more, and are more satisfied. When we take less, represented by stubble, we reduce our frustration, and, again, are more satisfied. Robert recommends that we go for the gold. His next chapter offers practical steps to leave sin behind on our way to truth.

### **Chapter 3: Fire Brightens Black Iron; God Leads the Sinful Soul to a Knowledge of Truth**

“We now take under consideration a second property of fire. So far we have learned from fire what God does to those who leave this life with evil works, and to those who reach the end of life with good works. I will draw another comparison based on fire which will help us understand what God accomplishes in persons he draws from sin to repentance.

“A sinful man is like iron because, [before purifying in fire] it is black, cold, hard, and heavy. But in the fire it become bright, hot, soft and light. Every sinner lacks inner light, and walks in darkness. In this he resembles the blackness of iron. Even if he seems to enjoy intelligence, and good judgment, in scholarship and human affairs, still he is blind, and worse than blind, in discerning between good and evil. The blind man sees nothing. Therefore, he does not move without a guide. The sinner thinks he sees what he does not see, or sees one thing for another, and judges good to be evil, and evil good, large to be small, and small large, long to be short, and short long. That’s why his choices are always so mistaken. This is Paul’s saying about gentiles who worship idols. Their “understanding is clouded in darkness, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart”, Ep 4:18. This is what our Lord himself in the Gospel so often criticized in the scribes and Pharisees, that they were blind guides for the blind (Mt 15:28). [Similarly] ‘Hear you deaf, and you blind behold that you may see’, Is 42:18. He predicted to them that Christ will come and open the eyes of the blind. Speaking in the person of God about the New Testament, he added: ‘I will lead the blind into the way which they know not, and in the paths which they were ignorant of, I will make them walk. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked ways straight’, Is 42:16. Lastly, will not sinners admit this after this life, when punishment begins to open the eyes of their mind, which guilt has closed? ‘We have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice did not shine on us, and the sun of understanding did not rise upon us’, Wis 5:6. It is not surprising that those who have turned away from God in their will and understanding are blind. ‘God is light, and in him is no darkness’, 1 Jn 1:5. The same Apostle concludes from this: ‘He who hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and does not know whither he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes’, 1 Jn 2:9, 11.

“The fact that they have turned away from God, who is light, is not the only cause for the blindness of sinners. Besides that, ‘their own malice blinded them’, Wis 2:21. The passions of the mind: love, hate, anger, envy... so blind the mind that they prevent it from discerning truth. But they work like tinted lenses, making white seem red, or small things large, or large things small, or things far away seem near, or near things distant.

A person violently in love judges that what he loves is beautiful, useful, wonderful, and absolutely necessary for him. So he must get hold of it, even at the cost of neglecting or throwing aside everything else. Conversely, when a person hates something violently, he considers it ugly, useless, evil, and even dangerous to himself; hence, absolutely [to be avoided], at the cost of losing everything else. But if this black and dark iron be put in the fire, i.e. if the sinner begins to be turned away from sin, and turned toward God, then ‘Come to him and be enlightened’, Ps 34:6, he gains light little by little, and sees the plain truth in that light: ‘In your light we shall see the light’, Ps 36:9. Then when the tinted glasses of the passions have been broken, and the crystal clear glasses of pure love have been put on, he will judge that eternal possessions are more important, and temporal ones count for little or nothing, as is really the case. Then he will see clearly that created splendor cannot in any way be compared with the light of wisdom and truth which is in God, and is God. He then will exclaim with St. Augustine: ‘late have I loved you, beauty ever ancient and new, late have I loved you’, *Confessions* 10, c, 27. Christ says: “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”, Jn 8:32. The man who is enlightened and freed by the light of truth from the shackles of concupiscence, greed, ambition, and other passions, will

rejoice with the Prophet: ‘Lord, you have broken my bonds. I will sacrifice to you the sacrifice of praise, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, Ps 116:16-17.’<sup>41</sup>

*Reflection* Robert describes activity visible in every blacksmith’s shop. In his time, there were many such shops. Today, there are very few. But we can see on TV that the smith starts with cold black ingots, and heats them into bright soft, even molten, iron. This striking display is like the invisible spiritual conversion from sinful darkness to repentant light. In order to sin, we must tell ourselves that the bad is good, that true is false. These abstractions can be concretized by saying that the short is long. For example, we could say that lying is profitable, because we could keep a \$50 bill that someone lost. We would indeed have an additional \$50. But if we lie that it is ours, we become liars. Becoming liars hurts us more than \$50 can repay. Moreover, the real owner of that \$50 is quite likely to come looking for it. Since he actually lost it, we may have to defend our first lie with a string of other lies. The real owner may have such a strong case for retaking that \$50 that we must either fight for it or flee with it. Obviously, the lie that we own that money is evil for us. Moreover, it is definitely bad for the true owner, and can harm some of the innocent bystanders. We fill in the unmentioned blanks by reviewing what is likely to happen when we impose this lie.

In addition to these drawbacks, Robert notes that each lie dims our vision, so that we eventually impose a form of blindness about good and evil that damages us until we repent. But repenting is harder because our spiritual vision is damaged. If we impose lie after lie, we become good at imposing lies. This is the blindness of the heart that St. Paul mentions in Ephesians. Isaiah shows that we also self-impose deafness to silence our conscience. Blindness is more devastating: “the light of justice did not shine on us; the sun of understanding did not rise upon us”, Wis 5:6. St. John’s first epistle expresses our condition clearly “darkness has blinded his eyes”.

We seldom mention malice these days. It means an active intent to harm. Robert associates it with mental passions, or drives like love and hate, anger and envy. When our spiritual vision is distorted by lies, we can’t protect ourselves against these malicious drives. So we often remove some good, leaving a gap which is evil. As tinted lenses redden what is white, we tint what’s around us with malicious tinges. Robert shows us that we become violent when we become malicious. If we convert, or allow God’s purifying fire to cleanse us, we begin to see what is right there in front of us. We see the light, and find the peace. This improvement helps us replace passion with reason, so that we love God, even if it is late in our lives. God’s fire can then purify us. We become much more effective, doing many more positive things, as Robert considers next.

#### **Chapter 4: Fire Makes Cold Iron Glow; God’s Grace makes Man’s Works and Deeds Effective**

“Fire not only changes iron from dark to bright, but also changes it from cold to hot, making it so fiery that it seems to be fire itself. Great is the Lord, and great his power. Man by nature is cold, and fears and trembles at everything, daring not to speak, or put himself forward to try difficult things. But as soon as God kindles in him the fire of love, he makes him braver than a lion, which terrifies everyone with his roar, and conquers everybody in combat. For him, nothing seems difficult, nothing hard, so he says with the blazing Apostle Paul: ‘I can do all things in him who strengthens me’, Phil 4:13.

“Let’s consider the efficacy of fire under different headings. We can first briefly discuss the efficacy of words, then of deeds. There are many preachers in the Church today... Why do all their exhortations and shouting convert so few? In large cities, twenty to forty preachers give sermons every day during Lent, but ... there seems to be no change in the morals of the city. The same vices, sins, indifference and dissoluteness appear. ... There is no soul, life, and fire. What’s missing is that great love which alone gives life and fire to preachers’ words, and inflames and changes the hearts of listeners. I do not say that many preachers lack energetic delivery, or gyrations of the whole body. Cannons let out a mighty roar even when they have no [cannonball], but they produce no result. What is needed is that preachers have a great love for God, and the salvation of souls. It must be genuine, not put on. It must flow out of the fountain of the heart naturally, not strained. St. Peter had not mastered the art of speaking. His skill was steering a boat, and repairing and casting nets. But when the Holy Spirit came down on him in fiery tongues, and filled him with a burning love, he at once began to speak in the middle of Jerusalem so powerfully, so fervently, so effectively, that in one sermon he converted many thousands to repentance and faith (Act 2:14). He did not shout or gyrate. ... St. Bonaventure tells of St. Francis that he was

not greatly learned, and had not studied rhetoric. But when he gave a sermon, the people listened as if an angel from heaven spoke. His speech was like burning fire piercing the inmost heart. Chapter 10 of *the Chronicle of the Order of Friars Minor* narrates that when he made a few unprepared remarks after dinner, there was such a great movement toward repentance that it seemed like Good Friday. Why were these few words so effective? It was because the holy preacher was like a glowing coal, and his word was a blazing torch (Sir 48:1).

“The written sermons of St. Vincent, St. Bernadine, and several others are too simple to entice us to read them. But many thousands of people converted because of these talks, coming from hearts afire. Moreover, that divine fire showed its power no less in deeds than in words. God decided to subject the city of Rome, the head of the empire, and the mistress of the nations, through the Apostle Peter. He decided to send forth the other apostles, to Ethiopia, India, Sythia, and distant Britain. Through them he destroyed the idols of the world, and raised the standard of the cross, changed laws and ceremonies, and overturned the tyranny of the devil. Had anybody predicted this to the apostles on lake Galilee, or when they were looking for a place to hide during the Lord’s passion, it would have seemed like dreams, or old wives’ tales. But all this came true a short time later, and by no other power than burning love, lit by the Holy Spirit in their hearts. ‘Love casts out fear’, 1 Jn 4:18. ‘Love bears all things, hopes all things’, 1 Cor 13:7. ... ‘I can do all things in him who strengthens me’, Phil 4:13. We see how the work and effort of these men, armed only with love, quickly overthrew idolatry throughout the world; how they founded churches everywhere, and raised up the standard of the cross in all kingdoms, without an army of soldiers...”<sup>42</sup>

*Reflection* Emphatically, Robert assures us that people convert because of the love pouring forth from the preacher’s heart, instead of the words pouring from his mouth. People freely decide to convert, but living Love in the preacher inspires their decision. People will not improve their lives unless inspired by the Holy Spirit. The examples that Robert provides drive his point home. Especially effective are his examples from Sts. Vincent Ferrer and Bernadine of Sienna. When we read their recorded words, we wonder how their listeners stayed awake. The Holy Spirit flowed from the preachers’ heart-felt devotion directly to the hearts of their hearers. By a time-warp, if TV news had videoed St. Peter’s talk on Pentecost, so that we could replay it, we would find it quite dull. But if we had been present, we would have received the Holy Spirit, lavished upon the three thousand who converted to Christ. You had to be there. Robert does not give himself as a prime example, but his preaching was effective, because he devoted his life to praying to accept the Holy Spirit. Now Robert considers hardened sinners, to show how God’s love through the Holy Spirit enters even there.

### **Chapter 5: Fire Makes Hard Iron Soft; God’s Grace Conquers a Stubborn Heart**

“Fire has the property of changing iron from hard to soft, so that it can be easily thinned and lengthened into blades, and can be adapted to any shape by a craftsman. Fire has great power over iron, but far greater is the strength of our God in the stubborn and obstinate hearts of mortals. Listen to St. Bernard, from *On Consideration*: ‘The only hard heart is one which is not aghast at itself because it feels nothing. What is a hard heart? It is one which is not torn by regret, nor softened by devotion, nor moved by prayers. It does not yield to threats, and is hardened by scourging. It is ungrateful for benefits, and heedless of advice. ... this is the one who neither fears God nor respects men.’ Pharaoh [against Moses] proves that all this is true. The more God scourged him, the more he hardened. The more God’s kindness shone upon him, the more he scorned and despised God.

“But if it sometimes pleases God to light a spark of the fire of true love for Him in even the hardest heart, it at once softens and becomes like molten wax. No stubbornness, though old and hard, can resist his power. Immediately the heart that was stony becomes fleshy. Under the breath of the Holy Spirit, waters flow from icy snow. The woman in the Gospel who was a public sinner [resisted] everyone until a single beam of Christ penetrated her heart, and lit in it a spark of divine love. This suddenly changed her into another woman. Even though she was of noble birth, she was not ashamed to go to Christ’s feet at a public banquet. Totally dissolved in tears, she bathed Christ’s feet with her tears, and dried them with her own hair..., kissed his feet in the intensity of her love, and anointed him with expensive fragrant ointment. Thus she signified that she wished henceforward to dedicate herself and all her possessions to him. Thereby she merited to hear these words of the Lord: ‘Her sins, many as they are, shall be forgiven her, because she has loved much’, Lk 7:47.

“William, Duke of Aquitaine, in St. Bernard’s time (1090-1153), was stubborn ... in defending Anacletus the anti-pope, and attacking Innocent the legitimate pope. He drove the Catholic bishops out of his territory, and swore an oath never to make peace with them. Because everybody knew how hardened in evil his heart was, and feared his ferocity and pride, nobody dared correct him. It pleased God through St. Bernard to visit the heart of this stubborn man, and kindle a small spark of divine love in it. Instantly he changed from lion to lamb, from proud to humble, from stubborn to obedient. He even followed Bernard’s suggestion to embrace the Bishop of Poitiers lovingly, and give him his throne... Even more wonderful, he asked a hermit about curing his soul from his sins. The hermit ordered William to put on his bronze breastplate over his bare skin, and lock it... The duke agreed immediately, and then obeyed the order to go to the Pope for forgiveness. Worried about William’s sincerity, the Pope asked him to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to beg absolution from the patriarch there. William accomplished this feat. Later, he became a humble monk, surpassing practically everybody of his time in modesty, patience, poverty, devotion, and piety. ‘This is the change of the right hand of the most High’, Ps 77:10. It is the power of divine fire which no stubbornness of the heart can resist.”<sup>43</sup>

*Reflection* Here Robert gives striking examples of hard-hearts softening by God’s fire of love. These repentant people encourage us. The details of their conversion assure us that no one’s heart is too hard for Jesus to melt, if the sinner opens to Christ. Thus prepared, Robert recounts how souls rise to justice.

### **Chapter 6 Fire Lightens Heavy objects; God’s Grace Lifts Souls to the Path of Justice**

“There remains the last property of fire: lightening heavy burdens, and lifting them up with ease. This is why men who do not burn with divine love are heavy of heart. To them the Prophet says: ‘How long will you be heavy of heart? Why do you love vanity and seek after lying?’ Ps 4:2. This is certainly the reason that ‘the corruptible body is a load upon the soul’, Wis 9:15. ‘A heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam from the day of their coming out of their mother’s womb until the day of their burial into the mother of all’, Sir 40:1.[What is] this heavy yoke which weighs down the soul in a mortal body? Sirach mentions anger, envy, inconstancy, fear, wrath, and passions of the mind. These weigh upon a man so that he looks at nothing except the earth, and clings to it, lying flat, and does not arise to seek God, and cannot run freely in the way of God’s commandments. But when the divine fire from above starts to inflame the human heart, these [evil] passions immediately grow weak, and begin to die, and the heavy burden begins to become lighter. If the fire [of God] increases, it is not hard for the human heart to drop its burden, so that it takes wings like a dove. [Then] ‘our citizenship is in heaven’, Phil 3:20. With a heart enlarged by the fire, ... ‘I have run the way of your commandments when you have enlarged my heart’, Ps 119:32. Indeed, the Savior said: ‘I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled’, Lk 12:49. We have seen many [souls] made so light, that they have put aside all love of honor, flesh, and riches, and have said to Christ, going off to heaven: ‘Draw us after you’, Sg 1:3. For this reason many monasteries were built, many deserts inhabited, and many choirs of virgins established. For them it was not only easy to run in the path of the commandments, but also to climb up the path of the counsels, and follow the Lamb wherever he goes’, Rv 14:4.

“O blessed fire, you do not consume, but enlighten. If you do consume, you consume our harmful disposition, so that it cannot destroy life. Who will grant me to be seized by this fire, which cleans and removes the blackness of ignorance and the darkness of false conscience, by the light of true wisdom. [This fire] changes the coldness of laziness, distraction, and carelessness into the fire of love, which never allows my heart to become hardened, but always softens it by its warmth, and makes it devout. [This fire] removes the heavy yoke of earthly cares and earthly desires, and lifts up my heart on the wings of holy contemplation that nourishes and increases charity, so that I can say ... ‘Lord Give joy to the soul of your servant, for unto you, O lord, do I lift up my soul’, Ps 86:4.”<sup>44</sup>

*Reflection* Robert’s experiences extend so far across the earth and into heaven, that he summarizes them in symbols like fire. These symbols sweep through the distracting details of his life, and provide a picture we can see in a glance. God’s love accomplishes so many improvements in Robert, that a list of them would be too tedious for us to follow. So he mentions only a few of fire’s properties, simple things we can observe. He then relates how God’s spiritual fire has similar effects upon his own soul. These effects make Robert quite admirable. He is a shining example of spiritual fire lightening him on the way to God. But following his example

is quite challenging. We can identify similar experiences in our own souls. Down deep inside, we know our heavy hearts very well. We have all the experiences that Robert lists, and have lightened up, now and then, as he describes. As soon as we accept God's flaming love, we become so satisfied that we abandon passionate desires for visible values. Visible values include food, sex, and imposing our desires. Visible things distract us from our ultimate desire for invisible God. We struggle to balance our desires with our needs.

We definitely need some food. Do we need as much as we desire? Does advertising inflate our desires beyond healthy limits? How often do we give in to desires for creatures, only to be disappointed? Our repeated frustrations should convince us to abandon false desires. They weigh us down. God's love removes these useless burdens. Then we can rest, and replace despair with joy. This is a foretaste of heavenly bliss, switching our citizenship from dreadful earth to delightful heaven. Instead of the drudgery of the daily grind, we delight in the fire of God's love. Robert describes religious communities full of monks and nuns who run in the path of God's commandments, but also climb up the path of the counsels, and follow the Lamb wherever he goes. We seldom consider the counsels, so a slight digression into them will expose Robert's meaning.

The Gospel teaches the evangelical counsels when it recounts how Jesus transcends commandments. In the Old Testament, ideal life culminates in God's ten commandments given through Moses. But Christ challenges us to live the more perfect life that He exemplifies. His magnificent life of poverty, chastity, and obedience call us all to imitate Him. On specific occasions, each of us must counter our drive for wealth with an act of poverty, because wealth can dazzle us, and even bewitch us into worshiping the Almighty Dollar. On occasion, we must dispose of our harmful excess. Some of us decide to counter our wealth-drive with a life of poverty, covering all occasions. The Apostles so loved Jesus that they became professionally poor men. Mary Magdalene renounced her wealth to become a professionally poor woman. From the outset, Christ's example inspired a few Catholics to adopt evangelical counsels, thereby following Jesus more closely.

Notice that these counsels are recommendations instead of requirements. The commandments are requirements, while the counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience are recommendations. Poverty counters our drive to wealth. Chastity counters our drive to pleasure. Obedience counters our drive to self-determination. Jesus does not command anyone to imitate Him fully by adopting the evangelical counsels. Instead, He invites us. Robert says that those few who accept, climb up the path, and follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Though living the counsels is harder than living the commandments, it is the swifter and surer way to Christ. Why is that?

The main reason why the counsels are the more perfect way to God is that they more completely reject the major obstacles to God. Material possessions, sex, and self-service lead the list of sinful distractions. Devotion to any of these acts destroys devotion to God. At its most sinful extreme, some people worship one of these distractions, excluding God from their hearts. If we follow Jesus into His counsels, we free ourselves from these all-too-popular distractions. By rejecting all property, the poor person depends completely upon God. By rejecting married life, the chaste person depends entirely on God for love and family support. By rejecting his own will and determination, the obedient person obeys God when He speaks through religious leaders. This short description shows how child-like the person becomes if he lives the counsels. Because Jesus lived this way, His life is our best example of the counsel's benefits. Christ teaches us that this three-step renunciation of fundamental goods is the most radical offering a person can make to God.

Robert notes that the symbol of fire helps us emphasize the light of God's love. Physical fire consumes fuel, but God's love never consumes our soul. Instead, His fire amplifies everything positive in the spiritual realm. All morality grows as it glows in the flame of God's infinite love. We easily picture that divine love consuming our sins, our inclinations to sin, and the devastating effects of our sins. We employ the fire symbol best if we realize that God's flaming love fosters all positive spiritual activities, and burns away all negative spiritual activities. Robert uses the fire symbol so effectively that we appreciate his fine work. Perhaps this introduction to his spiritual book will launch us into personal investigation of the rest of his book. But now we switch topics.

### **Transition to Different Topics**

Robert's *Ladder* continues for another eight steps, filling 125 more pages of the book. We could continue

into that rich spiritual treasure. But three factors enable us to take up other topics. First, we are now familiar enough with Robert's approach that each of us can continue individually studying his *Spiritual Ladder*. Second, Robert gives us such a marvelous example of living joyfully in spite of bodily illness that we will profit from a sketch of his virtue of fortitude while suffering great pains. Third, we can set the record straight against some people who falsely accuse Robert of persecuting Galileo. So these other topics beckon us to consider his moral vigor. Accordingly, we will now examine how he dealt so effectively with bodily pain. Later, we will investigate what really happened to Galileo. Fortunately, Broderick provides an accurate account of both.

### **Effective Response to Pain and Suffering**

Overwork and sleep-deprivation wrecked Robert's health. He hardly ever referred to his illness, but he almost died when he studied and taught in rainy Louvain, Belgium. Far from his warm, sunny Italy, Robert suffered from almost constant clouds, material and spiritual. More oppressive still were heretical ideas in the department of theology. An outstanding example of heresy was Dr. Michael de Bay, nicknamed Baius, who promoted Jansenism. In 1567 Pope Pius V condemned 79 of his heretical propositions. To avoid these, and other unhealthy opinions, running wild in the University of Louvain, the Jesuits opened their own theology school. Robert became the first Jesuit professor there. He provided lectures which corrected many of the prevailing errors. He used the exceptionally thorough reasoning of St. Thomas Aquinas to refute heresies.<sup>45</sup>

In so doing, he exerted himself past his endurance. In addition to his spiritual exercises, and his strenuous teaching, he prepared and delivered outstanding sermons. All this work, usually done at the expense of his slumber, took its toll. He suffered untold pains, but turned his experience into helping the masses of people whose afflictions drove them to despair. "The problem of human suffering occupied him more than any other subject. He was always reverting to it, arguing and pleading to God, and justifying His ways to the suspicious intellect of man. During the Lent of 1574, his whole course was entitled *De Tribulation*. He began his sermon: 'As I made my humble prayer to God today, I begged him, the Father of orphans, to inspire me with some thought for your consolation'. In eight long sermons, he proceeded to prove to them, by a thousand arguments, how sweet for the Christian soul might be the uses of adversity. His aim was to give these men he loved, right thoughts about God, and to instruct them in the strategy of His Providence, which ... 'sends sorrows out like soldiers to do battle with our vices'. His concern in all these sermons on suffering is to show that love is ultimately its meaning. 'My Lady Tribulation' is love, knocking at the door, trying to get in, an inexorable patient love, that sees men always in the perspective of eternity, and has no aim but to purify, enlighten, and perfect them. 'In the heyday of youth or prosperity, men easily forget God. But sorrow comes, wisest of counsellors, and teaches them that vanity is vanity. Then only do they learn that all is not gold that glitters, nor is everything of great worth which is bought and sold in the market-place of fools'.<sup>46</sup>

Robert concluded all this from his own struggle with bodily pain. He could not convince people to face their agony unless he first faced his. He spoke from conviction because suffering battered him to his knees, to invoke God's help during his agony. The reasons he provided for others are the very ones he discovered in his tribulations. For example, you can reread the fine quote on page 1 and 2 of these notes, about the just man's sufferings. We can see Robert at the end of his endurance, reminding himself that suffering is limited to the instant it occurs. Suffering does not seep out of that instant into the past or future. Past pains no longer make us suffer. Future pains are mere images of what could happen. So we can quit worrying about all pain except the one we presently endure. That pain is instantly gone. If another one replaces that one, we recall that we somehow got through the previous instantaneous pain. That success encourages us to face the present agonizing instant.

Meanwhile, we learn from "My Lady Tribulation" that these very pains are love knocking on our heart, begging us to let love in to our barricaded depths. Robert remembers how suffering purifies him of vain attachments to worthless glitter, sold in the market-place of fools. All of us learn similar lessons. We can apply this advanced knowledge to our present pains, to recognize how they purify us. Robert does not recount the next step in this direction, so here it is. We learn to enjoy the purification. With age comes wisdom to learn the value of purifying pain, and the supreme value of soul-purification. Attaining this value is supremely delightful. Love purifies us, as Robert so graphically describes in his steps through divine fire (pages 38-47 of these notes). We enjoy the love that God pours forth, even in suffering.

Notice how we transform endurance into enjoyment. Suffering itself is not enjoyable at all. But the purification and the gift of love are enjoyable. So we must focus accurately to join Robert as he enjoys My Lady Tribulation's visit. We must quit focusing on the pain, while acknowledging that it is surely present. We must instead focus on God's loving removal of sin, purging us of everything that separates us from Him. This mature evaluation enables us to advance from "endure" to "enjoy". Robert leads the way, and explains the steps so clearly that we can flow right into God's purifying love.

Though he enjoyed his purification, his health did not improve. His work-load drove him down. "Lecturing daily to a hundred students, preaching a carefully prepared Latin sermon each Sunday, spending interminable hours in the confessional, giving ... long and truly loving 'domestic exhortations' to his Jesuit brethren, pouring over his big Bible morning noon and night, seeing a constant stream of visitors in a cold and drafty parlor, giving each person the impression that he was the only person in Belgium who counted to the frail, infirm little priest of thirty-three... reading and annotating the works of the German and Swiss reformers (Protestants) ... and reporting periodically to Rome on the rule of the [Jesuit] house.<sup>47</sup> Many a rugged man would have collapsed much sooner under this load. Seeing Robert's desperate condition in 1576, his director sent him to Italy, hopefully to recover, but probably to die.

Our sketch of his work indicates that he must have accepted the loving gifts of My Lady Tribulation. Nothing but divine assistance could sustain him in this stress. To accomplish all this in cold, wet, and strife-torn Louvain, he must have operated in, by, and on Christ's own love. Nothing but that high-octane Love could keep him going during these labors. Already, during his short 33 years, Robert demonstrated firm union with God, enabling him to practice heroic virtue, the mark of the saint. No wonder that famous leaders, bishops like St. Charles Borromeo, and Popes like Gregory VIII, wanted him to work for them. But first he needed to recover from near-fatal overwork. Fortunately for us all, he did, once he got to sunny Rome. Our sketch of his advance from enduring to enjoying tribulation ends here, but he continued to survive poor health, and its agonizing pains, for another 35 years. If we keep that background suffering in mind, we can marvel at his service to the Church for several Popes, and his interaction with Galileo, to which we now turn.

### **What Really Happened to Galileo**

Growing up in America, we probably heard that the Catholic Church persecuted Galileo. Many people claim that the Church locked Galileo in prison, and tortured him, until he rejected the truth that the earth rotates around the sun. This sensational claim was quite popular, and filled nightmarish tales for many English-speaking kids. However, this popular horror-story is rather the opposite of what really happened. Instead, in 1611, after Galileo published his book *Starry Messenger*, the Pope initiated an octave of celebration for Galileo's new and improved way to investigate<sup>48</sup> the world.<sup>49</sup> Galileo accepted this well-deserved honor, and thrived because of Church protection. "Pope Paul V received [Galileo] in a long private audience, and assured him of his unalterable good will."<sup>50</sup> As a tangible expression of his good will, the Pope granted a pension of 60 crowns per year, originally for Galileo's nephew, but eventually increased to 100 crowns for Galileo himself. Accurate accounts of specific details can be found in *Galileo: the Man, his Work, his Misfortunes*.

The facts his contemporaries observed and reported tell us that Galileo was very emotional, prone to fits of angry dominance. His raw passions precipitated several serious misfortunes. But in a settled mood, Galileo wrote: "The holy scriptures cannot err, and the decrees there... are absolutely true and inviolable. But ... though scripture cannot err, its expounders and interpreters are liable to err in many ways... It being manifest that two truths cannot be contrary to each other, it becomes the office of wise expounders to labor till they find how to make these passages of holy writ concord with those conclusions which either necessary demonstration, or the evidence of our senses, have made us sure and certain..." Galileo affirms that Scripture is inerrant, if properly understood. Later in this letter, he says: "I believe that the intention of holy writ was to persuade men of the truths necessary for salvation, such as neither science nor any other means could render credible, but only the voice of the Holy Spirit."<sup>51</sup>

Here Galileo reminds us that Scripture contributes to our salvation, while science is about lesser things. Science accepts sensory input from bodies, and relates them. So if we want to know about heavenly bodies,

we use a telescope instead of the Bible. A telescope improves eyesight by artificially magnifying images. Glass lenses stretch rays of light inside a tube, thereby enhancing our view of the moon. In this way, we see things that were previously invisible. The Latin word for “I see” is *speculo*, so Galileo called scientific process speculation, compared to revelation from God through tradition to scripture. This is the primary distinction that Galileo employed to understand what he said about science and religion.

Enhanced sensory input shows us previously invisible things. But science has just begun, and has lots of work to do. Speculation gets interesting when scientists guess the pattern behind sensory data. For centuries, as men pondered natural science, these guesses made hardly any use of the quantity of material involved in the observed changes. Insights floated free of any quantitative cross checking. Galileo hit upon a cross-check method that revolutionized natural science by reducing sensations to measurements. Once he determined how to measure consistently, he could track the stable quantity behind shifting sensations. But lists of measurements themselves are merely another step toward knowledge. Galileo then guessed the mathematical formula that expresses the pattern in the measurements. As there are several possible guesses, he had to test formulas to discover which fit the measurements best. Originally, Galileo thought that God wrote creation in mathematical formulas. We exercised our image and likeness to God by decoding his writing, i.e. finding His formulas.

While that assumption worked well at the outset, continued mathematizing of measurements produced formulas of varying accuracy. Therefore, physicists changed these formulas as they improved their observations, and measurements. Before long, physicists discovered that theories were necessary to organize their formulas. With continued improvements, physicists had to change even their theories. The most famous change in physics was from Newton’s theory to Einstein’s theory. This scientific revolution was so sensational that even non-scientists discussed it. Newman proposed, and physicists believed that distance, mass, and time were absolute. Among theoretical assumptions, this was the most fundamental. Einstein followed Newton’s assumptions until he considered discrepancies in Mercury’s orbit around the sun. The only way to resolve these observations with the formulas was to change the formulas. That change was so shocking that, even today, hardly anyone accepts as factual that mass, distance and time all vary with the velocity of a moving body. If they believe what Einstein said, they have enough faith to keep working in modern physics. This massive change from absolute to relative quantities illustrates how speculative science is. This example illustrates that the scientific process is self-corrective, provided that physicists follow successive approximations in the direction they lead.

When scientists speculate about competing processes, following different patterns, they formulate guesses, called hypotheses. Then they test these hypotheses. In recent times, scientists prefer to call their work hypothesis-testing, rather than truth-seeking. During Galileo’s time, people assumed that both science and religion produced truth. So some people thought that Galileo attacked revealed truths when he insisted that the earth revolved around the sun. Everyone can see that the sun rises in the east, crosses the sky, and sets in the west. This is a fundamental truth that Galileo seemed to deny. His arrogant insistence that our observations were wrong, kindled animosity all around. Our personal experience doesn’t directly show the earth rotating. But abstract measurements have that pattern. It is not evident in direct sensation. For example, we insist that if the earth rotated, we would feel its motion, as we do on a merry-go-round. But Galileo re-organized science, away from direct personal experience, into indirect evidence from measurement and mathematics. Instead of reasoning about the meaning of bodies, Galileo’s new science measured bodies, and fitted these measurements into mathematical formulas. Even today, when we revere science, hardly anyone actually does science. Why not?

The main reason is that measurement is entirely too abstract for most folks. It is too far removed from real life. It is less interesting because it skips from meaning and value. Meaning is basic truth. Value is basic good. Religion deals with these things. So its method is quite different from scientific method. Revealed religion relies upon what God tells us. We first strive to learn what He revealed. Then we reason from this revelation to find what is most meaningful and valuable to us. Galileo understood each process, and kept them well balanced. He called attaining full meaning and value “heaven”. In a letter to Grand Duchess Christina, Galileo put it clearly: Scripture “shows us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.”<sup>52</sup> This balance reflects what St. Augustine pointed out in the 400’s: that reasonably certain observation of natural events is more important than Scriptural quotes about those events. Reading these few paragraphs shows that thinking about measurement and mathematics strains our minds. It does not come naturally. Lots of training enables us to do science, and even to

delight in testing hypotheses. But most people find the work too difficult. They prefer to attain heaven. This process has its difficulties also. Neither endeavor is a cake-walk. But revelation includes more meaning and value than speculation. Naturally, most people prefer the payoff from pursuing revelation.

When Galileo had just recently invented the new science of measuring and mathematizing, the vast majority of people had no notion what he was doing. Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon called Galileo a fool for contradicting the Bible. What could be clearer than the sun circling the earth? We actually observe it rise and set. Fortunately for Galileo, many important Catholics looked beyond direct sensory experience, into abstract patterns of planetary motion. For example, Bishop Grosseteste, Friar Roger Bacon, Bishop Oresme of Lisieux, and Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa had already questioned the validity of Aristotle's *Physics* and astronomy, which said the earth was the center of the solar system. Canon Copernicus wrote a treatise showing the mathematical advantages of a heliocentric model over a geocentric model. His book *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Orbs* appeared in 1543, and he taught that view for about 20 years, without conflict. Albrecht Widmanstadt lectured about a sun-centered system. Cardinal Schonberg persuaded Copernicus to publish his views.<sup>53</sup>

This list of Catholic officials and thinkers illustrates the general acceptance of sun-centered theory among educated members of the Church. At the abstract mathematical level, this Copernican theory fit the observations much better than the earth-centered theory. Only a few people bothered to think about how the bodies of our solar system rotated. Those who did, including the Jesuit astronomers who praised Galileo, realized that the most probable center of planetary rotation was the sun. But it was clear to everyone that proof was lacking. Measurements and mathematical models are too abstract to be proof. During the first century after Galileo launched his mathematical physics, most physicists spoke of proof. But proof is so hard to find, and various proofs have so often been found to be false, that modern physicists seldom use the term. Instead, they refer to various "models", and how well measurements fit models.

That vision of models is much too abstract for most of us. During Galileo's time, people confused proofs with models. A handful of people, mostly Jesuits, who did the new mathematical astronomy, taught both sun-centered and earth-centered theories, and waited for someone to find proof that would decide between them. We could say that the two models were available. The sun-centered model had the advantage of mathematical simplicity. The earth-centered model had the advantage of observational simplicity. Thinkers in the Church adopted a wait and see position. As long as Galileo taught helio-centric theory, he was encouraged to proceed. Perhaps he would discover the deciding factor tipping the balance toward one theory or the other.

Meanwhile, Galileo was impatient. He famously displayed his contempt for Kepler because Kepler proposed that the planets revolved around the sun in ellipses, instead of circles. Further investigation determined that our planets do revolve about the sun in ellipses. Galileo's abuse of Kepler is a fine example that even the most advanced scientists disagree about basic events. Galileo failed to use his mathematical physics consistently enough to find elliptical orbits for planets. But his big mistake was insisting that his model was a proof. His mistake illustrates why modern physicists avoid "proof", and use "models", which vary to fit measurements.

The Galileo-Kepler altercation illustrates how inherently shaky the scientific process is. It is true that astronomers eventually agreed that the earth rotates around the sun, but much more work had to be done to support that model. If tomorrow physicists find sufficient observational evidence to change their model, they would shift. Science adapts to the most probable interpretation of the measurements. Physicists reject air-tight theories precisely because they are air-tight. Karl Popper shows that hypothesis-testing is so essential to science that a non-testable hypothesis can't be science. A fine example is Aristotle's crystal-clear spheres rotating around earth with planets imbedded in them. Precisely because these spheres are not visible, they can't be observed. People accepted them for centuries because they were useful theories. But a truly scientific person would seek to test these crystal spheres. If no test is possible, then these spheres are not parts of a scientific model.

All this argumentation came later. Neither Galileo nor Robert thought these esoteric patterns through to that conclusion. In fact, Galileo did not isolate hypothesis-testing as such. His stroke of genius was to measure the quantity, and express the pattern of these measurements in a mathematical formula. Comparing the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic earth-centered process formula to the helio-centric formula showed the mathematical simplicity

of the sun-centered theory. Galileo galloped to the conclusion that the Copernical theory was true.

Instead of outlining every step in the scientific process, as it eventually came to be practiced, he claimed to doing natural philosophy in a new way. He insisted on this way so strongly that he earned a reputation for rage. People called him choleric (angry). Wherever he went, he fought with people. That earned him the nickname “wrangler”, or disputer.<sup>54</sup>

In spite of this character flaw, Galileo discovered many important astronomical events. For example, in 1604, he observed a star grow brighter, then return to its former brightness. This is evidence against Aristotle’s proposal that the heavens were perfect, therefore unchanging. Even better evidence appeared in his telescope. The moon, supposedly perfectly spherical, was pockmarked with craters, cracks, and crags. The star which brightened, then dimmed, ceased changing its luminosity, so it no longer provided evidence for changing heavenly bodies. But the defects on the moon’s surface were regularly visible with eye-enhancing telescopes. Even more convincing, Galileo found the moons of Jupiter. They rotated around Jupiter, not around the Earth. These observable facts opposed the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic model, which required all bodies to circle the earth.

Galileo published these findings in *Siderius Nuncius*. In English, that’s Starry Messenger, or Message From the Stars. This book inspired the Jesuit astronomers to ask the Pope to celebrate Galileo’s achievements in 1610. Clearly, the Church did not oppose scientific discoveries. Instead, it promoted them. The Popes even constructed an astronomical observatory at Castel Gondolfo. It is the oldest continually operating large telescope in the world, updated regularly. In direct contrast with Church acceptance, many university professors attacked Galileo. His arrogance invited attack. Naturally, some professors enthusiastically accepted the new science. After the Jesuits in Rome acquired a good telescope, Clavius, the mathematician/astronomer, saw all the phenomena that Galileo had reported. Therefore, he confirmed all Galileo’s claims for Robert, who carefully checked the evidence, to determine the proper response to those professors who attacked Galileo.

Robert was right there in Rome where Clavius confirmed Galileo’s observations. Robert looked through the same telescope, and saw for himself that Galileo’s observations were accurate. But none of these telescopic views could substantiate the Copernican theory. They do indeed discredit the claim that all heavenly bodies are perfectly formed. Moreover, the claim that all heavenly bodies circle the earth dies with the moons circling Jupiter. But there is a wide gap between these observations and the claim that the earth circles the sun. One of the greatest astronomers who ever lived, Tycho Brahe, refused to adopt the sun-centered model. The central problem is whether the earth moves. We don’t experience its motion. We do observe the sun circling the earth. So we use our experience to insist that the sun rotates around the earth. What could convince us otherwise? It is very difficult to suppose that the earth rotates and revolves around the sun. So we can understand why even great astronomers like Brahe would prefer the earth-centered model. Moreover, Scripture definitely employs that model. This sealed the deal for most people. It was the deciding factor for Tycho Brahe, a convinced Lutheran. For him, as for Luther, Scripture is all truth, and Scripture alone counts.

We see that Galileo struggled with titanic problems. Robert understood how far the telescope had already advanced our knowledge, and how much farther it might go. Perhaps someone would prove that the earth did move. Robert’s far-reaching thought outlined the adjustment that the Church eventually made to that proof, when it eventually appeared in 1838, about 200 years after Galileo claimed to prove the earth’s motion.

Meanwhile, during Galileo’s 1611 celebration in Rome, important people praised his achievements, and elected him to be the sixth member of the exclusive *Accademia dei Lincei*, or the Academy of the Lynx-eyed. This elite group of scientists promoted Galileo’s achievements. Clavius brought Robert along to a star-gazing session with Galileo. They all saw the same things. Seeing these important observations, they concluded that Aristotle’s propositions were refuted. But Robert was cautious, and requested confirmation from other Jesuit astronomers. Their continuous viewing over several months confirmed his quick observations. Galileo’s triumph in Rome was extraordinary, to match his achievements.<sup>55</sup> But trouble was brewing.

Martin Horky, a German Lutheran student of Kepler, wrote an *ad hominem* attack on Galileo’s morals. It was public knowledge that Galileo fathered two daughters and a son with a woman he did not marry. She eventually married another man. Galileo sent her money to support the kids. But his morals were irrelevant to

his observations. None of his misdeeds could alter his discoveries. Therefore, reasonable people recognized that Horkey's attack was unfair and irrelevant. To emphasize that point, Kepler broke off their friendship.

But other mathematicians and astronomers attacked Galileo for more substantial reasons. None of this mattered to him because he was so enthralled with his celebration in Rome that he did not care. Cardinal Maffeo Barberini attended some of the parties in Galileo's honor. They became fast friends, agreeing on almost everything about astronomical theories, and the balance of speculation with revelation. We shall see that this friendship profited Galileo up until he rashly attacked Maffeo, who had become Pope Urban VIII.

In 1612, Galileo published a book about why some things float in water. He sent a complimentary copy to Robert. Grateful for this first exposition of specific gravity, Robert replied with praise for its eminent author, and promised to support Galileo if the opportunity arose.<sup>56</sup> Robert did not flatter, or speak frivolously. Galileo needed such genuine friends, because he harshly attacked his enemies. He chose "the way to create even greater enmity than already existed, and he need not have resorted to such polemical methods at all."<sup>57</sup> This is a nice way to say that Galileo's vicious attacks caused unnecessary trouble.

Fortunately, Galileo expressed his *Letters on Sunspots* in quite moderate terms. The Lincean Academy published it in 1613. In this book, Galileo hinted that the Copernican model was more than an hypothesis; it was a physical fact. This claim, though vague, did not arouse objections among the cardinals who read it. In a combative mood, angry over a private conversation that he did not personally witness, Galileo began to intimate that he had proved the Copernican model. As a preemptive strike against his enemies, and protection for his weak argument, Galileo insisted that all his opponents must disprove the heliocentric system. He wanted them to produce arguments as effective as the moons of Jupiter.<sup>58</sup> Escalating even more, Galileo demanded that his opponents either accept the sun-centered system as fact, or repudiate it as heresy. He knew that most of his many antagonists were too disorderly to think coolly and logically. Only Robert was composed enough to say that the Copernican theory was suitable to learn, and to research, hoping to find substantial support: motion of the earth.

But Galileo could not find proof that the earth moved, even though he searched diligently for stellar parallax, i.e. the changes in the positions of distant stars due to earth motion. Friedrich Bessel finally measured stellar parallax in 1838. That was the first proof of earth movement, as physicists used "proof" in those days. In modern terms, it is highly likely that the earth moves. Galileo claimed that the tides prove the earth's motion. Even at his time, it was clear that tides are not the sloshing around of water because of earth movement, but gravitational attraction of the moon moving the oceans. It's sad to see that Galileo was so obviously wrong on some things, because his other contributions are so important that we could call them stellar.

The fiery preacher, Fra Tommaso Caccini damaged Galileo most seriously. A Dominican in Florence, he preached a sermon in 1613 that was so scurrilous that the Master General of the Dominicans apologized to Galileo. The crucial words of this apology are: "I have been extremely annoyed by this scandal caused by a member of my Order. It is my misfortune to have to answer for all the stupidities which some of the thirty or forty thousand of my brethren in religion may and actually do commit."<sup>59</sup> This text illustrates that thoughtful representatives of the Church saw rather clearly into the reality of Galileo's contributions. However Caccini and Galileo were just warming up to the conflict that followed.

Though Robert was fully occupied with Church jobs, he warned Galileo's friend Prince Cesi to moderate Galileo's zeal, lest emotions replace reason in this ongoing argument about heavenly bodies. Fr. Benedetto Castelli imprudently circulated copies of Galileo's letter to him. This letter emphatically insisted that Scripture was "last" in line for "how the heavens go". When an elderly Dominican, Fr. Lorini, read that letter, he agitated the Florence friary of St. Mark. The friars' letter to Cardinal Paolo Sfondrate, Prefect of the Holy Office in Rome, aroused official concern. Fr. Lorini accused Galileo of asserting "that the language of Holy Scripture does not mean what it seems to mean; that in discussions about natural phenomena, the last and lowest place ought to be given to the authority of the sacred text; that its commentators have very often erred in their interpretation; that the Holy Scriptures should not be mixed up with anything except matters of religion..."<sup>60</sup>

Obviously, such a serious set of charges aroused officials in Rome. When he learned of this arousal, Galileo wrote to a trusted counsellor in Rome, sending him an accurate copy of his letter to Castelli, to counter a

forgery that was circulating. Galileo wanted Robert to see the actual letter, to judge it justly. The forgery changed two words. This clever alteration made Galileo appear to accuse Scripture of “perverting” rather than “overshadowing” thereby producing “false” statements, instead of “questionable”. Neither “pervert” nor “false” are in the original letter. The theological committee of the Holy Office found everything followed Church teaching except these two words. So it was imperative that Galileo get the accurate original get to Robert. In light of the actual letter, Robert affirmed that Galileo could continue to teach Copernican theory, provided he identified it as a theory. Cardinal del Monte discussed these events in great detail, and concluded: “If you [Galileo] treat the system of Copernicus, and set forth its proofs, without bringing in the Scriptures, the interpretation of which is the business of qualified theologians, then you should not be opposed in any way whatever. . . .”<sup>61</sup> Robert agrees with del Monte’s expression affirming that Galileo “should not be opposed” for teaching Copernican theory.

The letter Robert wrote to Fr. Paul Anthony Foscarini, is another example of Robert’s prudent recommendations. It shows what care Robert took to read the disputed books himself. He replied: “It seems to me that your Reverence and Signor Galileo would act prudently if you contented yourselves with speaking hypothetically, and not absolutely, as I have always believed that Copernicus spoke. To say that, on the supposition of the earth’s movement, and the sun’s immobility, all celestial appearances are explained better than by the theory of eccentrics and epicycles, is to speak with excellent good sense, and to run no risk whatever. Such a manner of speaking is enough for a mathematician. But if you want to affirm that the sun, in very truth, is at the center of the universe, and only rotates on its axis, without going from east to west, and that the earth is situated in the third sphere, and revolves very swiftly around the sun, this is a very dangerous attitude, and one calculated to annoy all scholastic philosophers and theologians, but also to injure our holy faith by contradicting the Scriptures.”<sup>62</sup> We see that Robert penetrates to the heart of the dispute, and offers prudent assistance.

Robert reminded Fr. Foscarini that the Council of Trent, responding to the Protest, required us to avoid personal interpretations of Scripture. This is the heart of the rebellion that split Europe. To preserve the unity of faith, the Council insisted that all Scripture interpretations fit the original principles laid down by the Church Fathers. None of them interpreted Holy Writ as affirming the motion of the earth. But Robert stated: “If there were a real proof that the sun is the center of the universe, that the earth . . . [moves, then we should] admit that we did not understand [some Scriptural passages, rather] than declare an opinion [about the earth] to be false which is proved to be true. But for myself, I shall not believe that there are such proofs until they are shown to me.”<sup>63</sup> This text demonstrates how reasonable Robert was. Church leaders adopted his adaptation, once Bessel found indisputable stellar parallax in 1838. Incidentally, this almost vanishing variation in the position of the star 61 Cygni, was so hard to find, that it’s no wonder Galileo could not observe it. Robert wrote the letter quoted here on April 12, 1615. Pope Pius XII used those very principles in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, in 1943. This document opened the study of Scripture to the refinement which we enjoy today.

Sad to say, Galileo rejected Robert’s kind advice.<sup>64</sup> Galileo even exposed errors in Robert’s letter. For example, the Council of Trent did not restrict us as tightly as Robert claimed. Galileo insisted that his measurements expressed the structure of reality, and thereby transcended mere theory. Galileo believed that mathematics penetrated to God’s ultimate meaning for the world. In *Two New Sciences*, Galileo insisted that God wrote the world in mathematical formulae. Man’s job was to find the math behind the shimmering sensory display on the surface of the universe. This assumption still drives science, even if some scientists deny God’s writing.

Thus Galileo, ever pugnacious, thought that reality supported him against superstitious enemies. Robert wanted Galileo to calm down, stay away from Rome, and rely upon the evidence. It was abundantly clear that Copernicus presented a more accurate theory than Ptolemy. Several of Galileo’s friends agreed with Robert, and tried to pacify him. Here is an example from Piero Guicciardini, Tuscany’s ambassador to Rome. “Galileo sets more store by his own opinion than by the advice of his friends. Cardinal del Monte and myself . . . , as well as other cardinals of the Holy Office [including Robert] have endeavored to pacify him, and to persuade him not to stir up this affair, but, if he wished to hold his opinion, to hold it quietly, without using so much violence in his attempts to force others into holding it. We all . . . [suppose that] his coming here [Rome] is going to prove prejudicial and dangerous for him. . . . I do not think that there is any possibility of Galileo suffering in person, because, as a good and sensible man, he will be ready to submit to the decision of the Church. But he gets hotly excited about these views of his, and has an extremely passionate temper, with little patience and prudence to

keep it in control. It is this irritability that makes the skies of Rome very dangerous for him.”<sup>65</sup>

Galileo stirred up so much controversy that theologians at the Holy Office in Rome debated two propositions: “1) the sun is the center of the world, and altogether devoid of local motion: 2) the earth is not the center of the world, nor immovable, but moves as a whole, and also with a diurnal motion [rotation].”<sup>66</sup> Today, we take these statements for granted, even though we can’t support either of them with personally observed experience. In Galileo’s day, only a few mathematical astronomers believed them. The few scientists who agreed with Galileo gave reasons so abstract that most people could not agree with them. The same is true today. We believe because authorities told us to believe. Back then, the theologians condemned both propositions.

Robert conveyed these results to Galileo on Thursday March 3, 1616. “The Lord Cardinal Bellarmine, having reported that Galileo Galilei, the mathematician, had, according to the instructions of the Sacred Congregation, been admonished to abandon the opinion he has hitherto held, to the effect that the sun is the center of the spheres, and immovable, and that the earth moves, and, having acquiesced therein, . . .”<sup>67</sup> Two points are important to us here: 1) Robert admonished Galileo to abandon his opinions about the sun and the earth: 2) Galileo acquiesced. When Robert strongly advised Galileo, Galileo agreed. The rest of this report indicated that several writings were suspended and prohibited, including some by Copernicus, Diego di Zuniga, and Paolo Antonio Foscarini. Perhaps we’re upset by this decision against beliefs that we hold dear today. We can use that upsetting energy to examine the long story of how we came to believe that the sun is stationary and the earth moves around while spinning.

We must admit that we do not directly experience the sun’s stability, and the earth’s movement. Rather the opposite, since we directly see the motion of the sun. If we dig deep, we find abstract reasons that assure us that the sun stands still, while the earth rotates as a whole, and on its axis. But a similar set of abstract reasons tells us that the sun is streaking through space from the center of the Big Bang. Far from standing still, it moves rapidly. Einstein got to the bottom of this confusion by showing that we can adopt many different “reference systems” or points of view for the universe. These few steps cause most of us headaches. Simply put, measurements and formulae are so foreign to us that hardly any of us actually follow them to show that the math fits better if we assume that the sun is the center of our solar system. If it is that hard for us to follow the math, we easily understand how people in 1616 would prefer a reference system with the earth as center. No wonder that modern scientists avoid confusion by stating the reference system to use at the start. They then proceed to match observations from that starting point. They fit measurements of these observations into a model. If we use this abstract reference system, we avoid Galileo-style arguments about reality. We derive the maximum benefit of our measurements to predict and control, and we save the emotional stress Galileo fostered.

Neither Galileo nor Robert ever heard of reference systems. But Robert’s good judgment enabled him to recommend that Galileo teach theory as theory, and fact as fact. Galileo agreed with this simple distinction, as it left him perfect freedom to teach Copernican theory. Galileo rejoiced in the decision of the Holy Office, because his enemies failed to condemn him as a heretic. In his own words: “I told his Holiness [Pope Paul V] the reason for my coming to Rome . . . and made known to him the malice of my persecutors, and some of their calumnies against me. He answered that he was well aware of my uprightness and sincerity. When I gave evidence of being still somewhat anxious about the future, owing to my fear of being pursued with implacable hate by my enemies, he consoled me, and said that I might put away all care, because [of the] esteem both of himself, and of the whole congregation of cardinals . . . They would not lightly lend their ears to calumnious reports. During his life-time . . . I might feel quite secure. Before I took my departure, he assured me several times that he bore me the greatest goodwill, and was ready to show his affection and favor towards me on all occasions.”<sup>68</sup> That was the end of that round of the fight. Galileo won.

But Galileo’s enemies, stung by his success, spread the lie that the Holy Office both compelled him to recant, and imposed a penance. Galileo requested that Robert stop this calumny. So Robert issued a certificate, which Galileo cherished. “We, Robert, Cardinal Bellarmine, having heard that Signor Galileo Galilei has been calumniously reported to have abjured in our hand, and moreover to have been punished with a salutary penance, and having been asked to make known the truth as to this, declare that the said Signor Galileo has not abjured in our hand, nor in the hand of anybody else here in Rome, nor, so far as we are aware, in any place

whatever, any opinion or doctrine held by him. Neither has any penance, salutary or otherwise, been imposed upon him. All that happened was this. The declaration made by the Holy Father and published by the Sacred Congregation of the Index was intimated to him, wherein it is declared that the doctrine attributed to Copernicus that the earth moves round the sun, and that the sun is in the center of the universe, and does not move from east to west, is contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and therefore cannot be defended nor held. . . . May 20, 1616<sup>69</sup>

Clearly, Galileo was free to teach Copernican theory as the theory it is. His research, so esteemed by thinkers in the Church, was free to pursue further evidence. Already, this research had refuted the Aristotelian assumption that heavenly bodies were perfect spheres. Telescopic views of the moon's craters provided observed facts which demolished that assumption of perfection. Pope Paul V led Church officials to appreciate Galileo's magnificent expansion of knowledge. But his enemies influenced some secretary at the Holy Office to forge a document, dating it February 26, 1616, affirming that the Holy Office had absolutely forbidden Galileo to teach Copernican theory. Sixteen years later, this forgery would damage Galileo in his second appearance before the Holy Office. But in 1616, when Robert was 74, he wrote the certificate that should have superseded the forgery. The point of this excursion into Galileo's trial is to show that Robert retained his commitment to the truth throughout all this excitement. Thus ends Robert's magnanimous defense of Galileo.

### **Galileo's Subsequent Adventures, and Downfall**

Though Robert died in 1621, Galileo lived on, terrible temper and all. When Orazio Grassi, SJ imprudently and inexpertly attacked Galileo's teaching of Copernican theory, Galileo reacted harshly. His response, called *Il Saggiatore*, printed in 1624 is a masterpiece of science and polemic. Dedicated to Maffeo Barberini, just elected Pope Urban VIII, educated people considered it a sensation. Pope Urban VIII was so pleased that he threw another party in Rome to celebrate Galileo's achievements, gave him a pension, several expensive gifts, and a testimonial to the Medici court extolling the renowned scientist. Galileo sought a decree from the Pope, rescinding the requirement to teach sun-centered astronomy as theory. Because Galileo had no evidence to promote the theory to fact, the Pope refused to rescind the order.

Then Galileo made two massive errors in one single book. He wrote *Dialog Concerning Two Great World Systems*. His first massive mistake was to ridicule Pope Urban VIII by clearly depicting him as the fool Simplicio, who defended the Ptolemaic system so ludicrously. Galileo's second massive mistake was to insist that the tides proved the earth's motion. Pope Urban VIII resented this stab in the back, after so many gifts to Galileo over the years of their close friendship. The Pope ordered Galileo to Rome, put him under house arrest in the Medici mansion, and had the Holy Office condemn him for lying that the earth moved. This was too abstract for most people, so officers used the forged document forbidding him to teach Copernican theory. Even so, he did not suffer torture or deprivation of any kind. His printed word in the *Dialog* proved that he taught the Copernican theory. More thoughtful readers noticed that he insisted he had proved the motion of the earth, thereby proving its rotation around the sun. It is too bad that Robert had died three years earlier. He would have defended Galileo in 1624, as he had defended him in 1616. But no defense could overcome Galileo's determined claim that he had finally proved the earth's motion. The Pope, stung by Galileo's attack on him, publicized Galileo's disgrace by having him kneel to recite a formula of guilt. This was Galileo's public punishment for lying that he had proved the earth's motion. Nine years later, Galileo on Jan 8, 1643, and was buried in the Church he loved and served eagerly, if not wisely.

### **Last Words for Our St. Robert Bellarmine**

Robert gives us the good example of life-long service to the Church, to the poorest of the poor, and to everyone he met. Bolstered by his spiritual writings, we can face life by our personal rendition of his fortitude and grace. Let us learn from him to transform our endurance into enjoyment, however painful our life may be. Let us first accept God's love, so lavishly provided, then live it as best we can, for God and neighbor. Robert's unique soul, with his individual blend of admirable qualities, defies duplication. But we can follow his example to develop our unique souls into the fullness that God created us to live. Grateful thanks to you, dear saint.

## End Notes

- 1 Broderick 33
- 2 Broderick 34
- 3 Broderick 35
- 4 Bellarmine 51
- 5 Bellarmine 52
- 6 Bellarmine 53-54 Gradual Psalms are psalms 120-134. Each one starts with “Song of the ascents” (Shir Hama’aloth).
- 7 Bellarmine 55-56
- 8 Bellarmine 56-57
- 9 Bellarmine 57
- 10 Bellarmine 57-58
- 11 Bellarmine 58-59
- 12 Bellarmine 59-60
- 13 Bellarmine 60-61
- 14 Bellarmine 62
- 15 Bellarmine 63-64
- 16 Bellarmine 64-65
- 17 Bellarmine 66
- 18 Bellarmine 66-68
- 19 Bellarmine 68-69
- 20 Bellarmine 69-72
- 21 Bellarmine 72-73
- 22 Bellarmine 74-76
- 23 Bellarmine 77-80
- 24 Bellarmine 80-81
- 25 Bellarmine 81-83
- 26 Bellarmine 83-85
- 27 Bellarmine 86-88
- 28 Bellarmine 88-89
- 29 Bellarmine 89
- 30 Bellarmine 89-90
- 31 Bellarmine 90-91
- 32 Bellarmine 91-93
- 33 Bellarmine 93-96
- 34 Bellarmine 96-97
- 35 Bellarmine 98-100
- 36 Bellarmine 101-102
- 37 Bellarmine 102-105
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51 Galileo's letter to Castelli  
52 Galileo's letter to Grand Duchess Christina. An exact translation: "The Bible was not written to teach us astronomy. The intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go."  
53 Broderick 332-333  
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