

HUMILITY OF HEART

FROM THE ITALIAN OF

FR CAJETAN MARY DA BERGAMO

CAPUCHIN

BY

HERBERT CARDINAL VAUGHAN

First published in English around 1905



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Printed on 5 August 2024

SKU: 102

TO THE PRIESTS ORDAINED BY ME
FOR THE DIOCESE OF SALFORD
AND THE ARCHDIOCESE OF WESTMINSTER
AND FOR THE FOREIGN MISSIONS.

ALSO TO THE LADIES OF CHARITY,
ESTABLISHED BY ME IN SALFORD AND WESTMINSTER,
IN THE CONVICTION THAT THEIR WORKS OF CHARITY
IF PLANTED IN THE GARDEN OF HUMILITY,
WILL BEAR A FULLER AND RICHER HARVEST
THAN IF SOWN IN ANY OTHER SOIL.

—

Herbert Cardinal Vaughan
Archbishop of Westminster
April 23, 1903

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Preface

by Rev. Bernard Vaughan
(*brother of Herbert Cardinal Vaughan*)

These “Thoughts and Sentiments on Humility” were written by Cardinal Herbert Vaughan during the last months of his life. Being ordered by his medical advisers out of London, the Cardinal went to Derwent, where, as the guest of Lord and Lady Edmund Talbot, he found that perfect freedom and multitude of peace of which he had long felt the need.

It was while reposing his soul in quiet prayer and feasting his sight on the fine scenery of this ideal spot among the moorlands of Derbyshire, that the thought came to him of translating, while yet there was time, Father Cajetan’s treatise on Humility.

For more than thirty years Cardinal Vaughan had known and studied that work, and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say he had made it during the last fourteen years of his life his constant companion, his *vade mecum*.¹

What lessons it had taught him, what sights it had shown him, what stories it had told him, those only know to whom he revealed his inmost soul. However even those who knew the Cardinal less intimately could scarcely fail to realize in their dealings with him that they were treating with a man whose growing characteristic was humility of heart. A

¹ A *vade mecum* is a handbook or guide that is kept constantly at hand for consultation.

more truly humble man I have seldom, if ever, come across. It was the humility of a child, it was so sweet and simple, and yet so strong and saint-like—may I not even venture to say, Christ-like?

It was the sort of humility that could not go wrong, for it was founded on truth. It was truth. Does not St. Bernard remind us that “Humility is Truth”? It is a truth which, inasmuch as it is a home-thrusting truth, none of us can afford to ignore. It is the truth all about oneself in one’s triple alliance with God, with one’s neighbor, with one’s own soul.

Humility may not inappropriately be called the starting post in that race for Heaven of which the Apostle speaks. It is the *terminus a quo* in the spiritual life. It is the first of the many lessons set before us in the school of sanctity—a difficult lesson, I grant you, and one which nature seeks to shirk or to put off indefinitely, but for the man who means to graduate for Heaven there is no escape from it. Accordingly our Divine Master, who is not exacting, reminds all His would-be followers, without distinction, that they must learn this lesson, get it well by heart, and into the heart; for Humility is the alphabet out of which every other virtue is formed and built up. It is the soil of the garden of the soul, “the good ground” on which the Divine Sower goes forth to sow His seed. It is in the school of Christ, and from the lips of Christ Himself that we must learn Humility. “Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.” By following the Master Himself, by studying His Own Heart, we have to acquire, to appreciate and to practice this first, this vital,

this vitalizing, energizing virtue, without which no man can hope to make any progress at all on the Royal Road heavenward.

So all-important for us creatures is the acquisition of Humility that our Divine Lord became man in order to put before us in His own person this great object-lesson in its most attractive beauty. “He humbled Himself”; “He emptied Himself”; He became the humblest of the humble; because, as St. Augustine points out, the “Divine Master was unwilling to teach what He Himself was not; He was unwilling to command what He Himself did not practice.”

With our dear and blessed Lord as our great example of Humility, we may well, one and all of us, set about the practicing, with some hope of success, this indispensable virtue—this *maximum bonum*, as St. Thomas calls it.

To his own soul Cardinal Vaughan found so much benefit from the cultivation in it of Humility, that he resolved, at no small cost to himself, in the feeble state in which he then was, to gird himself and to go forth sowing broadcast, into the soil of the hearts of the laity as well as of clergy, this despised little mustard seed of which men speak so much but know so little.

It was Padre Gaetano’s work on Humility that had been the instrument, in God’s hand, of helping the Cardinal. Accordingly in his zeal for souls he proposed to put it into English, so as to bring the work within the reach of all such as care for the health, growth and strength, of their own individual souls in solid virtue.

That the Cardinal has left us a precious legacy in this treatise on Humility will, I feel sure, be the verdict of all who study, or who only peruse these pages, done into English from the Italian of the devout Minor Capuchin whose death occurred over two centuries ago.

Between the covers of this unpretending volume there is nourishment for all who “hunger and thirst after justice”—for the proficient in spiritual life as well as for the beginner—Humility, as it were, holding in itself all those elements that are needed to build up the strong Christian man. In it the soul will find a sovereign remedy for its many ills, a matchless balm for its many wounds, while a soul-beauty all its own will spring up in all who shall learn how to use it wisely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. “He who is truly humble,” says St. Bernard, “knows how to convert all his humiliations into humility,” while out of humility God can raise a soul to what otherwise might be giddy heights of sanctity. If anyone should need a proof of this statement I will refer him to any chapter in the life of any Saint in our Calendar. For a moment gaze into the face of “the Woman clothed with the Sun” and remember the words, “He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid.”² The height of Mary’s sanctity is gauged by the depth of her humility: “He shall exalt the humble.”³

To the Clergy and Ladies of Charity, to whom the Cardinal dedicates these “Thoughts and Sentiments,” this volume will come with very special meaning. It enshrines the last

² Respexit humilitatem ancillae suae.—Luke 1:48

³ Exaltavit humiles.

words of a great Churchman, of a truly spiritual man, while it conveys a special message from the Cardinal's heart to all readers.

This treatise is a sort of last will and testament of Cardinal Vaughan, bequeathed to those with whom he was most intimately associated in work for the good of souls. It is a legacy from one who made Humility a life-long study, and who had more opportunities than most of us know of making tremendous strides in it, through the humiliations which he welcomed as most precious opportunities offered him by God for the salvation and sanctification of his soul. May he rest in peace.

Bernard Vaughan, S.J.

Derwent Hall

August 8, 1905

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sanctity would have become apostates? These are examples which should make us tremble when we reflect upon the unfathomable mystery of the judgment and mercy of God: “One He putteth down, and another He lifteth up.”¹⁴¹ “He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble.”¹⁴²

Every Saint can in a moment become a sinner if he is vain of his sanctity; and a sinner can as quickly become a Saint if he is contrite and humbles himself for his sin. How many there are who in the fervor of their prayer “mount up to the heavens” and soon afterwards, at the slightest occasion of sin, they “go down to the depths”!¹⁴³ How many there are too who, given up to vanity and stained with the deepest sins, are suddenly changed by having their eyes opened to the knowledge of the truth and who thus attain to Christian perfection! Indeed the high counsels of God are to be adored and not scrutinized, for “The Lord humbleth and exalteth; He raiseth up the needy from the dust, and lifteth up the poor from the dung-hill.”¹⁴⁴

We know not whether we are worthy of love or hatred

47. Who knows if the one I judge and speak ill of may not be dearer to God than I am? Whether another whom I esteem but little and despise for his physical or moral defects be

¹⁴¹Ps. 74:8

¹⁴²Luke 1:52

¹⁴³Ps. 106:26

¹⁴⁴1 Kings 2:7,8

not destined to be very happy with God for all eternity? Who knows whether I may not be condemned to the pains of Hell for all eternity? With this uncertainty how can I then presume to consider myself better than any other?

No one is worth more than what he is worth in the eyes of God, and how can I know whether I am an object of hatred or of love to God? “And yet man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred.”¹⁴⁵ How do I know if God will fashion a vessel of honor or of dishonor from the clay of which I am made? “For who distinguisheth thee?”¹⁴⁶ “But what is the use of these vessels? The Potter is the judge.”¹⁴⁷

When I read of St. Paul, the herald of the Holy Ghost and great doctor of the Gentiles, who said of himself that he lived in fear of falling into sin and becoming a castaway after having converted so many thousands of souls to God: “Lest perhaps when I have preached to others I myself may become a castaway;”¹⁴⁸ ah, if St. Paul himself, who was rapt unto the third heaven and could say that “Christ lived in him,” “and I live now, not I, but Christ liveth in me,”¹⁴⁹ should thus fear, what shall I say of myself, who am so contemptible? At the day of judgment how many shall we see on the right hand of God whom we looked upon as castaways! And how many shall we see on His left whom we believed to be amongst His elect!

¹⁴⁵Ecclus. 9:1

¹⁴⁶1 Cor. 4:7

¹⁴⁷Wis. 15:7

¹⁴⁸1 Cor. 9:27

¹⁴⁹Gal. 2:20

It would be well for us, however, when we make comparisons between ourselves and others, to say what Juda said of Thamar, “She is juster than I,” and in some circumstance or other this will always prove to be true. St. Thomas taught that a man may truthfully say and believe that he is worse than others, partly on account of the hidden defects which he knows that he possesses, and partly on account of the gifts of God that are hidden in others.¹⁵⁰

Meditating upon predestination leads to humility

48. Who can assure me that before long I shall not fall into some mortal sin? And having once fallen, who can assure me that I may not die in sin, and thus be condemned to eternal punishment? As long as I live in this world I cannot be sure of anything. I must hope to save my soul, but I must also fear to lose it. O my soul, I do not intend to depress thee; no, nor do I wish to fill thee with pusillanimous despair by these thoughts. I only desire thee to be humble. And how much reason hast thou to humble thyself in this uncertainty, not knowing what manner of death shall be thine, nor what shall be thy lot for all eternity? It is only by the measure of thy humility that thou canst hope to please God and save thyself, because it is certain that God will “save the humble people,”¹⁵¹ “and He will save the humble of spirit.”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰Aliquis absque falsitate potest se credere et pronuciare omnibus viliorem secundum defectus occultos quos in se recognoscit et dona Dei quae in aliis latent.—2a 2æ, Q. 161, Art. 6, ad 2

¹⁵¹Ps. 17:28

¹⁵²Ps. 33:19

There are some who think that to meditate on the mystery of predestination is likely to fill us with despair; but it appears to me, as it also did to St. Augustine, that this thought is a most efficacious means of practicing humility,¹⁵³ because when I meditate upon my eternal salvation I see that it does not depend upon the power of my own free-will, but only upon the Divine mercy. Not trusting to myself, but placing all my hope in God, I must say with the wise Judith: “And therefore let us humble our souls before Him, and continuing in a humble spirit in His service, ask the Lord that He would show His mercy to us.”¹⁵⁴

Humility governs the tongue

49. It is a special gift of God to know how to govern the tongue, as the preacher says in his Proverbs: “It is the Lord who governs the tongue”;¹⁵⁵ and when God wishes to confer this gift of His upon anyone, He does so by means of humility. And the Savior teaches us in St. Matthew 12:34: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Therefore, if the heart is well-regulated by humility, the tongue will be well-regulated also.

He who is humble of heart has but a poor opinion of himself and a good opinion of others; hence it is that he never praises himself or blames others. The humble man speaks but little, and weighs and measures his words so as not to say more than truth and modesty require, and, as his heart

¹⁵³*Lib. de Praedest. et Grat.*

¹⁵⁴Jud. 8:16,17

¹⁵⁵Prov. 16:1

is free from vanity, so is his speech. We argue therefore that there can be little or no humility in our hearts when there is little or no circumspection in our speech. “Their heart is vain,” says the prophet, and this is the reason why he also adds: “Their throat is an open sepulcher.”¹⁵⁶ We speak of those things that fill the heart, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,”¹⁵⁷ and our speech will determine whether truth or vanity predominates in our hearts. It is well to ask God to curb our tongue, but let us also ask Him to give humility to our heart, for this alone will be a most powerful curb.

Humility is charitable

50. Humility is charitable, interpreting all things for the best and pitying and excusing the faults of others as much as possible. For this reason St. Peter, wishing to exhort us to love and have compassion upon our fellow-creatures, also exhorts us at the same time to be humble: “Having compassion one of another, being lovers of the brotherhood—humble,”¹⁵⁸ for there can be no charity without humility, and therefore to censure and criticize too readily the actions of our neighbors and to judge and speak ill of them are vices which are directly opposed to the virtue of humility. Who has given me the power to judge my brethren? When I thus constitute myself their judge and in the tribunal of my thoughts condemn first one and then another, I am usurping

¹⁵⁶Ps. 5:10,11

¹⁵⁷Luke 6:45

¹⁵⁸1 Pet. 3:8

an authority I do not possess and which belongs to God alone: "For God is Judge."¹⁵⁹ And if this is not pride, what is pride? In punishment of such arrogance God often permits us to fall into the very faults that we have condemned in others, and it is well for us to remember the teaching of St. Paul: "Wherefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest. For wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself."¹⁶⁰ There is always some pharisaical pride in the heart of him who judges and speaks evil of others, because in belittling others he exalts himself. It is in vain that we try and cover our evil-speaking under the veil of some good motive; it must always be the result of pride which is quick to find out the weaknesses of others while remaining blind to its own.

If we are guilty of pride let us try and amend and not flatter ourselves that we possess the smallest degree of humility, until by our good resolutions carefully carried out we have mortified our evil tendency to speak ill of our neighbor. Let us hearken to the Holy Ghost: "Where pride is there also shall be reproach, but where humility is there also is wisdom."¹⁶¹

The proud man is scornful and arrogant in his speech; and the humble alone knows how to speak well and wisely. If there is humility in the heart it will be manifested in the

¹⁵⁹Ps. 49:6

¹⁶⁰Rom. 2:1

¹⁶¹Prov. 11:2

speech, because “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good.”¹⁶²

The humble do not speak of themselves

51. But in order to acquire humility, it is necessary also to be prudent in not speaking well of oneself. “Let another praise thee,” says the inspired word, “and not thy own mouth, a stranger and not thy own lips.”¹⁶³

It is very easy for us to fall into this fault of praising ourselves until it becomes a habit, and with this habit so opposed to humility how can we be humble?

What good qualities have we of our own for which we can praise ourselves? All the good that is in us comes from God, and to Him alone we must give praise and honor. When, therefore, we praise ourselves we are usurping glory which is due to God alone. Even though in praising ourselves we sometimes refer all to the honor of God, it matters little; when there is no absolute necessity it is better to abstain from self-praise, for although we refer all to the glory of God with our lips, our ingenious and subtle self-love cannot fail to appropriate it secretly. And even speaking depreciatingly of ourselves there may lurk some hypocritical pride in our words, such as was mentioned by the sage of old when he said: “There is one that humbleth himself wickedly, and his interior is full of deceit.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶²Luke 6:45

¹⁶³Prov. 27:11

¹⁶⁴Ecclus. 19:23

Therefore we can never watch over ourselves enough, because there is nothing that teaches us so well to know the pride of our heart as our words, with which we either reveal or hide the depravity of our affections. And this is the characteristic of the proud, according to St. Bernard: “One who boastfully proclaims what he is, or lies about what he is not.”¹⁶⁵

Let us bear in heart and mind this precious advice given by Tobias to his son: “Never suffer pride to reign in thy mind or in thy words.”¹⁶⁶ The words of a proud man are nauseous, whether he speaks of himself or others, and they are hated both by God and man: therefore we should detest this vice, not only from the Christian but also from the human standpoint.

Meditating upon death a means to obtain humility

52. God has Himself given us the means of obtaining this humility of heart, in the remembrance of death and by meditation upon it. Death is the best teacher of truth; and pride—being nothing but an illusion of our heart—clings to a vanity which it does not recognize as vanity; and therefore death is the best means by which we can learn what vanity is and how to detach our hearts from it.

Our self-love is wounded at the thought that we must soon die, and when we least expect it, and that with death every-

¹⁶⁵Qui vel sibi arrogat quod est, vel mentitur de se quod non est.—Epist. 87

¹⁶⁶Tob. 4:14

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