

## THE FOURTH CONFERENCE

### On Renunciation(v1)

The little attachments of "yours" and "mine" are, then, remnants of the world in which there is nothing so precious. It is the world's greatest delight to have many things properly its own (n1) and of which it can say, "It is mine." For what makes us attached to what is ours is the high esteem that we have of ourselves. We hold ourselves in such high esteem that as soon as something belongs to us we think more about it and the low esteem that we have for others makes us feel a distaste for what they have used. But if we would be really humble and detached from ourselves, so that we would hold ourselves as nothing before God, we would not make so much of what is our own, and we would think ourselves extremely honored to use what has already been used by others.

Furthermore, we ought to know that there is a difference between inclinations and affections. For when it is only a matter of inclinations and not of affections, we should not be upset, because having no bad inclinations does not depend on ourselves. If it should happen that a Sister would exchange her habit for one that is shabbier and the inferior part of her spirit would react with a bit of annoyance, this is no sin because with her reason she accepts it in good heart for the love of God. The same would go for all the other feelings that might arise in us (v2). If I am told that someone has spoken unkindly about me, or that I am being opposed in some matter, I might instantly become angry and every vein might swell in me because my blood is boiling. But in spite of all this, if I turn to God and make an act of love for the person who has offended me, then there is no sin. I say further that even if a thousand kinds of thoughts should arise against this person, which might last a whole day, or even several, provided that from time to time I try to get rid of them, there is no sin because it is not within my power to prevent the feeling. But if this Sister consented to the feeling she had on changing her habit or undergarment (n2), undoubtedly that would be very wrong and she would be very unfaithful to God and her own growth in perfection. These feelings come because we have not joined our wills to the will of the community, which should be done on entering religion. Each Sister should have left her own will outside the door and have only the will of God within her.

Blessed is the person who has no other will than that of the community and who takes from the community each day only what she needs! This is how we ought to understand this saying of Our Lord : "Have no concern for tomorrow" (n3). It is not concerned with food or clothing but with spiritual exercises. Whoever would ask you, "What will you do tomorrow?" you should answer, "I don't know. I'll do today what I am asked to do. I don't know what I'll do tomorrow because I do not know what I will be asked to do." Whoever (v3) does this will never be anxious; they will never be troubled or saddened. Moreover, this is a virtue which cannot be acquired in five years; a good ten years are necessary. This is why we must not be disappointed if our Sisters still do not have it. They all have the good will to acquire it. If anyone wants to have what is "yours" and what is "mine," she must go outside the community for it because it will never be spoken about within it (v4).

Renunciation must not only be done in a general way, but specifically, for it is very easy to say: "We must go to the Visitation! There we will find the general principle, You must renounce yourselves and give up your own will. Oh, we can easily do that!" But when it comes (n4) to the

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practice and the details, there is the hard part. This is why we must consider the nature of renunciation and all the things which it involves.

We must be on our guard when we experience some passion for not doing a particular action which arises from our own impulse. When, however, it concerns small matters, as it would be to unconsciously throw out a pen or something similar, it is not a matter for confession. We must make it known to the Superior and make amends. Otherwise we would willingly nourish our imperfection.

We must regard with great honor and esteem everything belonging to our Congregation; all the acts of mortification, of piety and devotion which are observed there and which Superiors permit. Moreover, sometimes it happens that we have a dislike because of a bad inclination in our spirits suchwise that one Sister may be upset only with kissing the floor, another only with the making of the culpa or some other mortification. To despise or condemn these practices would be an intolerable presumption. We must take care not to do such a thing, for this would be very wrong. Such a thing should not happen. But this weakness is in all the religious that I have ever known, either through laziness or discouragement. Laziness would have us believe that we do not have the strength to do the mortifications or the desire to carry them out. This is why we dislike seeing others doing them. Discouragement makes them tiresome, and so we say: "My God, oh such pain! It is never over! I have never seen so much! There's no end to it!" We must not allow ourselves to be moved by these inclinations or dislikes but follow our reason and the direction of our Superior.

This is the spirit we ought to have in accepting mortifications. If we would prepare ourselves by informing ourselves two hours before, it would be easy not to be overly affected by them. However, when they happen by surprise, it is very difficult. The mortifications we choose, even though opposed to our nature because of the choice we have made, are no longer as difficult because our nature is not overcome by vanity. However, those given through our Superiors we must receive from the hand of God with honor and humility. Mortifications happen to us from the order of the providence of God and are given to us in charity. We must believe this because it is not for us to judge if they come from passions. But if such might come to us in our thoughts, we should accept them with gentleness as a form of trial and look always to the hand of God. Even though he is not the origin of evil and this passion, since it is bound to happen, Our Lord takes it from his hand and places it in ours so that we might merit through the suffering in such a trial.

We ought to love to do and to see done for our Sisters whatever can help and advance them in the way of perfection and do them with greater motivation. These small practices, even though they seem to be of little value, are of more value than the greater practices. The greatest practices are rarely done with poor motivation, but the small ones are innumerable and must be done with care and with good motivation. For example, speaking softly, walking in two's, wearing a neat and clean habit. If you bang the doors or walk noisily, you might disturb the recollection of a Sister who is perhaps praying; if you do not wear the habit correctly or properly (n5), you might cause another Sister to laugh or be distracted from the presence of God, and you would be guilty of hurting such a Sister; and so on. This is wrong because we ought to be continually practicing charity and do all everything possible for the good of all. Everything and everyone must be held in common, even Our Lord. He does not only want us to have charity. He wants what we have individually to belong to all in common and what we have in common to belong to each individually.

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When a certain temptation arises where there is danger of sin and it continues, to avoid offending God we must very often do some act that shows that we have not consented, like kissing the floor, raising our hands to heaven while spitting on the ground, all the while having the intention of not consenting, speaking to Our Lord, or similar things. This keeps us calm and removes any doubt and fear of having consented. If on examining ourselves we find that we have done these things, we have as much assurance as there can be in this life about not sinning.

True renunciation occurs in three steps: the first is the affection which comes about by the consideration of the beauty of renunciation; the second step is the resolution which follows the affection because we can very easily make a resolution on something that we like; the third step is the practice, which is more difficult.

The goods that we must renounce belong to three types: external goods (v5), goods of the body and goods of the heart. External goods are all the things that we left behind when entering the Visitation: our homes, our parents, and similar things. For us to make an act of renunciation we must place all of them in the hands of Our Savior and then, having put them aside, return to Our Lord asking him for the affection that he wants us to have for them. It is not necessary for us to live without affections or to hold them all equally but indifferently. We ought to love our fathers more, then children and also each one accordingly, for charity puts our affections in their proper order. Goods of the second type are those of the body, which are beauty, good health and similar things. We must renounce all these. We must not go to a mirror to see if we are beautiful nor should we be concerned any longer about health or sickness, at least in our higher will. Nature always shows itself and sometimes cries out, at least when we are not very perfect. One must live contentedly either in sickness or in health. One must take the medicine and food just as it comes; I mean this always on the level of reason, for I am not deceived by our natural tendencies. Goods of the heart are the consolations and moments of tenderness that are found in the spiritual life. These goods are very good. "Why," you will say, "must we give them up?" We must take them and put them into the hands of Our Lord to dispose of them as he pleases and to serve him either with or without them.

There is another type of goods, which is neither interior nor exterior, which is neither goods of the body nor of the heart. These are the imaginary goods of thought, which depend on the opinion of another: honor, esteem, a good reputation and the like. We must give these up entirely and desire no honor other than the honor of the Congregation, which is to find in all things the glory of God, no other esteem or reputation than that of the community, which is to give the best edification in all things (v6).

For the happiness that we feel on meeting those whom we love and the signs of affection that we give on seeing them are not at all opposed to this virtue of renunciation, as long as they are not overdone and that our hearts do not run after those persons who are not present. How can our faculties not be stirred up when these persons are present? It would be like saying to someone who met a lion or a bear, "Don't be afraid." It is not within our power. So, on meeting those whom we love, it is impossible for us not to be moved with joy and satisfaction. All must be conformed to the good pleasure of God (v7). This is why it is not contrary to virtue. Furthermore, I say that if I want to see someone about something beneficial and that redounds to the glory of God, if the purpose of their coming is thwarted and I feel upset about it and I am somewhat eager to remove the obstacles in

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the way of their coming, I have committed no fault against the virtue of renunciation, as long as I do not become anxious over it.

Thus you see that virtue is not as terrible a thing as is imagined. It is a mistake that many make. They form illusions in their minds and think that the way to heaven is especially difficult. They are deluded and very mistaken. David said to Our Lord that his law was very light and easy (n6). This good king said that it was "sweeter than honey" (n7). We must tell everyone the same about our vocation, that we regard it as not only good and excellent but also as gentle, pleasing and lovable. If we do this, we will have a great love in doing all that it demands.

It is true, my dearest Daughters, that we will never arrive at perfection as long as we have an attachment to a particular imperfection, however small it may be, even though this might only be holding on to a useless thought. You would not believe how much harm this does to us. When you give your mind the freedom to stop and think about something useless, you will sooner or later think about more harmful things. We must cut short what is harmful as soon as we are aware of it, no matter how insignificant it may be.

Many times we have to look at ourselves to see if it is true, as it sometimes seems, that we are not detached. Tell me, when someone praises you, whether you try to say something that increases the praise you are given; or better, when you look for praise through carefully chosen words, saying that your memory or mind is not as good as it used to be, so that you are ill at ease (n8) in having to speak well. Who doesn't see that you are pretending so that they will tell you that you always speak exceptionally well? Search your conscience thoroughly as to whether you will find there an attachment to vanity. You can easily find out whether you are attached to something or not when you are deprived of the opportunity of doing what you have proposed. If you no longer have it, you will be as calm in not doing it as you would have been in doing it. However, if you are upset, it is a sure sign that you have an attachment to it. Our affections are so precious because they must be totally used to love God. We have to be careful not to set our affections on useless things. One fault, small as it might seem, is more harmful to the life of perfection than a hundred done through surprise but without an affection for them (v8).

We must have more respect and honor for our Superiors than our good Angels, because our good Angels are only messengers of God, while our Superiors take the place of God himself. Our Lord said, "He who hears you, hears me," when speaking of Superiors, and "He who despises you, despises me" (n9).

You now ask me, "Suppose it happens that a Sister does not have the trust to reveal the secret of her heart (v9); or better, to be open to confessing it to the Superior or even to the Assistant in her absence?" The Superior ought to allow her to speak freely to one of the Sisters that she would like to speak to. The Sister who is asking for it should ask for the permission without showing any dislike for the Superior. The Superior should be very happy that it is pleasing to God that the Sister is being relieved of such a burden. But it is also true that the Sister would be guilty of a very great imperfection, since she does not see in the person of the Superior God alone, which she is not obliged to see in the person of her Sisters (v10).

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### NOTES

1. which belong to it in its own right – addition for the meaning of the French text.
2. a short petticoat – addition for the meaning of the French text.
3. Matt. 6:34.
4. one comes to the... – correction for the meaning of the French text.
5. impropriety – addition for the meaning of the French text.
6. Ps. 118:4,96,167.
7. Ps. 18:11; Ps. 118:103.
8. as good as you are accustomed to...
9. Lk. 10:16.

### VARIANTS

1. E1629. *Eighth Conference, On Self Renouncement and the Stripping of Ourselves of All Things*; E1933. *Eighth Conference, on Self-Renunciation*.
2. E1629. Go from here to "... these feelings come..." in the next paragraph.
3. E1629. "He who acts in this way will never be annoyed or anxious, for where there is true indifference there can never be anxiety or sadness..." Go down to "...If anyone wants to have what is `yours'!...", the last sentence of the paragraph.
4. E1629. Add: "We must not only want to have renunciation in general but in particular. There is nothing easier than to speak in generalities. We must renounce ourselves and give up our own will. When it comes to practice, this is where the difficulty begins. This is why we consider both the situation and all the things that follow from it in detail. Then we must renounce in particular one act of our own will, then another until we have given up everything." Then go down six paragraphs to: "... This renunciation is..."
5. E1629. "Material goods, spiritual goods, external goods..."

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6. E1629. "All these self-despoilments and renunciations of the above mentioned things must not be done out of contempt but through self-denial for the pure love of God alone."
7. E1629. "All must be conformed to the good pleasure of God" is missing.
8. The edition of 1629 inserts a lengthy passage, which is a special *Conference* in the Rouen manuscript and is entitled: *On the Love of Human Persons* (Cf, the first two variants of the next conference). This long passage concludes the *Eighth Conference*.
9. E1933. "... or better to open herself up" is missing.
10. E1629. These last two paragraphs are missing from the conference.