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LOUIS OF GRANADA: THE LAYMAN'S THEOLOGIAN

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LOUIS OF GRANADA STANDS WITHOUT A PEER AMONG DOMINICAN ASCETICAL writers, and throughout the seventeenth century his writings were a constant source of inspiration and education for Christians throughout the civilized world. He reached his maturity during the Council of Trent and at the high point of the Golden Age of Spain. He died in 1588, when the imperial supremacy of Spain was beginning to wane.

Both as a preacher and a writer, Fray Louis dedicated himself assiduously to the indoctrination and spiritual formation of the common people. A contemporary writer stated: "Water girls carried his books under their arms and the market women read them as they waited to sell their merchandise." But another contemporary said of him with disdain that he wrote for the "wives of carpenters," forgetting, perhaps, that the wife of a carpenter was the Mother of God and the Queen of angels and saints.

Long before St. Francis de Sales appeared on the scene, Louis of Granada was preaching the traditional, orthodox doctrine of the universal vocation of all Christians to the perfection of charity. He was *par excellence* a theologian for the laity, but in addition to the rank-and-file Christians, the books of Fray Louis were read with great profit by some of the great saints of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We mention only the following: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Peter Alcantara, St. Rose of Lima, St. Francis de Sales and St. Louise de Marillac.

The bibliography of Louis of Granada would run for several pages but we should at least make mention of four outstanding works: *Book of Prayer and Meditation* (*Libro de Oracion y Meditacion*), *The Sinners' Guide* (*Gula de Pecadores*), *Memorial of the Christian Life* (*Memorial de la Vida Cristiana*) and *Introduction to the Creed* (*Introduccion del Simbolo de la Fe*). The first two books received the widest diffusion; in a short time they were translated into more than twenty foreign languages. For example, a modern Jesuit historian, Father Bayle, has stated that "The Sinners' Guide was one of the bulwarks that sustained a hidden but vital Christianity for two centuries [in Japan], while both in Europe and Japan it was believed dead."

St. Charles Borromeo, a great admirer of Fray Louis and a defender of his teaching, paid him this tribute: "Of all those who up to our time have written on spiritual matters ... it can be stated that no one has written books either in greater number or of greater selection and profit than Fray Louis of



Louis of Granada

Granada ... In fact, I do not know if in matters of this type there is today a man more beneficial to the Church than he is.”

Another testimony comes from a letter written by St. Francis de Sales to a bishop-elect: “I urge you to have on hand the complete works of Fray Louis of Granada and to use them as a second breviary. In my opinion you should begin by reading *The Sinners’ Guide*, secondly the Memorial, and then all the rest. But to derive profit from them, they should not be read rapidly and in gulps, but you should ponder over them and savor them, chapter by chapter, meditating in your soul with much attention and prayers to God. They must be read with reverence and devotion as books that contain the most useful inspirations.”

THE LIFE OF FRAY LOUIS

Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic King and Queen of Spain (*los reyes catolicos*), finally reconquered Spain from the hands of the Moors on January 2, 1492. Spain had been under the domination of the Moors for eight centuries, but with the conquest of Granada, it became at last a united nation and a Catholic nation. In that same year, on October 12, Christopher Columbus discovered the New World that was to become known as the Americas. The fortunes and the political power of Spain now rapidly ascend to their greatest height. As a Catholic nation, Spain also becomes the “evangelizer of half the world, the hammer of heretics, and the light of the Council of Trent.”

Although the conquest of Granada was a great victory for Ferdinand and Isabella, it also gave rise to a serious problem. The Moors who remained as residents in Andalucia were allowed to retain their religion, their language and their customs, but this posed a constant threat to the peace and harmony of the city. Consequently, *los reyes catolicos* encouraged Spaniards from other regions of Spain to migrate to Andalucia, perhaps in the hope that eventually, through intermarriage, the Moors would be absorbed into the Spanish religion, language and culture.

Among the many immigrants to Granada early in the 1500’s was a young married couple from Galicia in northern Spain. Shortly after their arrival, Francis de Sarria and his wife (whose name we do not know) were blessed with the birth of a son whom they named Louis.

Unfortunately, the little family was not blessed with good fortune, but lived in great poverty. To this cross was added yet another and a heavier one - the death of the father in 1509, when Louis was only five years old. The widowed mother and her child were reduced to begging for their daily bread, as Louis himself related in a letter to St. Charles Borromeo: “I was the son of a woman who was so poor that she lived on the alms that were given to her at the gate of the monastery.” The monastery, of course, was the Dominican priory of Holy Cross, founded by Ferdinand and Isabella in testimony to their great devotion to St. Dominic Guzman.

Louis received his early education at one of the free schools established by the Archbishop of Granada. He also had the good fortune to come under the patronage of Count de Tendilla, the mayor of the Alhambra, and to serve as an acolyte in the royal chapel of St. Francis in the Alhambra. But eventually the time came when Louis was faced with the choice of a vocation in life. In those days a poor youth had three possibilities: the barracks, the sea, or the Church. In other words, he could enlist as a soldier in the service of the King; he could sail across the ocean to the New World in search of his fortune; or he could enter the religious life or the diocesan priesthood in the service of the Church. Louis de Sarria chose the religious life as a Friar Preacher.

As we have seen, the Dominican monastery of Holy Cross had been founded by Ferdinand and Isabella. Moreover, it belonged to the Congregation of Observance by express order of the King and was thus juridically separated from the Dominican Province of Spain in 1515, to become the Dominican Province of Andalucia. The new Province flourished and in a short time it had sent so many missionaries to the New World that all the Dominican foundations in Latin America were placed under the government of the Province of Andalucia.

It was in the monastery of Holy Cross that Louis de Sarria received the Dominican habit in 1524 and began his year of novitiate. After one year as a novice, followed by four years of study at Holy Cross, he was assigned to further studies at the famous College of St. Gregory, conducted by the Dominicans at Valladolid. Louis arrived there at the age of twenty-five and upon his registration he dropped the family name of Louis de Sarria and adopted the name of Fray Louis of Granada, a name that he carried with pride for the rest of his life.

In 1534 Fray Dominic Betanzos returned to Spain from Latin America to seek volunteers for a new Dominican Province in Mexico. Fray Louis eagerly responded to the call and by August of that year, together with twenty other friars, Louis was in Seville to inscribe his name as a volunteer for the missions of Latin America. However, when the day of departure arrived, Fray Louis was not on board the ship that sailed to the Americas. The change in plans was not due to Fray Louis, however, but was the result of an intervention by others. A brief resume of the historical facts will clarify the issue.

Pope Adrian VI had granted an unusual privilege to all friars desirous of going to Latin America as missionaries: they could of their own accord decide to go and no superior, under pain of excommunication, could prevent their departure. But because certain abuses had arisen in the use of the papal privilege, Pope Clement VI revoked the privilege in 1533. Now no friar could go to the Americas without permission of his Provincial. That is what happened: the Provincial of Andalucia had the name of Fray Louis removed from the list of missionaries and assigned him to Cordoba.

The task given to Fray Louis was to restore an abandoned Dominican convent named Escalaceli, founded a century earlier by Blessed Alvaro of Cordoba. It had been a place of pilgrimage at one time, due largely to the outdoor Via Crucis, the first even in Europe, and later due to the veneration of the remains of Blessed Alvaro which were buried in the church. Fray Louis spent a total of almost eleven years at Escalaceli and although he found the leisure and solitude there for the composition of a small treatise on prayer, he frequently walked the seven kilometers to the city of Cordoba to preach in various churches. Indeed, he became so beloved of the people and the city officials that when he was named prior at Palma del Rio, they sent official requests that Fray Louis be allowed to remain in Cordoba, but to no avail. In 1546, a little more than a year after Fray Louis had become prior at Palma del Rio, the Master General of the Dominican Order conferred on him the enviable privilege of preaching anywhere in Spain, with a companion of his own choosing, and no one could prevent him from doing so. Fray Louis had already received the honored title of Preacher General in 1540, so now he was free to dedicate himself exclusively to the ministry of the word by preaching and writing.

From that day in 1534, when he left the College

of St. Gregory in Valladolid in the hope of going as a missionary to the Americas, Fray Louis was resolutely determined to be a preacher rather than a professor. There were others who thought differently, and especially his close friend Fray Bartholomew Carranza, who had been a fellow student at the College of St. Gregory in Valladolid. In fact, when Fray Bartholomew became Regent of St. Gregory's and went to Rome to be installed as a Master of Sacred Theology in 1539, he used the occasion to have the Master General of the Dominicans transfer Fray Louis to the Province of Castile and assign him as a professor at St. Gregory's. Fray Louis declined the honor and in a letter to Fray Bartholomew he respectfully points out that an intellectual may also preach but the conversion of souls does not come from letters or knowledge but from God; and God effects the conversion of souls much more through his humble servants than through haughty scholars.

In January of 1547 Fray Louis attended the Provincial Chapter at Jerez de la Frontera and preached the sermon to the members of the Chapter. Also in attendance as a patron of the Province was the Duke de Medina Sidonia, a descendant of the family of St. Dominic Guzman. He was so impressed by the preaching of Fray Louis that he obtained the services of Fray Louis as chaplain of his estates. In a short time numerous other nobles asked and obtained the services of the humble Dominican who in fact had no taste for life in courts and palaces.



Fray Louis frequently crossed into Portugal to preach and eventually his reputation reached the ears of the Cardinal Infante, Archbishop of Evora. In the autumn of 1551 the Archbishop invited Fray Louis to Evora in order to explain to the people and clergy the vocation and mission of the Jesuits. Being of a rather recent foundation, the Society of Jesus encountered numerous obstacles in Spain and Portugal, both on the part of the clergy and the laity. They needed friends who would defend them, and Fray Louis succeeded so well that one of the Jesuits at Coimbra wrote a letter to St. Ignatius Loyola, describing how successfully Fray Louis had explained the nature and purpose of the Society. From that time on, the Jesuits were always counted among Granada's

friends.

Practically the rest of his life was spent in Portugal, with occasional preaching journeys to Spain. Fray Louis was installed as the confessor of Queen Catherine, the sister of Charles V. As a result he could travel less but he had the leisure for prayer and writing. Between 1554 and 1559 he published twelve books.

On April 14, 1556, Fray Louis was elected Provincial of the Dominican Province of Portugal and thus he became a member of that Province. He was scarcely a year in that office when Queen Catherine offered to submit his name as Archbishop of Braga. But Fray Louis declined the honor and suggested that the Queen submit the name of Fray Bartholomew de los Martires, which she did. It was this same Fray Bartholomew de los Martires who stated at Trent: "The most reverend and eminent Cardinals need a most reverend and eminent reform."

Fray Louis was becoming known far and wide not only as a preacher but as a writer of spiritual books. But dark clouds were gathering on the horizon. Because of the rapid spread of Lutheran doctrine north of the Pyrenees and the contagion of Illuminism spread by false mystics (*alumbrados*) in Spain, the authorities felt it necessary to institute the Spanish Inquisition. As early as 1525 the Inquisitor General had published an edict against the *alumbrados* and a syllabus of false spiritual doctrines. Twenty-five years later Fray Louis became a victim of the Inquisition and, sad to say, at the hands of the Dominican censor Melchior Cano, who had been a fellow student years ago at Valladolid. It seems that when suspected *alumbrados* were investigated for heresy, some of the books of Fray Louis were found in their possession.

But there is more to it than that. By this time - 1559 - Fray Bartholomew Carranza was Archbishop of Toledo and he had enemies who sought his downfall. The Inquisitor had ordered Melchior Cano to censor a catechism published by Carranza and also the works of Fray Louis of Granada. Cano, an irreconcilable enemy of Archbishop Carranza, condemned the catechism of Carranza and accused Fray Louis of heresy. For his part, Fray Louis had friends and supporters, among them the Jesuit St. Francis Borgia. But to no avail; in August, 1559, the Inquisitor General signed the list of condemned books and among them were the works of Fray Louis of Granada. A few days later Archbishop Carranza was ar-

rested and brought to Valladolid. He entered the city, riding on a mule and surrounded by constables and archers, like a common criminal, and was later imprisoned.

Through the machinations of Valdes and Melchior Cano, Fray Louis was suspected of heresy, and especially for the teaching contained in his *Book of Prayer and Meditation*. And what precisely was the heretical teaching? Melchior Cano listed four points of doctrine for which Fray Louis should be censured: 1) he is trying to make contemplatives and perfect Christians out of everybody and although this doctrine is profitable for only a few, for the majority of Christians it is imprudent and dangerous; 2) he is teaching a common and general way of perfection for states of life which lack the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; 3) in his *Book of Prayer and Meditation* there are serious errors that have the flavor of the *alumbrados* or are manifestly against the faith and sound Catholic doctrine; 4) the teaching of Fray Louis on vocal and mental prayer is identical with the teaching of the Illuminists, although he uses different examples to illustrate his teaching.

It is not necessary for us to reply to the accusations of Melchior Cano because subsequent history has done so. First of all, we have the teaching of St. Francis de Sales in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*:

Almost all those who have hitherto written about devotion have been concerned with instructing persons wholly withdrawn from the world or have at least taught a kind of devotion that leads to such complete retirement. My purpose is to instruct those who live in town, within families, or at court, and by their state of life are obliged to live an ordinary life as to outward appearances. Frequently, on the pretext of some supposed impossibility, they will not even think of undertaking a devout life. It is their opinion that ... no one should aspire to the palm of Christian piety as long as he is living under the pressure of worldly affairs. I shall show to such men that ... a strong, resolute soul can live in the world without being infected by any of its moods, find sweet springs of piety amid its salty waves, and fly through the flames of earthly lusts without burning the wings of its holy desires for a devout life. (Preface)

It is an error, or rather a heresy, to wish to banish the devout life from the regiment of soldiers, the mechanic's shop, the court of princes or the home of married people. It is true, Philothea,

that purely contemplative, monastic life and the devotion of religious cannot be exercised in such states of life. However, besides those three kinds of devotion there are several others adapted to bring perfection to those living in the secular state ... Wherever we may be, we can and should aspire to a perfect life. (Part I, no. 3)

Secondly, we have the teaching of Vatican Council II, which is diametrically opposed to the opinion of Melchior Cano:

The Lord Jesus, divine teacher and model of all perfection, preached holiness of life (of which he is the author and maker) to each and every one of his disciples without distinction: You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect, (Mt. 5:48) ... It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society ... The forms and tasks of life are many but holiness is one - that sanctity which is cultivated by all who act under God's Spirit and, obeying the Father's voice and adoring God the Father in spirit and in truth, follow Christ, poor, humble and cross-bearing, that they may deserve to be partakers of his glory. Each one, however, according to his own gifts and duties must steadfastly advance along the way of a living faith which arouses hope and works through love. (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 40-41)

To placate the censor Melchior Cano and the Inquisitor General, Fray Louis did make some revisions of his works, although they were still being widely read in Italy as originally written. After the painful experience in Valladolid, Fray Louis returned to Portugal to make a visitation of the various houses and to prepare for the Provincial Chapter of 1560. At that Chapter Fray Jerome de Azambuja, who had gained great renown at the Council of Trent, was elected Provincial, and Fray Louis could once again take his place in the ranks. He retired to the priory of St. Dominic in Lisbon and for the next decade he dedicated himself to prayer, religious observance and writing, although he was called to the royal court almost every day for spiritual ministry or to give advice on temporal matters.

But Fray Louis was not forgotten. On June 20, 1562, the Master General of the Dominican Order con-

ferred on him the envious title of Master of Sacred Theology, which was confirmed later at the General Chapter in Bologna in 1564. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, *The Sinners' Guide* and other works of Fray Louis were examined at the Council of Trent and declared to be orthodox Catholic teaching. Finally, in the last years of his life his name was put forward by St. Charles Borromeo and Cardinal Paleotti for receiving the cardinal's hat, which Fray Louis steadfastly refused.

In the last years of his life Fray Louis was incapacitated by almost total blindness, though he had a secretary to whom he could dictate his writings. In fact, he was already in his 80's when he composed a brief treatise or catechism for teaching religion to the natives in the Americas. He had never lost his nostalgia for the missions in the New World and even in the evening of life he wanted, as he said, to "contribute some small part" to the evangelization of the Indians.

Finally, after a long illness, Fray Louis passed into eternal life on December 31, 1588, at the age of 84. The General Chapter of the Dominican Order, held at Rome in 1589, communicated the news of his death to the entire Order of Preachers and commented as follows: "K doctrina et sanctitate insignis et in tot orbe celebris. " He was, as St. Teresa of Avila said, "a man given to the world by God for the great and universal good of souls." His mortal remains rest in Lisbon, near the sea, but neither time nor forgetfulness will ever bury his spiritual doctrine.¹

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

Unlike many of the great spiritual masters who preceded him, Fray Louis of Granada did not write his books for priests and religious, although they also can derive much profit from his works. He preached and he wrote primarily for the laity, because he was convinced that they, as living members of the Church, are called to the fullness of the Christian life: the perfection of charity. Therefore every Christian should strive to become a perfect Christian. As a worthy son of St. Dominic, Fray Louis exerted every effort to give the laity sound doctrine so that they could realize their Christian vocation to holiness. And rather than paraphrase the teaching of Fray Louis, we shall let him speak for himself, although this will necessitate some rather lengthy quotations.

The first quotation is taken from the *Memorial of*

the Christian Life, wherein Fray Louis explains the purpose for which he wrote this two-volume work:

It is certain that of all human vocations there is none more lofty than that of the perfect Christian who, being ordained to a supernatural end, lives a life that is likewise supernatural ... Now if authors have most diligently taught whatever is required for those other vocations in life.... how much more necessary it is to do the same thing as regards the Christian vocation which, since it is so much more lofty than the others, is much more difficult to attain ... If there is no occupation, however lowly, that does not require rules and regulations in order to be well done, how much more is this true of the greatest of all occupations, which is to serve and please God ... How will the uneducated man know what this occupation demands if he is not reminded of God's promise and warnings and the weighty obligations that he has of serving him? How will he be able to confess correctly if he is not taught the parts of the sacrament of penance and how to perform each one of them? How can he have sorrow for his sins and a purpose of amendment if he is not reminded of the reasons and motives for lamenting them? How can he receive Communion worthily and profitably if he is not taught the things required for this? How will he be able to regulate his life, cultivate virtue, and flee from sin if he does not know the means by which he must seek the former and avoid the latter and does not recognize the temptations and snares of the enemy? How can he formulate a prayer that will be fruitful and accompany it with the necessary conditions and virtues if he has not the doctrine for this? How can he ever reach the love of God if he knows not the means by which it is attained, as well as the things that impede it?²

In this same Prologue to the *Memorial of the Christian Life*, Fray Louis gives his reasons for writing the Memorial and insists strongly on the importance of spiritual reading in the life of the devout Christian:

For many years I have desired to see a book that would treat of the formation of the perfect Christian and would be a summa of all that pertains to the Christian vocation ... Possessing such a compendium, those who truly desire to serve God would easily find doctrine and light for their life, while preachers and confessors zealous for the good of souls would have something from which

they could readily dispense to their hearers whatever is necessary for the fulfillment of the Christian vocation.

I am well aware that there is no lack of books on sound Catholic doctrine, but most of them treat of some particular aspect and do not attempt to treat of everything in a brief space. Furthermore, although the various catechisms ... treat of everything that pertains to the Christian life, they state merely the bare substance of doctrine and only that which is necessary for a clear understanding. They are more speculative than practical, for they are meant to enlighten the understanding rather than move the will to the practice of the virtues.... My purpose is the formation of the perfect Christian and I shall lead him through all the steps and exercises of the Christian life from the beginning of his conversion to the summit of perfection.

The project that we are here attempting - the formation of the perfect Christian - is properly the work of the Holy Spirit, but just as grace does not preclude our own industry but rather concurs with it, so also neither does the interior instruction of God exclude the exterior teaching of men, but necessarily demands it. This office belongs especially to the priests and ministers of the Church ...

Although it is the office of preachers to cure this blindness with the light of God's word, preachers are not always available nor do they always treat of the matters that are most necessary. Neither are they able, as a rule, to descend to the particulars that moral doctrine demands, for this requires individual instruction which is not usually given from the pulpit. Therefore the reading of good books is highly profitable, for books are mute preachers that neither weary us because of their length, for we can always put them aside, nor leave us wanting because of their brevity, for it is within our power to continue reading as long as is necessary.

Although spiritual reading has always been necessary, it is even more so at the present time ... Many priests think that nothing more is required of them than the administration of the sacraments and the celebration of Mass at specified times, and they content themselves with this. Therefore, the greater the lack in preaching, the greater the necessity of supplying for this deficiency by means of

good books ...

So great is the light and fruit of spiritual reading that we know from experience many persons who have changed their entire lives by this means ... Moreover, it serves not only to arouse those who are sleeping but also to safeguard those who are already awake ... If this book has any merit at all, it is because it treats of everything that pertains to all Christians, whether they be beginners or proficients in the Christian life.³

Although Fray Louis was insistent on the universal vocation of all Christians - including the faithful - to the perfection of the Christian life, he likewise recognized the variety of ways in which Christians may follow the path that leads to perfection. He thus avoided what St. John of the Cross criticized in some spiritual guides, namely, that they try to lead everybody along the same path.⁴ Later on, we find that St. Francis de Sales (1622) teaches the same doctrine as Fray Louis of Granada.⁵ The diversity of the virtues manifested in the lives of holy Christians, says Fray Louis, “springs partly from nature and partly from grace”:

Some will be pre-eminent in one virtue and others will especially manifest other virtues. Thus, some persons are more given to the practice of those virtues which pertain to the adoration and worship of God and which are characteristic of the contemplative life. Others will be outstanding in those virtues that pertain to man’s relations with his neighbor, and these pertain to the active life ... Yet all the virtues are means of increasing grace and some persons will receive grace in one way rather than another...

However, there is a very common error among Christians in regard to the practice of the various virtues ... Thus, a man who devotes much time to prayer may think that there is no other way to holiness; he who fasts and practices mortification may think that all other exercises are useless; and he who dedicates himself to the contemplative life may think that those who do not do the same are in great danger and he may even go so far as to depreciate the active life. On the other hand, there are some in the active life who do not know from their own experience what transpires between God and the soul during contemplation, whereas they can see tangible results in the active life and the apostolate. As a result, they may be tempted to belittle the contemplative life ...

There is no better cure for this error than that which St. Paul gives in the passage from his Epistle to the Corinthians, in which he reminds them that all gifts and graces have the same source and origin. So also, through the same baptism they are all members of the same body of which Christ is the head ... Therefore, there is a certain equality among Christians so that there may be unity and brotherhood, but there is also a certain diversity and variety that are compatible with this unity.

The diversity among Christians springs partly from nature and partly from grace. It springs from nature because although the entire spiritual life pertains to the supernatural order of grace, grace itself is received like water into a vessel, that is, it will adapt itself to the various conditions and circumstances and dispositions of the one who receives grace ... The diversity among Christians also depends on the Holy Spirit, the Author of grace, who desires that there be variety among the servants of God for the beauty and glory of the Church....

Therefore, let us leave each one to his vocation and calling. This is what St. Paul advises when he says: “The man who will eat anything must not ridicule him who abstains from certain foods; the man who abstains must not sit in judgment on him who eats.” (Rom 14:3) The musical notes that are written on the line are as important as those that are written between the lines; so also, he who does one thing is as beneficial to the Church as he who does something entirely different.⁶



From this teaching it follows that one’s temperament or moral predisposition will be a weighty factor in determining one’s vocation or state of life; then the duties of one’s state of life are the framework within which one works out one’s sanctification and salvation. Thus, Fray Louis advises the married woman that she “should look first to the care of the home, provision for her family, satisfaction of her husband, and all that pertains to the duties of a wife and mother. Only after she has fulfilled the obligations of a wife and mother can she give herself to devotions and pious exercises, for her first duty is to

fulfill the obligations of her state in life.”⁷

And what are the practices that lead to Christian perfection? Fray Louis lists several, and they are not mutually exclusive, for a Christian will normally use most of them. The first and most important is the practice of prayer, which provides a direct and immediate contact with God. And if, as St. Thomas Aquinas taught, those who cease to practice prayer will eventually lose their taste for the things of God, the converse is also true, namely, that those who do practice prayer will develop and ever increasing attraction for the things of God.

Secondly, the devout Christian should cultivate a “contempt” for the things of this world (contemptus mundi). This does not mean that one should condemn the world but that one never allows any worldly pleasure or gain to become an obstacle to the love of God and neighbor. Indeed, if one becomes habituated to the practice of prayer, it necessarily follows that one will be weaned from the things of this world. More immediately, however, Fray Louis warns against the all too human tendency to inordinate self-love: “I say inordinate because if the love of self is regulated and controlled, it is not evil but good and necessary for the preservation of life.”⁸ The following passage is remarkably similar to the teaching of St. John of the Cross in his *Ascent of Mount Carmel*:

Now, what is more contrary to the love of God than love of self? Self-love desires everything for the individual, directing all things to himself and making himself his own ultimate end. The love of God, on the contrary, directs all things to God and denies self and even crucifies self for love of him. Since these two loves are so contrary, so also are the affections and works that proceed from them and for that reason it is impossible that both these loves should be contained in the one heart. For how can we possess at one and the same time the love of God and love of the world, love of the earth and love of heaven, love of the flesh and love of the spirit, selfish love and divine love?⁹

The third practice leading to the perfection of the Christian life is the cultivation of the virtues proper to one’s state of life. This is a teaching that was misunderstood by Melchior Cano, who complained: “He is trying to make all Christians perfect!” and by the Inquisitor Valdes, who accused Fray Louis of “writing sublime truths for the wives of carpenters.” Fray Louis repeat-

edly emphasized that the clergy, the religious and the laity should follow the path to holiness that is conformable to their state of life. All Christians, whatever their state of life, should cooperate with the graces given, and they do this by the practice of the virtues according to their particular vocation. But the pattern of virtues proper to the contemplative religious life will not be the same as that of the apostolic religious life; the virtues proper to the priestly state are different from those proper to the married state or the lay member of a secular institute. Yet another important distinction regarding the virtues pertains to the difference between the internal aspect of virtue and the external act of virtue. Following the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, Fray Louis states that “there is no doubt that the first is more excellent and necessary than the second.” He then adds:

If you adhere to the doctrine we have expounded, you will avoid two extremes: that of the Pharisees and that of the heretics. The Pharisees, a carnal and ambitious group who could see nothing but the external observance of the law, took no account of true justice, which is a spiritual and internal virtue. For that reason they had only the appearance of virtue without its substance, appearing good externally while within they were abominable.

The heretics, on the other hand, having seen the error of the Pharisees, fled from one extreme to the other and rejected and disdained all external acts of virtue.¹⁰

But Catholic doctrine avoids these two extremes by giving proper recognition to both the internal and the external virtues, but it gives the internal virtues first place while not neglecting to give the external virtues the importance that is due them.¹¹

We come at last, but not least, to the worthy reception of the sacraments as a necessary practice that leads to the perfection of the Christian life. Fray Louis describes the sacraments, instituted by Christ, as “heavenly instruments by which grace is communicated to us and as fountains which flow from the open side of Christ into our souls.” Unlike the practice of prayer and the performance of meritorious good works through the practice of the virtues, the sacraments do not depend on any activity on our part to be effective. They work, as the theologians say, *ex opere operato*, which means that they automatically produce the grace that is signified by the sacramental rite - unless there is an obstacle on the part of

recipient. This teaching was promulgated officially by the Council of Trent during the lifetime of Fray Louis.

Fray Louis asserts - and rightly so - that God could infuse grace into the soul without using the instrumentality of the sacraments, as he often does, but Christ instituted the various sacraments to supply for the various needs in our spiritual life. Following very closely the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, Fray Louis briefly states how the various sacraments supply for our spiritual needs:

Baptism serves for our birth into the spiritual life; confirmation makes us grow and become strong in the spiritual life; the Eucharist gives us nourishment in the spiritual life; penance cures us when we are ill; and extreme unction gives us back our spiritual strength.

These five sacraments are necessary for man as an individual person, but we can also consider that man has two possible functions or offices: the one to propagate and increase the human race and the other to govern and guide souls to their ultimate end which is God. For that reason two other sacraments are necessary: matrimony and holy orders

...These are the seven sacraments by which the Holy Spirit, through the sufferings and merits of the passion of Christ, communicates grace to the faithful.¹²

We have given but a very brief and succinct outline of the ascetical teaching of Fray Louis of Granada. In his various works he has developed this doctrine in greater detail and has made practical applications. His writing is not, however, purely speculative and abstract, nor could it be, since Fray Louis was teaching the theology of the Christian life. He was above all a preacher, and his books are sermons in print.

CONCLUSION

Even from our brief summary of the spiritual teaching of Fray Louis of Granada it is evident that he was truly a master of the spiritual life. Like some of the other writers of the Golden Age of Spain, including St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, he treats each topic so thoroughly and with such psychological insight that the reader feels that the books of Fray Louis were written especially for him or her. The reason for this is that, like any effective preacher or teacher, Fray Louis

understood the needs of his hearers or readers and could anticipate the questions and problems that would most likely arise.

Although he wrote well on all that he discussed, we should make special mention of his treatment of the practice of prayer and the virtue of charity. On these two topics alone Fray Louis would deserve to be ranked with the other great masters of the spiritual life such as St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila and St. Francis de Sales. A selection from his beautiful and inspiring treatment of the virtue of charity serves as a fitting conclusion to this article, especially since it arouses such optimism and confidence in the heart of the devout Christian.

To come to an end in this matter, let us observe that since charity is the greatest of all the virtues and the goal of all the others, the perfection of the Christian life must consist essentially in charity. Consequently, the measure of the perfection of just souls, both in this life and in glory, is taken from the degree of their charity ... Thus, if a woman finds herself at the moment of death with greater charity than that possessed by another who has worked miracles and has converted many souls, undoubtedly the woman will receive a much higher degree of glory in heaven, because she possessed greater charity here on earth ... Nor should we marvel that this is so, for whatever a man may do of himself is little in comparison with that which he receives from God, he can still do much if he loves much, because in loving he gives himself and thus performs the greatest service of which he is capable ... Then God responds to this generosity of the Christian soul by giving himself completely.

This doctrine offers much consolation and encouragement to those who have little to give; those who, because of lack of education or ingenuity or because of sickness or old age, cannot offer great services and labors to the glory of God. For even without doing these things, they can love God greatly. Moreover, he who loves much can do much; he who gives himself through love, already gives much; and he who desires to do much, has the credit of doing much, for God sees the heart of man, and in God's sight a good intention is of no less value than the good work itself.

If, therefore, you cannot do great deeds, then desire to do much and love as much as you can. In doing so, you will be doing great things for God.¹³

NOTES

1The details of the life of Fray Louis are based on the most recent biography: *Fray Luis de Granada: Una vida al servizio de la Iglesia*, by Fr. Alvaro Huerga, O.P., published by Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 1988.

2Cf. *Summa of the Christian Life: Selected Texts from the Writings of Venerable Louis of Granada*, O.P., Vol. I, translated and adapted by Jordan Aumann, O.P., St. Louis, B. Herder Book Co., 1954, pp. 3-4. The three volumes of this Summa were compiled by Fr. Antonio Trancho, O.P., of Almagro, Spain, using the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas as a framework for the spiritual doctrine of Fray Louis of Granada. Fr. Trancho did not live to see the completion of his work; with twenty-six fellow Dominicans, he gave his life for God and for Spain in the early days of the Spanish Civil War. The work was completed by the Most Reverend Francisco Barbado, O.P., Bishop of Salamanca, Spain. This three-volume series is now available from TAN Books, P.O. Box 424, Rockford, Illinois 61105.

3Cf. *Summa of the Christian Life*, Vol. I, pp. 3-4.

4See St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel, Prologue and The Living Flame of Love*, Stanza 3, paragraphs 30 to 62.

5Cf. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Preface and First Part, Section 3.

6See *Summa of the Christian Life*, Vol. 11, pp. 41u-41D.

7Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 421.

8Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 153.

9*Summa of the Christian Life*, Vol. II, p. 155. For an excellent treatment of conversion, see Vol. III, pp. 252-268.

10Fray Louis is here referring to the Lutheran doctrine of salvation through faith alone, without good works.

11*Summa of the Christian Life*, Vol. II, p. 22.

12Op. cit., Vol. III, p. 217.

13Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 152-153.

