

MANUAL FOR INTERIOR SOULS

A COLLECTION OF UNPUBLISHED WRITINGS

BY

THE REVEREND FATHER GROU,

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

TRANSLATED, BY PERMISSION, FROM THE NEW EDITION
OF VICTOR LECOFFRE

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The English Editor to the Reader

This book of Père Grou is the work of a master of the spiritual life who speaks in a clear and decisive manner, as only those can who are thoroughly acquainted with their subject. But it should be understood by those who read it that it is not intended for beginners, but for such as have made some sort of progress in a knowledge of the spiritual life. For much that he says is put so tersely that those whose knowledge of the subject is not within measurable relativity to that of the writer may easily miss the full sense of his words, and thus be led to look on some parts and passages as unreal or unmeaning, or at least exaggerated.

Writing for the French public at the time he did, there would be more likelihood of there being a good number of people who would be fitted to understand his work, and less likelihood of its falling into the hands of those who would misread it.

J. G. W.

Short Account of the Abbé Grou

Our readers will perhaps not be displeased if we give here a short account of the author of this excellent work, extracted from a longer notice which appeared in *L'Ami de la Religion*.¹

John Grou, born in the diocese of Boulogne, on the 24th of November 1731, entered the College of the Jesuits when very young, and was admitted to their novitiate at the age of fifteen; he made his first vows at the age of seventeen, and was afterwards employed in teaching, according to the custom of the Society. In this employment his taste for literature was developed. He was particularly fond of Plato and Cicero, in whose writings he found, with a great wealth of style, finer thoughts and a purer code of morals than in the generality of the ancient authors. The first fruit of his labours in Greek philosophy was the *Republic* of Plato, translated into French in two *duodecimo*² volumes. This translation was followed by another, of the *Laws*, by the same author, and later on by that of the *Dialogues*.

Father Grou lived for several years at Pont-à-Mousson, and it was there that he made his final vows, at a time when the Jesuits were already suppressed in France. After the death of Stanislas they were also banished from Lorraine. Father Grou came to Paris, where he took the name of Leclair. At Paris he led a very retired life, dividing his time between his studies and his religious duties. At first Monsieur de Beaumont, the Archbishop

¹ Vol. xxxiii., p. 65 et. seq.

² *duodecimo*, also written as *12mo.*, is a book size that is made by folding a standard printing sheet into 12 leaves, or 24 pages. The result is a relatively small, portable book. This size was common for devotional or spiritual works, as they were convenient to carry and read.

of Paris, employed him to write upon subjects relating to religion; the Archbishop also granted him for some time a pension, which eventually ceased. A holy nun of the Visitation, whose acquaintance he made through one of his brother priests, and who was believed to be favoured with special graces, induced him to enter upon the way of perfection and a life of prayer. He gave to literary work all the time which was left to him after fulfilling his spiritual exercises and the cares of his ministry. The result of this laborious life was the composition of several books upon matters of piety.

His first work of this kind was *La Morale Tirée des Confessions de Saint Augustine*, Paris 1766, 2 vols. 12mo. The author's design was to contrast the morals of Christianity with the systems of unbelievers, drawing his principles from the writings of Saint Augustine. This work was succeeded by *Les Caractères de la Vraie Dévotion* (Marks of True Devotion), Paris 1788, 18mo. In this the author defined what true devotion is, and also its motives, its object, and its means. This volume was quickly followed by the *Maximes Spirituelles, avec des Explications* (Spiritual Maxims Explained), Paris 1789, 12mo.

About the same time he also composed these little pious treatises which we have now given to the public, and had them copied for the use of a devout lady of high rank whose director he then was. These manuscripts, which consisted of nine small 12mo. volumes, have thus been preserved. He had also undertaken a great work which had cost him fourteen years of research and trouble. Before leaving France he confided the manuscripts of this work to a lady, who was arrested during the Reign of Terror, and whose servants committed them to the flames, fearing they might compromise their mistress.

The life of Father Grou was upright and peaceful; he was much esteemed, enjoyed a pension from the king, and did great good

by his advice and his writings. When the Revolution broke out he at first wished to remain concealed in Paris, and there to exercise his ministry in secret; but the nun of whom we have already spoken persuaded him to seek refuge in England. He followed her advice, and was invited by one of his former brothers in religion, who was then chaplain to an English Catholic in good position, Mr. Thomas Weld, to come and stay with him. Taking up his abode in the castle, Father Grou became the director of the whole family. His gentleness, his wisdom, his experience in the ways of the spiritual life, were most useful to the persons who gave him their confidence. It was then that he learnt that his great work, the fruit of so many years of labour, had been burnt at Paris. He bore this loss with much calmness, and said simply, "*If God had wished to derive any glory from this work, He would have preserved it.*"

He observed, as much as possible, the rule of the Jesuits; rose every day at four o'clock in the morning, without light or fire, made an hour's meditation, said his office, and prepared for Mass, which he never failed to celebrate every day until attacked by his last illness. He practised the strictest poverty, having nothing whatever of his own, and asking with the greatest simplicity for books or clothes when he needed them. What was most remarkable in him was his lively faith, and the constant tranquillity of his soul, his great humility, modesty, and zeal.

In 1796 he had printed in London, the *Méditations, en forme de Retraite, sur l'Amour de Dieu* (Meditations, in the form of a Retreat, upon the Love of God), and also a little treatise upon the resignation of one's self to God—*Don de Soi-même à Dieu*. Some theologians imagined these works contained ideas favourable to Quietism; but a French bishop, after examining them, pronounced them to be perfectly sound, and free from any taint of

the kind. There was another work of his published in London, called the *School of Christ*; but it has not yet appeared in French.

The Supplement to the Library of Jesuit Writers, published at Rome in 1816 mentions also, as written by Father Grou, *La Science du Crucifix*, Paris, chez Aufroy; and *La Science Pratique du Crucifix dans l'usage des Sacrements de Pénitence et de Eucharistie* (Practical Science of the Crucifix in the use of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist), as a continuation of the preceding.

Two years before his death, he had a very painful attack of asthma. Some time after, he was seized with apoplexy, and dropsy then declared itself; his legs swelled to an enormous size, he could not remain in bed, and passed the last ten months of his life in an armchair. He continued to the very end to hear the confessions of the pious family with whom he lived. Holy Communion was brought to him twice in the week. When he felt his end approaching, he asked for the last Sacraments, and received them with full consciousness and great devotion. A short time before he breathed his last, holding his crucifix in his hands, he exclaimed, "*O my God! how sweet it is to die in Thine arms!*"

His death took place on the 13th of December 1803: he was seventy-two years of age.

His manuscripts, which were numerous, were given up to his former companions; and by them was printed in 1815 *L'Intérieur de Jesus et de Marie* (The Inner Life of Jesus and Mary), two volumes 12mo. This esteemed work has been reprinted several times since.

Chapter 1

ON TRUE AND SOLID DEVOTION

The word *devotion*, which is derived from the Latin, answers to that of devotedness, a *vowing* of oneself, a consecration of one's self. A devout person is, then, a person devoted to God, consecrated to God. There is no stronger expression than that of devotion to mark that disposition of the soul which is ready to do everything and to suffer everything for Him to whom she is devoted.

The devotion to creatures (I mean, of course, that which is lawful and allowed by God) has necessarily its limits. The devotion to God has none, and can have none. As soon as the least reserve, the least exception, intrudes there, it is no longer devotion. True and solid devotion is, then, that disposition of the heart by which we are ready to do and to suffer, without exception or reserve, everything which comes from God's good pleasure, everything which is the Will of God. And this disposition is the most excellent of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We cannot ask for it too often or too earnestly; and we must never flatter ourselves that we have it in its perfection, because it can always go on increasing, either in itself or in its effects.

We see, by this definition, that devotion is something most interior, and which has to do with the inmost life of the soul, for it affects that within us which is most spiritual; that is to say, our understanding and our will. Devotion consists, then, neither in reasoning, nor in imagination, nor in anything that is sensible. We are not devout just because we are able to reason well about the things of God, nor because we have grand ideas

or fine imaginations about spiritual matters, nor because we are sometimes affected to tears.

Again, devotion is not a thing which passes, which comes and goes, as it were, but it is something habitual, fixed, permanent, which extends over every instant of life and regulates all our conduct.

The principle of devotion is, that God being the one source and the one author of holiness, the reasonable creature ought to depend on Him in everything, and be absolutely governed by the Spirit of God. She must be always attached to God in the depths of her soul, always attentive to His voice within her, always faithful to accomplish what He asks of her each moment.

It is, then, impossible to be truly devout unless we are interior, given to recollection, accustomed to retire within ourselves, or rather never to go out of ourselves, to possess our soul in peace.

Whoever gives himself up to his senses, to his imagination, to his passions, I do not say in criminal things, but even in those which are not bad in themselves, will never be devout; for the first effect of devotion is to bring into captivity the senses, the imagination, and the passions, and to prevent the will from ever being led away by them.

He who is curious, impulsive, delighting to interest himself in exterior things, and to mix himself up with the affairs of others; he who is never willingly alone; he who is critical, speaking ill of his neighbour, satirical, irritable, contemptuous, haughty, ready to take offence at anything which wounds his self-love; he who is obstinate, believing only in his own opinions, or he who is a slave to human respect and to public opinion to such an extent that he is in consequence weak, inconstant, always changing his principles and his conduct, will never be devout in the sense I mean.

The true devout man is a man of prayer, whose sole delight is to be with God, and to speak with Him, and who scarcely ever loses his sense of the presence of God. Not that he is always thinking of God—for that is impossible here below—but because he is always united to God in his heart, and is guided in everything by His Spirit. To pray, he has no need of a book, or of a method, or of great efforts of the head or even of the will. He has only to retire quietly into himself; there he finds God, there he finds peace, sometimes a peace full of joy, sometimes a peace in spite of dryness, but always a deep and real peace. He prefers the prayer in which he gives much to God, and in which he suffers, the prayer in which self-love is undermined gradually, until it can find nothing to feed upon; in short, a simple prayer, denuded of all images or of perceptible feelings, and of all those things which the soul can remark or experience in other kinds of prayer.

The true devout man seeks not himself or his own gratification in the service of God, and he endeavours to practise this maxim of the *Imitation of Christ*: Wherever you find self, renounce self.

The truly devout man studies to fulfil perfectly all the duties of his state, and all his really necessary duties of kindness and courtesy to society. He is faithful to his devotional exercises, but he is not a slave to them; he interrupts them, he suspends them, he even gives them up altogether for a time, when any reason of necessity or of simple charity requires it. Provided he does not do his own will, he is always certain of doing the Will of God.

The truly devout man does not run about seeking for good works, but he waits until the occasion of doing good presents itself to him. He does what in him lies to ensure success; but he leaves the care of the success to God. He prefers those good works which are obscure and done in secret to those which are bril-

liant and gain general admiration; but he does not shrink from these latter ones when they are for the glory of God and the edification of his neighbour. The truly devout man does not burden himself with a great quantity of vocal prayers and practices which do not leave him time to breathe. He always preserves his liberty of spirit; he is neither scrupulous nor uneasy about himself; he goes on with simplicity and confidence.

He has made a determination, once for all, to refuse nothing to God, to grant nothing to self-love, and never to commit a voluntary fault; but he does not perplex himself; he goes on courageously; he is not too particular. If he falls into a fault, he does not agitate himself; he humbles himself at the sight of his own weakness; he raises himself up, and thinks no more about it.

He is not astonished at his weaknesses, at his falls or his imperfections; he is never discouraged. He knows that he can do nothing, but that God can do everything. He does not rely upon his own good thoughts and resolutions, but simply upon the grace and the goodness of God. If he were to fall a hundred times a day, he would not despair; but he would stretch out his hands lovingly to God, and beg of Him to lift him up and to take pity on him.

The truly devout man has a horror of evil, but he has a still greater love of good. He thinks more about practising virtue than about avoiding vice. He is generous, largehearted, and courageous; and when there is a question of exposing himself to danger for God's sake, he does not fear wounds. In one word, he loves better to do what is good, even at the risk of falling into some imperfection, than to omit it, through fear of the danger of sinning.

No one is so amiable in the ordinary intercourse of life as a really devout man. He is simple, straightforward, open as the day, unpretentious, gentle, solid; and true; his conversation is pleasing and interesting; he can enter into all innocent amusements; and he carries his condescending kindness and charity as far as possible, short of what is wrong. Whatever some persons may say, true devotion is never a melancholy thing, either for itself or for others. How should the man who continually enjoys the truest happiness, the only happiness, be ever sad? It is the inordinate passions of human nature which are sad—avarice, ambition, love which is not sanctified by God and has not God for its chief end. And it is to divert themselves from the trouble and uneasiness which these passions cause the heart that men plunge themselves recklessly into pleasures and excesses, which they vary continually, but which weary the soul, without ever satisfying it.

Whoever really and in sincerity gives himself up to the service of God will experience the truth of that sentence: “*To serve God, is to reign,*” even if it be in poverty, in humiliations, and in suffering. All those who in this world seek their happiness in something that is not God, all, without exception, will verify the saying of Saint Augustine: “*The heart of man is made for God alone, and is never at peace until it rests in God.*” “Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart findeth no rest until it repositeth in Thee.”

Chapter 2

THE IDEAL OF TRUE VIRTUE

There are very few Christians, even amongst those who are specially consecrated to God, who have a right idea of what true virtue is. Almost all of them imagine it to consist in a certain routine of piety, and in fidelity to certain exterior practices. If with this they have at intervals some emotion of sensible devotion, without taking care to discern whether these emotions come from God or from their own efforts, they at once conclude that they are really virtuous.

Nevertheless, they are subject to a thousand faults and imperfections, of which they take no heed themselves, and which anyone else would try in vain to make them conscious of. They are narrow-minded, scrupulously exact in their practices of devotion, full of esteem for themselves, extremely sensitive and touchy, obstinate in holding their own opinions, puffed up with self-love, constrained and affected in their manners; nothing true, nothing simple, nothing natural about them. In their own hearts they prefer themselves to all others, and often they despise, they condemn, they persecute really holy persons, and true piety, of which they know nothing.

Nothing is more common in Christianity than this false and pharisaical virtue. Those who are really good have no greater enemies; and if we wish to describe them in a few words we may say, it was pretended holy persons who crucified Jesus Christ, and they still crucify Him every day in His most perfect imitators. As soon as anyone really gives himself to God and begins to lead an inner life, he is sure to draw upon himself, first of all

jealousy and criticism, and then persecutions and calumnies of every kind, from these devout Pharisees.

If we wish to understand what true virtue is, we must contemplate it in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: He is our one great Example; He gave Himself to us for that reason; He was made Man that holiness might be sensible and palpable to us. All sanctity which is not formed and modelled on His sanctity is false; it is displeasing to God; it may perhaps deceive men, but it is useless for Heaven.

Let us, then, make Jesus Christ our study; and that we may know Him thoroughly, and express His life in ourselves, let us continually ask Him for light and grace. Jesus Christ sought Himself in nothing; never had He in view His own interests, either temporal or spiritual; never did He perform one single action for the sake of pleasing men, neither did He ever abstain from any good action for fear of displeasing them. God alone, God's glory and His Will, was the sole object of His thoughts and feelings, the sole rule of His conduct. He sacrificed all, without reserve, to the interests of His Father.

Jesus Christ made piety to consist in our interior dispositions, the religion of the heart; not in vain and fleeting feelings, but in sincere and efficacious resolutions, always followed by execution; a disposition of an entire devotion to God, a continual annihilation of self, and a boundless charity towards others. Every instant of His life was consecrated to the accomplishment of these three dispositions. He neglected no observance of any point of the law; but, at the same time, He declared, both by word and example, that this observance was only of value when it proceeded from an inner principle of love, and that the practice of the letter of the law alone, without the interior spirit, made slaves, and not children of God.

Jesus Christ always looked upon this present life as passing away; as a pilgrimage, a time of trial, simply designed to test our love for God. The things which are eternal were His constant occupation. He gave to nature what was absolutely necessary, without going beyond. Although He possessed nothing, and was always dependent on Providence for His simple bodily wants, He was never uneasy about the morrow, and His delight was to experience the effects of poverty.

Jesus Christ embraced by His own free choice that which men accept with the greatest difficulty, and to which they only submit from necessity. He did not absolutely condemn riches, but He preferred poverty. He did not condemn the rank and marks of honour which God Himself has established amongst men, but He taught us that an obscure condition, bereft of every kind of consideration, is more pleasing to God, and more favourable to salvation; and that to think one's self better than others because one is born great, noble, or powerful, or in a position of authority, is an error and the source of countless sins. With the exception of the simple natural pleasure which the Creator has attached to certain actions, and the use of which is limited by the severest rules, He has absolutely scorned every other kind of pleasure, especially those which men seek with the greatest eagerness, and as far as He Himself was concerned, He renounced even the most innocent pleasure. Hard work, apostolic labours, prayer, and the instruction of His disciples and the multitude filled up every moment of His life.

Jesus Christ was simplicity itself; always the same, without any affectation in His speech or actions. He taught, with the authority of God-made-Man, the most sublime truths, and things which had before been unknown. But He propounded His doctrine in a simple, familiar manner, without any pomp of human eloquence, and so that all minds could understand Him. His

miracles, divine in themselves, are still more divine from the way in which He wrought them. He wished that the account of the evangelists should agree with the perfect simplicity of His own life. It is impossible to give in a more simple manner than they have done the account of a life, and of words and actions, which bear on them the very impress of Divinity.

Jesus Christ had a most tender compassion for sinners who were sincerely humble and repentant for their sins. "*I came for sinners,*" He said, "*and not for the just,*" *who trust in their own justice.* The publican who stood afar off, Mary Magdalen, the woman taken in adultery, the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob, were all treated by Him with a kindness and tenderness which astonishes us. But the pride of the Pharisees, their hypocrisy, their avarice, these were the objects of His most severe censure and malediction. The sins of the mind and the spirit, just the sins to which the falsely devout are more subject than any others, are those which He condemned with the greatest severity, because they are a sign of more blindness of the mind and more corruption of the heart.

Jesus Christ bore with a never-failing gentleness the faults and the roughness of His disciples. According to our way of thinking, what must He not have suffered at having to live with men so imperfect and so ignorant of the things of God? Intercourse with our neighbour is perhaps one of the most difficult things in this life; even the saints have felt how much it cost them. And the nearer they are to God, the more need they have of condescension, to lower themselves to others, as it were, to unbend, to conceal and excuse in others a thousand faults which they see and feel more keenly than anyone else. And this is a point upon which their practice must be continual, and it all depends upon how they acquit themselves with regard to it as to whether they will make virtue amiable or displeasing to others.

Jesus Christ suffered every kind of persecution at the hands of His enemies, but He never gave way. He only opposed to them His innocence and virtue, and He always confounded them by His spotless life. When the hour came that He allowed Himself to fall into their hands, He permitted their evil passions to act, and looked upon them as instruments of Divine justice. He kept silence when He saw them so obstinate in their malice; He sought not to justify Himself, although it would have been so easy; He allowed Himself to be condemned; He allowed them to enjoy their imaginary triumph; He pardoned them, He prayed for them, He shed His blood for them. This is the most sublime and the most difficult height of perfection.

Whoever aspires to true sanctity, and to be guided in everything by the Spirit of God, must expect to suffer from the tongues of men, to bear their calumnies, and sometimes their persecutions. In this, above all things, we must take Jesus Christ as our model; we must suffer, for His sake, as much as we can, in the interests of truth; our only answer to calumny must be the innocence of our life; we must keep silence when it is not absolutely necessary to speak; we must leave the care of our justification to God, if He sees fit to justify us; we must stifle in our heart every feeling of resentment and bitterness; we must try to soften our enemies by every kind of charitable actions; we must pray to God for their pardon; and we must try to see, in all they make us suffer, only the accomplishment of God's designs upon us.

And when virtue can thus sustain itself in contempt, in opprobrium, in ill-treatment, then we may look upon it as perfected, as consummate virtue. Therefore God generally reserves this trial to the last. Blessed are those who pass through it! When Jesus Christ comes in His glory, they will have a share in it proportionate to their share in His humiliations. To desire such a state as this, to accept it when it is offered to us, to bear it pa-

tiently and with joy when we find ourselves in it, this can only be the effect of grace, and of an extraordinary grace. As for us, let us rest content in our lowliness; let us never think we can attain of ourselves to anything so high; and let us only ask of God that human respect may never cause us to abandon His interests.

The rest of the pages have been removed from this preview..