

WILLIAM OF SAINT-THIERRY ON LOVE FOR GOD AND FOR CREATURES AND ON GOD BEING SUPREMELY LOVABLE AND DESIRABLE

**THAT GOD IS TO BE LOVED FOR HIMSELF ALONE AND THAT ALL
OTHER THINGS ARE TO BE LOVED ON ACCOUNT OF HIM**

THY way of showing the love Thou hast for those who love Thee, Lord, is to implant in them the desire to love Thee and the desire for loving and desiring Thee. This great gift Thou givest to man out of Thy loving goodness. It makes no difference to Thee, it does not affect Thee in the least when Thou lovest us, for Thou art eternally changeless. Thy very being is the same as Thy goodness, and Thou canst not be without being good. In Thee is all goodness, both to Thyself and to Thy creatures. But for us it is quite different. When we love Thee, Thou drawest us to Thyself and into Thyself. But we can exist without loving Thee, and this is an evil existence indeed, because it is living outside Thee. Since Thou art completely changeless it does not affect Thee in the least if we draw near to Thee by love. Thou art in no way the loser when we withdraw from Thy love. Now it is only on account of Thyself that Thou lovest us, while we in turn are bound by divine justice to love nothing outside Thee. And by the help of grace a man can love God in such a way that he loves Thee, and himself on account of Thee alone, and for no other reason than Thyself. In this way he begins to image God clearly again and he is restored to the likeness in which Thou didst create him. Like Thyself, he can love only on account of Thee. Thou, by the truth and fairness in Thy nature, and because Thou art by nature substantial Truth, canst love Thyself only on account of Thyself, and men and angels only for the same reason.

The soul which God has taken for His own is truly happy. Through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, Who is God's Unity

and Love, it loves only God. It no longer cares about itself or its own interests. Indeed it still loves itself, but in God and only in Him. God looks on such a soul and loves it. He sees that there is within it that which He cannot look upon without joy and approval—namely Himself. In the soul, God alone is to be loved, both by God Who made it and all other things, and by man who is God's handiwork. For there is no one but Thee, Lord, who deserves to be called love, and there is none who deserves to be loved but Thee. And moreover, Thy Son had a special wish for us. He prayed to God His Father that 'as Thou and I are one, so they too may be one in Us.'²⁵ When we are one with God in this way, we have reached our goal. The very reason for our creation was this completion of our nature in being joined inseparably to God. That is where we shall find real peace and the joy which the Lord promised to His faithful servants. There we will be filled with bliss by the Holy Spirit in the silence of heaven. But meanwhile, as long as we are alive, the heart can enjoy only very occasionally that peace and bliss in heaven. I mean that this blessing comes quite rarely to the godly man's soul, which is Wisdom's dwelling place. And when it does come, it lasts for only about half an hour. But the joy remains even when the blessing is no longer felt, for the soul still remembers it as it strives for Thee with renewed love and desire. And until we come to life without end in the vision of Thee; until we hear Thee say, 'Come and share the joy of your Lord,'²⁶ it will always be the same—we can never have complete and endless delight in Thee until then. And when a man seems to have been kept away from that delight for a great length of time, he will be even more happy when he does come to the never ending eternity of God's love. For that is what he has been striving after, and when he has it, his happiness in the sight of God cannot be marred.



THAT THERE IS NOTHING TO BE LOVED ABOVE GOD, AND NOTHING TO BE DESIRED BEYOND HIM

O LOVE, come into us and take complete possession of us. Let Thy presence in our souls kill every germ of sensuality and the filth of sin which has been conceived and born of fleshly lust and the pride of life. That sentiment which goes by the name of love among us, is infected and corrupted by the diseases of that very soul which Thou didst create in us for Thyself. Love was also intended for Thee alone, but now its nature fights contrary to that law, and very often refuses to follow it. Then it is no longer called love, but gluttony, sensuality, covetousness, and so on, depending on its object. But when it is not allowed to suffer corruption its whole tendency is towards Thee. To Thee alone, Lord, love is due. Rational love in the soul, it has been said, can be described as a movement, or as a state of rest, or even as the attainment of an end. But no matter how we may describe it, in every case the will desires nothing more; it finds nothing further to desire at all. If a man tries to go beyond Thee to look for something better than Thyself he is wasting his time because there is nothing to look for. The reason for that is that there is nothing better or sweeter than Thee. In fact, if a man ignores Thee, the only true object of love, and goes off to lust after other things, he himself becomes—nothing. That is because love is for Thee alone, and for nothing else, and because everything has its being in Thee. Since man is bound by his very *raison d'être* to fear God with a fear inspired only by love, and to keep His commandments, we can only find peace and satisfaction and happiness, Lord, in Thee.

—William of Saint-Thierry (between 1070 and 85–1148), Cluniac Abbot of Saint-Thierry or Theoderic, later (from 1135), Cistercian monk at Signy, chapters 4 and 5 (in respective order) of his *On Contemplating God* (*De contemplando Deo*, written between 1121 and 24), translated from the Latin by Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker, and published by The Saint Austin Press, London, in 2001, pages 25–28. *On Contemplating God* first published by A. R. Mowbray & Co., London, in 1955.

NOTES

²⁵ Saint John 17:11.

²⁶ Saint Matthew 25:21,23.

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