

COUNSELS OF PERFECTION
FOR
CHRISTIAN MOTHERS

BY

MONSIGNOR P. LEJEUNE
HONORARY CANON OF THE CATHEDRAL OF RHEIMS
ARCHBISHOP OF CHARLEVILLE

TRANSLATED BY

FRANCIS A. RYAN
OF THE SAME SOCIETY

Nihil Obstat
F. G. Holweck
Censor Librorum
October 21, 1913

Imprimatur
Joannes J. Glennon,
Archiepiscopus
October 21, 1913



© 2024 Tradidi. All rights reserved. While the text of this work is in the public domain, this edition's formatting, design, and any additional materials are protected by copyright.

Printed on 5 August 2024

SKU: 104

Contents

PART I

THE END—THE OBSTACLES

1. True And False Devotion.....	3
2. A Catalogue Of Souls	11
3. Naturalism.....	19
4. The Value of Time.....	23
5. The Need Of A Rule Of Life	29
6. Promptness In Rising	35
7. Venial Sin - Its Ugliness	41
8. Venial Sin — Its Effects.....	47
9. Impediments To Spiritual Progress.....	53
10. Impediments To Spiritual Progress (Concluded)..	59
11. Affections And Aversions	65

PART II

THE MEANS

12. Spiritual Reading — Its Advantages	75
13. Spiritual Reading — How To Engage In It.....	83
14. Spiritual Reading — What Books To Read.....	87

15. Meditation.....	93
<i>Note And Method Of Prayer</i>	98
<i>The Body Of The Prayer</i>	99
16. Good Resolutions.....	103
17. Examination Of Conscience.....	109
18. The Art of Rising After We Fall.....	115
19. The Interior Life.....	123
20. The Government of the Tongue.....	129
21. Spiritual Imperfection.....	135

PART III

THE MEANS PAR EXCELLENCE

22. The Holy Mass.....	145
23. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament.....	153
24. Holy Communion.....	159
25. Communion of Children and Young People.....	167
26. The Communion Of Little Children.....	171
27. The Eucharistic Education of the Child.....	179
28. The Church.....	187

Some pages have been removed here from this preview..

Chapter 2

A CATALOGUE OF SOULS

What is the state of my soul? What place do I occupy, with regard to God, in the great family of Christian souls? These, my daughters, are questions to which you must not be indifferent. In order to furnish you with the elements of a response to these questions, I intend to draw up a catalogue of souls which will enable you to determine to what category you belong. My purpose, I must avow, is not solely to satisfy your curiosity. When you know just where your place is in this catalogue you should aspire to a higher degree of excellence in the hierarchy of souls. It is my purpose to guide you in your upward march, to point out the halting places along the way, and to indicate the means by which you can arrive most quickly and most surely at the coveted goal.

A preliminary observation: The catalogue that I shall draw up is not at all concerned with those who live in the state of habitual mortal sin. I write for those earnest Christians who, to say the least, never commit a grave fault. If some one among my readers should be so unfortunate as to live continually at enmity with God, this poor soul would be an object to weep over and to pray for, but not to delay upon.

What principle is to guide us in our classification of souls? Which one of our faculties will instruct us as to the state of our souls, and authorize us to decide, without fear of error,

whether this or that soul is ill or well? Let us interrogate successively our three chief faculties: the sensibility, the intelligence, and the will.

Will the sensibility instruct us infallibly as to the state of a soul? No! The sensibility is a faculty which deceives us even in the ordinary affairs of life, and which, in our relations with God, baffles all our calculations, and evades all our previsions. For example, today you feel that your affection for some person you love is much less lively than yesterday, and you are at a loss to account for this. You have done nothing which, to your knowledge, might produce this effect. So in the affairs of piety you will experience vacillations yet more pronounced, and not less inexplicable. Today, full of ardor in prayer, you open your soul before God without the least effort, and experience a deep feeling of love for Him. Tomorrow, your prayers seem but empty words which your sensibility disavows. Evidently your sensibility has undergone a change. But has the state of your soul changed? Not at all! In the eyes of God you are the same as you were yesterday, despite your seeming lukewarmness.

It is not to the sensibility, then, that we must have recourse when we wish to determine our place in the catalogue of souls. To take this faculty for our guide would be to expose ourselves to innumerable disappointments. We should be great saints at times when our hearts beat more lively in prayer than is customary with us; but we should be the worst miscreants when we prayed without relish and happiness.

Are you not aware, my daughters, that the majority of the saints had to endure this absence of sensible relish, and these vacillations of the sensibility, which, in their relations with God, brought them agony and torture rather than joy? We may well believe them when they tell us that in prayer they were “beasts of burden before God.” But was their prayer less meritorious and efficacious because it was not accompanied by sensible joy? The sensibility, then, is a faculty which we cannot be too distrustful of when we desire to render to ourselves an account of our standing with God.



Is the intelligence our infallible guide? Does the vigor of our spiritual life depend upon this faculty? It would, if to know good were to do good. But how frequently we find those of enlightened intelligence satisfied to let their morality consist mainly in desire! It is so seldom that we love God in the measure in which we know Him. It is not at all impossible to have a consummate knowledge of religion and the spiritual life, to be a light for others, and yet resemble the guidepost which points the way, but itself remains immovable.

Moreover, would it be just for our spiritual vitality to be in proportion to the various lights which God gives us? There are some on whom God has bestowed light sparingly; there are others on whom He has shed it abundantly. But what is light? It is but the means of knowing good. Thus

each one is held to do good in the measure in which she comprehends it. Abundance of light, then, is a gift for which we shall be judged more severely by God; and if we bring to His tribunal an intelligence rich in light, and a life poor in merits, we may well be fearful.

It is not to the intelligence you must look, therefore, in order to ascertain the state of your spiritual life.

There remains, now, the will. How is your will disposed towards God? Is your will united to the will of God? Do you wish what God wishes, the least important things as well as the most essential? Do you make some reserve, yielding to the divine will on one point, and opposing it on another? These, my daughters, are questions the import of which you will at once appreciate; questions which are of capital significance for you. It is indeed true that the will is the important faculty in the spiritual man. Hence it is that Catholic theology styles the sinful soul, “a will turned away from God,” and the fervent soul, “a will which adheres to God.”

Moreover, recall the definition of perfection which we have given in the preceding chapter: *Perfection consists in accomplishing the will of God in a constant and generous fashion.* Thus it follows that we withdraw from or approach perfection according as we shun the divine will, or adhere more generously to it.

We have at hand, then, the solution of our problem: the will must teach us the state of the soul. What is the attitude of my will relative to God? When I have responded to this

question, I know what the state of my soul is; I can tell to what category it belongs.

The principle which we have just laid down will permit a classification of souls which I trust will be satisfactory to my readers.

1. Those whose souls are lukewarm, and who accept only the struggle against mortal sin.
2. Those whose souls are fervent, and who not only struggle against venial sin, but also undertake to reform themselves.
3. Those whose souls are very fervent, and who are habitually disposed to refuse God nothing.

The first of these three categories calls for some remarks. The signs of lukewarmness are indicated by the general rules which I have laid down. I have found them well drawn out in a fine passage taken from one of the works of Père Jennesseaux on the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius:

Signs of lukewarmness:

To have little or no regard for venial sin, and to fear only mortal sin; to perform one's spiritual exercises out of a spirit of routine or human respect, with disgust and with negligence reflected upon and consented to; to pray habitually without attention; to confess one's faults lightly, without the serious resolution of avoiding them; to communicate without devotion, by not striving to obtain it; to perform one's daily

actions without the proper intention, without order or method; to be given over to exterior things; to be rarely present to one's self, and yet more rarely to have God present; to renounce the exercise of great virtues, even those whose practice is suited to one's state or profession; to be content with a state of mediocrity; to shun the company of those who work with ardor for their perfection; to seek the company of those who are more dissipated, less fervent and less regular; to form an erroneous conscience, the cause of which superiors and directors often attribute to lack of good judgement; to employ false principles to silence remorse; to nourish, despite the frequent use of the sacraments, interior aversions, jealousies, movements of pride, and particular and dangerous affections; to encourage a spirit of harshness, insubordination and cavilling, which manifests itself in offensive and contentious words; to entertain continually a secret self-love, which, mingling in all one's actions, corrupts and infects them with its virus; lastly, to shirk whatever entails labor and self-abnegation, and to seek rather for comforts, futile consolations, and ease.

From this simple statement, you can tell to what category you belong. After having read the chapters that will follow, you will be yet more capable of judging and will better understand how one can pass from one of these states into the other.

Very happy should I be if this study would stimulate those among you who are lukewarm to march with a resolute step to the conquest of fervor, and should inspire those already fervent, with the desire to mount higher and still higher in fervor and love.

Chapter 3

NATURALISM

My daughters, permit me to denounce, under the name of naturalism, a wide-spread evil of our day, an evil that infects the soul in various ways. Surely you are not ignorant of the vast difference between the soul of the Christian and the soul of the Pagan. The will and intelligence of the Christian have received a new life, super added to that of nature, and called for that reason the supernatural life.

Analyze the intelligence of the Christian, and you will see that it is formed and fashioned in an entirely different way than the intelligence of the Pagan. You will find there certain truths which reason itself could not have discovered, and a unity of conviction and judgement that has not sprung from natural causes.

Apply yourselves with the same earnestness to the study of the Christian's will: you will obtain the same results. You will behold this will, loving persons and things to which the will of the Pagan is indifferent. For example, you will see the supernatural man regarding the Sacred Host with love, and the natural man casting only a vacant glance upon it.

The soul of the Christian is cast in a supernatural mold. The supernatural life is its foundation. Hence the supernatural ought to rule our thoughts, and be the principal inspiration of all our actions.

Now there are certain Christians who live continuously in the state of grace, and observe the chief precepts of religion, but who, in the ordinary course of their lives, do not differ notably from Pagans. In their mode of appreciating persons and things, they manifest sentiments which have nothing of the supernatural in them. Their souls have remained partly pagan. We are right then in characterizing by the name of *naturalism*, the evil with which they are tainted.

Although their souls have received a new life, these persons think, feel and act, as if they were yet in the life of nature.

My daughters, some of you may be forced to confess that your souls are yet pagan-like. Perhaps a truly Christian education has been denied you, and the atmosphere of religious indifference, in which you have lived, has left its stamp upon you. Perhaps you have permitted the fire of that Christian life, which burned so brightly in your earlier years, to die out. Occasionally now you sit down before the fire-grate of that life, and stir up the smoldering embers.



Whatever may have been the origin of this semi-paganism in these people of whom I write, they all have this one trait in common: a cold indifference towards Jesus Christ. This is a natural sequence; for, since Jesus is the Author and Source of our supernatural life, it is from Him and through Him that it comes to us. Why should we be astonished, then, that a soul tainted by naturalism is indifferent towards Jesus Christ?

How often have I heard people deploring their inability to approach near to Jesus, and expressing their envy of those who find, in the love of the Master, a food for the heart, and a consolation in the hours of trial. The words and examples of Jesus have made no impression on these people. His Sacred Person, so real for many others, is to them a mere abstraction. In one word Jesus is not a real being for them.

What do those pages of the Gospel, read so assiduously by the devout, mean to them? Nothing! Their hearts do not vibrate at the recital of all that Jesus has done for them in His mortal life. What says the Tabernacle to them? Hardly anything! Their faith is so weak, so little awakened! But what terror would seize them if the mask of indifference were torn off; if the God whom they carry in them after Communion, should suddenly reveal Himself as He really is, so good, so tender, so compassionate, all glorious and resplendent with light. How confounded and humiliated they would be at their want of appreciation for Christ's great majesty. How profoundly would they reproach themselves for having been indifferent to such love, and for returning nothing for it save a distracted thanks.

Now these honest Pagans, whom I am describing, are wont to despair of themselves, and to imagine that the Christian sense is wanting in them, just as certain persons are wanting in appreciation for music and poetry. Consequently, they are led to believe that whatever they do, this Christian sense will never awaken in them. I rejoice to be able to fill them with hope, and to assure them that they possess this treasure, though it lies buried under a debris of negligence,

venial faults and unchristian habits. Since they are in the state of grace, they have a true love for Jesus in the depths of their souls: a very passive love, it is true, but a love that is real, nevertheless. To awaken this love, and to make it active, is within the reach of everyone. The important thing is to proceed with method, and to submit with docility to the treatment which we shall soon advise.

There is very little to despair of in these people, because they often possess precious natural qualities. Indeed many of them are capable of great things. They perhaps will never go out of their way to adopt a religious practice which is not commanded, or to work with a view to their own personal sanctification; but the day wherein they will have recognized Jesus, the day wherein they will have comprehended the immense love of Jesus, the day wherein Jesus will have become a real being for them, on that day all the energy that they have wasted on creatures, will find its place in the supernatural life, and bloom into Christian virtues.

Oh! How often have such people, after shaking off their semi-paganism, accomplished great things in the spiritual life!

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