

The Christian Alphabet: A Dialogue Between Giulia Gonzaga and Juan de Valdes

Juan de Valdés

Reformed · Reformation · Dialogue

STROMATA 201

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INTRODUCTION

Cast as an intimate conversation between Valdes and his patron and pupil Giulia Gonzaga, this piece opens with her confession of restless discontent and follows Valdes's patient diagnosis: a soul made in God's image can find no true rest in worldly things. From there the dialogue widens into a compact course in Reformation theology - the distinct offices of Law and Gospel, the nature of justifying faith, the fruit of charity, and what Valdes calls Christian liberty, serving God as sons rather than as slaves. Twelve practical "steps" punctuate the argument, giving the teaching a shape a reader can actually walk through. The tone throughout is pastoral counsel addressed to one troubled woman, not a general treatise, read it as spiritual direction overheard.

A Dialogue between Giulia Gonzaga and Juan de Valdes

GIULIA: I have so much confidence in our friendship, that I seem as though I could freely communicate to you even those things that we scarcely discover to the ears of a confessor. Therefore, wishing now to impart to you some things nearer to me than life itself, I entreat you, if you have not more important business elsewhere, to listen attentively to what I wish to say to you. And notice, if you think you cannot attend closely to me now, through having your thoughts engaged elsewhere, tell me with all freedom; for if so, I can defer it to another day.

VALDÉS: On the contrary, Signora, I gain a favour by whatever you command me; and you know already that I have no business which can hinder me, especially in what relates to your service.

GIULIA: Now, setting aside all vain rhetoric and useless ceremony, which between us are quite superfluous, I wish you to know that I live almost continually so dissatisfied with myself, and in like manner with everything in the world, and so out of conceit with them, that if you saw my heart, I am sure you would pity me; for in it you would find, if not confusion, at least inquietude and perplexity. And of these I have now more, now less, according to the nature of the circumstances that present themselves. But I never feel so much calmness of mind, that wishing to settle it, I can conclusively understand what it is that I would wish for, or what thing would satisfy it, or with what it would rest contented. Hence,

I cannot conceive what can now be offered to me, sufficient to remove this, my confusion of mind, appease my inquietude, and resolve this perplexity. Many years have I lived in the manner I describe, and during this time, as you know, various circumstances have happened to me sufficient to disturb a tranquil spirit, much more a soul so disquieted and confused as mine. Besides this, you know, that at the first sermons I heard from our Preacher, you persuaded me by your words, that by means of this doctrine, I should be able to tranquillise and settle my mind in peace; but now, at last, I find it altogether the reverse of what I thought. And although I attribute this more to my own imperfections than to any defect in him, yet altogether it gives me pain to perceive that my hopes have not succeeded. This disappointment might be tolerable, yet it is the worse, that, instead of being cured of one infirmity, I have entered into another, without being released from the former. This is a most heavy and cruel contrariety, so much so, that I feel so weary and disgusted with myself, that tears frequently come into my eyes through not knowing what to do with myself, or what to lean upon. The sermons of the Preacher have engendered this contrariety in my mind. Through them I see myself violently assailed, on one side by the fear of hell and the love of paradise, and on the other by the dread of people's tongues and the love of the world's honour. In this manner two kinds of fears and two of affections, or, to speak more correctly, two affections of fear and two different ones of love, are what fight within me, and have kept me such as I am for some days. If you could feel what I now feel, you might truly wonder how I can pass it off and conceal it as I do. This is what I find within me, and in this state, good and bad, which I have described as well as I have known how, my concerns remain. Now, since you have shown so much affection and good will to aid me in my outward affairs, I entreat you to be ready to assist and counsel me in these interior things, because I very well know, that if you are willing, you have more skill to assist me in these, than in the others.

VALDÉS: Say freely, Signora, all that you wish to ask of me, and you may be assured that I will always expend in your service all that I know and am able to do.

GIULIA: In such confidence I have entered into this conversation with you, in the first instance, in order that you may tell me from what cause you believe the confusion, doubt, and perplexity spring, which for so long a time I have felt in my mind, and whether you think they can be remedied, and what means can be used for the purpose. This said, you will tell me concerning the contradictions that have arisen in me after I heard these sermons, whether it would be possible by any way to quiet my mind, either by assent, or really by resistance, because this tempest of affections and appetites, of imaginations and diversities of will, it cannot endure much longer; and I wish you not to lose time with excusing yourself by your usual, not to say feigned humility, which in such a case you are accustomed frequently to use.

VALDÉS: On the contrary, without more reflection, I will at once make a beginning. Yet, I wish you first to make me one promise.

GIULIA: What promise?

VALDÉS: It is this, that, if I make you truly comprehend, from what cause your confusion, inquietude, and contradictions proceed, and show you the way by which you can be freed from them, you will give me your assurance and word, that you will walk in it.

GIULIA: If in this manner I might be so certain that you would do what you say, as I am certain that in such case I would do what you ask of me, I should already begin to quiet myself.

VALDÉS: Now then, I hope, not so much from any skill, or sufficiency of my own, as in the affection and willingness I have to serve you, and likewise in your lively understanding and lucid judgment, and above all in the grace of God, that before I leave this place, you shall not only learn what you wish, but you shall know and understand the way by which you can free yourself from your former infirmity and its consequences. Be very attentive, Signora, because upon every single thing which I shall say to you, you can reply to me what may occur to you.

GIULIA: I will do so.

VALDÉS: Then in order to understand, Signora, whence proceed the travail and confusion, which you say you have felt for so many years, I wish you would turn over in your memory how that man is made in the image and likeness of God.

GIULIA: Let me understand what this image and likeness of God is.

VALDÉS: I wish rather that St. Paul may explain it to you, and thus you will understand it by what he says to the Colossians, where, admonishing them to speak the truth one to another, he counsels them to put off the Old man with his deeds, and to put on the New man, who is renewed in knowledge conformable to the image and likeness of Him who created him.

And you will also understand it by what St. Paul again says to those of Ephesus, reminding them, that by becoming Christians they have learned to put off the Old man and to be renewed in the spirit and clothed with the New man, who is created in the image and likeness of God. From this it appears that in such a degree as man possesses and retains in himself the image and likeness of God, in the same measure he sees and knows, understands and relishes spiritual things, in a spiritual life and conversation. This truly known, and what objects you set before your mind well scrutinised, you will understand clearly how all the inquietude, all the travail, all the confusion you feel, arises; because your soul desires you to procure its restitution to the image of God to which it was created, and of which it appears you have deprived it. Submitting to your appetites, and persisting in crossing this image, you have put before it things earthly and transitory, not by any means worthy of that excellence for which it was created. For this reason it cannot be satisfied, or contented with any of these things. It seems to you that it knows not what it wishes for, and hence you know not how to set before it that which it would desire. This state of mind that happens to you, ever befalls worldly persons who having attained to a reflective intellect and clear judgment, knowing truly that their souls find not, nor ever can find, entire satisfaction in outward things, turn themselves to seek for it in things relating to the mind. Yet as the supernatural Light, by which alone truth is discovered, seen, and known, is wanting to them, they go wandering in a labyrinth of appearances and opinions. And thus some seek happiness in one thing, some in another. I think it not worth while to refer here to examples, because this is not the point of your proposition. It is enough that you know this, that all these persons deceive themselves, and can never shadow out, nor reach to the symbols of the things in which true happiness consists, who, if they had had a little of the light of faith, would most easily, and with the grace of God, have acquired it, and thus they would have quieted

and pacified their souls. Have you now understood the cause whence your inquietude, confusion, and labour proceed?

GIULIA: Yes, very well.

VALDÉS: Now then you know that they may surely be remedied, and that the remedy is in your own hands.

GIULIA: In my hands?

VALDÉS: Yes! in your hands. Because whenever you determine yourself to do what I tell you, and which St. Paul tells you, respecting the renewing and restoring within you the image and likeness of God, you will find peace, quiet, and repose of spirit.

GIULIA: And how must I do this?

VALDÉS: By withdrawing it from things fallen and transitory, and by applying it to those that are fixed and eternal; not wishing, nor endeavouring to feed it with things corporal, but spiritual, not nourishing it with things worldly, but with things celestial. And in this manner your spirit finding its proper aliment, and seeing itself clothed with the New man in the image and likeness of which it was created, it will always live content and cheerful; and here in this present life it will begin to taste of that felicity which it expects to enjoy for ever in the life eternal, being thus that the happiness of man consists in his knowledge of God and of Christ shown by the light of faith, and in the union of the soul with God through faith, hope, and charity. To this happiness only the true Christian can arrive.

GIULIA: I should well believe this you say, because indeed it appears founded in reason, but as I know many persons who have as much, and perhaps more cancelled the image of God than I have done, and who do not present to their minds things more spiritual than I present to mine, yet they live in pleasure, finding content and satisfaction in the things of this world; so that I know not what to believe.

VALDÉS: Such persons' minds dwell in a low and vulgar state, and therefore low and mean objects give them satisfaction. But a spirit, generous and refined like yours, cannot calm itself and take repose, except in that greatness for which it was created. Hence, I repeat, if you are disgusted and live with your mind in confusion, it is because you do not turn it to things spiritual and divine, and because you continually fix its consideration upon these low and transitory concerns. You will better understand it by this comparison.

Two persons set out from this place to go to Spain. One of them is so careless and forgetful of his purpose, that whenever anything amusing or delightful occurs on the way he not only partakes of it and enjoys it, but quite forgets his principal journey, and gratifies his body and mind, stopping on the road. The other on the contrary is so solicitous and punctual, that with all the entertainments and feasts that are offered to him he will not taste or enjoy any, because he knows and is sure that he is not to remain there; nay, they are frequently displeasing and distasteful to him, considering them as hindrances and interruptions of his journey. And such earthly-minded persons even now have a want of satisfaction in these things whenever their principal journey becomes more impressed on their remembrance, and although at times they forget themselves and lose sight of their object, there remains impressed upon their memory altogether a something, I know not what, which causes them to find no true enjoyment in anything that the journey presents to them.

Such are we in this life. We are all born and created to know God, to believe God, to love God, and after this state of existence to enjoy God. And yet there are some who feed on the pleasures of this world, not only delighting and giving themselves up to rest in them, but who are wholly forgetful of that other life for which they were created. There are also others who, being offered the same delights and pleasures, enjoy them not, nor take relish in them; nay, they are often insipid and distasteful, keeping always in view that other life for which God created them. And although for a time these forget themselves, losing the remembrance of the other life, yet because God stands ever at the door and calls them, it will be impossible that they should find relish and enjoyment in things of this world; and if they expect or endeavour to find them here, they will live in confusion, disgust, and inquietude, as you are living, Signora. In the same manner then, like him who knows how to taste of the things of this world, yet does not enjoy them as things suitable to his better nature, or that will be lasting, but who looks at them as the curious beholder views them, turning away from the recreations and banquets offered to him by the way, I wish, Signora, you to do the same. Turn within yourself, open the ears of your soul, so that you may hear the voice of God, and think as a true Christian that in this life you can have no other real contentment and rest, than what will come to you by means of the knowledge of God, through the faith and love of God. Settle your mind in this consideration; most earnestly putting aside all those things that are transitory and cannot endure. Doing this, I promise that you will occupy a much shorter time in quieting, soothing, and giving peace to your mind than you have spent in disturbing it. And if you do not thus overcome it, I am content that you should never give credit to anything I may say to you.

GIULIA: Truly I believe that you have divined the source whence my infirmity proceeds, without erring in a single point. O God, do thou assist me! How blindly do we worldly persons go on! Even now I am sure that you have divined how to give me the medicine by which I shall be healed of my weakness. It only remains that I put my trust in God and take it. I have no doubt that it will heal me, so much the more having such a physician as you on my side.

VALDÉS: The true physician of the soul is Christ crucified. Put all your confidence in Him alone, and you will discover the remedy.

GIULIA: From what you have said, one doubt has come to my recollection, on which I am often accustomed to think; I entreat you to tell me how it appears to you.

VALDÉS: Ask it freely.

GIULIA: I wish to know from you how it comes to pass that people fall into such blindness, and go on lost in the things that gratify the senses, forgetful chiefly of those which they ought continually to care for?

VALDÉS: These are remains of original sin.

GIULIA: This is what I do not comprehend. They say, God pardons original sin in baptism. Since it is thus he pardons us, how is it that there remains with us these evil inclinations and this blindness, being so prejudicial to our salvation?

VALDÉS: Signora, you must understand it in this manner. In original sin two things are to be considered, one the guilt, the other the inclination to evil, which is that of which you speak. And it is thus; in baptism through faith, God pardons us the guilt of sin, and as to the inclination to evil he goes on medicating and curing it by his grace, little by little, in such a manner, that a person may, by the grace and favour of God, so much perfect himself as almost to come to lose all evil inclinations, all unrestrained appetites, and all inordinate affections that reign in us through original sin. Conformable to this is that saying of St. Augustine, that the Spirit of God restores and renews in us the image and likeness of God to which we were created. But you will understand it better by this example.

A great nobleman has a servant whom he loves and to whom he shows much grace and favour. This servant commits a serious offence against his lord, for which he not only deprives him of all favour and grace, but with just indignation sentences him to death. It happens at the time, that a person in high favour with the nobleman entreats for that servant, to whom, in consideration for such person, he graciously gives pardon of his life, and although he does not admit him to the same place in his favour as before he had sinned, he gives him the entry of his palace and chamber, so that he may in time return to occupy the station in which he stood at first.

GIULIA: By this example I completely comprehend it, and am so well satisfied that I remain tranquil, and am without any scruple as to this point. So you may believe that you have accomplished not a little.

VALDÉS: If I were conversing with a person of a low, gross, and unpolished understanding, I might well think I had already done something; but addressing whom I do, I have need of a little diligence to make you capable to receive the truth in a manner that shall not leave me wherewith to pride myself, if it were only for the credit you give to my words.

GIULIA: Come now, no more of this. Let us come to the subject, and tell me your sentiments about the mental contradiction that I feel.

VALDÉS: I say, Signora, that as I pity and regret that you are living under the confusion of mind, of which we have just now spoken, so also I am pleased and satisfied that you feel the contradiction of which you speak.

GIULIA: Why so?

VALDÉS: I will tell you. I regret the confusion, because it proceeds from your fault, as we have said, and tends to your injury, as you yourself experience; and I am pleased at the contradiction of mind, because I know that it proceeds from this: that the preaching of the Gospel produces its first effect in you.

GIULIA: Why do you call this contradiction the first effect of preaching the Gospel?

VALDÉS: Because the first thing that light does when entering into a dark room is to scatter the darkness unseen before, and to discover and show what is not seen in the obscurity; so in the same manner, when the light of evangelical truth begins to shine in the soul of a worldly person, dispersing in some degree the darkness and obscurity, as well of the senses as of human reason, it scatters and chases away in light, what the darkness covered, and then when such a person turns within himself he begins to feel, that what he before regarded as good is evil; what he judged to be true is false; and that which seemed to him sweet is bitter. And because of our incapacity and fragility, the light of this evangelical truth shines not so much at first in our souls as would suffice to scatter from them at once all the obscurity, so that they could clearly and manifestly know the nature and existence of these things. It then happens that, the darkness contending with the light, and human reason with the Christian spirit, these contests cause them to feel those earthquakes of inward contradiction that you, Signora, now feel. We have so many instances of this, as well in the history of Christ which the Evangelists wrote, as in what St. Luke wrote of the acts of the Apostles, and also in the epistles of St. Paul, that if I wished to quote all the passages one by one, I should spend all our time in doing this; and not to spend the time in doing so, I will leave them for you, since you have the New Testament in Italian, to read them there yourself, I pointing them out to you. I only wish to tell you this: that you should consider these contradictions of mind which you feel, as a gift and blessing from God, and you should make use of them as such, giving place to the Light as it shines more and more in your soul. In this manner you will become freed from the contradiction, and will put yourself into a capacity to receive the other gifts of God, which will be sweet and well-flavoured. May God preserve you, Signora, from not feeling this contradiction, because not to feel it is a sign of hardness and obstinacy.

GIULIA: In conclusion, this is the decision; that I cannot conclude to understand both you and the other. All the Preacher's theme is to say, that the preaching of the Gospel soothes and pacifies the conscience, and now you say quite the contrary. I know not what to say, except that I do not understand you.

VALDÉS: Then I will make you understand us, and, comprehending it, you will know that we both speak rightly, and that there is no contradiction in our language. And it is thus: the Preacher says very truly that the preaching of the Gospel soothes and pacifies the conscience. Yet you must understand that it produces this effect in all those persons who receive and embrace Christ through faith, in a way that by means of preaching the Gospel, which announces remission and pardon of sin by Christ, faith soothes and pacifies the conscience, yet only of those persons who have living and entire faith. So also I speak truly that the same preaching begets contradiction, terror, and dismay, yet it is in those persons who hear the preaching, although they do not thereon determine to embrace the truth through faith, nor keep it, except as it may be merely for a rule of moral doctrine. Finding that it is opposed to their affections and appetites, and desiring to make it conform to them, at one time they desire one thing,

and at another time they wish another, and not concluding to determine themselves, they truly feel one of the effects of the gospel preaching, but do not enjoy the fruition of it. Have you understood it?

GIULIA: Yes, very well. But I do not understand why you are pleased to see me in this state of contradiction.

VALDÉS: Because it is a sign that you hearken to the doctrine; and although the evangelical preaching does not exercise in you its chief office, which is that described by the Preacher, I may be glad that at least it executes the office of the Law, which is what I describe to you, and I hope, in the grace of God, that after the preaching has performed in you the office of the Law, it will then exercise the service of the Gospel.

GIULIA: I imagine that I can nearly understand what you wish to explain, but I shall have pleasure in learning a little more particularly what is the office of the Law, and what the office of the Gospel.

VALDÉS: Indeed it is most proper, Signora, that you should comprehend both of them. Know then that the Law is the rule of conscience, and it is thus, that conscience is no other than the Law understood; whose office is to evidence sin, and also to increase it. St. Paul means both by experience, and as he truly had experienced it, he writes to the Romans, in that his most excellent epistle, and says himself, that the Law works wrath, because persons are angry, disgustful, and variable when restricted by the Law. (Rom. 8.) He says more, that the Law is spiritual, for it is not observed in its integrity, nor rightly understood, unless the person is a spiritual person. The prophets call the Law a heavy yoke, a rigorous sceptre, and other names of this kind, which signify severity. And when God gave the Law to Moses, the people of Israel, who stood at the foot of the mountain, saw great lightnings and thunderings, so that all trembled with fear and dismay. All say, that these things signify the terror, alarm, and conflict of the affections which the Law generates in those minds to whom it is given. But with all this, you, Signora, ought to know that the Law is very needful to you, for if you had not the Law you would not have conscience, and if without conscience, sin would not be known, and if sin were not known, we should not humble ourselves, and if we did not humble ourselves, we should not obtain grace, if we did not obtain grace, we should not be justified, and not being justified, our souls would not be saved. And this I believe St. Paul wishes to be understood where he says, that the Law is as a schoolmaster or governor who leads and conducts us to Christ, although by means of faith we are justified. Here you perceive the office of the Law. The Gospel executes the same office in persons who receive it only as law; but in them who receive it as an ambassador or messenger of grace its especial office is to heal the wounds made by the Law, to preach grace, peace, and remission of sins; to calm and pacify the conscience; to give strength to accomplish what the Law shows us to be the will of God, and by which the enemies of the soul are warred with, and by which they are overcome and beaten down to the ground. And thus Christ comes to them compassionate, humble, pacific, and full of love and charity, and not terrible and alarming like the Law. In this manner the Law teaches us what we have to do, the Gospel gives us spirit by which we are enabled to fulfil it. The Law makes the wound, the Gospel heals it, and finally, the Law slays, the Gospel gives life. I do not care to go on confirming this with the authority of the sacred Scriptures, not to occupy the time.

GIULIA: You have done very well. Do not trouble yourself if you do not quote your authorities; when you shall say anything that appears difficult to me, I will ask you to prove it to me by some authority from Scripture. VALDÉS: Let it be so. And since you have already understood the office of the Law and of the Gospel, by this too you will more clearly discover the source whence springs the contradiction that you feel, it will be as well that we go forward.

GIULIA: I wish first that you would tell me a little more about this subject.

VALDÉS: I know not what more to tell you, if I do not go into particulars.

GIULIA: Now this is what I wish.

VALDÉS: The Preacher, Signora, by his sermons, has awakened in your remembrance what you already had conceived of heaven and hell, and has known so well how to picture it to you that the fear of hell makes you love heaven, and the love of heaven makes you dread hell. And in connection with showing you this, he tells you that you cannot fly from hell except through the observance and keeping of the

law and the doctrine of Christ. And as he declares this to you in a manner it seems to you that you cannot perform without hazard of being whispered about, disesteemed, undervalued, and considered as little by people of the world, the forecast for the future life conflicting within you on one side, and on the other an unwillingness to bear the troubles of this, so the contradiction you feel is generated. All this is born of the amor proprio with which you love yourself. You fear hell for your own interest, you love heaven for your own interest, you fear the confusion of the world for your own interest, you love the glory and honour of the world for your own interest. Thus in everything you fear and love, if strictly noticed, you will discover yourself there.

GIULIA: Then whom do you wish that I should find in my own things if not myself?

VALDÉS: I wish that you should again find God, and not yourself, if you wish to be free from contradiction, confusion, inquietude, discontent, and a thousand other discomforts beside, from which you can never become freed; but when you find God, you will find peace, serenity, quietness, content, cheerfulness, and courage, and such an infinitude of spiritual blessings, that you will not know how to gather them. Now if you wish to slight him, and if you are willing to deprive yourself of heaven and bind yourself to hell, through unwillingness to go a little out of yourself, and enter into God, why, see you to it. For myself, I assure you that there is nothing in the world that could give me equal satisfaction and content, than to see you walk in this Christian path, because I know your mind so well inclined, I hold it certain that if you begin to enamour yourself with God, you will surpass in the victory of holiness many of those saints who stand in heaven.

GIULIA: Indeed I desire no other thing; God knows my wishes.

VALDÉS: Then why do you not take what you desire?

GIULIA: Because I do not know how to do so.

VALDÉS: Force, force, Signora, is the only means the Gospel concern demands. And so Christ said: “from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”

Thus if you wish to take the kingdom of heaven, do violence to yourself, and so you will fear nothing, because, as a Spanish lady of high rank said, although I think not upon this subject [*Quien a sí venze, á nadie teme*], he who conquers himself fears no one.

GIULIA: Let us leave mere words; the fact is, that I indeed believe all my confusion, my inquietude, and my contradiction of mind would cease by entering upon the way of God, and for this reason I would resolve to enter upon it immediately, but it seems to me so difficult to find, that I dare not set myself to seek it.

VALDÉS: What do you see that makes it so troublesome to find?

GIULIA: I see few who walk by that road.

VALDÉS: In this you are so far right that few walk in it. But you should know, that this does not arise so much from the difficulty of the way as from our own evil nature and imperfection. And because I

desire to confirm you in this truth, I wish you to know that in the present life you will discover five kinds of persons. Some there are who know not the way of God, neither wish to know it, because they foresee that by walking in that way they must deprive themselves of their amusements and pleasures. And these persons, although they do not speak it with the lips, yet from the heart they use the language that Job utters when noticing the wickedness of the impious: "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

The same says David: "the fool hath said in his heart there is no God," because in reality, they wish that there were no God. You will find other persons who know the way of God, but overcome by their affections and appetites, they do not conclusively determine to walk in it. Christ says of such: "the servant who knew his lord's will and did it not shall be beaten with many stripes." And truly it is so also here in this world. Such persons feel a continual remorse of conscience which keeps them discontented and without enjoyment.

You will find another kind of persons who desire and have the will to learn and know the way of God, but being bound by the love of the things of this present life, and taking supreme delight in them, they are not willing to give them up, and so they do not dispose themselves, in a manner that God should teach and show them his way. Satan directly sets before such persons certain masked passages, which he gives them to understand are the right paths, and they, blind with love of themselves, willingly yield themselves to be deceived and injured by supposing that God carries them whilst it is the devil who is leading them. Hence are born superfluous ceremonies; hence arise pernicious superstitions; hence come false worships. God says of such persons by Isaiah: "they seek me daily, wishing to learn and know my ways like people who have lived righteously, and have not abandoned the justice and judgment of the Lord their God."

You will find another kind of persons who are willing to know the way of God and dispose themselves towards it. These hearing in their souls the voice of Christ which says: “turn within you, ye who go wandering; that is not the right path in which you are walking for you cannot go by that to the kingdom of heaven.” These turn within themselves, and perceiving that they are lost, leave the road they are pursuing, and before they take any other course pray unto God that he would show them the true way. And the disposal is this. Such persons are presently sensible of Christ, who says to them: “whoever will walk by the true and certain way, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me, imitating me in what he can,” and they are sensible that in another place of Scripture he declares this to them: “learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, [and ye shall find rest unto your souls.]” And thus they immediately enter by the way of denial of their own will and by the way of patience and true humility. You will find some other persons who know the way of God and walk by it, some with more and greater fervency than others, yet in a manner that neither the one nor the other go out of the way nor forsake it. They go on well, and these in truth are but few, as you say, Signora, although they are not so few as you think, because their path being spiritual, they cannot be seen but by spiritual sight, nor are they possibly known except by persons who walk by the same road. These live in continual care not to offend God; and if at times they fall into any mortal sin through weakness, overcome by temptation, they turn immediately to God, confess their offence, and have no need of many preparations for the confession, for as David says, speaking of himself, their sin is ever before their eyes.

These very persons have some negligences and defects which are signs that their minds stand not entirely mortified. Indeed their defects and negligences are often made to be the cause of their improvement, because they repent and humble themselves, and thus learn to mistrust themselves and to confide in God. For this reason St. Paul says that all things work together for good to them that love God, and hence he says in another place that there is nothing to bring condemnation to them who having entered upon this road, stand united to Christ Jesus by faith and love.

The first persons are the wicked; the second, the blind; the third, the unsteady; the fourth, the prudent; the fifth, the holy. In this manner you can see that if few persons walk by the Christian way, it is more through their impiety, blindness, and fickleness than through its difficulty; and knowing this, you should have no fear of finding it. And since you, Signora, as I think, are one of the fourth sort of persons, set yourself to listen to the voice of Christ, for he will put you forward by the true way; and consider it certain that directly you shall have entered upon it you will feel no more confusion, inquietude, travail, or perplexity; in short, you will not feel any of those conflicts of mind, but on the contrary you will experience great peace, cheerfulness, satisfaction, and supreme content.

GIULIA: All that you have said satisfies me. And since I absolutely wish to enter upon this way, it remains for you to lead me by the hand, instructing me in those footsteps by which I believe you have walked.

VALDÉS: I know not what more you wish to learn from me of that which the Preacher tells you every day.

GIULIA: I am weak, and cannot make such resistance to my inclination as the Preacher speaks of.

VALDÉS: I already, in good part, understand you, Signora. What need have you to go by the branches? I know well what you would wish.

GIULIA: What rudeness! Since you know it, why do you not mention it?

VALDÉS: Because I wait that you should ask it with your own lips.

GIULIA: Do me this favour then, since you know it, to mention it; and if you divine it, I will tell you the truth without reserve.

VALDÉS: I am content with this. You, Signora, wish to be freed from the troublesome things that come and go through your imagination, and being convinced that this is the true way to free you from them, you wish me to show you some royal and ladylike road by which you may be able to get to God without turning away from the world, and by which you can attain to interior humility without showing it outwardly; possess the virtue of patience without the occurrence to you of what would exercise it; despise the world, but in a manner that the world may not condemn you; clothe your soul with Christian virtues without despoiling the body of its accustomed ornaments; nourish your soul with spiritual viands without depriving the body of its usual banquets; you wish to appear good in the sight of God without appearing ill in the eyes of the world; and in short by this path you wish to be able to lead your religious life, but in a mode that no person of the world, even with the great familiarity and intercourse he might have with you, could discover in your life more than he at present knows. Have I divined your sentiments?

GIULIA: Very nearly; or at least if you have not divined them you can say that you have gone to the turn of the mark.

VALDÉS: This is sufficient for me to warrant my saying, that according to my perception, you are more ready to free yourself from the conflict, than you feel to assent to the verdict.

GIULIA: Yet do you not always tell me that a bad compromise is better than a good verdict?

VALDÉS: Yes, I say so, but not in this case, in which the compromise is very dangerous, and terribly hurtful. Know you not that Christ says, that we cannot serve God and the world; either we must serve the world and despise God, or we must love God and despise the world?

And have you not understood what Job says, that the life of man, here in this world, is but a constant warfare? But know that the warfare is between the flesh and the spirit, when the flesh draws us towards the world, and the spirit draws us towards God. And sad for those who do not feel this warfare!

GIULIA: Now then, I well understand and experience both, and I wish that without more laying it upon me, you would decidedly tell me whether your mind is sufficient to put me into a way which leads somewhat to that which you have described, although it be not so loose, for I am not so subjected to my appetites as you must think, according to what you have expressed by your words.

VALDÉS: If I knew, Signora, anything in your manner of life and outward conversation disgraceful or base, or that you had any relic, or any show or appearance of evil, I would freely tell you, that my mind is not sufficient for me to satisfy you in what you desire, because it being necessary in such case that you should depart from all that might be evil, it would be necessary that there should be seen in you a different person from her whom we now see and know. But knowing your way of life and conversation to be so decorous, your manners as regular as can be wished for in such a lady, and seeing that all the reformation necessary to you in order to conquer and obtain the end you desire consists in the affections and appetites of the soul, which corrected and reformed, it would be an easy thing to reform the exterior in what appears to have need of reformation, I am bold to tell you, my mind is equal to set you in the way you desire, without worldly persons perceiving it in you, in such a manner that if you engage yourself to it, with the grace of God, before many days have passed, you will begin to feel the peace of conscience and the other benefits which spiritual persons enjoy.

GIULIA: If you do this I shall remain for ever obliged to you.

VALDÉS: With the grace of God I will do this now; and I only wish that you should remain obliged to God himself, from whom I wish you to acknowledge every good that comes.

GIULIA: I will endeavour to do what you say. Now do that which belongs to you to do.

VALDÉS: I am content. But first tell me whether you have ever crossed any stream by a ford.

GIULIA: Yes, I have, many times.

VALDÉS: And have you considered how that, by looking upon the water, it seemed as though your head swam, so that if you had not assisted yourself, either by closing your eyes, or by fixing them on the opposite shore, you would have fallen into the water in great danger of drowning?

GIULIA: Yes, I have noticed it.

VALDÉS: And have you seen how by keeping always for your object the view of the land that lies on the other side, you have not felt the swimming of the head, and so have suffered no danger of drowning?

GIULIA: I have noticed this too.

VALDÉS: Then if you, Signora, wish to cross the running flood of the things of this world, do in the same manner. Look not upon them with your affections, so that such danger may not happen to you as befalls them who, gazing on the stream, fall into it and are drowned. And endeavour to keep the view of your soul, fixed and nailed with Christ, on the cross. And if at any time, through want of care, you set your eyes upon the things of the world, in such a manner that you feel your heart incline to them, turn back upon yourself, and return to fix your view upon Christ crucified, and in this way your course will go on well. And therefore I wish you, Signora, to take above all things, for your principal purpose, to enamour yourself with Christ, regulating all your works, all your words, all your thoughts by that divine command which says: “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself.”

And I say, hold fast this command as your principal rule, for Christian perfection consists in loving God above all things and your neighbour as yourself.

GIULIA: I marvel at what you say, because I have all my life been told that friars and nuns are in the rule of perfection by the vows that they make, if they observe them.

VALDÉS: Let them say so, Signora, and give credit to me that, whether friars or non-friars, they possess so much of Christian perfection as they have of faith and love of God, and not a grain more.

GIULIA: It would much please me if you could make me comprehend this.

VALDÉS: I will do it very willingly. You must know, Signora, that the human heart is naturally inclined to love; in such way, it must either love God and all things for God, or it must love itself and all things for itself. That which loves itself does all things for itself. I mean to say that it is so far moved to them as its own self-interest invites it, and thus if it love anything beyond itself, it loves it for itself and for its own interest, and if it have any love towards God, it has it for its own interest and in no other respect. Such a one, friar or non-friar, because he has his affection in a state of disorder, having placed it in himself, never knows how, or in what manner, he ought to love created things. Rather when he desires to dispose himself to love God, because he does not conceive how to go out of himself, he never discovers the way, and therefore goes continually wandering in mere appearances, and thus being always confused and variable in his affections, bad or good, he lives much out of the life of Christian perfection; and so much the more will he live further from it as the more he becomes enamoured of himself, although he may be very perfect in outward observances; because God requires the heart.

He who loves God performs everything he does for him. I would say that he is moved to this by the love he bears to God, and this he does with as much warmth and earnestness as the degree of affection moves or incites him. And thus if he love anything beside God, he loves it for the sake of God, and because God wills it so, and he likewise loves himself, because he knows that God wills that he be loved. Such a one, friar or non-friar, because he has his love ordered in God, takes hence the mode and manner how he should love all created things, and is most regulated and ordered in his love, and loves nothing inordinately. And now his good works please and are grateful before God, because he is moved to work by the impulse of love, because as God is love, so no work is grateful to him that is not done by

love. Agreeable to this is what St. Augustine says: “good works follow them who are already justified, and do not go before in him who has to be justified.” I mean to say that works are good when done by a person already justified, and none can be justified unless he stand in love and charity with God and his neighbour. In such manner a person will be more perfect, the more he continues fervent in this love. You can confirm this truth yourself by considering how you estimate what a person does in your affairs when you know that he is not moved to do it by the affection he bears towards you, but by some other design of his own. But since you wish one not born under the obligation to love you, to serve you for love, as all of us are born to love God, think whether God would at least require from us the same that you wish; how much more from those persons who are regenerate and born again in Christ, by the new, spiritual regeneration through faith and baptism; because such of us have a fresh obligation to love God. Speak I of one obligation? rather should I say infinite obligations, since we see that he loved us infinitely, and Christ loves us, and by infinite modes and ways he sought, and still seeks, to bring us to himself and to unite us with himself through grace and love. Reflecting on this, I am sure you will make yourself capable of this truth, that Christian perfection consists in loving God, and that each one will be so much more perfect as he shall so much the more love God, whether he make monastic vows, or whether he make them not, provided only, that he keep the vow that he made in baptism by which we are Christians.

GIULIA: I rest satisfied now with what you have said of perfection, in such a degree that I already know from your argument what I had not known until now. And since you wish me to take for my chief purpose the love of God and of my neighbour in order to become a perfect Christian, and I determine to do so, it will be well, if you please, to mention some rules by which I may know and understand what it is I ought to do, and how I must conduct myself not to swerve from the love of God and of my neighbour; because I wish absolutely to give myself up to be enamoured with God, so much so as may deprive myself of your favour, and the favour of a hundred others like you.

VALDÉS: Be deprived of favour! No! Learn rather, Signora, that in this divine love there is no jealousy, because it is communicable from itself. And it is thus, that so much the more you love God, so much more you will rejoice that God loves others of us, and that God should be loved by others of us. But leaving this, until you learn it in time by experience, I say, Signora, that there are no better rules for this that you ask, than those God has given to us in his most perfect law, which we understand not like the Jews, but as Christians, in the form and manner in which Christ declared it. It teaches us what we ought to do in order not to swerve from the love of God and of our neighbour. GIULIA: If it be not troublesome to you, since you say that the rules of the law of God are right for what I desire, it will be well that you should briefly describe the way in which you understand them.

VALDÉS: I will do so very willingly, because I know this is the entrance to lead and conduct you in the way I have pointed out. But as I desire that my words should not generate scruples in your conscience, I wish to apprise you first of this, that I will explain to you the law of God, not in a manner that you are obliged to observe it under pain of mortal sin, but in the way that all those persons should understand it who desire to become so much masters of their own affections and appetites as that they may in all things be obedient to the Spirit. For thus, as he goes in peril of poison who carries a viper or scorpion in his bosom, so he goes in danger of mortal sin who bears about his affections and appetites active and entire.

GIULIA: You have found out the scruples. Take no further care, but begin to tell me, for I shall remain so attentive that perhaps I shall not lose a single word. VALDÉS: You ought to do so. You will take for the first rule to make God in such a manner absolute lord of your heart that you do not hope or confide in any created thing, nor love or fear, except God alone. In a manner that then you may be able to count that you keep your heart ordered conformably to this rule, when, despoiled of all mere human affections, you shall feel within you that neither prosperity will elevate you, nor adversity depress you, honours will not make you proud, nor injuries abase you, and with all this you shall continue to believe in Christ, hope in Christ, love Christ, and live safely and contentedly with Christ, embracing the cross of Christ, and taking it as sweet to suffer with Christ, having in abhorrence the glory of the world, and holding the pleasures of the world as bitter.

And since it is not enough that the heart be kept in this manner if the lips do not conform to it, it is proper that you take as a rein to them the second rule, and this will be that you continually praise, magnify, invoke and bless the name of God, slighting and holding in little consideration your own name and glory, in such manner that all the honour and glory may be attributed to the omnipotent God, to whom your words go always directed. And because the divine Majesty is much offended by our oaths,

we should ever hold in remembrance those words of Christ, where, after he has reminded us that we should by no means swear at all, he says: “let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay;” meaning to say, that when we would affirm a thing, we should assert it with a simple Yes; and when we would deny a thing, we should deny it by the like simple No. Because when more than this is said, it is a sign that the heart is not well ordered.

Again, since God is not satisfied without being absolute lord of our hearts and of our lips, but wishes to govern our actions, take for the third rule to make an offering to God of your whole will, referring it in all and for all to his divine Majesty, in such mode that he may regulate it and govern it without your putting into your concerns anything of your own. And this remitting of yourself to the divine will, you should know, Signora, is the celebrating of the Christian sabbath, for by bodily rest is understood the spiritual rest, and by servile labours are understood the works of sin. St. Paul entreats us to make this offering, saying: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,” in a manner that you entirely offer to him all your will, all your understanding, all your memory. And I entreat you also, that you do not conform your conduct to the conduct of persons of the world, and that you be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may know and understand the will of God. See here, Signora, three rules according to the three commandments of the law of God, which are so spiritual that while you observe them, you may be certain that you truly love God in the manner he desires to be loved. And consider that you will be so much nearer, or farther from this love, as you feel your affections and appetites remain nearer, or farther from conformity with these three rules, which I entreat you to print on your memory. And though it will indeed be, that while you live in conformity with these rules, living with love to God you will live in love to your neighbour, it may therefore seem in a manner superfluous to give you any rule for this, yet considering that God, to assist our weakness, has also given us rules by which we may live in love towards our neighbour, I am willing to repeat them. And so you will take those already given, as well as these now mentioned, as rules of God and not mine.

The first rule will be, such being the will of God, that with inward obedience you obey and be submissive to your parents, to your seniors, to your superiors in whatever pre-eminence or authority they may be, not opposing them, nor murmuring at them. And observe, Signora, that you do not think to satisfy yourself with exterior observance, because God is not satisfied that his commands be kept only in appearance, but he chiefly desires the heart. And because the worldly things most corrupting to Christian charity are strifes, hatred, and enmities, from which proceed homicides, I wish you to take for the second rule, that you make your mind patient, quiet, pacific, humane, compassionate, all feelings of hatred, anger, and retaliation being eradicated and banished. Doing this, you will live conformably with that doctrine of Jesus Christ which in short says, that we should not be angry against our neighbour, nor scorn him by outward signs, nor revile him with injurious words. And consider, that you cannot do this, unless you have first composed your mind in the manner I have told you. And that you may conceive the great importance of this, consider what St. John says: “whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.” In this way, although you are not homicidal, it is enough if there move in you the feelings of wrath, retaliation, rancour, and ill-will. Begin, then, Signora, henceforward to make this self-denial, for the sooner you begin it the sooner you will come out of it, and pass on to the third rule. This will

be, that you endeavour, as much as possible, to hold all your outward senses subjected, in such manner, that nothing rude or disreputable may ever pass through them to the mind. For God desires that your actions, your words, and your thoughts may be chaste and modest. And in order to be able to fulfil this, it is proper that you keep your feelings so subdued as I have said. It is proper also that you be temperate in eating, in drinking, and sleeping, in intercourse with worldly persons, and in short in all those things that can generate in your mind any unlawful desire. Know surely that as well to preserve your mind pure and spotless, as also not to offend Christian charity, it is necessary that all the sensual appetites, from which spring many hindrances to the love of our neighbour, should die out. Therefore Christ, closing the entrance of such thoughts to us, says:” whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”“ So that he who wishes not to sin desires the affections and appetites towards sinful things within him to die out.

Another rule is, because this mine and thine are mortal enemies of Christian charity, God provides us a healthy, wise, and necessary doctrine, which you may take for the fourth rule. This is, that you subdue in your heart all desire and appetite for those things which people of the world call good, in such degree, that not putting any happiness in them, you do not even wish for what you have not; and that you possess those things you have, not as owner, but as a trustee, so that if you were wronged you would not be so disturbed as that you should come to feel ill-will towards the person, or those persons, who took them from you. Then, having your mind so well ordered, you will willingly do what Christ says, whether as to leaving the cloak to him who would bring you into litigation for the gown (*gonnella*), or as to giving up your property to them who demand it. This is Christian liberality, and this is the true poverty so much praised and commended in the holy Scriptures. And I certainly believe that David for this calls them poor who so serve and obey God. And most surely hold that this is the true way to root out and expel cursed avarice, which is so intimate an evil that they are little aware of it who are most addicted to it. But ask St. Paul the inconveniences that follow from it, and he will tell you that covetousness is idolatry.

Thus as God wishes us not to offend divine love by the lips, he lays down the second rule which I have mentioned, speaking of the care you ought to take for the love of God, so also for the care of the love of our neighbour, he lays down a rule over the tongue, and this will be the fifth rule. This is, that you keep the tongue well ruled and governed, and only use it for the glory of God, and for the religious or physical good of your neighbour and your own, taking away and removing from you every occasion that may lead or induce you to let anything escape from your lips that offends, or may offend, the most lowly or abject individual of all who are found in the world. And that you may see how important this is, I wish you to know that St. James says: “if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.”

And notice, Signora, that I do not tell you that, in order to keep the commandment of love towards his neighbour perfectly, a person must do all these things precisely, for I do not say so; but that a person, who wishes to be perfect, must keep all his affections so obedient and well-regulated that when it may be needful for the honour of God to do so, he will not find in himself a repugnance to them.

In conclusion, I may say that you ought to compose your mind in conformity with these five rules which you have heard, if you wish to attain to the love of your neighbour perfectly, and maintain yourself in it, which Christ comprises in a single rule, saying: “Do unto others what you wish others should do unto you.” And it is so, that there is no person in the world who is not pleased by being obeyed by them who ought to obey him; nor is there an individual who is not pleased to preserve his life, or not to have ill-will or hatred from another; nor any who are not pleased that people entertain no ill thought of their wife, children, sisters or relatives, especially as to disreputable deeds; nor is there any one who is not pleased to be assisted and succoured in his necessities and who, if he have property, does not endeavour not to be wronged, or encroached upon; and finally, there is no one who is not pleased when everybody speaks well of him, and who is not grieved by the contrary. So that doing to our neighbour all that would please us that he should do towards ourselves, we should accomplish the law of God, since we keep ourselves in accordance with them in love and charity. And on this, as Christ says, hang all the law and the prophets. To this you can resolve all that is written in the sacred Scriptures. GIULIA: You have kept me so much surprised after you began to enter into these rules, considering what perfection is necessary in order to live in conformity with them, that I have been unwilling to reply to anything that you have said. But now that you have finished, I wish you to tell me whether all those persons are condemned who do not live with the purity, sincerity, and circumspection that you have described in these rules.

VALDÉS: St. John, in one of his epistles, says: “My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And, if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins.”

This same I say to you, Signora, that I set before you this perfection, in order that labouring and attaining to live conformably to it, you may never sin. But should you commit sin, I wish you to remember that Jesus Christ is your advocate before his Eternal Father, who satisfied for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. So you may not think that the persons will therefore be condemned, who have not so mortified their appetites as I say that I wish you to hold yours, according to these rules that I have shown you. Yet I wish you to know, that those persons who, not arriving at this perfection, but having opened their eyes, and known their evil way and discovered the way which Christ teaches, according to what I have here told you, if they would be saved, endeavour and strive to walk in this path, truly, as far as human weakness allows, mortifying the Old man, and renewing the New, whilst they do not arrive at perfection, they confess in the sorrow of their soul that they are not what God would wish them to be. Having this lively conviction, they use most affectingly the expression of the Lord’s prayer: “forgive us our debts,” and those of David: “Create in me a clean heart, O God! and blot out my transgressions; therefore I acknowledge my iniquity, and my sin is ever before me.” If all who walk by the Christian way would always thus perfectly live as we have said, St. John would not have said: that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; and a just man falleth seven times and riseth up again. And know, Signora, that he is a just man because he goes by the way of justification (*giustitia*), which is that which Christ taught us. He who falls through weakness, and turns to arise again through the faith and trust that he has in Jesus Christ, will be forgiven: and these are the infirmities which St. Paul means, when, speaking of Christ, he says: that we have a high priest who can have compassion on

our infirmities, having been himself clothed with the garment of humanity. The whole affair consists in leaving at once the way of the world, and entering upon the way of God, and after having entered upon it, falling and rising, stumbling and not falling, everything goes well for us. Hence fear not the purity of this Christian perfection. And so I entreat you rather that you may enamour yourself of it, for I warrant you, that you would never have understood it, if God had not first internally taught it to you. And because he gives you to understand it, proper it is that you should dispose yourself to experience it.

GIULIA: I would wish this; that you would let me comprehend, for what purpose God sets before us a rule so painful to observe, that we have always to confess ourselves his debtors; for it has in appearance an odour, I know not how, of tyranny.

VALDÉS: Rather know, Signora, that God has shown the love he bears towards us as well in this as in all the rest he has done for us; for so arrogant is the human mind, that unless it were acknowledged debtor to fulfil the whole law, it would not consider itself as a sinner; and unless it considered itself a sinner, it would not fear the judgment of God; and unless it feared this, it would not humble itself; and unless it were humbled it would not gain the grace of God; and without his grace it could not become justified before Him, and if not justified, then not saved. Now think whether this singular blessing of God may not be as good as all the others! And know, Signora, that so much as a person in this present life will be more perfect, and will stand more united to God in love and charity, so much the more will he humble himself before God, as more knowing his imperfection and the necessity he has that God would continually pardon him his faults, and purify and accept his actions. Therefore David calls, not those persons who never sinned, blessed, for all have sinned; but he calls them blessed to whom God pardons the sins they commit.

Do you rest satisfied with this explanation?

GIULIA: Yes, I rest satisfied, you can now proceed further.

VALDÉS: I wish you now to consider that in this present life we sin in three ways, through evil design, through ignorance, and through weakness. They sin by evil design who neither know the way of God, nor wish to know it. According to St. Paul, the sin of these is punished by blindness and obstinacy in sin. God pronounces a similar sentence by Jeremiah. These with difficulty raise themselves, as Jeremiah says. Through ignorance they sin, who, not caring to discover the way of the Lord, depart from Him. He is ready to pardon these, according to St. Paul, for so he says, that because he sinned through ignorance in persecuting the Christians, God had mercy on him. They sin through weakness, who having entered upon the way of God, wish in no manner to offend his divine Majesty, but at times fall, overcome by temptation. David was one of these, and one of such was Peter, when he denied Christ. The sin of such as these God pardons more readily than any others, because as soon as they know it, they speedily humble themselves and thus quickly regain the grace of God. It even frequently happens that, humbled by the sin, they walk more resolutely on the Christian way. Thus David shows it occurred so with him, saying: "Good for me was it that thou humbledest me, that so I might learn thy forgiveness." I have wished to tell you this because you raise in your conscience all sorts of scruples, which are commonly born of self-love, and slight knowledge of God, being certain that walking by this Christian way you

will not sin, except through weakness. God will quickly forgive you for this in which you so offend, by the humility with which you will ask his pardon, and through the faith and trust that you will maintain in Jesus Christ.

GIULIA: You have entirely given me life by this, for you had kept me greatly terrified.

VALDÉS: If you wish to banish all fear from your soul, love Christ, Signora, for no fear can ever dwell in the soul which sets its view with a lively and efficacious sentiment on Christ crucified, considering with entire faith that Christ made atonement and payment for it. Now I say, Signora, in conclusion, that these rules will lead you to the love of God and of your neighbour, and will preserve you in both. And then you will know by experience the fruits of charity, according as St. Paul describes them, saying: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

You will also know, that which St. John says: that perfect love casteth out all fear from the conscience. For they who truly love have no fear.

GIULIA: I am already satisfied with what refers to charity. May it please God to make me feel and relish it in my soul as well as you have made it penetrate my understanding. But because at times I have heard you say that charity is the fruit of faith, I wish you to tell me something relating to faith.

VALDÉS: It is true, as you say, that I have told you that charity is the fruit of faith. And do you know why I said so? Because I am sure that where lively faith is, there is charity. And know, Signora, that, as fire cannot fail to warm, so a lively faith cannot fail to work deeds of charity, and you must imagine that faith is like a tree, and charity is the fruit of the tree; as the tree when it is dried up yields no fruit, so faith wanting in the heart of a person, there is no charity. And notice, Signora, that when I speak of faith, I do not understand by faith a mere historical belief of the history of Christ, for this can well exist without charity, and, therefore, St. James calls the faith bad Christians have, a dead faith, such as the evil spirits of hell have.

But understand that when I say faith I mean to speak of that faith which is alive in the soul, acquired not by industry, nor human contrivance, but by means of the grace of God communicated with supernatural Light. This faith gives credit to all the words of God, as well to his threatenings as to his promises, so that when it hears said what Christ said: that he who will believe and is baptized shall be saved, and that he who will not believe shall be condemned; giving such credit to these words as holding them for a certainty, it has not the least doubt of salvation.

GIULIA: In this we so well agree, both you and I; because in believing, no one shall be before me.

VALDÉS: Do not presume, Signora, that you believe, for very spiritual must he be who would have a faith so lively as to be fit to be justified by it. Rather know that you are weak in the faith, and call upon Christ with the Apostles: "Lord, increase my faith!" and say with the lunatic's father: "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!" and in this manner you will gain more than by persuading yourself that you believe. It is a great thing, Signora, to obtain from our souls that they entirely confide in God. You will see it by this: that if you are asked whether you believe the articles of the faith, one by one, you will answer yes; but if inadvertently, on your coming to confession, they should ask you whether you believe that God has pardoned all your sins, you will say, you think so, but that you are not certain. Now know that this uncertainty arises from want of faith, because if you entirely relied upon the words of Christ, who says to the priests that whatsoever they shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever they shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and if you shall truly believe that which you confess in the Creed when you say that you believe the remission of sins, you will not hesitate to say with a full voice, feeling grief in your soul for the offence done to God, and having confessed it, that you hold it certain that God has pardoned all your sins. Do you wish to see clearly and manifestly how you do not entirely confide in God? Tell me with what thing you would rest most without care and be most at ease with, and in what you would most confide to assure yourself that you have this year wherewith to live upon; whether with a good sum of money that you have in a bank, or in that which Christ promises to them who seek the kingdom of God, when he says to them: "Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? Since God takes thought for you; seek first the kingdom of God, and God himself will provide for you all these things?"

GIULIA: There is no doubt but that I should have most confidence in the money in the bank. But if I knew myself so perfect as to merit that God should take thought of me, perhaps I should then trust more in the words of Christ. VALDÉS: Rather it is the contrary. The more perfect you might be, so much the want of merit would you find in yourself. And it is thus, that he who stands nearest to the grace of God, stands farthest from thinking that he merits it. And for this reason St. Paul said that by the grace of God he was what he was; not attributing anything to his own merit.

So that, Signora, if you have little confidence in the words of Christ, it is not because of what you say, but through not giving credence to them; and this is the greatest injury you can do towards God.

GIULIA: You are too sharp with me. You will soon make me to believe that I have not faith.

VALDÉS: I do not wish you to believe that you have it not, but I wish you to think that what you have is a dead faith; and I wish you to pray very urgently to God, that he would quicken it and make you strong in that faith, for according to St. Paul: without faith no one can please God; and if you are willing to notice this, you will find that in nothing can your friend offend you so much as by not giving credence to your word; and on the contrary, nothing can do you greater service, or give you more pleasure, than by his giving entire faith to whatever you shall say to him.

GIULIA: In this you so rightly speak the truth, that it extremely grieves me when I am not believed, and I am greatly pleased when others give me credence. VALDÉS: Since you know this of yourself, you ought at least to think the same of God. And thinking so, you should labour to confine and subject your intellect to the obedience of faith; thus you would learn to confide in God and to give entire faith

to his words, as much so when he threatens, as when he promises. Not to dwell much upon this, I may say, that if we put all our confidence entirely in Christ, giving entire faith to all his promises, we shall not depend upon, nor be so bound to created things, in which we put more confidence than we do in Christ, since we are carnal and we judge of things only so far as the outward sense represents them to us, and so we make no count of the interior. I could well tell marvellous things if I wished to begin to praise faith to you, but this is enough to know, that you will be so far a Christian as you shall know that you confide in Christ; it being thus: that to be a Christian person, is to be justified; and no one can be justified except by faith, because the just live by faith.

GIULIA: Never have I been able to comprehend conclusively what difference there is between faith and hope; and it would gratify me to know from you, in what manner you make them to differ.

VALDÉS: I do not wonder that you do not understand this, because the same thing occurs to many learned persons. Know then that faith is exercised in the things of the present life, hope in those of the life eternal. This you should understand in this way. You wish to go from the Mole to the Isle of Capri, but you know not how. I come to you, and say, “trust yourself to me, Signora; for I will lead you on foot by the hand without your being drowned in the passage, and when crossed over I will place you in that spot of the island where you desire to be.” You, although it appears to you a thing beyond all reason, give credence to my words, and confiding in them, you take my hand and walk through the water. See here, faith carries you, and you are at the same time borne up by the expectation of enjoying the satisfaction you have said you should feel when you should find yourself upon the island. Do you now comprehend the difference?

GIULIA: Yes, very well.

VALDÉS: Now, turning to our subject, I wish, Signora, that you set before the view of your soul the idea of Christian perfection, according to what we have discoursed, and that you set yourself to be enamoured of it, and when enamoured of it, you will not satisfy yourself until you have reached very near to it; and consider that you will then be near it when you shall know in truth that your heart is not inclined to love anything out of God, nor your tongue taste sweetness in naming any other name than that of God, and this only when naming it for his glory. And when you shall feel that you are not inclined to perform anything that may not be conformable to the will of God; and when you shall find your mind most obedient and submissive to your superiors, and far removed from all ire and all revenge and rancour, filled with peace and humility; and as far removed from all sensual vice that you will not find in it a thought that is not chaste; and so poor in spirit, that you would incline your desire to nothing more than to preserve what it has; and so fervent in love towards your neighbour that you not only never speak to his prejudice, but if you hear others speak so, you excuse and exculpate him as much as possible: by all this I wish to say, that when you shall feel yourself as dead to the outward affections and appetites as to the interior, that neither the estimation of the world exalts you nor its dishonour abases you, that neither anger overrules you nor envy molests, nor less the flesh disturbs you; then well and truly may you believe that you are indeed near to Christian perfection. I say not that you should imagine you are not in a good state, when you are not so much advanced in Christian perfection as I have said; but I say that until you feel and know this perfection within, such as I have

depicted it, you should not fail to entreat God continually that he would increase it in you, although you should come to perform miracles; and on the other side, until you should feel yourself very strong and firm in this Christian perfection, I would not wish that you should think you had gained anything. This is the perfection to which Christ invites us when he says: “be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

St. Paul invites us to the same, saying to us: “be ye therefore followers of God as dear children:” and in another place saying: “follow me as I have followed Christ.” To the same I invite you, and to the same I desire you to ask me to come by words and by works.

GIULIA: O my God, what would I pay to see a Christian so perfect as the one you have here pictured! for me, I would strip myself of all that I have.

VALDÉS: And would it not be still better to see yourself as perfect a Christian as I have here described?

GIULIA: Yes, but this is impossible!

VALDÉS: How impossible? Do you not know what Christ says: that all things are possible to him who attains, as it were naturally, to put his whole confidence in God?

GIULIA: I have indeed heard say so, but I am weak.

VALDÉS: And yet so much the more you are weak so much greater will be the grace of God which will make you strong; if then you confess in sincerity that you are weak, and trust in Christ, he will strengthen you. Do you not know what the Gospel says, that the things that are impossible with men are possible with God?

GIULIA: I desire it so much that I dare not expect it.

VALDÉS: Now if you wish it, ask it of God, and entreating him for it, as St. James says, confidently, he will give it you, and I promise you that it will not be wanting to you. A grand thing this, that persons wish to be believed in their promises, being naturally fickle, and, as David calls them, liars, and that they are not willing to give credence, nor trust themselves to the promises of God! I truly believe that this may be the greatest injury that a person can do to the divine Majesty, so also to believe and trust in his promises is the most grateful sacrifice that can be made to him.

GIULIA: I do not care to detain you longer upon this point, unless you begin to guide me in this way of Christian perfection; since you already keep me so enamoured of it, that it seems as though I could not live content until I unite with it, if not entirely, at least in such a degree as may be needful to me, that my concerns may become accepted in the sight of God. But it is understood that you always have regard to lead me so privately that no person be sensible of me, because, if I can be excused, I wish not to give occasion for talk among the people.

VALDÉS: I will do what you say; but notice, Signora, that again I wish you to promise me to govern yourself by what I shall say to you, because I shall not be willing to have lost my time, and that you should remain the same individual as before.

GIULIA: Trust me; and I promise you that, with the grace of God, before many days you will see the effect of your words upon me.

VALDÉS: With this confidence I shall recover heart to disclose to you what I know and have been able to understand of this way of Christian perfection. And before I begin to show you the stages by which you must walk, I wish you to know this: that St. Paul, in many places of his epistles, divides man into two parts, one he calls the flesh, and the other the spirit; one the Old man, the other the New man. And know that by the Old man he means man unquickened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and by the New man he means man already made alive by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Old man he calls the flesh; and he calls it the body subject to sin. Whence it appears that under the title of flesh he means the whole man, soul and body, without the Holy Spirit, and nature without grace. The same is proved by what he says in another part, that the flesh strives against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, in which conflict, if the soul yields itself to be overcome by the flesh, and with it mingling, it becomes altogether carnal; and if it yield itself to be persuaded by the spirit, conjoining with the spirit, it becomes wholly spiritual. St. Paul, therefore, almost always divides man into two parts, I say almost always, because in one or two places he appears to divide him into three, that is, into spirit, soul, and body. You have already understood what is the Old man, flesh and body subject to sin; and what is the New man, soul and spirit; therefore mind well which of these lives in you, because thus the wound better known, you may be able to apply the medicine. Know also, according to St. Paul, the appetites and affections of the flesh are death, and are enemies to God, because they are neither willing, nor do indeed become subject to the law of God.

Know further, that the outward fruits of the flesh are homicides, wrongs, fleshly lusts; and the internal are ambition, avarice, envy, wrath, revenge. Know, too, that according to the same St. Paul, the effects of the spirit are life and peace; he would say, that by means of the spirit the soul lives, and the conscience remains peaceful and at rest. Know yet more that the fruits of the spirit are charity, cheerfulness, sincerity, peace, benignity, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. So that one and the same person is, according to nature, the Old man; and according to grace, the New man. The Old man does not join to the things that are from the Spirit of God, rather, blinded by his human reason, he considers them as vain and uncertain. The New man judges all things, and cannot be judged of any. From all this that is said, you can gather, Signora, that your soul stands in one of these three states; either it has mingled with the flesh and become carnal, or it is united with the Spirit and become spiritual; or it is now in the battle, the flesh wishing it for itself, and the Spirit inviting it to itself. And it is proper that you make this examination, because if your soul is found with the flesh, you should commend yourself to God, and by these rules give favour to the Spirit, for thus it begins to combat and come forth with the victory; and if you find it joined with the Spirit, endeavour with constant prayer to preserve it so; and if you find it undetermined, use force to yourself, that it may very, very soon be determined to be embraced and united with the Spirit, so that you may thus become wholly spiritual, and recover that image and likeness of God, to which it was created. And reflect, Signora, that it is impossible that you are not in one of these three states, for thinking on this I am sure that you will very closely examine what is that state in which you are.

GIULIA: I have already well examined it, and I know it much more clearly by what you have said. Make account that I am in the worst state, and conform your language to this presumption.

VALDÉS: Since so it is, commending you with heartfelt affection to God, for his help in this work, with all your mind be very attentive.

GIULIA: Leave that to my care.

VALDÉS: The first step you have to take in this way is in truth to know, that until this time you have been going out of the way, although you thought you were going by the right way. And because I am sure that you have amply known this from the Preacher's sermons, I do not care to detain myself in explaining it to you.

GIULIA: You do right. Because although the Preacher may not have shown it to me, yet I have well understood it from what you have often said.

VALDÉS: This is well, and since you know that you are out of the way, the second step will be to apply your will to resolve to walk by this way, that the Preacher has discovered to you, and which I think more particularly to show to you. And I likewise think certainly that you are already taking this step, for the Preacher's sermons must have set and disposed your soul in a manner that you know what it is that concerns you, and indeed, you desire already to walk by the direct way.

GIULIA: So much so, I promise you, that I desire it more than you think.

VALDÉS: Consider this desire, Signora, as the gift of God. Now because it is not enough to have a thing in the will, unless we design to put it in practice, the third step is that you not only resolve to leave the way by which it appeared to you that you were walking to Christ, but now to take this, by which without any failure you will find Christ. And, consider, that when you have made these three steps, they will have wrought in you the effect of these words with which first John the Baptist, and afterwards Christ, began their preaching, saying: *Poenitentiam agite, appropinquavit enim regnum coelorum*; that is, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand;" as though they had said: "Turn within you, ye who go wandering, turn to the good way, be aware that the kingdom of heaven is nigh."

GIULIA: As soon as I knew that the course I held was not good, I desired to find the right way, and proposed within myself to walk by that, if God would give me grace to find it.

VALDÉS: Since you cannot walk by this way without the favour and grace of God, and these God gives not, except to them who leave sin, and who leave being employed in things that may lead to sin, and in curious arts, the fourth step is that you prepare the soul to celebrate the Christian Sabbath. I mean to say that you cease from sin; and it does not satisfy me that you may have no outward sin, because I wish that you begin to withdraw from those within, since you know that they are those that deprive you of the grace of God. And I wish you to leave off inquiring into things curious or vain, and that you strictly separate from you all that company and conversation which tends to remove from God, and to draw away your mind, and from which nothing useful can follow for the end that you undertake, that of living unto Christ and not to the world. I greatly desire that God would move your mind with that large impulse of spirit which he put into those of Ephesus, who hearing the preaching of Paul were converted to Christ, and brought the books in which they learned and exercised their curious arts, and burned them in the presence of all who were there assembled. But if you do not find in yourself this

earnestness of spirit, I shall be satisfied, for the present, if you lay aside all such curious books in a corner, for I let you know that they are a very great hindrance to one beginning to walk in this way. And you see already that you can put away all these impediments without exciting outward notice.

GIULIA: I see clearly that it is useful for me to do so, but I do not see how it can be done without evident appearance.

VALDÉS: How not? Is not your mind capable to direct yourself so discreetly that leaving these things you do not show that you leave them?

GIULIA: Go on, and in this thing I will act as you advise me, which I can do because I wish in this to be governed more by your discretion than by my own.

VALDÉS: This is sufficient for me. Now since it is not enough to leave the evil unless you apply yourself to the good, it is necessary that from this day forward you take some portion of the time you lost in these curious things, to enter deeply into a knowledge of the world.

And this will be the fifth step. You will know the world to be false, for there is nothing in it that has not more show than substance; a deceiver, because it never fulfils what it promises, for all its foundation is laid upon things fallen and passing away; an enemy of God, because it is always trying to divert us from the way of truth, and lead us into that of falsehood and lying; inconstant, never persevering in the same opinion. In short, recall to your memory that beautiful tragedy that you heard the Preacher relate, by which he showed that people in this world are no other than actors of a tragedy, it being that our existence has no more certainty than theirs, nor is one dissimilar from the other, except that the actors' continues some hours, and ours some years. You will go on in this knowledge every day, for so much as the more you know the world in this way, so much the more will you abhor it.

And this abhorrence will be the sixth step. I wish to say, that your motive for knowing the world may not be to settle you there, but, by passing through it, to abhor the world. This will help you to lose the relish of worldly things. Such are honours, dignities, stations, lordships and riches, all which things by this consideration you will cease to value, and hold them as little, desirous to win Christ and live with Christ from the example of St. Paul, who counted all these things as dung and dross, having fixed his whole purpose to win Christ. And thus St. Paul himself enjoins us: "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Then having knowledge of the world, you must abhor it. Or, to speak more correctly, when you have entered a little into a knowledge of the world and of its abominations, you will take a little more time to enter into a knowledge of yourself, and this will be the seventh step.

O Signora! of what consequence it is that a person should know how to have acquaintance with himself. I am sure that if we truly knew it, we should apply much more study and diligence to this than to any other object whatever.

GIULIA: In what does this importance consist?

VALDÉS: In this, that if you do not know yourself, you can never cease to love yourself inordinately. And while you have this selflove you cannot love God. And whilst you do not love him you cannot

do, say, or think anything that may be to his honour; and not being to his honour, consider whether it would be to the service of your soul.

GIULIA: So might I know others as fully as I know myself.

VALDÉS: And still in this, Signora, consists the deception; that not knowing yourself, you think you do. I give you to know that he must be a very spiritual person who entirely knows himself.

GIULIA: I believe it may be so. And since this knowledge is of so much importance, instruct me what I must do to know myself.

VALDÉS: The first thing you ought to do is to persuade yourself that you do not know yourself. The second is, to know indeed the necessity you have to know yourself. The third is, to pray God that he would open the eyes of your understanding so that you could know yourself. The fourth, to occupy yourself a little every day in examining your affections and appetites which incline you to disobey God. This inclination you must consider comes to you through original sin, and, therefore, you should hold it as the more pernicious, because it is natural to you, and so this causes you to love yourself without restraint, and to desire everything for yourself. Hence you will learn to trust not at all in yourself; so will you live always above yourself. After this, you may run a little over your past life, and you will find many defects, which will lead you to know what you are. You will discover, as David discovered, much inward iniquity and much rebellion against God. With him you will learn that every man is false and a liar; that is to say, that he has an ill opinion of the things of God. You will know with Jeremiah that the heart of man is perverse, and you will know what God says: that the imagination of the thoughts of the human heart are evil continually, and you will discover in yourself much ingratitude that you have used against God. You will know this every time you examine, on one side, the blessings you have received from his hand, as well as the general ones that all people in the world partake of, also the particular favours you enjoy, especially the benefit of the suffering of Christ and of your having been drawn to the knowledge of it, so that you possess and rejoice in it; and on the other side, when you examine your actions, in all of which you have shown great ingratitude, in evil deeds, by having offended God who gave you the being you have, and who redeemed you by his most precious blood; and in those acts that appear to you good, because you will understand how you did them, not through your love to God, but the love of yourself, since you have been living, not in the love of God, but in the love of yourself. This being the vice of ingratitude, it is so much the more abominable and vile in you, as that you have received probably more of the gifts of God in person and in mind than any other individual now living. Think, then, whether you have reason to stand ill with yourself and to suspect every evil, and thus you will live always carefully watchful over yourself.

It is proper that you enter every day into the knowledge of this deficiency and ingratitude, not to remain there, but to pass forward to the eighth step. This will be self-abhorrence. To this you will readily come, because as much better you know yourself, so much the more will you abhor and suspect yourself of all evil; and although you will not entirely abhor yourself, you will at least lose the love you bear towards yourself. For this reason as much more and better a thing is known that is evil in itself, much more it is to be hated. I do not say that you should show your self-abhorrence by misusing your person, but by despoiling your heart of its self-love, which is the greatest hindrance we have to grace, it being the case that we have no enemy so deadly as this; for it is that which in every possible way and manner labours to separate us from God; rather it keeps us in so blind a state and so carried away by it, that we scarcely remember God, and hence the prophet Micah says: “a man’s enemies are those of his own house.”

Therefore, Signora, if you wish to walk lightly along this Christian path, entering frequently into a knowledge of your own misery and weakness, labour to banish this mortal enemy, self-love, from your breast. And know for a certainty that, when this is driven out, the Holy Spirit may quickly, quickly come and dwell in you.

And as you go on stripping your heart of self-love you will go forward clothing it with the love of God, it is then proper that you advance very soon to the ninth step. This is, that as you take a small portion of the day to enter into a knowledge of yourself, in order to come by this to disenamour yourself of yourself, so, without dwelling long upon this, you take another small portion of time to enter into acquaintance with God, in order thus to enamour yourself with him. This you will readily come to, seeing that the more anything good in itself is known, so much the more it is loved. And that you should the more willingly enter into this knowledge, know what Christ says: “and this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent;” and that the wise man says, that the knowledge of God is perfect justification; and that to know justification, and the properties (virtù) of God is the root and foundation of immortality.

GIULIA: You make account that as I have not known how to know myself, so I have less known how to understand God. Teach me how I can know him.

VALDÉS: There are three ways by which persons have arrived and do come to a knowledge of God. One is by the light of nature. This light the Gentile philosophers had, and this those people have at the present day to whom Christ is not known. St. Paul spoke of this knowledge when he said, that by the visible things of creation people come to a knowledge of the invisible things of God. And it is thus: that reflecting on this mundane frame of things in which they behold so much that is excellent, they go on investigating and imagining what they do not see, and by the one and the other they arrive at the knowledge that God who made these things is omnipotent. And going on farther, to the consideration of the admirable providence with which he governs and regulates all things, in such a manner that one does not interfere with another, rather one assists and serves the others, they arrive at the knowledge that God is supremely wise, and is indeed wisdom itself. Again, besides this, passing on to the consideration of the equality with which, without distinction, all these blessings, earthly and celestial, are distributed to the people of the world, they know that God is supreme goodness. In this way people of the world, having only the light of Nature, reading in the volume of created things, have known and do now know in God omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness.

Another way to the knowledge of God is by sacred Scripture; I mean by the Old Testament, which gave a knowledge of God, but imperfectly, exhibiting him as angry, cruel, and vindictive; and therefore it calls him a God of vengeance, and Lord of hosts, and such similar severe names. In this manner the blind Hebrews knew God; yet altogether it is a less obscure knowledge than that the Gentiles possessed, although they would yet serve as slaves, indeed they even now serve as such. The third way of knowing God is by Christ. This way is the certain, clear, and safe way; this is the straight, royal, and noble way. And know, Signora, that in knowing God through Christ consists the whole being of a Christian; for to know God through Christ it is necessary first to know Christ himself. And because we cannot know Christ by the light of Nature, nor by other human industry, if God does not internally illumine and open the vision of our souls, I say that this knowledge of God through Christ is supernatural knowledge for which the special grace of God is necessary. And that it is the truth, that we cannot have the true knowledge of God except through Christ, Christ himself demonstrates, saying: “no man can come to him, except his Eternal Father draw him.” And he shows it again by his answer to Peter, when Peter acknowledged him to be the true Son of God, saying to him: “blessed art thou, Simon son of John,

for this thou hast not gained by human reason, nor by the light of Nature, but my Father who is in heaven has revealed it unto thee.” When we know God through Christ, we know him as loving, benign, merciful, compassionate, because we find in Christ, love, benignity, mercy, and compassion. See here, Signora, three ways of knowing God, according to three different kinds of people who have had, and still have, a knowledge of God. And because the two first are not to your purpose, you will let them pass, and only exercise yourself in the third, which is, to know God through Christ. But in order that this exercise may be profitable, it is proper that you should learn to know Christ, not by knowledge gained by custom, nor acquired by the intellect and human industry, but by the light of faith inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is needful for you in this manner to learn rightly to know Christ if you wish to come perfectly to know God through Christ.

GIULIA: I know not that I have anything to reply to you; so much it seems to me that I know Christ well, if there be not some other secret cognizance to which I have not arrived.

VALDÉS: Now this secret cognizance is what I said persons must come to by inspiration. And therefore we should not think the public cognizance of Christ sufficient, which an assassin or a traitor has. St. John undeceives us, saying: “he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar.”

GIULIA: You seem to me to straiten me much, and I feel it so much the more as I have nothing to answer you. Now then for your life let us not lose time, but open a little to me the way by which I may enter into the true cognizance of Christ.

VALDÉS: I will give you, Signora, some principles, by means of which, commending yourself to God, he will himself reveal the rest to you. And so I say, since you already believe that Christ is truly God and truly man, as God, equal with his Eternal Father and one and the same with Him, the true cognizance of Christ consists, Signora, in knowing and considering to what purpose the Son of God came into the world; and was made man; why he suffered; and why he arose again.

GIULIA: I wish to learn from you how you consider these three things.

VALDÉS: You may consider, Signora, that Christ came into the world to make satisfaction for original sin. Because this having been an infinite crime in respect to God who was offended, it was necessary that the satisfaction should be infinite, and this could not be made except by God himself, who is infinite. Therefore the Son of God, made man, has made satisfaction for the sin of the first man, and together with his, for all the sins of all persons who had been, were then, are now, and shall be; and to them who forsake the benefit of this propitiation it will be wanting by their own fault. Christ came to qualify men that they might become the sons of God. He came to show us the way to heaven. He came to confound the pride of the flesh, and to preach humility of spirit. He came to destroy death. He came to break the power of the devil. He came to give and to communicate with us of his own Spirit by which we might do the will of God, for by the Law alone had God before declared his will to us, but the Law did not give us the power by which we could fulfil it. He came to show us the love that his Eternal Father bears to the human race, which is most perfectly seen and known in Christ. And in short, he came to open to us the gates of Paradise, and to qualify us so that we might enter therein.

Now considering these causes for which Christ came, think you whether you could acquire by any other means than by the Son of God made man, so many and such singular blessings. Besides this, when you wish to consider wherefore he suffered, Christ himself shall teach you, saying: *cum exaltatus fuero a terra omnia traham ad meipsum*, that is, “and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things unto me;” as though he said: in order to uproot people from the things of this world, and enamour them with the things of life eternal, it is needful that I be crucified; and saying in another place that it was necessary he should suffer on the cross that all who believed in him might be saved. And know for a certainty that there is nowhere that we can better know God than in Christ crucified. I can say yet more, that if the contemplation of Christ crucified does not disenamour you of the things of the world and enamour you of the things of God, you will be always miserably bound to created things. So much so, that one of the reasons why I think St. Paul calls Christ the mediator between God and man is, because we can neither know, believe, nor love God, but by contemplating Christ crucified; who suffering, made it sweet to suffer; and enduring, made it easy to endure; and being injuriously treated, made injuries sweet; and dying, gave to death itself a relish. Do not these reasons appear to you most sufficient why Christ should have suffered? Does it not seem to you that Christ has shown so much love in this as to satisfy us why we should disenamour ourselves of self-love, and enamour ourselves with God? But considering still further, you will find that Christ arose from the dead that we might arise with him, as well in spirit in this life, as in body in the life eternal. And the spiritual resurrection is when through dying to the Old man we come to be revived in the New man. This is the passing from death unto life; and thus as Christ through dying came to the resurrection, so we by denial of self come to the newness of life. And this is what Christ says to Nicodemus: “except a man be born of water and of the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” You will consider also in Christ, that he ascended up on high to raise our souls to the contemplation of heavenly things. To these St. Paul invites us, saying: “if, brethren, ye are raised spiritually with Christ, raise your minds to things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of his Eternal Father; search out the things on high, not those that are upon the earth.” And lastly, consider that Christ sent the Holy Spirit that we might be taught the truth of these things, that thereby all love of earthly things banished away, we might be inflamed with the love of spiritual things, and through means of it recover and restore within us that image of God to the likeness of which we were created. By these considerations, Signora, God aiding you, and favouring you with his grace, you may be enabled to come, little by little, to the perfect knowledge of Christ, and through Christ to the true knowledge of God. And thus you will go on by it, loving God and loving Christ. In the same manner you will go forward verifying in yourself those truths that you confess in the Creed, in a mode that what you now confess through obedience, merely subjecting your intellect, you will then confess through some experience. In this manner, that as joined with the first cognizance of God by the light of Nature, which the Gentiles had, united with the knowledge gained of him through the Scriptures of the Old Testament which the Jews have, a person can with truth say that he believes in one God, the Father, omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth; so also and much better than they, after you have known Christ, and through Christ known God, and through God returning to know Christ [more fully], you will be able to say, or to speak more correctly, you will say with truth, feeling in your soul that which you say, the same the others have said and confessed; and passing beyond these, you will declare with truth that you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our only Lord. You will believe him to be

so because the love and obedience with which you know that Christ showed himself most obedient to the will of God and all the other divine perfections that you know to be in Christ, will certify you that Christ is the Son of God; and the sweetness and charity that you will consider in Christ will constrain you to hold him alone as your absolute Lord. And passing further in the truth, you will believe that he was conceived by the operation of the Holy Spirit; because the admirable perfection you will know to be in Christ will assure you that his generation, or conception, was not an ordinary occurrence, but truly the work of the Holy Spirit. And with this assurance entering more profoundly into the knowledge of Christ, you will chastely confess that he was born from the womb of the Virgin Mary, because you will understand that such perfection could not be born but of a most perfect mother, and yet it is consistent that she was a virgin before the birth, in the birth, and after the birth.

After this, when you shall feel within your soul that, contrary to all natural reason, suffering is sweet to you, affliction grateful, and glorious the cross, knowing truly that glory would not be found in trouble, nor honour in calumny, if Christ had not dignified both, then with living faith will you confess, that Christ suffered under the presidency of Pontius Pilate. And when you shall have crucified and buried with Christ your Old man with all his affections and appetites, you will not have any doubt in believing and confessing that Christ was crucified, dead and buried.

After this, when you become in any manner free from the burden of your appetites and affections, considering that thus as Christ has freed you from that hell, so also he freed the holy fathers from Hades (limbo), you will believe in truth that Christ descended into hell.

And when, passing further on, you feel the enlivening of the New man, and by this you will see that you are raised with Christ, you will be constrained to confess that Christ himself, the third day rose from the dead. And when you shall see and feel that all your desires are directed to the Spirit, all walking on towards heaven, you will know that Christ already is in heaven, seated on the right hand of the Father, and thus you will confess it. Your soul at once inflamed with desire that the world may behold Christ glorified, since it already saw him suffering, taking it for certain it must be so, you will confess that Christ must come to judge the living and the dead.

And because the Holy Spirit who dwells in you will open your eyes, you will recognise the same Spirit in many other persons, agreeable to what David says: *Qui timent te, videbunt me, et laetabuntur*: that is, “they that fear thee will see me and be glad;” with the whole heart and a ready tongue you will confess the Holy Spirit. With the same knowledge you will believe the holy catholic Church and the spiritual communion of holy persons who are in it. Thus, you will truly know that Christ has here on earth a Church universal, holy by participation with the holiness of Christ, which Church contains and embraces good and bad, and which holds a spiritual union of holy persons maintained by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who live in faith, hope, and charity. And knowing that you have confessed your sins to a priest of this universal Church, and being absolved, having given credit to the absolution that he, on the part of God, has given you, feeling the soul peaceful and quieted, you will confess in truth that in this universal Church is remission of sins.

Besides this: when by inward experience you have felt the truth of all the rest that a faithful Christian ought to believe, you will not doubt of the confession of the resurrection of the body. This will be so

much the more easy for you to confess, as you will have confessed the resurrection of Christ, having begun to feel in your soul the advantage of it. Finally, when you shall feel and enjoy so much of the sweetness and love of Christ here in this world as is to be felt and enjoyed, taking this sense and enjoyment for an earnest of what you will yet have to feel and enjoy in the other life to which you will expect certainly to go to rejoice perpetually with Christ, you will not hesitate to confess the Life Eternal.

And now, when you hold such inward experience, yours will be living and true faith, because you will have the experience of it within you. Now mark well, Signora, and consider the fruit you will gather from the knowledge of God through Christ. And considering that you will be so much a Christian as you have this knowledge of God by Christ lively in your soul, I am sure you will willingly forget so much of yourself, entering into this divine cognizance; in which you ought to enter many times a day, if you wish to walk by this Christian path. I also desire that you will do so, Signora, for I wish you to begin at once to walk in it, and that the time may not slip away in mere desires, therefore I will not say more to you than has been said about this knowledge of Christ. I hope well in God's goodness that as you begin to enter upon this way you will find so many things of which I have not known how to make mention here, that since you now keep me so long talking, so you will then keep me but a short time in speaking.

GIULIA: Rather, it has gratified me so much to hear you discourse, that the greatest displeasure you have done me has been the passing so briefly through subjects so high and so important. Besides, I tell you that wishing not to interrupt you, I omitted to ask you some things that occurred to me; but as they have already gone from my memory it is of no consequence. Go on.

VALDÉS: I know not what more to say to you on this subject, except that I wish what has been already said may be used by you more as a way-mark to point to the entrance of the knowledge of God and of Christ, than as an introduction into it, because the introduction must be made by the special gift and grace of God, which you ought always most affectionately to ask for, and when you so ask it of him, I promise you that he will not deny you.

GIULIA: Great is the power that the word of God has! I say so because I assure you, of all the arguments I hear from you, there is none that so freshly increases the resolution I have to walk by this Christian path.

VALDÉS: All these new resolutions you ought, Signora, to embrace, and acknowledge to come from the hand of God. And know that my words cannot be sufficient for this if the Holy Spirit did not stand within yourself, soliciting you. Now because in nothing can people entirely know and comprehend the love God bears to us, his mercy, his compassion, his benignity, except in Christ, for this reason I say, Signora, that the most certain way and the most royal road to come to a knowledge of God is to know him through Christ. And so Christ himself says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and so the Eternal Father draws us to know Christ, and Christ leads us to know the Eternal Father, and we cannot come to Christ [God?] but by Christ, and life eternal consists in knowing God, and in knowing Christ. Hence Christ himself, speaking to his Eternal Father, says: "this is life eternal, that they should know thee, the true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent into the world."

GIULIA: I pray God that he would give me grace to know him in truth, even as he wishes to be known.

VALDÉS: Signora, hold firm confidence in God that you will certainly know him, and knowing him you will endeavour to enamour yourself of him, using this knowledge for this purpose. And this will be the tenth step. I desire, that exercising yourself in the knowledge of God and in the knowledge of Christ, you enamour yourself of God and of Christ: I mean to say that you begin to enamour yourself of God and of Christ. Because I have already told you, in what has passed, sufficiently of this love; referring to that, I do not wish to detain you by saying anything particularly of the necessity we have for it, what wonderful effects it produces in the soul where it exists lively and fervent, and how, according to St. John, “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love God dwells in him,” which is surely a different dignity and other happiness, than living to the world and the world living in us. I say then that I wish to pass by all this, and come to tell you and assure you that, as by means of the knowledge of yourself you will lose your own selflove, so much through the knowledge of God will you gain of the love of God. And this is to go out of yourself and to enter into God.

GIULIA: It is a usual saying that what is not seen is so far not understood. I had heard tell a thousand times of this going out of a person’s self to enter into God, but never, in all I have heard, has it been accomplished to my comprehension until now.

VALDÉS: You are so much the more under obligation to love God since he has preserved you so long in this world as to come to know this, which until now you have not understood.

GIULIA: You are right. May it please God that I may know how to profit from it.

VALDÉS: So much will you do this as you constrain your will to confide entirely in God. And because as much the firmer faith exists in our soul, so much more fervent is charity, and as much the more fervent is charity, so much stronger is faith, I wish you, Signora, to refresh in your memory continually what the Church commands you to believe.

GIULIA: Then this alone will be enough for the whole day.

VALDÉS: I mean only the Creed, which I wish you to refresh in your memory every day, not by repeating it by rote with the lips, but by simply comprehending and considering it with the mind; and this will be the eleventh step. Since you have seen, by what I have before told you, in faith is readiness to believe and confidence in believing things to come, you will confirm yourself by the consideration of things past. I mean to say that, as the expectation of the effect that you know the preaching of the Gospel of Christ has made upon persons, makes you sure that God has been true in the past, so now you will strengthen yourself in believing that he will be so in what remains to be accomplished; such as in the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, life eternal, the condemnation of the wicked and the salvation of the good. In like confidence you will confirm and strengthen yourself by bringing to remembrance some promises God has made and which are found accomplished; such as the sending Christ into the world for the salvation of the human race, which he had promised to the patriarchs and prophets; and such as the promise of succession to Abraham. And coming down to the New Testament, you will recollect that Christ promised that he would rise from the dead, and he arose; he promised that he would send the Holy Spirit, and he sent it; he promised that faith should not fail in the Christian Church, and it has not failed; he promised that he would be with his Christian people to the end of the

world, and until the present time he has been, is now, and will be; he promised that when the Holy Spirit should come to the apostles, it would teach them all truth, and so it was accomplished. Now, finding, Signora, that he has performed all these promises, it will be an easy thing to you to give belief to all he shall say to you. And so when you are sensible that he tells you to have no anxiety to provide the things of this world, but to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and that he will provide all these things, you will believe it, and you will confide in him. And in the same manner, when with confidence in his bounty and liberality you shall hear it said to you that Christ promises to give us all we ask of him, you will hold it certain that he will give you what you ask, and if he does not grant it, you will believe it to be through your unbelief; in this manner you will confirm and strengthen yourself in the faith in proportion to your confidence. And since thus entering into the knowledge of God and of Christ, you will enamour yourself with God and with Christ and put all your confidence in the promises of God through Christ, so also beloved of God and of Christ, and you relying upon God and upon Christ, it is proper that by these means you pass one more step forward.

This will be to confirm yourself in the expectation of eternal life, in which you hope to live and enjoy God and Christ for ever. This will be the twelfth step in this Christian way.

In the consideration of this, you will endeavour to dispose your mind in such a manner that you may have a living expectation of enjoying the presence of God in glory, so firm and certain as not to have a doubt of it. And know surely, that as much as you have of hope, so much you will have of faith; and as much as you have of faith, you will have so much of charity. And in like manner, as much as you have of charity, so much will you have of faith, and as much of faith, so much of hope; because these three Christian virtues always go so much in brotherhood, that one never exists without the other; I mean when one exists perfectly and lives perfectly in the soul. Are you satisfied with these twelve steps that I have shown you?

GIULIA: You may think that if they satisfied me the case would be, that I should be out of these troubles and disgusts in which I live, as you well know, and which have kept me so estranged from myself that if you had seen me before you would not know me now.

VALDÉS: Signora, trust in Christ, and set yourself to go to him by this way, and believe me that he will help you more completely to scatter all your disgusts and troubles, and with such good companionship there is nothing in this life that will be wearisome and disgustful, except to see how people of the world offend God and contradict and slight his law and his doctrine.

GIULIA: All this I fully believe. But what shall I do in order to remember all that you have said upon this subject?

VALDÉS: If you do not recollect the whole, it will be sufficient that you remember a part of it. And I wish to undeceive you in this; that I do not give you these rules that you should be bound to them, because it is my purpose that you make use of them only as a CHRISTIAN ALPHABET, by the means of which you may come to Christian PERFECTION.

Of all that has been said, I shall be satisfied if you remember that the first step is, to know that the way in which you have been walking to the present time cannot conduct you to Christ.

The second is, that you hold the resolution to walk by this, which without fail will conduct you to Christ.

The third, that you determine to begin to walk by it.

The fourth, that you lay aside worldly manners and conversation, which tend to separate you from God, and that you put away all curious speculations.

The fifth, that you occupy a portion of every day to enter into a knowledge of the world.

The sixth, that by means of this knowledge you endeavour to slight and abhor the world.

The seventh, that you take a little time every day to enter into a knowledge of yourself.

The eighth, that by means of this knowledge you labour to free your heart from your selflove.

The ninth, that you take another small portion of time to enter into the knowledge of God, and that you enter by the knowledge of Christ.

The tenth, that through this knowledge you enamour yourself with God through the medium of Christ, enamouring yourself in like manner with Christ.

The eleventh, that as well by the narratives of the Old Testament as by those of the New, you confirm faith in your soul, as much in belief as in confidence.

The twelfth, that in the same way you confirm and strengthen in your soul the expectation of Eternal Life.

And because I wish you to walk by this way as a daughter (Signora), and not as a servant, as free and not as a slave, with love and not with fear, take notice that I do not wish you to take these small portions of time that I mention for these considerations superstitiously, setting one hour apart for them more than another, or one part of your house more than another, because I wish you to take them with freedom of spirit, at the hour most agreeable to you, and in the part of the house that most suits you; and when you have not any other convenient time, it will satisfy me if you take it when you awake in bed; and I shall be content with this, that, when you go walking about the house saying the Lord's prayer, not considering or minding what you are repeating, having your attention occupied with worldly things, and sometimes in building castles in the air, you consider all these occasions as time lost. And you already see that you can do all that I have so far told you without any worldly person hearing or noticing you. And you also perceive that all this is a kind of service that no one can hinder or disturb you in, except solely your own ill inclination, forgetfulness, and carelessness of God.

GIULIA: I see it well. It is a difficult thing for a person to have to confine her attention upon such things.

VALDÉS: It is hard at the first, through the repugnance there is on the part of the old nature, but it presently becomes easy as that goes on dying. Besides, I know not why you should suppose the daily consideration of eight subjects so difficult; for although four of them are distasteful, the other four are

so lovely and sweet, that they are sufficient to make all the others sweet and tasteful; so much the more, as these considerations do not occupy more than the time that would otherwise be lost.

GIULIA: May God grant me his grace, because I go on perceiving it is very necessary.

VALDÉS: Yes, he will give it you while you are indeed conscious that you have need of it; and with this conviction you will ask it of him, and know that this conviction also comes to you through the special grace of God. Now I wish you to recall to memory what little I told you of the division St. Paul makes of man, separating him into the Old man and the New man. I do not know whether you clearly recollect what I said to you about this.

GIULIA: I fully remember it.

VALDÉS: Since you recollect, without repeating it I may say, Signora, that you must begin your Christian walk by the mental exercise of what we have discoursed in the twelve steps, and I say that you must continue it by another exercise, which also I wish to be mental, so that you may go forward with your view of gaining Christ without losing the world. This is, that you live with continual care and vigilance to mortify the Old man in you and revive the New. I wish you to know that as by knowing yourself you cease to love yourself, and by knowing God you will come to love him, so that as far as you leave the love of your own self-love, so much you gain of the love of God; and so neither more nor less, as much as you mortify the Old man, so much you make alive the New.

GIULIA: It is needful that you tell me how I must make this mortification and vivification.

VALDÉS: I have already told you that making the mortification, you make at the same time the revivification of the New man; and you will make the mortification by denial of your own will; I mean, by denying and opposing your will in all things, little as well as great. And know certainly that no one can in any manner go to Christ without this denial of the will. Because our will being naturally inclined to love itself, and to wish entirely the contrary to what Christ wills, think whether it is not necessary to deny it and conquer it in order to follow Christ. And hence Christ says the same: “if any man will come after me, let him deny himself,” that is to say, deny his self-will, and take on his shoulders the cross of his labours and sufferings, and follow me. St. Paul has the same; when he counsels us not to do whatever we wish, he means to say, that we deny our wills. And that God is offended by our following our own wills entirely, appears clearly in what he says by Isaiah, speaking of fasts, where it is one of the things he reprehends, for which he says, why our fast is not good is, because, at the same time that we fast, we keep entire our own wills. And this is, because so long as our wills remain entire, the old nature remains alive; and the Old man living, the flesh with its appetites and affections lives and reigns within us, and in the same manner self-love also, by which we are rendered idols of pride and arrogance. So that in every way, Signora, it is proper for you to exercise yourself in this denial of your own will.

GIULIA: This appears to me to be a hard step.

VALDÉS: Hard it would be to a low, plebeian and servile mind, but to a mind lofty, generous and courageous, such as that God has given you, nothing is difficult; rather, if you rightly consider, it is a harder thing to have your will so free and loose, as to lead you as with a leash to everything, whatever it wishes for; this is cruel and unbearable servitude. Does it not appear to you that I am right?

GIULIA: If I could do as you tell me as certainly as I know that you are very right in all this, I promise you there should be no person in the world who would set foot before me in this Christian way, but...

VALDÉS: Do not say so, for your life, Signora, but recover, recover heart; be not dismayed; think that the weight of all this you have not to bear, but Christ for you, hence love will make it light and easy.

GIULIA: Well, now then, since it must be done, let us not waste words. Tell me how I must act in order to deny my will.

VALDÉS: As to the beginning, it is proper, Signora, that you take this for granted, that your will is your domestic enemy, always inviting you to things that separate you from God. And because it frequently covers such things with a mantle of virtue and sanctity, determine, Signora, from this day forward, not to do, say, or think anything your will offers to you without first examining it very strictly, applying the understanding to it, in order that the understanding may verify it by the rule of the law of God. And because all things are either good in themselves, evil in themselves, or indifferent, be on the watch, Signora, and when the will would invite you to do, say, or think anything, examine it first, as I say, by the rule of the law of God; and if you find that such a thing is wrong in itself, drive it from your fancy. Command your will to carry you no further, by the example of Christ, who, when the devil requested his worship, answered him with the law of God: “Dominum Deum tuum adorabis;” that is, “thou shalt worship the Lord thy God.”

As though he said: I will not worship thee, because the law of God ordains that none shall be worshipped except himself. If you find the thing good in itself, put it at once into practice without losing the opportunity. And if you find what is offered to your mind to be indifferent, think a little over it, and finding that more evil than good may come of it, let it alone; or finding that more good than evil may come, take it, but be very careful that you do not deceive yourself; for the devil frequently transforms himself into an angel of light, and often the flesh moves us, and we think it is the Spirit. And if such a thing be of the nature that it can be neither ill nor good, more than a satisfaction to your will, to leave it or take it is of little consequence; yet it is quite true, it may be better to leave it, because as much more you deny your will, so much more you mortify it. But notice, Signora, what I say: I wish you to make this examination continually, and never be moved to do, say, or think anything without first taking these considerations that I have mentioned.

GIULIA: I will constrain myself to this the best I can. But I wish, in order to understand this better, that you would explain it more to me, putting it practically.

VALDÉS: The true explanation will be that you begin to occupy yourself in the exercise of it, and by this means you will learn more in one week than without it you would learn in ten years.

GIULIA: At all events, I shall be much gratified if you will tell me some particulars of it.

VALDÉS: I say, Signora, that because our will always moves itself to wish something for one of the five bodily senses, it is proper that you have much care over them, not leaving them to be disordered in anything, in such manner that neither by the eyes, the ears, the taste, smell, or touch, anything may enter to the will which can change or disturb it. It is needful to exercise this care even so far that the senses may continue so mortified to the things of the world that they find no delight in them; yet neither is it proper to be negligent of them, for by our carelessness their influence may again revive. And know, Signora, that so much as you mortify the outward senses, so much will you revivify the interior ones. And this will be certain, that as much less you gratify yourself in regarding corporal things, so much the more will you take pleasure in viewing, with lively faith and heartfelt love, things spiritual. So much less you take pleasure in hearing light and trifling things, the more will you occupy yourself in hearing and listening outwardly to the word of God, and inwardly to divine inspirations; and thus you will hear the voice of God when he shall speak within with your soul. As little that you delight in outward viands, so much the more will you inwardly awake and enliven yourself to relish interior things which are the feast of the soul. As little as exterior odours please and give you satisfaction, so much more and better will your soul scent, as it were, things divine and spiritual, and will say to Christ as the good spouse: *Currimus in odorem unguentorum tuorum*; that is: “we will run to the odour of thy unguents.”

And as much less the body enjoys the touch of things that are pleasurable and delightful to it, so much the more will your soul affect to be nailed, hands and feet, with Christ on the cross. Hence it is proper, Signora, that you constantly stand prepared in the denial of these outward senses, since you know that by this means you will enliven the interior. At the same time you will, little by little, mortify in yourself the respect for the world; for so much the more will you estimate the Divine Being, as in less esteem you hold the world. You will mortify every feeling of anger, every sentiment of retaliation. You will do this by the exercise of patience, of suffering, of humility, of contempt of the world. And because I wish

these Christian virtues to be ever alive in your soul, I desire that you examine and take a review of your mind from day to day, to know how it stands well grounded in these respects. You will do this, reflecting truly, and in a lively manner, how you receive with patience any adversity that may come upon you; how you bear an injury, or a burden that may be imposed upon you; how you conduct yourself when a low and plebeian person takes precedence of you; how you pass through the confusion of the world when worldly persons despise and regard you lightly. I wish you to examine at the same time how strong you are in faith, how sure in hope, how fervent in charity. You should do this taking into account how much you confide in the promises of God with regard to outward things. Because from these you may form a judgment how far you trust him in eternal things. For indeed, unless you determine to confide in God that he will provide things necessary for the body without your anxiety, I know not how you can resolve to confide in him that he will give you the things that belong to the soul, or how you can expect to enjoy God in the life eternal. And examining all your works, whether they go forward directed to your bodily or your spiritual benefit, or directed to the honour of God and the good of your neighbour, you will know that you are so far advanced in charity. I desire further, that when this examination has been made, if you do not find your appetites and feelings so mortified that those virtues truly live and reign within you, turn then your soul's regard upon Christ crucified, and say from the heart these or similar words: "Oh Christ, favour me, Lord, with thy grace, so that in thy strength overcoming these my appetites, and mortifying these my senses, these Christian virtues may be planted and grow up in my soul, so that thou, my Lord, mayst ever live in me, and I in thee!"

GIULIA: How have you given me fresh life by this! You have not said here anything better. But I wish to understand from you how I shall know that I have made this mortification or vivification.

VALDÉS: I have already told you that this is a state which begins in baptism, and continues through the whole life of man, because whilst he lives he always finds in himself something to mortify. For these appetites and affections within us, through original sin, though restrained, always grow green and come to shoot again. For this reason, I say to you, never be unwatchful, thinking you have made this mortification, until you are so far removed from anger and retaliation that nothing worldly people can do to you shall move you; and until you become so far from desiring or wishing for anything whatever held and possessed by your neighbours, that you would be content that they should rather take of yours than that you should unlawfully have of theirs; and so truly chaste as never impure thought shall reign in your mind; and so far from speaking in prejudice of your neighbours, that you may at all times be ready to excuse and defend them. When you have obtained all these virtues think then that you have mortified the Old man. And when you shall know your heart so filled with love to God, that it loves nothing out of God, and if it love anything, it loves it for God; and when you shall feel that there is nothing more savoury and sweet on your lips than the name of God; and when you shall in truth behold your life one continual Christian sabbath, then may you think and believe that you have perfectly vivified the New man, and not before.

GIULIA: High perfection is this into which you wish to raise me.

VALDÉS: Even when I may wish to place you in this state of perfection, it ought not to appear great to you; since God has given you such perfection in mind and in person according to the world, it would

not be a great thing for you to dispose yourself to it, for he may yet give you the perfection of the spirit according to his nature. So much more, as I do not wish to put you into this perfection in an instant, but I show it to you, and invite you to it; and I entreat you to go forward, walking towards it at your good leisure, in such manner that neither haste may weary you, nor negligence lead you to turn aside from it.

GIULIA: You give me fresh life by this. Yet, to be candid, it much tries me to have to leave some conversations, in which at times I take some little pleasure, and some curious things with which I pass my time, for I fear that if I leave these things, I shall sink into a melancholy humour that may cause me to live in continual tastelessness.

VALDÉS: I little wish to be so rigorous as to ask you to leave all these things at once. It will be well for you to leave them, but if it be very troublesome, you can leave them little by little, but on such conditions, that you remain not in them; and believe me, Signora, that as you go on taking pleasure and relish in the things of God, you will go on to consider those things bitter and insipid in which you now find pleasure and delight.

GIULIA: I clearly see, in short, that you are accommodating yourself to my weakness, not to discourage me.

VALDÉS: Does it appear to you that I am doing wrong?

GIULIA: It rather seems to me that this is the better that you do.

VALDÉS: It appears well to you for this reason, that you wish it well. But let us leave this as it is. I am willing, Signora, to give you yet further licence in order that the difficulty that will arise before you in this path may not lead you to turn aside from it. It is this: that if you are not able so entirely to subdue your appetites and affections in such degree as to be absolutely mistress over them, that you at least moderate and regulate them in such a manner that they be not lords over you. The Stoics dream, by I know not what precepts, to reduce a person to such a state that they cannot be troubled or perturbed in any way by their affections; but to this they are never able to arrive. The good Christian should not seek nor endeavour to be wanting in affections, for he will never succeed with it, nor is it well that he should succeed with it, but he ought to strive to be lord over his affections in such a manner, that his perturbations and trials may in no degree be able to separate him from God. I mention this, considering that the Apostle Paul, feeling these perturbations and troubles, said: *Infelix ego homo, quis me liberabit de corpore mortis hujus?* that is: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This he said, feeling troubled and disturbed by his affections, and therefore he desired to be liberated from the prison of the body, although he was so much master of his affections and so superior to them, that even so greatly as they tempted him, they never caused him to fall. The imperfect Christian feels these disturbances and troubles more, the farther he lives from the mortification of the Old man. And so, whilst he is not lord over his affections, yet not yielding himself to be lorded over by them, falling and recovering himself, and at other times stumbling and not falling, he walks onwards towards Christ; and provided he always keeps his attention directed to Christ, God readily pardons his slippings and his falls. They who do not feel these troubles and disturbances are those persons who have resigned the lordship to their affections in such degree that they run unchecked along with them without opposition. I am not willing to class such persons in the number of Christians, not to do such injury to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now since the war against the appetites is difficult, and much more so against the interior affections, against which you, Signora, have to fight, I wish you to keep in your remembrance Christ crucified; carry him at all times and in every place before you for a witness of all your thoughts, words, and actions, and as a shield to preserve you from the assaults that your appetites

and affections will make upon you; and I am certain, in this way you will not do, or speak, or think anything contrary to the law of God, because you would be ashamed to be seen by Christ whom you bear with you. Although, at the first, you will not be able to do this so constantly, I am certain that after a time you will be able to do it very easily; I even tell you that very pleasant and tasteful will such companionship be to you.

GIULIA: So I believe it, and so hope I in God that he will grant it to me.

VALDÉS: I desire, Signora, this also of you, that you let not a night pass without examining before you go to sleep in what actions, what words, what thoughts you have spent that day, beginning with the morning, and going through the day until night, examining the little things as well as great; because he who allows himself to be overcome by little things, will more readily allow himself to be vanquished in the great.

And I desire you heartily to censure yourself for time ill gained and ill spent, knowing in truth that this has been by reason of your evil inclinations, and purposing to have more care and watchfulness over yourself another day; and, for the day well spent, I wish you to give thanks to God, truly acknowledging that whatever of good is in you is the gift of God, and whatever of evil, is of your own stock. And when practicable to make this examination with some spiritual person, the benefit no doubt will be much greater; but I am satisfied if you do it alone by yourself. And also because we are often moved to good works not purely for the sake of Christ, but for some purposes and gratifications of our own senses, in such a manner that our selflove and not the love of God incites us to do them, I wish, Signora, that these also which appear to be good works you should suspect, and with this suspicion examine them very strictly; because if it were possible I wish that you may be moved to all of them purely, and sincerely for the love of God; and believe me, this rogue, self-love, is so within us that it wishes to have its part in everything. Indeed I desire that you should not be satisfied with cutting it down, but I wish you to pull it up by the root from your heart, that in no way it may come to grow up again. I wish more, that whenever you converse with any spiritual person you communicate to him and let him share all things that come and go through your fancy, and all your thoughts; for if the person be spiritual, he will know how to give you such advice respecting any of them as will leave you well satisfied and contented. I wish also that you give leave to all those spiritual persons who may converse with you that, without asking permission, they may tell you what they feel and know of you in your words and conduct.

I wish also that you not only give them leave to do this, but that you entreat and strongly charge them to do so; and surely know that from this you will feel a wonderful spiritual benefit.

And lastly I wish you, Signora, to refresh in your memory from day to day, the idea and image of Christian perfection, in the manner we have here painted it, that putting this on one side, and what you have attained to in this Christian way on the other, you can rightly consider how near you find yourself to that image of perfection, or how far from it. Finding yourself at a distance, I wish you to return, with affectionate impulse and efficacious confidence, to Christ crucified, and address him from the heart: "O Christ Jesus, my Lord and my God! breathe, breathe, O my Lord, into my soul the breath of the Holy Spirit so effectually that with marvellous earnestness I may keep it without wavering until I may be found entirely transformed to this state of Christian perfection that I hold before my view. This,

Signora, is the book in which I desire that you may continually read, for in this you will learn more in one day, than you could learn from all the rest in the world in a hundred years. I say rather that all the good that is written is so far understood and relished as the mind of him who reads stands disposed in this manner; so much so that even sacred Scripture is poison for the mind that has not this humble disposition, that which I desire that you may have; also I desire you may have it most entirely, since you have promised me, that if I put you into a private way by which you can go to God without being seen by the world, you will walk in it. And if that which I have shown to you be not of this nature, I am content that you do not fulfil your word to me.

GIULIA: It rather appears to me so private that I find no difficulty in it greater than its privacy; not because it does not appear to me very good, nor because I have any other wish than I first had to walk in it, but because it is so inward, that as I did not find the way, or perceive it with my bodily sight, I know not whether I can discover how to walk by it.

VALDÉS: If you find not the way, it is because you have not yet begun to walk in it. Begin, and you will see whether you will find the way. And if you do not see it with the bodily eyes, open the eyes of the soul, and you will then see it. And certainly know, that from having closed these latter, all the evils and sins proceed, into which persons fall in this present life. Think not that you do not discover the path to walk in, because you will discover it. Confide therefore in Christ, and mistrust yourself, for thus you must enter, and thence you must continue your journey. And because, amongst other things that will present themselves to you in it to disturb and hinder you, worldly honour and regard, beyond all comparison, obstruct the way more than all others, and as I surely believe that these lead many more souls to hell than any other human passion whatever, I wish, Signora, that you persuade yourself, that your honour and your dishonour depend upon yourself alone, in such manner that only your bad actions bring dishonour, and only your good ones bring you honour. And in this way not placing your honour in the hands, or in the courtesy of worldly persons, you will have no occasion to inhale honour from them, nor to fear dishonour from them; with this sentiment you will converse and have intercourse with them with much freedom, and in much inward superiority. This is a thing which, when talking of, seems very easy, and yet I promise you that it is so difficult, that blessed is he who sets himself to do it, and most blessed is he who carries it out. And because, after this respect of the world, the thing that most hinders persons who wish to walk by this Christian path is the false persuasion that we have formed to ourselves, believing that we can find in outward things, satisfaction and contentment, I wish, Signora, that you go armed against this false persuasion with a certain, strong and true opinion. This is, that you assure your mind that in none of such things that you can acquire of yourself without a third person, nor less from those that persons of the world can bestow upon you, or take away from you, can you ever be able to find entire contentment, or felicity by gaining them, or dissatisfaction, or unhappiness in the loss of them. And it will be thus: that as you will not expect to find satisfaction, or happiness in riches or in station, nor in the other things that the world and persons of the world give and take; nor unhappiness in being deprived of that which you find you have, not only will you not desire what you have not, but you will possess what you have in such a manner, that when you may be wronged you will not think you have lost anything. The same consideration you can extend to relatives and friends, and also to your own person; because standing in this persuasion, you will not desire health of body,

nor fear sickness; you will not desire life, nor dread death, since neither the one rests in your own hand to preserve it, nor can you fly from the other. I ask you not to make yourself so insensible as not to feel these affections, but I ask you to mortify them in such a way that although your mind may regret, it shall not waver or disquiet itself.

GIULIA: This appears to me yet more difficult than the other.

VALDÉS: Now know, Signora, that I have learned this consideration and the other from a heathen Philosopher. He, by these things, so difficult as you view them, sought only, I know not what tranquillity of mind. Now reflect whether they ought to be so disagreeable to a Christian mind which undertakes to walk more readily to Christ, and to go out of itself, more quickly and more radically, in order to enter into Christ. And therefore I supplicate you, Signora, before you put yourself into this practice, that you do not consider it as difficult.

GIULIA: It is a great thing for a person to have to despoil herself of those natural affections, of which she is scarcely conscious.

VALDÉS: I will tell you that it is so great, that David, feeling the difficulty there is, not only in despoiling himself of them but of knowing and understanding them, prays God to cleanse him from these hidden and secret things, which are these affections, and immediately adds, also from presumptuous sins.

The sacred Prophet considered that among the inward and secret affections, ambition, as it is most natural to man, so it is most dangerous and secret. He therefore so especially asks assistance from God to overcome it.

GIULIA: And with reason. Therefore I tell you in truth that what gives me most fear when I think of walking in this way that you teach me, is, that having constantly heard say that God always punishes them who join him with temptations and persecutions, and finding myself very weak to resist and bear them, I think I shall not be able to persevere.

VALDÉS: It pleases me to hear you say this, because I am certain that causing you to turn over the leaf and to read farther on about this that you have been told, you will lose the fear you now have. Because St. Paul will so well assure you about this, saying to the fearful like you, that God is just and faithful, and that he will in no way suffer us to be tempted or chastened more than our strength is able to bear; and he also there says that God will assist us with his grace, the more lightly and easily to bear them.

So that you can hold for certain, Signora, that God does not permit any one in this present life, to be more tempted, more chastened, or more persecuted, all which he knows, than their strength of mind may be sufficient to endure. Thus to the strong he promises strong temptations, chastisements and persecutions, and with the weak he bears himself mildly. We have an example of this in Job, who by permission of God was tempted and persecuted by Satan as much as his patience was able to bear. But observe that God had always his hand upon Satan that he should not touch Job's life; so by this, as by what David says, that the consolations that God inwardly sent to his soul were in proportion to the misery and anguish with which he was afflicted, you may be confirmed in this truth, that God chastens and tries his servants so much as he sees they are able to bear, and no more. So that for such cause you ought not to shrink from undertaking this Christian enterprise, and once undertaken, to persevere in it, until you go through it valiantly; since it is as St. Paul says: they only receive the crown of glory who walking by this way combat bravely against their adversaries.

GIULIA: You have given me fresh life by this, for I assure you I was strongly tempted by this fear.

VALDÉS: Whenever, Signora, such things come into your imagination, think that they are the work of the devil, and always resist them with the shield of faith, and if you are not able by this to destroy such imagination, mention it freely to some spiritual person whom you may see, who will know how to understand it, and understanding, will know how to assist you in it.

GIULIA: Such persons are in this day as scarce as white flies.

VALDÉS: So much the more should you render thanks to God, since he has placed you in the position, that in this scarcity you speak of, you will have one who will be such to you.

I wish also another thing of you. Cease from this time to employ yourself in reading, or in wishing to know abstruse subjects, although they may be sacred things, in a manner that your understanding be not curiously occupied with them. Because at this beginning, the reading of simple things that may kindle the will, will be much more useful to you; and believe me, I do not say this without great reason. And because I am sure that in this Christian exercise you will know by experience the truth of what you have heard from me, and many other most Christian truths, and because I have seen by experience that many persons, as soon as they know them, go telling and talking of them without any consideration, whence some inconveniences arise, take care, Signora, in such case to know how to direct yourself wisely, and endeavour to do like the good sheep of the flock that show to their shepherd what herbage they feed upon, by the wool and milk they give him; and not like the poor ones, that show him theirs by throwing it up by the mouth. And I let you know, that doctrine dressed and digested in the mind produces its fruit; and that what immediately escapes by the mouth does not nourish the mind. I desire that you may hold your doctrine in the soul, and not on the tip of the tongue.

GIULIA: It is well; may God assist me in all things, and do you likewise aid me to compose my outward conduct, since you have so well shown me how to adorn the interior.

VALDÉS: Adorn the interior firstly, Signora, and I promise you that you will have no need of my council, nor that of any one in the world, how to compose the exterior. That you may credit me in this, I wish to show it to you by a comparison, and if it be somewhat repugnant, disguise it. When a skilful physician would heal a scaly body, he does not begin to cure it by scraping the blotches outside, for he knows that if for the present he thoroughly removes them, immediately others come out again afresh. Nor otherwise does he begin to heal it by unguents, because he knows that whatever removes it from the part without drives it into the body and it is the cause of another greater disease. But if he be a good experienced physician, the first thing he does is to consider the cause whence such a disease proceeds. This understood, he causes the patient to take by the mouth those medicines which he knows to be proper to heal that disease of the body from which the scales proceed, because he understands and knows that the inward disorder once healed, the outward scales fall away without any difficulty. In the same manner a spiritual physician, when he wishes to cure a vicious body, or a licentious one, must not begin by removing the outward superfluities, because as the root of the evil remains within, it immediately returns to come out again, if not in the same way, perhaps by another more dangerous. Nor otherwise must he begin with the unction of superstitious ceremonies and outward services, which whilst they smooth over outward vices, put them within; and thus the disorder becomes more dangerous and hurtful. But if the physician be one of experience, the vices perceived and the outward excesses

considered, he knows the cause whence they come, and this known, he gives the medicine that appears to him necessary to heal the inward disease, because he knows certainly that once healed, the vices and excesses will cease immediately. Do you comprehend what I mean to say?

GIULIA: Fully. And although you have spoken a little of things unpolite, since you have spoken well, I tolerate the allegory. And as you do not wish me to say anything upon this, at least tell me how I ought to conduct myself in matters of outward devotion.

VALDÉS: Take this interior devotion that I offer you, and it will regulate you in all others; but explain to me what exterior devotions you mean.

GIULIA: Mass, preaching, reading, prayer, fasts, confession, communion and alms. I would wish you at all events to tell me as briefly as you please, your views, respecting the manner I ought to observe in my exercise each of these things; and do not excuse yourself, for I will admit of no excuse.

VALDÉS: In short, Signora, you wish to be always obeyed, and you are right. So much I may say, you ought always to hear mass attentively. And because there are three principal parts in it, the adoration of the most holy sacrament, the doctrine of the gospel and the epistle, and the prayers, you can draw benefit from all three. From the adoration, you will draw a fresh and fervent desire to incorporate yourself by faith and love in the passion of Christ, and to slay your Old man by Christ, and to resuscitate your New man with Christ. From the doctrine, you will always take something on which to think during that day. In this way, if you hear the priest recite the gospel that begins: *In principio erat verbum*, when he adds to this, *dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri*, his *qui credunt in nomine ejus*, he means to say: “God gives ability and power to all those who believe in his name to become the sons of God,” you can continue thinking on the supreme goodness and mercy of God, with which he calls so vile a creature to so high and excellent a dignity as is the being a daughter of God, and this solely by believing in Christ. In the same manner when you hear the epistle of St. Paul, beginning: *Hoc sentite in nobis quod in Christo Jesu, qui cum in forma Dei esset, &c.*, that is to say: “Brethren, let your minds have the same contempt of the world and of your own estimation that you know Christ Jesus had, who being the Son of God humbled himself to take the form of a servant, in which he conversed here in the world,” endeavour to dwell in thought upon the profound humility of Christ, in such a manner that this reflection may confound your pride, make you altogether humble, and desirous to imitate the lowliness and meekness of Christ. In this way you can always gather from the epistle or from the gospel some considerations to remain with you.

GIULIA: I understand it already; go on further.

VALDÉS: From the prayers you will take occasion to elevate your soul towards God, inwardly praying that he would accept what the priest asks in the name of the whole Church.

GIULIA: And does it seem to you that I ought to hear mass every day?

VALDÉS: On feast days, if possible, do not stay away from any. Of the others you will leave only those which, when occupied in some work of charity, you cannot go to hear without taking yourself from them. You should go to hear the sermon with a mind lowly and obedient, as though you went to hear

Christ. And when you shall hear something said by the preacher that appears to you good, with a secret prayer entreat God that he will imprint it on your memory, and grant you his grace and favour, by which you may be enabled to put it into practice.

GIULIA: And if the preacher be one of those followed by the world, who preach not Christ, but vain and subtle things, or about philosophy, or I know not what sort of theology, or about their dreams and fables, do you wish me to go to hear him?

VALDÉS: In this you will do so far as seems best to yourself. For my part I can declare that of the whole year I have no times worse spent than those that I lose in hearing some of those preachers, whom you have wisely pictured, and so I seldom hear them.

GIULIA: This is not being willing to be exercised in the virtue of patience.

VALDÉS: It may be so if you will. But I wish to hear Christ preached in the pulpit, if it be possible. It is very true that however bad may be the preacher, it is well to hear him, if it be only because that, seeing the necessity Christian souls have to hear the doctrine of Christ, you may incite yourself ardently to solicit Christ to send into the Church his preachers who preach and teach his most holy doctrine purely and sincerely. Of reading I have told you already, that for the present I would wish that it should be in the most simple things, those that would kindle the will and not occupy the intellect. And when you read portions of the sacred Scriptures, keep in mind that God is speaking to you, and therefore you should go to the reading of it with an humble and obedient mind; and consider, that you read not to know how to reason, but to understand how you ought to live. You must seek in the sacred Scriptures, medicine against temptations by the example of Christ, who being tempted by the devil in the wilderness, to each of his temptations answered him by a passage of Holy Scripture. In the same manner you must seek remedy against adversities, persecutions, and worldly trials, for, as St. Paul says: all that is there written was written for our instruction.

GIULIA: What books are those you call the most simple?

VALDÉS: Those I used at one time are a little book that they call *De imitatione Christi*, another by Cassian, and that by Saint Jerome called the *Lives of the Hermits*, and I think all these are in Italian. This is as to reading. Prayer is the raising of the mind to God with desire to obtain what it asks of him. The manner of prayer, and what should be asked for in prayer, are such as Christ taught us by St. Matthew: “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not do as the hypocrites, for they love to pray in the congregations of the people and in the corners of the streets that they may be seen of men; verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

Christ teaches us by these words that our prayer should be private, as well to avoid vain glory as because the mind outwardly quiet, more easily quiets itself within. And Christ immediately says: and “when thou prayest, use not many words, as the Gentiles do.” Whence he shows that he wishes few words to be used, but much faith and affection in prayer. Afterwards he says: In this manner therefore pray ye: *Pater noster qui es in coelis*, &c. In this he instructs us that we should not ask for vain or superfluous things in prayer, but for those only which seem to be necessary for the glory of God, for the salvation of the souls of our neighbours and of our own, and for the support of our life. Christ, in another place, teaches us how we ought to pray, saying: “And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” So that in order for prayer to be right, it should be in private, with few words, with much desire, with true and just request, and with entire faith and confidence that God will give us what we shall ask of him. Also Christ teaches us in another place that we should be importunate and persevering in prayer. Yet because vocal prayer frequently kindles and elevates the mind to mental prayer, I would not wish you, Signora, to oblige yourself to repeat a certain number of psalms or paternosters, in order that you may always stand at liberty, for then, God sending to you some good inspiration in prayer, you may be able to dwell in it as long as you feel that your soul has the relish of it.

GIULIA: I do not understand this unless you explain it by some example.

VALDÉS: I mean to say, that when saying the paternoster, you come to repeat: *adveniat regnum tuum*, “thy kingdom come:” and at that passage God shall show you the felicity the soul enjoys when God reigns within it, that you dwell in this consideration. In the same manner, when saying: *cor mundum, crea in me Deus, et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis*, that is: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,” you should feel that your heart begins to be warmed with desire for that purity, and your bosom begins to open, anxious that the Holy Spirit may be renewed in it, without , going on with the psalm, feed the fire of your heart with a thought of Christ crucified, and open wider the door of your breast, that your heart may remain purified and your bosom go filled with the Holy Spirit. You will do this, without being obliged to a certain number of psalms or of paternosters. Do you now understand it?

GIULIA: Fully.

VALDÉS: Fasting, as it regards abstinence, rests upon holy Scripture, and conduces to Christian charity. For this, I will leave it always to your discretion, that you make use of abstinence so far as you are conscious that it is necessary to you to destroy the old nature and vivify the new; and I shall be always pleased if you determine the abstinence, more frequently in the quantity of the food, than in the quality of it. In this manner you can always fast when you wish, without any one being sensible of it. As to the fasts of the Church you will do as others do, and for this I give you no rule. I much wish to advise you of this: that if the precepts, as they say, are obligatory according to the intention of him who gives them, I think the persons are few who fulfil the precept of fasting.

GIULIA: Why?

VALDÉS: Because few persons accomplish the effect that the Church wishes them to gain by fasting.

GIULIA: From what do you know this intention of the Church?

VALDÉS: From what is sung in the prelude all Lent, saying: *Qui corporali jejunio vitia comprimis mentem elevas, virtutem largiris et premia*, that is: “Thou O God, who by bodily fasting restrainest the passions, elevatest the mind, bestowest virtue and recompense.” From hence it appears that the Church intends that we Christians, by means of fasting, should mortify the sensual appetites that incite us to vice, and exalt our souls towards God, in order that they should be rewarded with the recompense of Christian virtues. Confession is so inward and spiritual a subject, that you may believe, Signora, that were you to read all that has been written upon it, and if you heard it talked of by the angels of heaven, you would not in the end know how properly to confess, if God does not first move your heart to the consciousness of your ignorance and misery, so that you humble yourself before the presence of his divine Majesty; and enlighten your understanding and inflame your will, to a knowledge of his infinite goodness and mercy, so that you heartily believe in Christ and love Christ. I wish you, Signora, to persuade yourself of this truth, so that, when God shall touch your heart and move your will, giving you to be conscious that by your sins you have lost his grace, and generating within you a horror of them and a desire to confess them in order to return and regain his grace, being sure that you cannot know this without his grace and favour, – you then unreservedly recommend yourself to God, supplicating him to open the eyes of your understanding, so that in truth you may know yourself, and to enlighten

the eyes of your soul so that you may entirely confide in Christ and ardently love Christ. This is the first preparation you ought to make for your confession. And, as I have told you, because you must go to confession with profound humility, with firm faith and ardent charity, it is proper, Signora, that you advance to humility by the knowledge of yourself, into which you ought deeply to enter, in the manner I have already told you; and that you go on to faith and charity by the knowledge of God, in which you will exercise yourself by the considerations which you have just before heard.

GIULIA: I should much wish you to return to repeat them if it were not so late.

VALDÉS: It will be enough that yourself when alone recall them to your remembrance. This second preparation made, I wish you, Signora, to examine well your affections, and what things incite you, whether they are of a nature that can draw you away from God. You will make this examination setting before you the law of God, understood in the manner we have discoursed upon. After this, I wish that, setting on one side these inordinate affections that you have discovered in yourself, and the law of God on the other side, you recall to memory the exercises you have kept, the things with which you have employed yourself, the affairs you have managed, the people with whom you have kept company, the persons you have discoursed about, the books you have read in, the designs you have formed and the thoughts you have delighted in. I wish you to examine what it is that you have done, said, or thought, which may be, or can be contrary to the law of God, taking them one by one, beginning from the first day, and running down to the day when you wish to confess.

And I wish you besides, to examine what in all this time you have failed to do, say, or think that might have conduced to the honour of God, to the advantage of your soul, and to the spiritual or temporal gain of your neighbours. That as in what we sin by commission we show our iniquity and display our ill inclination towards God and towards our neighbours, so neither more nor less in what we sin by omission we declare our little faith, our want of charity, and the small respect and love we have to God and to our neighbours; and as we have said, we are bound to love God above all things, and our neighbours as ourselves. This preparation made, and feeling your mind already humbled by the knowledge of your own wickedness and malignity, very firm in faith and greatly warmed in charity, with the greatest horror of your sins and feeling the vexation of your appetites, you will put yourself at the feet of the confessor, yourself bearing anger against yourself and feeling the same confusion that you would have to ask forgiveness from a great prince from whom you had received the greatest favours and to whom you had shamefully committed shocking treacheries. And so with such preparation, bringing down and casting to the ground human arrogance and presumption, you will clearly and openly disclose to him everything in which you are conscious you have disobeyed God through evil intention, through ignorance, carelessness, or weakness. And if the confessor be a person who feels and relishes spiritual things, I wish you to disclose and display to him the affections that move, incline, and carry you on to the offences and sins; because if being such a one, he will give you advice by which you may be able to mortify them.

GIULIA: I never in my life heard such a thing said, as that I must confess my affections.

VALDÉS: If you are unwilling to confess them to the priest, confess them to God, saying with David: Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco, and more, Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum, et in

peccatis concepit me mater mea, that is: “for I acknowledge my transgressions,” and more, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

And so much, Signora, as the more evils you have cause to confess while these affections live within you, so much the more and the better ought you to confess them, because you will more abase your natural pride, and you will thus exercise yourself in the virtue of humility. And be aware, Signora, that I do not wish you to be scrupulous, nor superstitious in confession, because it is sufficient to confess to the priest those things you are conscious to have done with a mind disobedient to God, about which you so much grieve; in order that, knowing you can live without committing them, you may keep a firm intention and determination never to do them again. But of failings without which we can scarcely live in this present life, that are signs of a mind not mortified, you will confess yourself continually to God, supplicating him to favour you with his grace, so that, the mortification of your old nature completed, these defects may cease in you.

GIULIA: Have I not to confess these failings to the priest?

VALDÉS: Not by obligation, because they are not sins that belong to confession. These properly are those I told you of a little before, from which David prayed to be cleansed, calling them secret defects.

Your confession made in this manner, and your absolution received from the priest, I desire, Signora, that refreshing in your remembrance the authority that Christ gave to the priests, saying to them: “whatsoever that ye bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,” you firmly believe that God has forgiven all your sins and has restored you to his grace. But notice, that I do not wish you to think he has pardoned them for the reason because you have confessed them, for that would be to attribute to yourself what is not yours. I wish therefore that you should think that God has forgiven you, because you believe in Christ, love Christ, and have placed your hope in Christ, and that you have confessed them because God desires you to confess them.

GIULIA: I understand this well. But I wish to know from you, what is your opinion about the selection of a confessor.

VALDÉS: Because I hold it certain that a good part of the fruit of confession consists in a good confessor, to whom it belongs, not only to make absolution, but also gravely and severely to reprehend the sins, and to animate him who makes the confession to the practice of the Christian virtues, and to offer proper remedies for them according to the disposition of the person, in order to overcome the inclinations and appetites that incline him to sin; I wish you, Signora, to lay out all your prudence and all your authority in the selection of a suitable confessor. If such a one can be found who knows and understands by doctrine the Christian life, and who has acquired and verified by experience what he may have read in books, you ought to rank him before all others and take him. To such a one you may communicate your failings, for being well experienced, he will know how to give you such directions, with which, mortifying the affections, you may go onward, leaving off the defects. And because such a person is rarely found, when you have to make choice between a learned person without experience in this Christian life, and an experienced person without learning, I wish you much rather to take the experienced one. Because in the same manner as a person will know how to give you a better relation of the road from this place to Jerusalem who has been accustomed to travel along it, than another who knows it by cosmography, although he should know the science better than Ptolemy; so will he better know how to introduce and guide you in the Christian journey, who has himself gone and still goes in

it, than another who has read and still reads about it. This, as St. Paul says, because he does not attain to things that are of the Spirit of God, can in no manner conduct another where he has never gone himself. And because I know that it will be the better for you, I wish you to select in preference a confessor without learning, but with experience in spiritual things, if you can know of such a one, than a person with learning only; and in this so far trust me; for there is no one blinder than he who persuades himself that he sees. And be advised, Signora, that having found a confessor experienced in this Christian road, I wish you to ask his opinion and advice in all your concerns; and to trust him much in them all. So also it seems to me that from an inexperienced one you should accept nothing more than absolution. I say this, because I know by experience such confessors frequently, wishing to appear knowing, tell you of subjects not belonging to the duty of a true Christian, by which, against your will, they lead you to regard them lightly; and this is not to be considered as nothing to the object of so high a sacrament. I think you may rest satisfied with this.

GIULIA: Yes, I remain so: go on further.

VALDÉS: Of the holy communion, in which we Christians partake of the most precious body and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, I wish to say not a little to you, because I think I should not remain satisfied even with saying much to you; but, considering that it wants little from now to the night, and that a great part of what I have said respecting confession may serve for the communion, I will pass over this briefly. And so I say, Signora, you should bring to the communion an ardent desire to unite yourself to Christ, by faith, hope, and charity. I wish you to quicken these three virtues in your soul when you go to communion. I wish you to go grounded in humility, which you will acquire, as I have frequently told you, by the knowledge of yourself. I would have you to go full of faith, in such manner that you firmly believe, that under these species exists the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. This you should think he left to us here in this world; so that whenever these species shall be represented to our bodily sight, we should refresh in our hearts the remembrance of his passion, through which, by means of his most precious blood, he established a new covenant between God and mankind, annulling and making void the old. And the new covenant is, that we, mankind, should believe ourselves to be justified by the blood of Jesus Christ, and that Christ justifies us, forgiving our sins. I wish besides, that you go full of confidence in the promise of Christ, very secure that this celestial food must bestow upon you great power and intrepidity to walk with resolution in the Christian course; and that it will protect and secure you from the assaults and conflicts of your affections and sensual appetites, and thus assist in the mortification of the Old man and in the revival of the New man. For you should hold it certain that the holy communion of the most precious body and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord works all these effects in the soul, and many more. And, therefore, frequenting the communion I hold to be a laudable and joyful service, especially with persons who, having set the idea of Christian perfection before their view, have begun to walk towards it. And so I wish you, Signora, as soon as you begin to walk in this path, to begin also to frequent the communion, going always to it with the preparation that I have said. Your alms will be in proportion to your charity, but I should rather say, that your almsgiving will be good in proportion as it will proceed from pure charity and the true love of God.

GIULIA: And will you not give me some rule that I may observe in dispensing my alms?

VALDÉS: I shall give you no other rule than that of charity. Love God, and you will know how to dispense your alms.

GIULIA: I ask it because the Preacher said one day, that according to the order of charity, we were more under obligation to our neighbour than to ourselves.

VALDÉS: What the Preacher said is that well-ordered charity begins from God; and that in him persons learn it; both how they should love themselves, and how they should love their neighbour. And he said more: that he who lives in perfect charity frequently postpones his own individual interest for the good of his neighbour. This we see in many passages in St. Paul; who says, that charity seeketh not its own interest. As to distributing alms, St. Paul himself without any difference says: *Facite bonum ad omnes*, do good to all men; and wishing, in some respects, to come to particulars, he says: but chiefly to the household of faith. Keeping to that which Christ says: “he that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receiveth righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man’s reward.” Does it appear to you that these are gifts to be forsaken?

GIULIA: Rather, I have so much enjoyed to hear this, that I would die with pleasure to know some righteous person, to show him a thousand favours, and do him a thousand benefits, to be myself also righteous.

VALDÉS: A pretty contradiction is this! Do you not perceive that in this case you are moved by your own interest, and not as Christ desires, purely by his love? In short, I see, Signora, that you would be satisfied to do whatever God would command you and wish of you, provided you take care of your love for yourself; and I do not wonder, because there is nothing in the world more disagreeable than for persons to do force to themselves; so much more in things belonging to the soul where outward force and human labour are insufficient. But in short, willing or not willing, I promise you that you must give your love up to God.

GIULIA: What rudeness!

VALDÉS: Do you take it as rudeness, Signora, that God having created you, in order that you should love him, and having in so many modes and ways shown his love, he asks you to love him?

GIULIA: Let me put up with your answer. Yet if I were able to do it so readily, I promise you that I would not be slow to do it; but it is necessary to come to this effect through so many intricacies; and to tell you the truth, I do not know how you mean this. Since God commands me to give him all my love, why does he not make me certainly able always to do what I would wish for him as easily as I could give him this gown (*gonna*)?

VALDÉS: The impossibility, or, better to say, the difficulty, comes to us from original sin.

GIULIA: I cannot arrive in my mind to wish well to that Adam when I remember the evils and difficulties that he puts upon us through his sin. VALDÉS: Turn over the leaf, Signora, and at every turn when thinking of these difficulties and evils, you wish ill to Adam, wish well towards Christ, who by

his obedience enables you to fly from the evils and difficulties in which the disobedience of Adam puts you.

GIULIA: You speak well. But as I experience the evil Of Adam's disobedience, and not the good of Christ's obedience, I cannot so readily persuade myself to love Christ as I incline to wish ill to Adam.

VALDÉS: You will find also another thing more than sufficient, if you well consider it, that you can wish ill to Adam following your own will, and you cannot wish well to Christ without contradicting your own will; and to Adam you can wish ill, loving yourself, and you cannot wish well to Christ without leaving the amor proprio with which you love yourself. So that if you desire not to wish ill to Adam and to wish well to Christ, put yourself to experience the benefit of Christ as you now experience the evil of Adam, and set yourself to deny your own will and leave your self-love; then you will as soon experience the good of Christ's obedience, more efficaciously than you now experience the evil of Adam's disobedience.

GIULIA: What pertinacity you have with this Self-love and this Will! Now I assure you that I do not love myself so much as you think.

VALDÉS: I do not think that you love yourself more than as you disclose it and declare it by your words; and it appears to me that if you did not love yourself you would not wish ill to Adam.

GIULIA: Now then, I say, I do not desire to wish him ill. You go taking my words in a manner that makes me venture to say that I thought they never came from my lips. And as from the past I have gained good fruit by your discourse, I wish nothing to be left, and so I wish you to explain one thing which keeps me much confused, and in which I find most unpleasantness, when I wish to deliberate about my entrance upon this Christian course. Let us see what success you will give me, and how you will settle it for me in the mind. The Preacher says: God only accepts those good works that we do, moved purely by the love of God, without being moved to do them either by the fear of hell or desire and love of glory; and I certainly believe it may be so, since he says it. Now then, to tell the truth and to talk freely with you, wishing to examine my mind sincerely, I find that I should not be moved to perform anything, if it were not through fear of that hell and sometimes by the love of glory, but none from pure love to God; because I know from myself, that if there were neither Hell nor Paradise, I should pass along very well in this world, living morally and laudably in the eyes of the world in this life as I have lived until this time, without concerning myself to seek beyond it. Now then, this being so, as I truly know it to be with me, and that also being true which the Preacher says, I find by my calculation that all I shall do in this manner will be lost, since in reality I know that I am not moved to it by love to God, but by love of myself. I cannot conceive in what way you will know how to reconcile this to me. VALDÉS: So might I drive from your mind all your self-love, as I shall know how to settle this point.

GIULIA: To the proof!

VALDÉS: You have a slave, Signora, bought with your money, and although he is vicious, roguish, and ill-inclined, you wish him well; and in order to prevent him from putting his roguery and vice into practice, you threaten him with the galley and other severe punishments. If this slave has good sense, not to be sent to the galleys and not to be punished, understanding also that you make these threatenings for his benefit, he not only labours to restrain his vices and to conquer his evil propensities, but he begins to wish well to you. You, knowing this, begin to treat him well. Feeling and enjoying the good treatment and the affection you bear to him, he begins also to serve you diligently, so that you confer honour upon him, and you bestow upon him those benefits that he wants. You do this, and in thus doing, the more you show him the love you bear towards him, so much the more the love and good-will that he has to serve you increase in him. In this way he already abstains from vice and roguery, not through fear of the galley; nor is he diligent in your service for the sake of the good treatment you give him, but for the sake of the good-will and affection that he knows you have to him; and although there were no galleys, and although you might not treat him well, he would not cease to serve you, because he finds himself obliged by the past, and because he knows that you deserve to be served and obeyed. Now, on your part, seeing the good disposition of the slave, you make him free, giving him a charter of freedom; hence he obeys you through love and not through fear, and serves you as a freeman and not as a slave, and through gratitude and not through interest.

God behaves in this same manner towards us. Because he knows the evil disposition, the malignity, and iniquity of which we are heirs by the sin of our first parents, wishing us well by having created us, and having redeemed us by the most precious blood of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, in order that we should not put our inordinate passions in practice, he sets hell before us. And hence arise the continual threatenings, of which the sacred Scriptures are full. Those of us who open our eyes and believe that there is a hell, and know that God will certainly do what he says in punishing our vices with the pains of hell, labour to leave off our vices not to incur the penalty; likewise because we know in some degree that God loves us. And in such case, although we are not moved by pure love, yet God seeing our obedience, further opens our eyes, so that we perceive the blessedness of Paradise. Knowing and desiring this, we begin to apply ourselves to do the will of God, so that he may give us his glory. Now God, accepting our good-will, opens our eyes still more, so that we know on one part our evil nature, and on the other his infinite goodness. With this knowledge, we begin to be enamoured with God, and to obey and serve him, not indeed through fear of hell, neither through love of glory, but solely because we have known that he is worthy to be loved, and that he infinitely loves us. Then God gives us a charter of freedom, yet we quit not his service by having freedom; rather we are more subject and more obedient; not indeed as slaves, but as freemen; not as hirelings, but as sons. And in this consists Christian liberty. Are you satisfied with this?

GIULIA: Yes, very much; and I have only one doubt remaining. What is the cause that, although many persons serve through fear as slaves, and as mercenaries through interest, they never come to serve as sons with the freedom you speak of?

VALDÉS: It is that whilst they serve as slaves, and whilst they serve as mercenaries, they consider and hold themselves to be perfect; and, seeking no other perfection, they remain always in that servitude, as St. Paul says: “for they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, by which he justifies them who believe in him, and desiring to justify themselves by their works, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” For this cause it is necessary that you recall to your remembrance what I said: that it is proper to keep always before you the idea of Christian perfection in the manner that I have depicted, and better, if better could be. In order so to think, that you must not stop in this Christian course until you find yourself very close to it; as because always that you compare your perfection with it, you may hold yourself as imperfect, and not presume upon yourself; rather you have always legitimate cause to humble yourself; for as the evil angels lost their glory by pride, so God desires us to gain it by humility.

GIULIA: I remain indeed satisfied with this; and if you tell me in two words about Christian liberty, I will then leave you to Go with God!

VALDÉS: You know, Signora, that Christian liberty is a thing which, however much it is reasoned about, and however good the conduct be, can never be understood if it be not experienced; so that you will know so much of it as you experience it in your soul, and no more. If, Signora, you therefore desire to learn it, set yourself to experience it, and you will have no necessity that I should tell you about it. But at all events, I wish to say this: that it appears according to what St. Paul says: “though I be free from all, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain them all for Christ;” the liberty of

the Christian is in the conscience, for the real and perfect Christian is free from the tyranny of the law, from sin and from death, and is absolute lord of his affections and appetites. And on the other part he is the servant of all as to the outward man, because he is subject to serve the necessities of the body, to keep the flesh subject, and to serve his neighbours according to his power, either with his faculties, if gifted with them, or with good doctrine if that be added, and with the example of a good and holy life. So that such a Christian person is free as regards the spirit, acknowledging no other superior than God, and as to the body, he is subject to everybody in the world for Christ's sake. You have already understood, Signora, whence has arisen your confusion of mind in which you have lived until now, and likewise the remedy that you can use for it. You have understood whence the contradiction arises that you felt within you after you heard the Preacher, and in what manner you can free yourself from it. I have depicted to you the idea of Christian perfection. I have shown you twelve steps by which you will begin to walk to Christ without being seen by the world. I have satisfied you of some doubts that have occurred to you. Lastly, you have understood in what Christian liberty consists. It now remains for you directly, directly from this night, to make proof of going in those steps that I have taught you. Therefore I desire that you would tell me in the morning what you think of them. And observe, that you always pray God that he would guide and conduct you by his grace, without ever consenting to withdraw yourself from him. Because this is the way to arrive at Christian perfection, and to enjoy Christian liberty, to which when you shall become united you will be able with truth to say with the Prophet David: *Dominus regit me, et nihil mihi deerit. In loco pasquae ibi me collocavit*; that is, "the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."

Source: From *The Christian Alphabet (Alfabeto Christiano)*, trans. Benjamin Barron Wiffen, in *Life and Writings of Juan de Valdes* (London, 1861 / 1865).

Previously prepared for an earlier version of *The Stromata*. Accessed July 2026.

Translation: Author died 1541. Presumptively the same Wiffen 1861 translation as the companion text 'In What Manner the Christian Should Study in His Own Book,' sourced from the same capdox.capuchin.org.au page (different anchor). Content confirmed distinct - the core *Alfabeto Christiano* dialogue, no overlap with the already-imported excerpt.

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/dialogue-giulia-gonzaga-valdes>