

# The Healing of Families

Father Yozefu-B. Ssemakula

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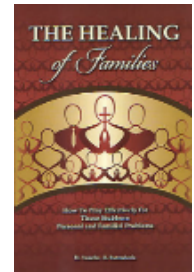
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This serious issue is addressed in a truly fresh and inspired book, "The Healing of Families", by renowned author Father Yozefu-B. Ssemakula, who hails from Uganda, and is now ministering in the U.S. based in the Pensacola-Tallahassee diocese. His in-depth book is filled with powerful prayers to cleanse and heal the family.

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**STATEMENT ON REVEREND YOZEFU SSEMAKULA  
AND THE HEALING OF FAMILIES**

Reverend Yozefu Ssemakula is an incardinated priest in good standing in the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee. His healing of families ministry/seminar is not a ministry of the diocese and does not enjoy any particular endorsement from the bishop. In addition, his book, *The Healing of Families*, has not received an *Imprimatur* or *Nihil Obstat*. Fr. Ssemakula requested these canonical designations when he presented his manuscript to Archbishop Thomas Wenski, who was at the time, the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee. Archbishop Wenski asked Reverend Juan Quijano, S.T.D., a professor at St. Vincent de Paul Seminary in Boynton Beach, FL, to review the manuscript. Fr. Quijano noted errors with his text in the area of theology and presented his findings to Archbishop Wenski and Fr. Ssemakula. He stated that the book could not be given the requested *Imprimatur* and *Nihil Obstat* unless these errors were corrected. The book was published without any ecclesial approbation.

Furthermore, I have received various reviews from those who have attended his seminars which are based on the content of his book. Some have found the seminar to be very helpful, while others have found his theological conclusions to be erroneous. I have also received requests from various individuals who wish to know the position of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee on his book and seminars. Therefore, I have asked the *Censor Librorum* of our diocese, Reverend Hector Perez, S.T.D., to review all materials written by Fr. Ssemakula to determine if an *Imprimatur* and *Nihil Obstat* can be granted, and if not, what action should be taken.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ 

Most Reverend Gregory L. Parkes  
Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee  
August 26, 2014

# **“The Healing of Families” -- Critique and Concerns<sup>1</sup>**

-Bruce Sullivan

The following is a brief critique of the book, *The Healing of Families* by Fr. Yozefu -B. Ssemakula.

## **Introduction**

Let me begin by expressing my deep respect for Fr. Yozefu-B Ssemakula’s desire to bring healing to entire families. To say that dedication to such a work is admirable falls short. It is, rather, nothing short of beautiful in the most meaningful of ways. Therefore, any critiques I offer or questions I raise regarding the particulars of his “Healing of Families” ministry need to be understood in that light.

I participated in Fr. Yozefu’s “Healing of Families” seminar and read his book at the recommendation of a friend who is also a priest. All five of my children suffer from a seriously debilitating condition, and my friend thought that what Fr. Yozefu offers might be of help. It was, therefore, with great anticipation that I attended the seminar and, subsequently, read the book.

Having read the book and participated in the seminar, I can say that there are some solid and beneficial ideas presented by Fr. Yozefu. However, many of the ideas put forth are very problematic and difficult--in fact, impossible--to harmonize with traditional Catholic teaching. The following is an explication of the major concerns raised by the book and the corresponding seminars. It is presented in more-or-less outline form.

Please note: my intention is not to present a treatise on healing *per se*. My intention is to address the specific problems presented by “*The Healing of Families*” book and seminar.

## **I. Too Focused on this World**

In the Introduction, Fr. Yozefu sets the stage for what follows by suggesting that persistent problems (including sickness) are problems that we can “*unload*” because “(we) *are in control even without knowing it*”<sup>2</sup>. He states, “*Your Heavenly Father...wills those good things for you in this life even more than you desire them for yourself.*”<sup>3</sup>

I don’t think anyone would disagree with the fact that God desires our health, happiness, and well-being more than even we do ourselves. It does not follow,

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<sup>1</sup> Revised 8/5/14

<sup>2</sup> Page 11

<sup>3</sup> Page 10

however, that He has willed for us to experience that in this life. Yes, we experience many joys in this life that provide evidence of God's goodness and serve as a foretaste of Heaven. However, it is equally true that in this fallen world we are--as the Church militant--in the wilderness somewhere between the Red Sea Crossing and crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. In other words, it does not appear to be the will of God that the temporal consequences of the Fall (consequences that the Catechism tells us remain after Baptism) be completely removed in this life. We know by virtue of our Faith that at least one of the reasons for this is that we might grow in grace, humility, faith, *etc.* In other words, it is for our sanctification and, ultimately, salvation.

While all of us certainly do desire health and well-being (even in this life), and while God desires our ultimate health and well-being, it does not follow that we will experience such in this life. My concern, then, is that even in the opening paragraphs, the book sets before the reader expectations that are not in harmony with reality and with the Catholic faith as it comes to us through two thousand years of Sacred Tradition.

In other words, it seems to me that Fr. Yozefu is concerned that God not be connected in any way with human suffering because, it would seem, if we think that God might have a purpose for our suffering (say, in the form of illness), we might get upset with God and turn our backs on him. In other words, since we cannot go to heaven without loving God...and since, presumably, we cannot love God unless we are happy...and since we cannot be happy unless we are healthy...it is as if we are asking God to make us healthy, so that we can be happy, so that we can love Him, so that we can then go to heaven. That, however, is a very worldly approach to our relationship with God and one that is out of harmony with the Catholic faith.

## **II. Denial of Temporal Punishment & Handling of OT**

Starting with John 10:10, Fr. Joseph tries to make a case for the idea that God does not send any sort of temporal punishments to us in this life. In pages 48 - 60, he basically states the idea that God punishes his people (*i.e.* with temporal punishments in this life) is an erroneous idea we carry over from the Old Testament. Because of the apparent lack of any direct statements from Jesus on the subject, the conclusion is made that God does not chastise his people in this life (*i.e.* as if to say, "If Jesus did not say it, then it is not true.") He offers the metaphor of a child touching a hot stove in support of this conclusion.<sup>4</sup> There are several problems with this. They include:

### **A. Dismissive Approach to Old Testament Passages that Don't "Fit"**

In other words, the plethora of OT passages of Scripture that speak quite plainly regarding the fact that God chastises his people are more-or-less dismissed as simply being due to underdeveloped theology, *etc.*

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<sup>4</sup> In the illustration, a child is found by his parent crying on the kitchen floor because he touched the hot stove. No good parent would proceed to whip or discipline the child because the suffering caused by touching the stove is sufficient to learn the lesson. In fact, the parent will kneel down and suffer with the child rather than proceed to administer punishment.

While revelation is, of course, progressive, such a simplistic view of the Old Testament that relegates much of its teaching to the dustbin is simply not compatible with the Catholic teaching on Sacred Scripture as it is presented in Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* and Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*.

Moreover, the OT wisdom literature makes it clear that a good father does, in fact, chastise his son for the good of the son (e.g. Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-15; *et. al.*) God, of course, is the ultimate model for all fathers (and, as we shall see, disciplines his children accordingly).

## **B. Overlooks New Testament Teaching to the Contrary**

Fr. Yozefu maintains that if we do not have any recorded statements from Jesus that indicate that God administers temporal punishment in this life, it must be that God does not do so. While it is true that Jesus Christ--the Word Incarnate--is the culmination of all divine revelation, it does not follow that we should only hold as true those teachings for which we have a direct quote from Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus himself told the Apostles that He had many other things to tell them, but they were unable to receive them. However, Jesus assured them that the Comforter--the Holy Spirit--whom He would send, would "*guide them into all truth*" (John 16:12-13). This is why Jesus told his Apostles, "*He who hears you, hears Me*" (Luke 10:16).

Along these lines, it is pertinent to note that there are not any recorded statements of Jesus that directly address abortion, contraception, or homosexuality. Are we, therefore, to conclude that the Church's teaching is incorrect in regard to these matters?

Finally, it is important to note that the New Testament does, in fact, indicate that God chastises his people in this life out of love for them and for the salvation of their souls. Consider the following.

### **Hebrews 12:7-11**

*"It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."*

NOTE: It is clear that God does in fact discipline (chastise / punish) in this

life for our salvation. In fact, the writer of Hebrews says that if we are not disciplined we are illegitimate sons. Why? Because fatherly discipline is an expression of fatherly love.

### **1 Corinthians 11:27-32**

*“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”*

NOTE: There are some that hold that God punishes only by allowing us to experience the natural consequences of our sins. However, this passage concerning the desecration of the Eucharist indicates that God--in His love for us--actually punishes / chastises us in order to keep us from losing our souls. There are, after all, no *natural* physical consequences that come from an unworthy Holy Communion. In other words, it is clear that our Lord does, in fact, directly discipline us.

### **John 2:13-15**

*“The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.”*

NOTE: It is said the actions speak louder than words. In regard to temporal punishment, we see in this instance the Lord Jesus actually administering a form of temporal punishment (unless, of course, we assume that the whip He made and wielded was merely a prop that served no real purpose).

### **C. Contradicts what St. John Paul II taught in *Salvifici doloris*.**

Fr. Yozefu makes a passing reference to *Salvific Doloris* (“Salvific Sufferin”) in his book. However, Fr. Joseph’s insistence that God does not administer temporal punishment is out of harmony with what St. John Paul II taught. I offer the following full length citation as an illustration. Therein

we see that St. John Paul II taught that God does administer temporal punishments as an act of love in order to bring us to repentance and conversion.

*“12. The Book of Job poses in an extremely acute way the question of the “why” of suffering; it also shows that suffering strikes the innocent, but it does not yet give the solution to the problem. Already in the Old Testament we note an orientation that begins to go beyond the concept according to which suffering has a meaning only as a punishment for sin, insofar as it emphasizes at the same time the educational value of suffering as a punishment. Thus in the sufferings inflicted by God upon the Chosen People there is included an invitation of his mercy, which corrects in order to lead to conversion: “... these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people”*

*Thus the personal dimension of punishment is affirmed. According to this dimension, punishment has a meaning not only because it serves to repay the objective evil of the transgression with another evil, but first and foremost because it creates the possibility of rebuilding goodness in the subject who suffers.*

*This is an extremely important aspect of suffering. It is profoundly rooted in the entire Revelation of the Old and above all the New Covenant. Suffering must serve for conversion, that is, for the rebuilding of goodness in the subject, who can recognize the divine mercy in this call to repentance. The purpose of penance is to overcome evil, which under different forms lies dormant in man. Its purpose is also to strengthen goodness both in man himself and in his relationships with others and especially with God.”*

#### **D. The “Hot Stove” metaphor is NOT the only model for discipline.**

Fr. Yozefu uses the illustration of a child touching a hot stove as a metaphor for punishment. Would a good father punish a child who has already burned his hand on the stove? Would not a loving father share the child’s pain and weep with him rather than punish him?

While it is true that in the scenario described in the “Hot Stove” metaphor, no good parent would proceed to administer corporal punishment to an already-suffering child, it is also true that in real life there are scenarios in which a good parent will administer corporal punishment in order to protect the child.<sup>5</sup> In the same way, God--our Father--disciplines us for our good (*i.e.* in order to keep us from perishing).

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<sup>5</sup> If a child is about to “cross a line” that might result in serious injury or death, any parent possessing common sense will discipline the child, if necessary, in order to prevent them from “crossing the line” and killing themselves (*i.e.* especially in the case of a danger that the child is unable to comprehend).

In other words, if one equates “discipline” and “punishment” with an exercise in cruelty or as an expression of vengeance, then it will be hard to harmonize “temporal punishment” with John 10:10 (*i.e.* Jesus coming to bring us life). However, this difficulty disappears if we recognize what the Scriptures teach (and human experience confirms): namely, that discipline and punishment can be an expression of love.

NOTE: This underscores the problems that accompany “proof texting”. Generally, it always starts with a plausible conclusion from one passage, then--through a string of other passages--builds up to a conclusion you might not have accepted otherwise. In this case, starting with John 10:10 (Jesus came to bring us life), we eventually end up with the conclusion that God does not discipline his children in this life with temporal punishments. However, John 10:10 has nothing to say about temporal punishment unless one reduces all chastisement to an exercise in cruelty or vengeance. If, however, we look at the rest of the Bible--and human experience--we see that chastisement is literally for purification and discipline can be an expression of love (thereby fitting into John 10:10...Jesus brings us life).

NOTE: On page 55, an appeal is made to Hosea 4:6 with special emphasis on the word “perish”. The suggestion is made that God is not saying that He, himself, will “punish” his people. Rather, they will simply “perish” (*i.e.* as a natural consequence of their sin, *etc.*). However, the verse is lifted out of context--a context in which the Lord specifically states that He will, in fact, punish them (Hosea 4:9). This, again, is the direct result of selective proof-texting.

## **II. Contradicts Church Teaching on the True Cross of Sickness**

In pages 38 - 48, Fr. Yozefu addresses what he calls “unnecessary” and “necessary” sufferings. In the process, he lumps virtually all illnesses under the heading of “unnecessary” suffering and teaches that they are not really “true” crosses because they don’t appear (in his opinion) to advance the Kingdom of God. In fact, he specifically states, “*Neither boils nor cancer does any good for the Kingdom of God on earth.*”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, he goes on to say that if we are not clear on this distinction in our own minds, God will not be able to heal us.<sup>7</sup>

Equally troubling is his assertion (made more than once) that ridding ourselves of problems like sickness is “*completely up to you, in your control, and that therefore you*

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<sup>6</sup> Page 42

<sup>7</sup> Page 47.



*can deal effectively with it--to free yourself and your entire family from it!*<sup>8</sup>

Fundamentally, this seems to suggest that Christians--for the most part--should be disease-free (and, if they are not, it is their own fault because they have not taken charge of the situation).

There problems contained in these pages include at least the following.

#### **A. Presumes to Know What Does or Does Not Advance the Kingdom**

This begs the question as to whether or not God can use illness for our salvation. It also presupposes that we know the end from the beginning.

Along these lines, Fr. Yozefu suggests that if a particular suffering results in a feeling of happiness or peace it is probably a true cross, but if it leaves you feeling troubled or unhappy, it is not a true cross and you need to try to get rid of it.<sup>9</sup> But, this, overlooks the fact that one can be unhappy in a particular suffering precisely because of the failure to recognize it as a cross from our Lord to be born for his glory, our salvation, and the salvation of others. In other words, instead of trying to help his readers adopt the posture advocated by the Saints and Doctors of the Church regarding their sufferings, Fr. Yozefu seems to advise them to try and get shed of sufferings they don't like.

On a practical note, I know from my own experience that I have had to endure trials that, at the time, seemed horrific and gave me anything but peace and joy. However, looking back I can see the hand of God guiding me for the good of my soul, the well-being of my family, and the furtherance of the Kingdom of God on earth. In other words, if--at the time of the trial--I had tried to assess whether the trial was what Fr. Yozefu calls "unnecessary suffering" (*i.e.* from Satan) or a true Cross, I would have been unable to do so (or, in fact, would have arrived at an incorrect conclusion).

#### **B. Contradicts the Teaching of the Doctors of the Church<sup>10</sup>**

The attached essay by St. Alphonsus Liguori emphatically teaches that "*it is of faith*" that everything that comes into our lives--including illness--is allowed by God for our salvation. In fact, St. Alphonsus states that sickness is the "*acid test*" of spirituality (the antithesis of what is presented

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<sup>8</sup> Page 12 (Introduction). Also stated on the preceding page (p. 11). Contextually, he is referring to any and all persistent problems faced by our families (*i.e.* including "constant disease").

<sup>9</sup> Page 47

<sup>10</sup> By definition, a Doctor of the Church is a Saint who was blessed with wisdom and insights that have permanent value to the Church. Therefore, when the Church designates a particular Saint as a Doctor of the Church, she is, in essence, inviting us--rather, urging us--to sit in that Saint's classroom (so to speak) and drink more deeply of the mysteries of our faith.

by Fr. Yozefu).

St. Augustine--the Doctor of Grace--offers us the following perspective on sickness and healing. It is, in fact, a very succinct summation of what the always has (and still does) teach.

*"Undoubtedly, it is good that you request bodily health from God. If He knows that it is for your greater good, He will give it to you. If He does not give it to you, then it was not for your advantage.*

*God knows, therefore, what is better for us. Let us seek only that our heart be free from sin."*

-St. Augustine (Sermon on John 7, 12)

### **C. Contradicts the Catechism's Teaching on Sickness**

Fr. Yozefu seems to think that the Gospel accounts of healing constitute a basis for the universal expectation of physical healing for all subsequent generations. However, while it is indeed true that our Lord Jesus Christ--the Great Physician--*can* heal (and *does* heal), it does not necessarily follow that He *always* heals us in this life. This is, in fact, born out by human experience and Church teaching.

The attached compilation of citations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* indicates the following:

1. Jesus did not heal all sickness (#1505)
2. Jesus' healing miracles were primarily messianic signs, not a precedent for a universal expectation of physical healing in this life (#549 & #1505)
3. Even after Baptism, sickness remains a part of the human experience (#1264 & #1420)
4. Sickness can be used to effect our salvation by causing us to search for God and return to him (#1501).
5. Not even the most intense prayers necessarily obtain physical healing (#1508)

### **D. Contradicts Teaching of CDF on Sickness**

In 2000, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document entitled “*Instructions on Prayers for Healing*” that opens with the following statement:

“The longing for happiness, deeply rooted in the human heart, has always been accompanied by a desire to be freed from illness and to be able to understand the meaning of sickness when it is experienced. This is a human phenomenon, which in some way concerns every person and finds particular resonance in the Church, where ***sickness is understood as a means of union with Christ and of spiritual purification.***”

In other words, herein we see the actual teaching of the Church regarding the mystery of sickness. It is “*a means of union with Christ and of spiritual purification*”. In other words, this is not simply a default, “fall-back” posture adopted by the Church because she is unaware of the supposed “fact” that almost all sickness is “unnecessary suffering” which we have the ability to cast off if we simply cast out Satan, say the “right” prayers, *etc.* Rather, it provides the only truly satisfying answer to the question of why we endure the trials of sickness even after Baptism. If, however, we fail to recognize the truth presented in this document of the Church, we will find ourselves perpetually in turmoil because of our failure to see God’s hand in all aspects of our lives.

#### **E. Contradicts the Core Message of *Salvifici Doloris***

On page 44, Fr. Yozefu makes a passing reference to the Apostolic Letter of Pope St. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris* (“Salvific Suffering”). However, in what follows, Fr. Yozefu essentially contradicts the core message of the document by virtually denying that illness can be regarded as a true Cross that serves to advance the Kingdom of God<sup>11</sup> (except, he says, in extremely rare individuals--none of whom he has come across in over twenty years of priestly ministry).<sup>12</sup>

Fr. Yozefu suggests that if a particular suffering does not bring one joy, it is not truly a cross from the Lord. However, this gets the “cart and the horse” in the wrong order. In his introduction to *S. Doloris*, St. John Paul II states that “*joy comes from the discovery of the meaning of suffering*”. In other words, we do not evaluate the purpose or source of our suffering by the criterion of whether or not it brings us joy. Rather, we experience joy once we have come to see the true meaning of suffering.

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<sup>11</sup> Page 42

<sup>12</sup> Page 47

That understanding comes from grasping the reality of St. John Paul II goes on to describe as “*The Gospel of Suffering*”.

St. John Paul II goes on to say the following:

1. “*With the Passion of Christ all human suffering has found itself in a new situation.*” (#19)
2. “*In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed*” (#19)
3. “*The Cross of Christ throws salvific light, in a most penetrating way, on man’s life and in particular on his suffering.*”

Again, Fr. Yozefu categorically states that “*Neither boils nor (sic.) cancer does any good for the Kingdom of God on earth.*” (p. 42) However, St. John Paul II assures us that the **opposite** is true:

*“When this body is gravely ill, totally incapacitated, and the person is almost incapable of living and acting, all the more do interior maturity and spiritual greatness become evident, constituting a touching lesson to those who are healthy and normal.*

*This interior maturity and spiritual greatness in suffering are certainly the result of a particular conversion and cooperation with the grace of the Crucified Redeemer. It is he himself who acts at the heart of human sufferings through his Spirit of truth, through the consoling Spirit. It is he who transforms, in a certain sense, the very substance of the spiritual life, indicating for the person who suffers a place close to himself. It is he—as the interior Master and Guide—who reveals to the suffering brother and sister this wonderful interchange, situated at the very heart of the mystery of the Redemption. Suffering is, in itself, an experience of evil. But Christ has made suffering the firmest basis of the definitive good, namely the good of eternal salvation.”* (#26)

**NOTE:** St. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, provides with an example of how the Christian should view physical infirmities in a way that is in harmony with the preceding.

Regarding his “*thorn in the flesh*”:

1. It was a “messenger of Satan”. All sickness is ultimately such because all sickness takes us back to the Fall (*i.e.* that was prompted by Satan).
2. However, Paul asked God to remove it (*i.e.* he did not command Satan)

3. God allowed it to remain in order that Paul might learn reliance upon Him (*i.e.* it was, ultimately, for Paul's salvation).

In other words, while it is absolutely true that God can and does heal, it is also true that He does not always heal us of our infirmities in this life. And, when in his infinite wisdom, God chooses not to heal us in this life, it is always so that a greater good may be accomplished. The attached essay from St. Alphonsus Liguori actually goes into this in greater depth.

### **III. Generational Bondage**

One of the foundational ideas underlying the prayers for family healing advocated by Fr. Yozefu is that of what he calls "generational bondage". In Chapter 9 ("A Stymied Impasse"), he describes the effects of "generational bondage" by using a fictitious character, "Thomas", who is a devout, practicing Catholic. That description can be summarized as follows: After Baptism, Satan can maintain certain "rights" or prerogatives in a Christian's life based upon the choices made by one's ancestors. Moreover, unless the Christian is cognizant of this "fact" and offers some form of family deliverance prayers, that bondage (and accompanying suffering) will remain. In fact, Fr. Yozefu describes the situation using the metaphor of an umbrella. In this metaphor, Satan erects an umbrella between the Christian and God, thereby preventing God's graces and blessings from reaching the sincere believer who is unknowingly held captive by "generational bondage".

The implications of this teaching are enormously problematic for at least the following reasons:

#### **A. Contradicts Church Teaching on the Effects of Baptism**

Regarding Baptism and its effects, the following excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* obliterate any notion that Satan maintains any sort of "rights" or dominion over the Christian after Baptism.

**1221** But above all, the crossing of the Red Sea, literally the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, announces the liberation wrought by Baptism:

*You freed the children of Abraham from the slavery of Pharaoh, bringing them dry-shod through the waters of the Red Sea, to be an image of the people set free in Baptism.*

**1263** By Baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin. In those who have been reborn nothing remains that would impede their entry into the Kingdom of God, neither Adam's sin, nor personal sin, nor the consequences of sin, the gravest of which is separation from God.

**1264** Yet certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character, and so on, as well as an inclination to sin that Tradition calls concupiscence, or metaphorically, "the tinder for sin" (*fomes peccati*); since concupiscence "is left for us to wrestle with, it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ." Indeed, "an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."

**1265** Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte "a new creature," an adopted son of God, who has become a "partaker of the divine nature," member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit.

**1266** The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of justification:

- enabling them to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues;
- giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues.

Thus the whole organism of the Christian's supernatural life has its roots in Baptism.

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If we were to summarize the preceding statements on Baptism, we would note that in--and through--Baptism the Christian is set free from bondage, made an adopted son of God, and given the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit. In other words, sound Baptismal theology utterly excludes any notion of Satan maintaining some sort of "prerogatives", "rights", or dominion in the life of the Christian (much less "rights" based upon the decisions of ancestors).

Do temporal consequences for sin remain? Yes.

Do illness, suffering, and death remain? Yes.

Does concupiscence remain? Yes.

Does any claim of Satan on the newly baptized remain? No!

We come forth from the Baptismal font freed from the bondage of Satan in order to walk in the freedom of the sons of God. In fact, the Sacred Scriptures tell us that as Christians, God has *“delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love”* (Colossians 1:13).

NOTE: While sound Baptismal theology excludes any notion of satanic claims upon the baptized based upon the decisions or actions of ancestors, the reality of generational influences are a different matter. No one can deny that generations impact each other in many ways through patterns of behavior, environment, inherited traits, and the temporal consequences of both good and bad decisions. None of that, however, translates into the kind of generational bondage describe by Fr. Yozefu in which Satan maintains “rights” in the life of the newly baptized child of God.

NOTE: Related to the preceding citations on Baptism, is the supposed parallel between original sin and "generational bondage". In other words, one might reason that Original Sin is the ultimate expression of “generational bondage” and, therefore, lends credence to the concept of “generational bondage” as is it is presented in *The Healing of Families*. The reasoning might go like this:

1. Even though we are forgiven of all sin at Baptism, the **effects** of original sin remain in the form of concupiscence.
2. In the same way, while any connection to generational sin is forgiven in Baptism, the **effects** can remain unless they are eliminated through some form of "Family Tree" healing rite / prayer /action.

The supposed parallel, however, does not hold for the following reasons:

1. The effects of original sin are due to a wounded nature passed on to all sons of Adam (not selectively to some family lines, *etc*)
2. The effects of original sin **remain permanently** (cf. CCC-1264) whereas the effects of alleged generational bondage can be supposedly removed.
3. The effects of original sin are "*left for us to wrestle with*" but "*cannot harm those who do not consent*" whereas the effects of alleged generational bondage are supposed to harm those who do not consent and are said to be “unnecessary” (*i.e.* as opposed to "left for us to wrestle with").

NOTE: Also, relative to the subject of Baptism and “generational bondage”, I have heard it suggested that the old rite of Baptism had specific exorcisms associated with it that could be seen as addressing "generational bondage" whereas the new rite of Baptism does not. However, the effects of the Sacrament of Baptism are not dependent upon the particulars of the rite that accompanies it (rites which have, undeniably, changed over the centuries).<sup>13</sup> In other words, the effects of Baptism listed above apply to Baptism by virtue of the sacramental graces that accompany it regardless of whether it is conducted with elaborate ritual and accompanying rite or in a hospital emergency room by medical personnel who do not even profess the faith. Any other position empties the Church's sacramental theology of its true meaning and borders upon being a strange twist on Donatism (*i.e.* making the efficacy of the sacraments dependent upon the virtue of the minister...or, in this case, the accompanying non-essential rites).

The supposed deficiency of the new rite of Baptism is also problematic for a couple of other reasons:

1. It would imply that the Church--the universal sacrament of salvation to whom has been entrusted all the sacraments under the protection of the Holy Spirit--has botched the administration of the primary and foundational sacrament (thereby undermining the spiritual life of all the hundreds of millions of Catholics baptized over the past forty years).
2. It would also imply that prior to the adoption of the new rite of Baptism, Catholics would have all been freed from the supposed generational bondage that allegedly now afflicts so many. If that were the case, then the indicators of generational bondage offered set forth by proponents of family tree healing would have been virtually non-existent prior to the implementation of the new rite. That, however, is not the case (*i.e.* there were diseases and personality traits, *etc.*, that were common to families).

## **B. Contradicts the Principle of Simplicity in Prayer**

1. Makes “hay” of Divine Mercy (“*Jesus I trust in You*”). In other words, the emphasis on needing to “pray right” runs counter to the idea that we can simply come before the Lord--with all of our uncertainties and simply say, “***Jesus, I trust in You.***”
2. An implicit denial of Romans 8:26-27

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<sup>13</sup> In regard to the exorcisms associated with Baptism, the old Catholic Encyclopedia states the following: “*At an early age the practice was introduced into the Church of exorcising catechumens as a preparation for the Sacrament of Baptism. This did not imply that they were considered to be obsessed, like demoniacs, but merely that they were, in consequence of original sin (and of personal sins in case of adults), subject more or less to the power of the devil, whose "works" or "pomps" they were called upon to renounce, and from whose dominion the grace of baptism was about to deliver them...Exorcism in this connection is a symbolical anticipation of one of the chief effects of the sacrament of regeneration*”.



*“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”*

In other words, the notion that God does not respond to the sincere prayer of Christians who are not using the “right” words, *etc.*, is absurd and contradicts the plain teaching of Sacred Scripture.

### 3. Hard to reconcile with the Little Way of St. Therese of Lisieux

How does one practice spiritual childhood--as taught by this Doctor of the Church--when, according to *The Healing of Families*, our Heavenly Father cannot help us unless we accurately assess the root cause of our suffering and pray accordingly?

In other words, while we may not always understand God’s purpose in allowing us to experience various sufferings, The Little Flower teaches us that what God desires most from us (especially when we are suffering) is our complete and child-like confidence in our Heavenly Father. It is, in fact, ***the way of trust and love***.<sup>14</sup>

If what Fr. Yozefu teaches is true, it is as if the faithful Catholic is being told that praying the Rosary is not enough. Why? Because even if Our Lady does as we ask and prays for us, God the Father is going to have to reply sadly to her with words to the effect, *“I am sorry, but I cannot do anything about this particular issue because of a deal Johnny’s grandpa made with the Devil fifty years ago.”* In this way, Johnny’s grandfather’s free will trumps the free will of Johnny who desires wholeheartedly to serve the Lord.

Along these lines, Fr. Yozefu makes frequent reference to Hosea 4:6 (*“My people perish for a lack of knowledge”*). In fact, the dedication of the book references Hosea 4:6 and states, *“To the many children of God who have perished in unnecessary suffering for not knowing.”* The implication both in the book, and in the seminar, is that faithful Catholics who lovingly embrace our Lord in a life of prayer and the sacraments can *“perish”* because of a *“lack of knowledge”* regarding *“generational bondage”*, *etc.*

In other words, Fr. Yozefu seems to use Hosea 4:6 in way that suggests that God’s people, in Hosea’s day, were perishing simply out of honest ignorance. However,

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<sup>14</sup> I highly recommend Fr. Jacques Philippe’s little book, *“The Way of Trust and Love”* (Scepter Publishers). It is short retreat that explores the Little Way of St. Therese. The principles taught therein are especially helpful in the face of sufferings.

when we look at Hosea 4:6 in its context, we can see that such was certainly not the case. The “lack of knowledge” spoken of was not mere ignorance of the finer points of theology or the methods of prayer. Rather, their “lack of knowledge” was a fundamental lack of knowledge regarding the ways of the Lord as seen in their wicked practices as enumerated in the verses surrounding Hosea 4:6. In other words, the “knowledge” spoken of is not one of facts so much as it is a moral knowledge; an experiential knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, despite Fr. Yozefu’s claim to the contrary, the prayer we see in Daniel 9:1-27 has nothing to say about generational bondage of the type being presented by Father Yozefu. The context is a prayer for national repentance and healing based upon the prophesied 70 year exile of Judah. It says nothing, however, about satanic generational bondage. In fact, it clearly contradicts the claim made by Fr. Yozefu that God does not administer temporal punishments. In the context, it is clear that the people of God are being chastised by God and, therefore, Daniel asks our Lord to remember His people and forgive their sins. In other words, Daniel does not even mention Satan, much less suggest that the nation is in need of deliverance from satanic bondage.

In many respects, it is similar to Catholics in America today recognizing that we all should pray for the healing of America while recognizing our own role in her sins, *etc.*

### **C. A Distorted Notion of Free Will**

Fr. Yozefu rightly exposes the falsity of the stereotypical American icon of “rugged individualism”. He rightly emphasizes that we are corporately connected and have an impact on each other (this, of course, is the basis for the Church’s teaching on the Communion of Saints). However, he goes too far. In support of “generational bondage”, Fr. Yozefu devotes 3-1/2 pages to explaining how “*Our most important and fundamental choices in life are made for us by others.*”<sup>16</sup>

While it is true that many important and fundamental choices are made for us by others, it is not true that **the** “most important and fundamental” choice in our life is made for us by others. That choice, of course, is the choice we make--aided by grace--to embrace or reject God. That choice is THE choice, and it is a choice that only the individual makes--and it is a choice God honors regardless of any demonic pacts one’s ancestors may have made with Satan.

Along these lines, St. Paul gave a very important and encouraging message to the Church at Corinth. The Christians to whom he wrote were first generation Christians converted from pagan idolatry (*i.e.* prime candidates for satanic “generational bondage”). But what did St. Paul say to these baptized believers? He told them,

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of what “knowledge” of the Lord means is, for example, elaborated upon in 1 John 2:1-3 wherein we are told, “*by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.*”

<sup>16</sup> Pages 90 - 93

*"Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."*<sup>17</sup>

In other words, just like the *Catechism* affirms, in Baptism we are truly born again as new creations in Christ--liberated from bondage to Satan and sin. Do the temporal consequences of sin remain? Yes. Does any kind of satanic "claim" on the newborn child of God remain? No.

NOTE: There is one additional point that needs to be made regarding "generational bondage." It is this: not one of the passages of Scripture cited in the book actually speak of satanic generational bondage. None of them, in their contexts, has reference to satanic bondage (collectively, therefore, they cannot teach such a concept). This leads to a question, namely: If we were to read any of these passages in their contexts, would the notion of satanic generational bondage cross our minds if the thought had not already been suggested to us? I am inclined to think not.

#### **IV. Absence of Support from Sacred Tradition**

Possibly one of the most problematic aspects of the book is the seemingly total absence of support from Sacred Tradition for its foundational concepts. In the entire book there are only about seven or eight references to the teachings of the saints and doctors of the Church or to the Church magisterial documents. Those that are given are basically passing references to commonly accepted truths (*e.g.* the reality of Satan, etc.). However, in regard to the concept of "generational bondage" (*i.e.* THE foundational principal of the entire program), not a single reference from Sacred Tradition is provided. In other words, nothing in the writings of the Doctors of the Church, the Magisterial pronouncements of the Church, or the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* lends any support the notion of "generational bondage" as presented in this book. I think this fact alone should constitute a major "red flag" to any Catholic reading this book. In other words, what Fr. Yozefu teaches regarding satanic "generational bondage" has, in fact, been virtually unknown during two thousand year life of the Church (*i.e.* coming on the scene only thirty years ago).

In view of the fact that the program described in this book is fundamentally foreign to Sacred Tradition, acceptance of it can have significant implications for the reality of the Church being "*the pillar and support of the truth*" (1 Timothy 3:15). In other words, if, in fact, Christians can be held in bondage by Satan after Baptism--with God's graces unable to reach them and bear fruit in their lives unless they offer specific prayers for family deliverance--then the Church has, essentially, been either (1) ignorant of an essential element of the spiritual life or (2) perversely negligent for nearly 2,000 years. Either one of these options is a destroyer of confidence in the Church as our Holy Mother.

NOTE: Along these lines Fr. Yozefu communicated the following words to me by e-mail, "*I had studied theology for 10 years, in Africa and Europe, and not one day had any*

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<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

*professor walked into that classroom and said stuff like this!* This, coupled with the fact that he had to rely upon workshops offered by “Christian Healing Ministries” in Jacksonville, FL (a non-Catholic organization), would seem to indicate that the notion of “generational bondage” is something foreign to the Deposit of Faith received by the Catholic Church and passed on in Sacred Tradition.

NOTE: In my correspondence with Fr. Yozefu, he indicated that the lack of support in Sacred Tradition (*i.e.* historically speaking) is not a problem because Sacred Tradition is living and dynamic. Therefore, according to Fr. Yozefu, this is simply something “new” that God is doing. To support that idea he offered the our Lord’s words from Matthew 13:52. Therein we read: *“Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”* The problem with this approach is at least two-fold.

1. The proof-text employed by Fr. Yozefu does not apply to the scenario under consideration. Jesus was speaking of scribes / teachers of the Mosaic Law and indicating that when they become a disciple of the Kingdom (*i.e.* a Christian) they, in effect, have the best of both worlds (so to speak). They have the “old” and the “new”. It has nothing to say about people “pulling rabbits out of the hat” two thousand years deep into the history of the Church and declaring, “Here is something new!”
2. Sacred Tradition is, indeed, living--and like all things living possess continuity. That which cannot be harmonized with the whole of Sacred Tradition cannot be passed off as simply a new addition. Rather, it must be recognized for it is: a novel break with Sacred Tradition.

Moreover, in the context of this same exchange, Fr. Yozefu admitted that in the writings of the Saints of the Church, there is no indication that any of them knew anything about the type of “generational bondage” that he presents. In fact, he told me that the Church was simply not ready for this teaching until recent times (*i.e.* thirty years ago). However, Fr. Yozefu devotes a large part of his book to demonstrating that “generational bondage” was a part of the Jewish mindset. If, however, that was truly the case, then what Fr. Yozefu teaches would have been a natural “fit” with the doctrine of the early Church and would have been practiced from the beginning (and, thereby, come down to us in Sacred Tradition). Such, however, is simply not the case (hence, the fact that his teaching is foreign to Sacred Tradition).

## **V. Pitfalls of Proof-Texting**

Because, as noted above, the idea of “generational bondage” as set forth in the book has no support in Sacred Tradition (*i.e.* the constant teaching of the Church), the author must make use of extensive proof texts from Sacred Scripture. The problem, however, with proof-texting in this fashion is that it almost invariably leads to lifting passages of

Scripture out of context and, therefore, results in erroneous interpretations. The following serve as examples.

- A. **Wisdom 1:13** -- "*For God did not make death*". This verse from the Old Testament is used to make the case that God never kills (i.e. because death is the tool of the Devil). However, the second half of the verse states, "*He (God) takes no pleasure in destroying the living.*" By implication God does, therefore, destroy the living when necessary (but, as the verse states, takes no pleasure in it). In fact, the verses that follow clarify verse 13 by establishing that death was not in God's original plan but entered the world only because of the envy of Satan (2:23-24). None of that, however, leads to the conclusion that God--since the Fall--has nothing to do with the death of anyone. In fact, to accept that conclusion requires the dismissing of a multitude of other Old Testament passages of Scripture (which, in fact, Fr. Yozefu essentially does).<sup>18</sup>
- B. **John 10:10** -- "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*" Used in a similar fashion as Wisdom 1:13, this is used to suggest that God has no involvement with death. However, in the New Testament Jesus is revealed as a conquering ruler who smites the nations and "*treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty*" (Revelation 19:11-16). Does this contradict what Jesus said in John 10:10? No. What it does show, however, is this: the dynamics surrounding death, punishment, judgment, etc., are more nuanced and complicated than suggested by Fr. Yozefu.

There are many other examples of this sort of proof-texting in the book, but these, I think, suffice to underscore the problem. As a result, there are conclusions presented in the book that have no support in Sacred Tradition and which, in fact, contradict what is taught in Sacred Tradition.

## **VI. Erroneous View of Our Lord's Passion & Death**

Possibly the most troubling statement made in the book pertains to our Lord's Passion and atoning death. On page 41, under the heading "Necessary Suffering--the Cross", Fr. Yozefu states:

*He did not come to die, but to save, and ended up dying because when the world opposed Him, ever more strongly (which was expected), He did not back down from His mission, so the world*

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<sup>18</sup> For example, when we read further in the Book of Wisdom, we find the same writer informing us that it is God who, in essence, destroys the wicked and reduces them to "*corpses without honor*" (Wisdom 4:19).

*extinguished Him. But He had to go through that in order to give a way out to those in the world who would want a worthy exit. That way, He became a light and a hope for the world. If, because of the pressure mounted upon Him by the world, He had given up the fight, the world would never have had an outlet from its misery nor a hope or light to look toward. Now, that suffering was willed by neither the Father nor the Son. What the Father willed was to save the world, not the death of His Son. But there was no alternative --- -He had to go through it in order to plant that burning torch of the truth in the center of the world so we have somewhere to look in hope from our messiness (Jn 18:37).*

The preceding statement is not simply problematic it is, in fact, heretical. It is an explicit denial that our Lord came into this world expressly and purposely to die for our sins in accord with the express foreknowledge and intent of God. In fact, it effectively reduces our Lord's Passion and death to an unintended outcome that God subsequently turned around for the better (*i.e.* a sort of supernatural version of "making lemonade out of lemons"). The Old and New Testament passages of Scripture contradicting this notion are numerous. The following, however, suffice to make the point.

Psalm 22:1-31 -- This entire Psalm is a Messianic prophecy foretelling that the Christ would suffer and die.

Isaiah 53:1-12 -- "The Suffering Servant" (arguably the most well-known Old Testament passage of Scripture foretelling that our Lord would come expressly to suffer on our behalf).

John 1:29 -- "*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*" These words of our Lord's forerunner, St. John the Baptist, are repeated at every Mass and make it perfectly clear that our Lord came into this world expressly to be the sacrificial offering for our sins.

John 3:14-16 -- Jesus plainly states that He "MUST" be lifted up (*i.e.* on the Cross) in order for the world to be saved.

John 10:17-18 -- "*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes[a] it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.*"

In this passage, Jesus specifically states that the laying down of His life for the sheep is "*a command from my Father*".

Please note also, these explicit statements from Sacred Scripture--which can be multiplied--do not even come close to exhausting the evidence for the reality that our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world expressly for the purpose of dying for our sins.

For example, there are numerous "system prophecies" from the Levitical system in the Old Testament. All of the sacrifices of the Levitical system pointed to--and are fulfilled--in Christ.

Take, for example, the Passover sacrifice from Exodus 12:1ff. It was established to be a divine foreshadow of the sacrifice of Christ. In fact, when the greatest of all Old Testament prophets (St. John the Baptist) introduced Jesus Christ to the world, he did so by exclaiming, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29) in an obvious reference to an Old Testament sacrificial lamb. Then, Jesus himself established the Eucharist and priesthood on the eve of his Passion and death in the setting of the Passover (Matthew 26:17-30). Finally, St. Paul, after our Lord's glorious Ascension back into Heaven, referred to Jesus as "our Passover" who had been "sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7). None of this can be harmonized with the heretical notion that our Lord's death was some sort of unintended consequence due to the obstinacy of the Jews.

That such an understanding of the Sacred Scriptures is authentic can be corroborated by the fact that this is the teaching that is presented in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC #613-615).

**613** Christ's death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through "*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*", and the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the "blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins".

**614** This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices. First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience.

**615** "*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.*" By his obedience unto death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant, who "*makes himself an offering for sin*", when "*he bore the sin of many*", and who "*shall make many to be accounted righteous*", for "*he shall bear their iniquities*". Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father.

Finally, in stating that "(Jesus) *did not come to die, but to save*", Fr. Yozefu seems to be overlooking the fact that, in accord with God's foreordained plan, Jesus, in order to save us, did, in fact, have to die. This is precisely because He came primarily to save us from our sins, and--as Scripture plainly attests-- "*without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins*" (Hebrews 9:11-12).

## **VII. The Improper Use of Exorcism Prayers by the Laity**

The prayers that Fr. Yozefu recommends to the faithful include the following:

*“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the power of his blood, his cross and his resurrection, I bind you satan, and all your evil spirits, demonic forces, satanic powers, principalities, attributes, aspects, clusters, endowments, and satanic thrones: I bind all kings and princes of terrors, I bind all demonic assignments and functions of destruction, from any of the above demonic entities from outer space, the air, water, fire, the ground, the netherworld, and the evil forces of nature. I bind all interplay, interaction, and communication between satanic and demonic spirits and expose all you demonic forces and spirits as weakened, defeated enemies of Jesus Christ. I sever all demonic spirits from any demonic ruler above these spirits in the name of Jesus Christ. I bind all enemies of Christ present together, all demonic entities under the one highest authority, Your assignments and influences are over and broken. In Jesus' name.”*

From what I have been told by solid priest of established reputation--at least one of them being a retired priest who was an exorcist for his diocese--this prayer constitutes an exorcism. As such it is not licit for the laity to say. There are many problems associated with the laity directly commanding Satan. Historically, all of the deliverance prayers commended to the faithful by the Magisterium of the Church call upon the faithful to implore God to deliver them.

Take for example, the ultimate prayer given to us by our Lord himself: The Our Father. It contains a prayer for deliverance: *“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”* Or consider, for example, the St. Michael prayer wherein we implore God to rebuke the devil and St. Michael to bind Satan and cast him into hell.

Along these lines, I have heard it said that the prayer against storms in the popular Pieta Prayer Booklet directly addresses the evil / enemy spirits. However, please note the following:

1. I have not been able to find any verifiable magisterial approbation for this prayer.
2. The Pieta Prayer Booklet hardly constitutes an authoritative norm. In fact, it has been criticized for reporting as facts details from unapproved private revelations.

Again, the point being this: the faithful are not authorized to conduct what amounts to exorcisms. This is a practice that is emphatically discouraged by those in the Church who are most versed in the subject: namely, exorcists. Yet, the deliverance prayers being recommended to the faithful by Fr. Yozefu amount to doing just that.



## **VIII. What About the Fruit?**

Have there been people who have apparently benefited from the prayers of deliverance suggested by the book? Yes. However, it should be remembered that there are many complex dimensions to the subjective aspects of healing. These include, for example, the openness of the recipient, the transference of confidence from the minister to the recipient, and timing (*i.e.* in the recipient's life). It is also true that "God can write straight with crooked lines". In other words, God can reach out to us in many ways. One can be touched by the Lord, for example, through a Pentecostal televangelist. That, however, does not constitute a validation of everything taught by the televangelist. It only underscores the reality of God reaching out to us where we are.

As Catholics, however, it is vital that we evaluate both our experiences and our interpretations of Sacred Scripture against the backdrop of Sacred Tradition. When we do that with notions of "generational bondage" and sickness and suffering as it is taught in this book, we are left with some troubling contradictions.

It should also be noted, that I have had conversations with several different people who have attended the seminar and / or read the book and suffered negative consequences as a result. These negative consequences have ranged from having their personal faith shaken as a result of distressing teachings to apparently demonic encounters after attempting to command Satan by means of the deliverance prayers promoted by Fr. Yozefu. One nun told me that several members of her community were "haunted" by Fr. Yozefu's teachings for several weeks after reading the book.<sup>19</sup>

## **IX. Good Things in the Book**

Having elaborated upon many of the concerns raised by the book, I also want to point out some of the good points made in the book. These include the following.

- A. Importance of a right mental image of God.** Distorted views of God definitely result in a distorted relationship with God and a distorted experience of life.<sup>20</sup>
  
- B. The recognition of the reality of Satan and our corresponding spiritual warfare.** Far too often, it seems as Catholics in developed countries seem to relegate Satan and his minions to "pre-Vatican II mythology". That, of course, is sheer nonsense and a denial of the teachings of our faith. Therefore, I appreciate the emphasis Fr. Yozefu places on spiritual warfare.

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<sup>19</sup> The sister used the term "haunted" in a figurative manner in order to indicate the lingering distress caused by the implications of Fr. Yozefu's teachings.

<sup>20</sup> Ironically, however, Fr. Yozefu ends up presenting just that: a distorted view of God in which our Lord is almost playing "hide and seek" with His children because they don't possess the "knowledge" Fr. Yozefu admits has only been recently revealed to the Church (*i.e.* in the past 30 years).

**C. The identification of satanic access points.** Fr. Yozefu identifies four (4) access points into our lives that open the doors to satanic activity. These access points are (1) Unforgiveness / Childhood Trauma, (2) Unhealthy Relationships, (3) Occult Activity, and (4) Generational Bondage.

The first three access points are certainly solid, but the fourth -- “generational bondage” -- is problematic for the reasons already stated. However, it is true that Satan can find footholds in our lives through established family patterns. Therefore, I would modify the fourth access point by describing it as “The Power of Parental Patterns” or “Generational Influence”. In other words, it is the old adage, “The apple does not fall far from the tree”. Our parents’ vices can affect us through learned behaviors. These behaviors are not necessarily transformed at Baptism. They are transformed over time through prayer, the sacraments, spiritual direction, and growth in virtue.

### **Conclusion:**

As stated in the beginning, I do believe that Fr. Yozefu is sincere in his desire to serve God’s people and to bring them healing. I also understand why many people are drawn to the ideas expressed in his book and at the seminars. In a certain sense they are looking for that “silver bullet” that can alleviate their suffering (that, of course, is perfectly understandable).

However, the book presents many ideas as being “black & white” absolutes-- *absolutes that simply cannot be sustained*. These statements rely upon proof-texting and personal experience, but have seemingly little or no support in Sacred Tradition. As a result, certain unfounded conclusions are presented that, in fact, cause confusion regarding what authentic Catholic teaching is. This, in the final analysis, can set up many for a “fall” because of distorted expectations and a faulty understanding of suffering and its purpose in our lives.

The relatively few good ideas presented in the book are, in fact, truths that can be accessed by reading solid, recognized works of the Saints and Doctors of the Church. There, is therefore, absolutely no need for anyone to utilize a deeply flawed work like “The Healing of Families”. As my good friend, Fr. Bill Casey, CPM is known to say, “Even a stopped clock is right twice a day” and “Satan will give you 1,000 truths in order to get you to swallow just one lie.”

One of the saddest aspects of this entire scenario is this: all of the errors being taught by Fr. Yozefu are completely avoidable. In other words, if Fr. Yozefu gave due respect to Sacred Tradition, he would not find himself in the position of presenting teachings contrary to it. As it stands, however, his inadequate appreciation for the gift of Sacred Tradition (*i.e.* the constant teaching of the Church as it comes to us through the Saints, Doctors, and Magisterium of the Church), has led him into the unavoidable errors that occur whenever any Christian chooses to go by their own, personal interpretations of Sacred Scripture rather than the authentic understanding of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition that comes to us through the Church.

Finally, it is for this very reason (*i.e.* the need for the faithful to be protected from error) that the Code of Canon Law (articles 822-832) requires any religious writings touching on faith and morals to have an *imprimatur* prior to publication. Fr. Yozefu, in publishing this work without an *imprimatur*, has, in fact, violated canon law.<sup>21</sup>

## **Post Script:**

I was struggling with the concerns expressed in this book review in a very particular way on Divine Mercy Sunday. In the midst of that struggle, I found consolation in the Second Reading from the Divine Mercy Sunday Mass.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope  
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,  
to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,  
kept in heaven for you  
who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith,  
to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time.  
In this you rejoice, although now for a little while  
you may have to suffer through various trials,  
so that the genuineness of your faith,  
more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire,  
may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor  
at the revelation of Jesus Christ.  
Although you have not seen him you love him;  
even though you do not see him now yet believe in him,  
you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,  
as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

- 1 Peter 1:3-9

These verses make several points that apply to the issues raised in this review. They include:

1. God has (at Baptism) given us “*a new birth to a living hope*” (*i.e.* not one that is overshadowed by some form of vestigial satanic bondage).
2. The inheritance that we thereby gain is “*kept in heaven*” for us (*i.e.*

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<sup>21</sup> In an e-mail to me, Fr. Yozefu told me that an “archbishop” (whom he chose not to name) is preparing to issue an *imprimatur* for his book. Whether or not such an *imprimatur* is forthcoming has no bearing upon the fact that Fr. Yozefu has published this book without an *imprimatur* in violation of canon law. Moreover, the sale of his book in Catholic churches is a violation of canon law until such time as it receives an *imprimatur*.

it is not a promise of the “good life” on this earth).

3. In the mean time we “*suffer through various trials*”.
4. The stated purpose of those trials is the testing of our faith.
5. The goal of our faith is “*the salvation of our souls*”

The following Sunday (the 3rd Sunday of Easter), the Second Reading continued with these words:

*If you invoke as Father him who judges impartially  
according to each one’s works,  
conduct yourselves with reverence during the time of your sojourning,  
realizing that you were ransomed from your futile conduct,  
handed on by your ancestors,  
not with perishable things like silver or gold  
but with the precious blood of Christ  
as of a spotless unblemished lamb.*

*He was known before the foundation of the world  
but revealed in the final time for you,  
who through him believe in God  
who raised him from the dead and gave him glory,  
so that your faith and hope are in God.*

- 1 Peter 1:17-21

Of relevance to the topic at hand are the following statements:

1. God judges us according to our works (*i.e.* not those of our fathers)
2. We have been “*ransomed from (our) futile conduct, handed on by (our) ancestors*” (*i.e.* rather than held in bondage by any deals they may have made with the Devil).

These two readings from the the First Epistle of St. Peter seem to place everything in perspective for me--the same perspective that I see in Sacred Tradition as it comes to us through the Doctors of the Church, the Magisterium of the Church, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is the perspective that brings peace.

# The Catechism of the Catholic Church on Sickness

**549** By freeing **some** individuals from the earthly evils of hunger, injustice, illness and death, Jesus performed **messianic signs**. **Nevertheless he did not come to abolish all evils here below, but to free men from the gravest slavery, sin**, which thwarts them in their vocation as God's sons and causes all forms of human bondage.

**1263** By Baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin. **In those who have been reborn nothing remains that would impede their entry into the Kingdom of God**, neither Adam's sin, nor personal sin, nor the consequences of sin, the gravest of which is separation from God.

**1264** Yet certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character, and so on, as well as an inclination to sin that Tradition calls **concupiscence**, or metaphorically, "the tinder for sin" (*fomes peccati*); since concupiscence "is left for us to wrestle with, it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ." Indeed, "an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."

**1420** Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, man receives the new life of Christ. Now we carry this life "in earthen vessels," and it remains "hidden with Christ in God." **We are still in our "earthly tent," subject to suffering, illness, and death**. This new life as a child of God can be weakened and even lost by sin.

**1421** The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, has willed that his Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation, even among her own members. This is the purpose of the two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

**1500** Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death.

**1501** Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.

**1502** The man of the Old Testament lives his sickness in the presence of God. It is before God that he laments his illness, and it is of God, Master of life and death, that he implores healing. Illness becomes a way to conversion; God's forgiveness initiates the

healing. It is the experience of Israel that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, and that faithfulness to God according to his law restores life: "For I am the Lord, your healer." The prophet intuits that suffering can also have a redemptive meaning for the sins of others. Finally Isaiah announces that God will usher in a time for Zion when he will pardon every offense and heal every illness.

**1503** Christ's compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that "God has visited his people" and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of. His compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: "I was sick and you visited me." His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them.

**1504** Often Jesus asks the sick to believe. He makes use of signs to heal: spittle and the laying on of hands, mud and washing. The sick try to touch him, "for power came forth from him and healed them all." And so in the sacraments Christ continues to "touch" us in order to heal us.

**1505** Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." **But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover.** On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the "sin of the world," of which illness is only a consequence. By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion.

**1508** The Holy Spirit gives to some a special charism of healing so as to make manifest the power of the grace of the risen Lord. **But even the most intense prayers do not always obtain the healing of all illnesses.** Thus St. Paul must learn from the Lord that "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness," and that the sufferings to be endured can mean that "in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church."

# UNIFORMITY WITH GOD'S WILL

**Saint Alphonsus de Ligouri**

Translated by Thomas W. Tobin, C.S.S.R.

Who knows ? Perhaps if God had given us greater talent, better health, a more personable appearance, we might have lost our souls! Great talent and knowledge have caused many to be puffed up with the idea of their own importance and, in their pride, they have despised others. How easily those who have these gifts fall into these dangers to their salvation! How many on account of physical beauty or robust health have plunged headlong into a life of debauchery! How many, on the contrary, by reason of poverty, infirmity or physical deformity, have become saints and have saved their souls, who, given health, wealth or physical attractiveness had else lost their souls! Let us then be content with what God has given us. "But one thing is necessary," and it is not beauty, not health, not talent. It is the salvation of our immortal souls.

*"Perfection is founded entirely on the love of God: 'Charity is the bond of perfection;' and perfect love of God means the complete union of our will with God's."*

## Preface

In Volume 1, Opere Ascetiche di S. Alfonso M. de Liguori, Roma, 1933, "Uniformity with God's Will" is included as one of three works under the heading, "Lesser Works on Divine Love." There is no preface in the Italian original. However, it has been thought well to provide one here.

Prof. Candido M. Romano<sup>[1]</sup> says this brochure was written probably in 1755, as appears from a letter by the Saint, under date of Nov. 2, 1755, to Sister Giannastasio, at Cava. Romano goes on to say:

*"This (i.e. God's will) was for Alphonsus a theme of predilection, a theme dearest to his heart. Just as St. Ignatius stressed 'the greater glory of God,' St. Alphonsus in all his works, gave prominence to 'the greater good pleasure of God.' Most likely the occasion that brought forth this treatise was the death, in 1753, of Father Paul Cafaro, C.S.S.R., St. Alphonsus' confessor and director. The death of this worthy priest deeply affected the Saint and he expressed his sentiments in a poem on God's will. The wide acclaim it received may have suggested to him the thought that a tract on the same subject would be helpful to the souls of others. If this be true, his surmise proved correct, for the appearance of his subsequent pamphlet was greeted with instant favor."*

Cardinal Villecourt, in his Life of St. Alphonsus, quotes long passages from this pamphlet and ends by saying: "Our Saint frequently read it himself and when his sight had failed he arranged to have it read to him by others."

This brochure bears the stamp of Alphonsian simplicity of style and solidity of doctrine. Moreover the instances he cites from the lives of the saints have a gentle graciousness and contain a fragrance that is redolent of the Fioretti of St. Francis of Assisi.

Through God's grace and our Lady's prayers may a diligent reading of the book bring us far along the way of perfection by the cultivation of uniformity with God's holy will!

THOMAS W. TOBIN, C.S.S.R.

Oct. 16, 1952.

Feast of St. Gerard Majella, C.SS.R.

## 1. Excellence of this Virtue

Perfection is founded entirely on the love of God: "*Charity is the bond of perfection*[2]," and perfect love of God means the complete union of our will with God's: "*The principal effect of love is so to unite the wills of those who love each other as to make them will the same things*[3]." It follows then, that the more one unites his will with the divine will, the greater will be his love of God. Mortification, meditation, receiving Holy Communion, acts of fraternal charity are all certainly pleasing to God -- but only when they are in accordance with his will. When they do not accord with God's will, he not only finds no pleasure in them, but he even rejects them utterly and punishes them.

To illustrate: -- A man has two servants. One works unremittingly all day long -- but according to his own devices; the other, conceivably, works less, but he does do what he is told. This latter of course is going to find favor in the eyes of his master; the other will not. Now, in applying this example, we may ask: Why should we perform actions for God's glory if they are not going to be acceptable to him? God does not want sacrifices, the prophet Samuel told King Saul, but he does want obedience to his will: "*Doth the Lord desire holocausts and victims, and not rather that the voice of the Lord should be obeyed? For obedience is better than sacrifices; and to hearken, rather than to offer the fat of rams. Because it is like the sin of witchcraft to rebel; and like the crime of idolatry to refuse to obey*[4]." The man who follows his own will independently of God's, is guilty of a kind of idolatry. Instead of adoring God's will, he, in a certain sense, adores his own.

The greatest glory we can give to God is to do his will in everything. Our Redeemer came on earth to glorify his heavenly Father and to teach us by his example how to do the same. St. Paul represents him saying to his eternal Father: "*Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not: But a body thou hast fitted to me . . . Then said I: Behold I come to do thy will, O God*[5]." Thou hast refused the victims offered thee by man; thou dost will that I sacrifice my body to thee. Behold me ready to do thy will.

Our Lord frequently declared that he had come on earth not to do his own will, but solely that of his Father: "*I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me*[6]." He spoke in the same strain in the garden when he went forth to meet his enemies who had come to seize him and to lead him to death: "*But that the world may know that I love the Father: and as the Father hath given me commandment, so do I; arise and let us go hence*[7]." Furthermore, he said he would recognize as his brother, him who would do his will: "*Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother*[8]."

To do God's will -- this was the goal upon which the saints constantly fixed their gaze. They were fully persuaded that in this consists the entire perfection of the soul. Blessed Henry Suso used to say: "It is not God's will that we should abound in spiritual delights, but that in all things we should submit to his holy will[9]." "Those who give themselves to prayer," says St. Teresa, "should concentrate solely on this: the conformity of their wills with the divine will. They should be convinced that this constitutes their highest perfection. The more fully they practice this, the greater the gifts they will receive from God, and the greater the progress they will make in the interior life[10]." A certain Dominican nun was vouchsafed a vision of heaven one day. She recognized there some persons she had known during their mortal life on earth. It was told her these souls were raised to the sublime heights of the seraphs on account of the uniformity of their wills with that of God's during their lifetime here on earth. Blessed Henry Suso, mentioned above, said of himself: "I would rather be the vilest worm on earth by God's will, than be a seraph by my own[11]."



During our sojourn in this world, we should learn from the saints now in heaven, how to love God. The pure and perfect love of God they enjoy there, consists in uniting themselves perfectly to his will. It would be the greatest delight of the seraphs to pile up sand on the seashore or to pull weeds in a garden for all eternity, if they found out such was God's will. Our Lord himself teaches us to ask to do the will of God on earth as the saints do it in heaven: "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*[12]."

Because David fulfilled all his wishes, God called him a man after his own heart: "*I have found David . . . a man according to my own heart, who shall do all my wills*[13]." David was always ready to embrace the divine will, as he frequently protested: "*My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready*[14]." He asked God for one thing alone -- to teach him to do his will: "*Teach me to do thy will*[15]."

A single act of uniformity with the divine will suffices to make a saint. Behold while Saul was persecuting the Church, God enlightened him and converted him. What does Saul do? What does he say? Nothing else but to offer himself to do God's will: "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do*[16]?" In return the Lord calls him a vessel of election and an apostle of the gentiles: "*This man is to me a vessel of election, to carry my name before the gentiles*[17]." Absolutely true -- because he who gives his will to God, gives him everything. He who gives his goods in alms, his blood in scourgings, his food in fasting, gives God what he *has*. But he who gives God his will, gives himself, gives everything he *is*. Such a one can say: "Though I am poor, Lord, I give thee all I possess; but when I say I give thee my will, I have nothing left to give thee." This is just what God does require of us: "*My son, give me thy heart*[18]." St. Augustine's comment is: "There is nothing more pleasing we can offer God than to say to him: `Possess thyself of us'[19]." We cannot offer God anything more pleasing than to say: Take us, Lord, we give thee our entire will. Only let us know thy will and we will carry it out.

If we would completely rejoice the heart of God, let us strive in all things to conform ourselves to his divine will. Let us not only strive to conform ourselves, but also to unite ourselves to whatever dispositions God makes of us. *Conformity* signifies that we join our wills to the will of God. *Uniformity* means more -- it means that we make one will of God's will and ours, so that we will only what God wills; that God's will alone, is our will. This is the summit of perfection and to it we should always aspire; this should be the goal of all our works, desires, meditations and prayers. To this end we should always invoke the aid of our holy patrons, our guardian angels, and above all, of our mother Mary, the most perfect of all the saints because she most perfectly embraced the divine will.

## 2. Uniformity in All Things

The essence of perfection is to embrace the will of God in all things, prosperous or adverse. In prosperity, even sinners find it easy to unite themselves to the divine will; but it takes saints to unite themselves to God's will when things go wrong and are painful to self-love. Our conduct in such instances is the measure of our love of God. St. John of Avila used to say: "*One `Blessed be God' in times of adversity, is worth more than a thousand acts of gratitude in times of prosperity*[20]."

Furthermore, we must unite ourselves to God's will not only in things that come to us directly from his hands, such as sickness, desolation, poverty, death of relatives, but likewise in those we suffer from man -- for example, contempt, injustice, loss of reputation, loss of temporal goods and all kinds of persecution. On these occasions we must remember that whilst God does not will the sin, he does will our humiliation, our poverty, or our mortification, as the case may be. It is certain and of faith, that whatever happens, happens by the will of God: "*I am the Lord forming the light and creating the darkness, making peace and creating evil*[21]." From God come all things, good as well as evil. We call adversities *evil*; actually they are good and meritorious, when we receive them as coming from God's hands: "*Shall there be evil in a city which the Lord hath not done*[22]?" "*Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches are from God*[23]."

It is true, when one offends us unjustly, God does not will his sin, nor does he concur in the sinner's bad will; but God does, in a general way, concur in the material action by which such a one strikes us, robs us or does us an injury, so that God certainly wills the offense we suffer and it comes to us from his hands. Thus the Lord told David he would be the author of those things he would suffer at the hands of Absalom: "*I will raise up evils against thee out of thy own house, and I will take thy wives before thy face and give them to thy neighbor*[24]." Hence too God told the Jews that in punishment for their sins, he would send the Assyrians to plunder them and spread destruction among them: "*The Assyrian is the rod and staff of my anger . . . I will send him to take away the spoils*[25]." "Assyrian wickedness served as God's scourge for the Hebrews[26]" is St. Augustine's comment on this text. And our Lord himself told St. Peter that his sacred passion came not so much from man as from his Father: "*The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it*[27]?"

When the messenger came to announce to Job that the Sabeans had plundered his goods and slain his children, he said: "*The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away*[28]." He did not say: "The Lord hath given me my children and my possessions, and the Sabeans have taken them away." He realized that adversity had come upon him by the will of God. Therefore he added: "*As it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord*[29]." We must not therefore consider the afflictions that come upon us as happening by chance or solely from the malice of men; we should be convinced that what happens, happens by the will of God. Apropos of this it is related that two martyrs, Epictetus and Atho, being put to the torture by having their bodies raked with iron hooks and burnt with flaming torches, kept repeating: "Work thy will upon us, O Lord." Arrived at the place of execution, they exclaimed: "Eternal God, be thou blessed in that thy will has been entirely accomplished in us[30]."

Cesarius points up what we have been saying by offering this incident in the life of a certain monk: Externally his religious observance was the same as that of the other monks, but he had attained such sanctity that the mere touch of his garments healed the sick. Marveling at these deeds, since his life was no more exemplary than the lives of the other monks, the superior asked him one day what was the cause of these miracles.

## 3. Happiness deriving from perfect Uniformity

He replied that he too was mystified and was at a loss how to account for such happenings. "What devotions do you practice?" asked the abbot. He answered that there was little or nothing special that he did beyond making a great deal of willing only what God willed, and that God had given him the grace of abandoning his will totally to the will of God.

"Prosperity does not lift me up, nor adversity cast me down," added the monk. "I direct all my prayers to the end that God's will may be done fully in me and by me." "That raid that our enemies made against the monastery the other day, in which our stores were plundered, our granaries put to the torch and our cattle driven off -- did not this misfortune cause you any resentment?" queried the abbot.

"No, Father," came the reply. "On the contrary, I returned thanks to God -- as is my custom in such circumstances -- fully persuaded that God does all things, or permits all that happens, for his glory and for our greater good; thus I am always at peace, no matter what happens." Seeing such uniformity with the will of God, the abbot no longer wondered why the monk worked so many miracles[31].

Acting according to this pattern, one not only becomes holy but also enjoys perpetual serenity in this life. Alphonsus the Great, King of Aragon, being asked one day whom he considered the happiest person in the world, answered: "He who abandons himself to the will of God and accepts all things, prosperous and adverse, as coming from his hands[32]." "*To those that love God, all things work together unto good*[33]." Those who love God are always happy, because their whole happiness is to fulfill, even in adversity, the will of God. Afflictions do not mar their serenity, because by accepting misfortune, they know they give pleasure to their beloved Lord: "*Whatever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad*[34]." Indeed, what can be more satisfactory to a person than to experience the fulfillment of all his desires? This is the happy lot of the man who wills only what God wills, because everything that happens, save sin, happens through the will of God.

There is a story to this effect in the "Lives of the Fathers" about a farmer whose crops were more plentiful than those of his neighbors. On being asked how this happened with such unvarying regularity, he said he was not surprised because he always had the kind of weather he wanted. He was asked to explain. He said: "It is so because I want whatever kind of weather God wants, and because I do, he gives me the harvests I want[35]." If souls resigned to God's will are humiliated, says Salvian[36], they want to be humiliated; if they are poor, they want to be poor; in short, whatever happens is acceptable to them, hence they are truly at peace in this life. In cold and heat, in rain and wind, the soul united to God says: "I want it to be warm, to be cold, windy, to rain, because God wills it."

This is the beautiful freedom of the sons of God, and it is worth vastly more than all the rank and distinction of blood and birth, more than all the kingdoms in the world. This is the abiding peace which, in the experience of the saints, "*surpasseth all understanding*[37]." It surpasses all pleasures rising from gratification of the senses, from social gatherings, banquets and other worldly amusements; vain and deceiving as they are, they captivate the senses for the time being, but bring no lasting contentment; rather they afflict man in the depth of his soul where alone true peace can reside.

Solomon, who tasted to satiety all the pleasures of the world and found them bitter, voiced his disillusionment thus: "*But this also is vanity and vexation of spirit*[38]." "A fool," says the Holy Spirit, "*is changed as the moon; but a holy man continueth in wisdom as the sun*[39]." The fool, that is, the sinner, is as changeable as the moon, which today waxes and tomorrow wanes; today he laughs, tomorrow he cries; today he is meek as a lamb, tomorrow cross as a bear. Why? Because his peace

of mind depends on the prosperity or the adversity he meets; he changes with the changes in the things that happen to him. The just man is like the sun, constant in his serenity, no matter what betides him. His calmness of soul is founded on his union with the will of God; hence he enjoys unruffled peace. This is the peace promised by the angel of the Nativity: "*And on earth, peace to men of good will*[40]." Who are these "men of good will" if not those whose wills are united to the infinitely good and perfect will of God? "*The good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God*[41]."

By uniting themselves to the divine will, the saints have enjoyed paradise by anticipation in this life. Accustoming themselves to receive all things from the hands of God, says St. Dorotheus[42], the men of old maintained continual serenity of soul. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi derived such consolation at hearing the words "will of God," that she usually fell into an ecstasy of love[43]. The instances of jangling irritation that are bound to arise will not fail to make surface impact on the senses. This however will be experienced only in the inferior part of the soul; in the superior part will reign peace and tranquillity as long as our will remains united with God's. Our Lord assured his apostles: "*Your joy no man shall take from you . . . Your joy shall be full*[44]." He who unites his will to God's experiences a full and lasting joy: *full*, because he has what he wants, as was explained above; *lasting*, because no one can take his joy from him, since no one can prevent what God wills from happening.

The devout Father John Tauler[45] relates this personal experience: For years he had prayed God to send him someone who would teach him the real spiritual life. One day, at prayer, he heard a voice saying: "Go to such and such a church and you will have the answer to your prayers." He went and at the door of the church he found a beggar, barefooted and in rags. He greeted the mendicant saying: "Good day, my friend."

"Thank you, sir, for your kind wishes, but I do not recall ever having had a 'bad' day."

"Then God has certainly given you a very happy life."

"That is very true, sir. I have never been unhappy. In saying this I am not making any rash statement either. This is the reason: When I have nothing to eat, I give thanks to God; when it rains or snows, I bless God's providence; when someone insults me, drives me away, or otherwise mistreats me, I give glory to God. I said I've never had an unhappy day, and it's the truth, because I am accustomed to will unreservedly what God wills. Whatever happens to me, sweet or bitter, I gladly receive from his hands as what is best for me. Hence my unvarying happiness."

"Where did you find God?"

"I found him where I left creatures."

"Who are you anyway?"

"I am a king."

"And where is your kingdom?"

"In my soul, where everything is in good order; where the passions obey reason, and reason obeys God."

"How have you come to such a state of perfection?"

"By silence. I practice silence towards men, while I cultivate the habit of speaking with God. Conversing with God is the way I found and maintain my peace of soul."

Union with God brought this poor beggar to the very heights of perfection. In his poverty he was richer than the mightiest monarch; in his sufferings, he was vastly happier than worldlings amid their worldly delights.

## 4. God wills our Good

O the supreme folly of those who resist the divine will! In God's providence, no one can escape hardship: "*Who resisteth his will*[46]?" A person who rails at God in adversity, suffers without merit; moreover by his lack of resignation he adds to his punishment in the next life and experiences greater disquietude of mind in this life: "*Who resisteth him and hath had peace*[47]?" The screaming rage of the sick man in his pain, the whining complaints of the poor man in his destitution -- what will they avail these people, except increase their unhappiness and bring them no relief? "Little man," says St. Augustine, "grow up. What are you seeking in your search for happiness? Seek the one good that embraces all others[48]." Whom do you seek, friend, if you seek not God? Seek him, find him, cleave to him; bind your will to his with bands of steel and you will live always at peace in this life and in the next.

God wills only our good; God loves us more than anybody else can or does love us. His will is that no one should lose his soul, that everyone should save and sanctify his soul: "*Not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance*[49]." "*This is the will of God, your sanctification*[50]." God has made the attainment of our happiness, his glory. Since he is by his nature infinite goodness, and since as St. Leo[51] says goodness is diffusive of itself, God has a supreme desire to make us sharers of his goods and of his happiness. If then he sends us suffering in this life, it is for our own good: "*All things work together unto good*[52]." Even chastisements come to us, not to crush us, but to make us mend our ways and save our souls: "*Let us believe that these scourges of the Lord have happened for our amendment and not for our destruction*[53]."

God surrounds us with his loving care lest we suffer eternal damnation: "*O Lord, thou hast crowned us as with a shield of thy good will*[54]." He is most solicitous for our welfare: "*The Lord is solicitous for me*[55]." What can God deny us when he has given us his own son? "*He that spared not even his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also, with him, given us all things*[56]?" Therefore we should most confidently abandon ourselves to all the dispositions of divine providence, since they are for our own good. In all that happens to us, let us say: "*In peace, in the self same I will sleep, and I will rest: Because thou, O Lord, hast singularly settled me in hope*[57]."

Let us place ourselves unreservedly in his hands because he will not fail to have care of us: "*Casting all your care upon him, for he hath care of you*[58]." Let us keep God in our thoughts and carry out his will, and he will think of us and of our welfare. Our Lord said to St. Catherine of Siena, "Daughter, think of me, and I will always think of you." Let us often repeat with the Spouse in the Canticle: "*My beloved to me, and I to him*[59]."

St. Niles, abbot, used to say that our petitions should be, not that our wishes be done, but that God's holy will should be fulfilled in us and by us. When, therefore, something adverse happens to us, let us accept it from his hands, not only patiently, but even with gladness, as did the apostles "*who went from the presence of the council rejoicing, that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus*[60]." What greater consolation can come to a soul than to know that by patiently bearing some tribulation, it gives God the greatest pleasure in its power? Spiritual writers tell us that though the desire of certain souls to please God by their sufferings is acceptable to him, still more pleasing to him is the union of certain others with his will, so that their will is neither to rejoice nor to suffer,

but to hold themselves completely amenable to his will, and they desire only that his holy will be fulfilled.

If, devout soul, it is your will to please God and live a life of serenity in this world, unite yourself always and in all things to the divine will. Reflect that all the sins of your past wicked life happened because you wandered from the path of God's will. For the future, embrace God's good pleasure and say to him in every happening: "*Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in thy sight*[61]." When anything disagreeable happens, remember it comes from God and say at once, "This comes from God" and be at peace: "*I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because thou hast done it.*" Lord, since thou hast done this, I will be silent and accept it. Direct all your thoughts and prayers to this end, to beg God constantly in meditation, Communion, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament that he help you accomplish his holy will. Form the habit of offering yourself frequently to God by saying, "My God, behold me in thy presence; do with me and all that I have as thou pleasest." This was the constant practice of St. Teresa. At least fifty times a day she offered herself to God, placing herself at his entire disposition and good pleasure.

How fortunate you, kind reader, if you too act thus! You will surely become a saint. Your life will be calm and peaceful; your death will be happy. At death all our hope of salvation will come from the testimony of our conscience as to whether or not we are dying resigned to God's will. If during life we have embraced everything as coming from God's hands, and if at death we embrace death in fulfillment of God's holy will, we shall certainly save our souls and die the death of saints. Let us then abandon everything to God's good pleasure, because being infinitely wise, he *knows* what is best for us; and being *all-good* and *all-loving* -- having given his life for us -- he *wills* what is best for us. Let us, as St. Basil counsels us, rest secure in the conviction that beyond the possibility of a doubt, God works to effect our welfare, infinitely better than we could ever hope to accomplish or desire it ourselves.

## 5. Special Practices of Uniformity

Let us now take up in a practical way the consideration of those matters in which we should unite ourselves to God's will.

1. *In external matters.* In times of great heat, cold or rain; in times of famine, epidemics and similar occasions we should refrain from expressions like these: "What unbearable heat!" "What piercing cold!" "What a tragedy!" In these instances we should avoid expressions indicating opposition to God's will. We should want things to be just as they are, because it is God who thus disposes them. An incident in point would be this one: Late one night St. Francis Borgia arrived unexpectedly at a Jesuit house, in a snowstorm. He knocked and knocked on the door, but all to no purpose because the community being asleep, no one heard him. When morning came all were embarrassed for the discomfort he had experienced by having had to spend the night in the open. The saint, however, said he had enjoyed the greatest consolation during those long hours of the night by imagining that he saw our Lord up in the sky dropping the snowflakes down upon him.

2. *In personal matters.* In matters that affect us personally, let us acquiesce in God's will. For example, in hunger, thirst, poverty, desolation, loss of reputation, let us always say: "Do thou build up or tear down, O Lord, as seems good in thy sight. I am content. I wish only what thou dost wish." Thus too, says Rodriguez, should we act when the devil proposes certain hypothetical cases to us in order to wrest a sinful consent from us, or at least to cause us to be interiorly disturbed. For example: "What would you say or what would you do if some one were to say or do such and such a

thing to you?" Let us dismiss the temptation by saying: "By God's grace, I would say or do what God would want me to say or do." Thus we shall free ourselves from imperfection and harassment.

3. Let us not lament if we suffer from some *natural defect* of body or mind; from poor memory, slowness of understanding, little ability, lameness or general bad health. What claim have we, or what obligation is God under, to give us a more brilliant mind or a more robust body? Who is ever offered a gift and then lays down the conditions upon which he will accept it? Let us thank God for what, in his pure goodness, he has given us and let us be content too with the manner in which he has given it to us.

Who knows? Perhaps if God had given us greater talent, better health, a more personable appearance, we might have lost our souls! Great talent and knowledge have caused many to be puffed up with the idea of their own importance and, in their pride, they have despised others. How easily those who have these gifts fall into grave danger to their salvation! How many on account of physical beauty or robust health have plunged headlong into a life of debauchery! How many, on the contrary, who, by reason of poverty, infirmity or physical deformity, have become saints and have saved their souls, who, given health, wealth or physical attractiveness had else lost their souls! Let us then be content with what God has given us. "*But one thing is necessary*[62]," and it is not beauty, not health, not talent. It is the salvation of our immortal souls.

4. It is especially necessary that we be resigned in *corporal infirmities*. We should willingly embrace them in the manner and for the length of time that God wills. We ought to make use of the ordinary remedies in time of sickness -- such is God's will; but if they are not effective, let us unite ourselves to God's will and this will be better for us than would be our restoration to health. Let us say: "Lord, I wish neither to be well nor to remain sick; I want only what thou wilt." Certainly, it is more virtuous not to repine in times of painful illness; still and all, when our sufferings are excessive, it is not wrong to let our friends know what we are enduring, and also to ask God to free us from our sufferings. Let it be understood, however, that the sufferings here referred to are actually excessive. It often happens that some, on the occasion of a slight illness, or even a slight indisposition, want the whole world to stand still and sympathize with them in their illnesses.

But where it is a case of real suffering, we have the example of our Lord, who, at the approach of his bitter passion, made known his state of soul to his disciples, saying: "*My soul is sorrowful even unto death*[63]" and besought his eternal Father to deliver him from it: "*Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me*[64]." But our Lord likewise taught us what we should do when we have made such a petition, when he added: "*Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt*[65]."

How childish the pretense of those who protest they wish for health not to escape suffering, but to serve our Lord better by being able to observe their Rule, to serve the community, go to church, receive Communion, do penance, study, work for souls in the confessional and pulpit! Devout soul, tell me, why do you desire to do these things? To please God? Why then search any further to please God when you are sure God does not wish these prayers, Communions, penances or studies, but he does wish that you suffer patiently this sickness he sends you? Unite then your sufferings to those of our Lord.

"But," you say, "I do not want to be sick for then I am useless, a burden to my Order, to my monastery." But if you are united to and resigned to God's will, you will realize that your superiors are likewise resigned to the dispositions of divine providence, and that they recognize the fact that you are a burden, not through indolence, but by the will of God. Ah, how often these desires and these laments are born, not of the love of God, but of the love of self! How many of them are so many pretexts for fleeing the will of God! Do we want to please God? When we find ourselves confined to our sickbed, let us utter this one prayer: "Thy will be done." Let us repeat it time and time again and it will please God more than all our mortifications and devotions. There is no better way to

serve God than cheerfully to embrace his holy will.

St. John of Avila once wrote to a sick priest: "My dear friend, -- Do not weary yourself planning what you would do if you were well, but be content to be sick for as long as God wishes. If you are seeking to carry out God's will, what difference should it make to you whether you are sick or well[66]?" The saint was perfectly right, for God is glorified not by our works, but by our resignation to, and by our union with, his holy will. In this respect St. Francis de Sales used to say we serve God better by our sufferings than by our actions.

Many times it will happen that proper medical attention or effective remedies will be lacking, or even that the doctor will not rightly diagnose our case. In such instances we must unite ourselves to the divine will which thus disposes of our physical health. The story is told of a client of St. Thomas of Canterbury, who being sick, went to the saint's tomb to obtain a cure. He returned home cured. But then he thought to himself: "Suppose it would be better for my soul's salvation if I remained sick, what point then is there in being well?" In this frame of mind he went back and asked the saint to intercede with God that he grant what would be best for his eternal salvation. His illness returned and he was perfectly content with the turn things had taken, being fully persuaded that God had thus disposed of him for his own good.

There is a similar account by Surio to the effect that a certain blind man obtained the restoration of his sight by praying to St. Bedasto, bishop. Thinking the matter over, he prayed again to his heavenly patron, but this time with the purpose that if the possession of his sight were not expedient for his soul, that his blindness should return. And that is exactly what happened -- he was blind again. Therefore, in sickness it is better that we seek neither sickness nor health, but that we abandon ourselves to the will of God so that he may dispose of us as he wishes. However, if we decide to ask for health, let us do so at least always resigned and with the proviso that our bodily health may be conducive to the health of our soul. Otherwise our prayer will be defective and will remain unheard because our Lord does not answer prayers made without resignation to his holy will.

Sickness is the acid test of spirituality, because it discloses whether our virtue is real or sham. If the soul is not agitated, does not break out in lamentations, is not feverishly restless in seeking a cure, but instead is submissive to the doctors and to superiors, is serene and tranquil, completely resigned to God's will, it is a sign that that soul is well-grounded in virtue.

What of the whiner who complains of lack of attention? That his sufferings are beyond endurance? That the doctor does not know his business? What of the faint-hearted soul who laments that the hand of God is too heavy upon him?

This story by St. Bonaventure in his "Life of St. Francis" is in point: On a certain occasion when the saint was suffering extraordinary physical pain, one of his religious meaning to sympathize with him, said in his simplicity: "My Father, pray God that he treat you a little more gently, for his hand seems heavy upon you just now." Hearing this, St. Francis strongly resented the unhappy remark of his well-meaning brother, saying: "My good brother, did I not know that what you have just said was spoken in all simplicity, without realizing the implication of your words, I should never see you again because of your rashness in passing judgment on the dispositions of divine providence." Whereupon, weak and wasted as he was by his illness, he got out of bed, knelt down, kissed the floor and prayed thus: "Lord, I thank thee for the sufferings thou art sending me. Send me more, if it be thy good pleasure. My pleasure is that you afflict me and spare me not, for the fulfillment of thy holy will is the greatest consolation of my life."



## 6. Spiritual Desolation

We ought to view in the light of God's holy will, the loss of persons who are helpful to us in a spiritual or material way. Pious souls often fail in this respect by not being resigned to the dispositions of God's holy will. Our sanctification comes fundamentally and essentially from God, not from spiritual directors. When God sends us a spiritual director, he wishes us to use him for our spiritual profit; but if he takes him away, he wants us to remain calm and unperturbed and to increase our confidence in his goodness by saying to him: "Lord, thou hast given me this help and now thou dost take it away. Blessed be thy holy will! I beg thee, teach me what I must do to serve thee."

In this manner too, we should receive whatever other crosses God sends us. "But," you reply, "these sufferings are really punishments." The answer to that remark is: Are not the punishments God sends us in this life also graces and benefits? Our offenses against God must be atoned for somehow, either in this life or in the next. Hence we should all make St. Augustine's prayer our own: "Lord, here cut, here burn and spare me not, but spare me in eternity!" Let us say with Job: "*Let this be my comfort, that afflicting me with sorrow, he spare not*<sup>[67]</sup>." Having merited hell for our sins, we should be consoled that God chastises us in this life, and animate ourselves to look upon such treatment as a pledge that God wishes to spare us in the next. When God sends us punishments let us say with the high-priest Heli: "*It is the Lord, let him do what is good in his sight*<sup>[68]</sup>."

The time of spiritual desolation is also a time for being resigned. When a soul begins to cultivate the spiritual life, God usually showers his consolations upon her to wean her away from the world; but when he sees her making solid progress, he withdraws his hand to test her and to see if she will love and serve him without the reward of sensible consolations. "In this life," as St. Teresa used to say, "our lot is not to enjoy God, but to do his holy will." And again, "Love of God does not consist in experiencing his tendernesses, but in serving him with resolution and humility." And in yet another place, "God's true lovers are discovered in times of aridity and temptation."

Let the soul thank God when she experiences his loving endearments, but let her not repine when she finds herself left in desolation. It is important to lay great stress on this point, because some souls, beginners in the spiritual life, finding themselves in spiritual aridity, think God has abandoned them, or that the spiritual life is not for them; thus they give up the practice of prayer and lose what they have previously gained. The time of aridity is the best time to practice resignation to God's holy will. I do not say you will feel no pain in seeing yourself deprived of the sensible presence of God; it is impossible for the soul not to feel it and lament over it, when even our Lord cried out on the cross: "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me*<sup>[69]</sup>?" In her sufferings, however, the soul should always be resigned to God's will.

The saints have all experienced desolations and abandonment of soul. "How impervious to things spiritual, my heart!" cries a St. Bernard. "No savor in pious reading, no pleasure in meditation nor in prayer!" For the most part it has been the common lot of the saints to encounter aridities; sensible consolations were the exceptions. Such things are rare occurrences granted to untried souls so that they may not halt on the road to sanctity; the real delights and happiness that will constitute their reward are reserved for heaven. This earth is a place of merit which is acquired by suffering; heaven is a place of reward and happiness. Hence, in this life the saints neither desired nor sought the joys of sensible fervor, but rather the fervor of the spirit toughened in the crucible of suffering. "O how much better it is," says St. John of Avila, "to endure aridity and temptation by God's will than to be raised to the heights of contemplation without God's will!"

But you say you would gladly endure desolation if you were certain that it comes from God, but you are tortured by the anxiety that your desolation comes by your own fault and is a punishment for your tepidity. Very well, let us suppose you are right; then get rid of your tepidity and exercise more

diligence in the affairs of your soul. But because you are possibly experiencing spiritual darkness, are you going to get all wrought up, give up prayer, and thus make things twice as bad as they are?

Let us assume that this aridity is a punishment for your tepidity. Was it not God who sent it? Accept your desolation, as your just desserts and unite yourself to God's holy will. Did you not say that you merited hell? And now you are complaining? Perhaps you think God should send you consolations! Away with such ideas and be patient under God's hand. Take up your prayers again and continue to walk in the way you have entered upon; for the future, fear lest such laments come from too little humility and too little resignation to the will of God. Therefore be resigned and say: "Lord, I accept this punishment from thy hands, and I accept it for as long as it pleases thee; if it be thy will that I should be thus afflicted for all eternity, I am satisfied." Such a prayer, though hard to make, will be far more advantageous to you than the sweetest sensible consolations.

It is well to remember, however, that aridity is not always a chastisement; at times it is a disposition of divine providence for our greater spiritual profit and to keep us humble. Lest St. Paul become vain on account of the spiritual gifts he had received, the Lord permitted him to be tempted to impurity: "*And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me*[70]."

Prayer made amid sensible devotion is not much of an achievement: "*There is a friend, a companion at the table, and he will not abide in the day of distress*[71]." You would not consider the casual guest at your table a friend, but only him who assists you in your need without thought of benefit to himself. When God sends spiritual darkness and desolation, his true friends are known.

Palladius, the author of the "Lives of the Fathers of the Desert," experiencing great disgust in prayer, went seeking advice from the abbot Macarius. The saintly abbot gave him this counsel: "When you are tempted in times of dryness to give up praying because you seem to be wasting your time, say: 'Since I cannot pray, I will be satisfied just to remain on watch here in my cell for the love of Jesus Christ!' "Devout soul, you do the same when you are tempted to give up prayer just because you seem to be getting nowhere. Say: "I am going to stay here just to please God." St. Francis de Sales used to say that if we do nothing else but banish distractions and temptations in our prayers, the prayer is well made. Tauler states that persevering prayer in time of dryness will receive greater grace than prayer made amid great sensible devotion.

Rodriguez cites the case of a person who persevered forty years in prayer despite aridity, and experienced great spiritual strength as a result of it; on occasion, when through aridity he would omit meditation he felt spiritually weak and incapable of good deeds. St. Bonaventure and Gerson both say that persons who do not experience the recollection they would like to have in their meditations, often serve God better than they would do if they did have it; the reason is that lack of recollection keeps them more diligent and humble; otherwise they would become puffed up with spiritual pride and grow tepid, vainly believing they had reached the summit of sanctity.

What has been said of dryness holds true of *temptations* also. Certainly we should strive to avoid temptations; but if God wishes that we be tempted against faith, purity, or any other virtue, we should not give in to discouraging lamentations, but submit ourselves with resignation to God's holy will. St. Paul asked to be freed from temptations to impurity and our Lord answered him, saying: "*My grace is sufficient for thee*[72]."

So should we act when we find ourselves victims of unrelenting temptations and God seemingly deaf to our prayers. Let us then say: "Lord, do with me, let happen to me what thou wilt; thy grace is sufficient for me. Only never let me lose this grace." Consent to temptation, not temptation of itself, can make us lose the grace of God. Temptation resisted keeps us humble, brings us greater merit, makes us have frequent recourse to God, thus preserving us from offending him and unites us more

closely to him in the bonds of his holy love.

Finally, we should be united to God's will in regard to the *time* and *manner* of our death. One day St. Gertrude, while climbing up a small hill, lost her footing and fell into a ravine below. After her companions had come to her assistance, they asked her if while falling she had any fear of dying without the sacraments. "I earnestly hope and desire to have the benefit of the sacraments when death is at hand; still, to my way of thinking, the will of God is more important. I believe that the best disposition I could have to die a happy death would be to submit myself to whatever God would wish in my regard. For this reason I desire whatever kind of death God will be pleased to send me."

In his "Dialogues", St. Gregory<sup>[73]</sup> tells of a certain priest, Santolo by name, who was captured by the Vandals and condemned to death. The barbarians told him to choose the manner of his death. He refused, saying: "I am in God's hands and I gladly accept whatever kind of death he wishes me to suffer at your hands; I wish no other." This reply was so pleasing to God that he miraculously stayed the hand of the executioner ready to behead him. The barbarians were so impressed by the miracle that they freed their prisoner. As regards the manner of our death, therefore, we should esteem that the best kind of death for us which God has designed for us. When therefore we think of our death, let our prayer be: "O Lord, only let me save my soul and I leave the manner of my death to thee!"

We should likewise unite ourselves to God's will when the moment of death is near. What else is this earth but a prison where we suffer and where we are in constant danger of losing God? Hence David prayed: "*Bring my soul out of prison*"<sup>[74]</sup>. St. Teresa too feared to lose God and when she would hear the striking of the clock, she would find consolation in the thought that the passing of the hour was an hour less of the danger of losing God.

St. John of Avila was convinced that every right-minded person should desire death on account of living in peril of losing divine grace. What can be more pleasant or desirable than by dying a good death, to have the assurance of no longer being able to lose the grace of God? Perhaps you will answer that you have as yet done nothing to deserve this reward. If it were God's will that your life should end now, what would you be doing, living on here against his will? Who knows, you might fall into sin and be lost! Even if you escaped mortal sin, you could not live free from all sin. "Why are we so tenacious of life," exclaims St. Bernard, "when the longer we live, the more we sin"<sup>[75]</sup>? A single venial sin is more displeasing to God than all the good works we can perform.

Moreover, the person who has little desire for heaven shows he has little love for God. The true lover desires to be with his beloved. We cannot see God while we remain here on earth; hence the saints have yearned for death so that they might go and behold their beloved Lord, face to face. "Oh, that I might die and behold thy beautiful face!" sighed St. Augustine. And St. Paul: "*Having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ*"<sup>[76]</sup>. "*When shall I come and appear before the face of God*"<sup>[77]</sup>? exclaimed the psalmist.

A hunter one day heard the voice of a man singing most sweetly in the forest. Following the sound, he came upon a leper horribly disfigured by the ravages of his disease. Addressing him he said: "How can you sing when you are so terribly afflicted and your death is so near at hand?" And the leper: "Friend, my poor body is a crumbling wall and it is the only thing that separates me from my God. When it falls I shall go forth to God. Time for me is indeed fast running out, so every day I show my happiness by lifting my voice in song."

Lastly, we should unite ourselves to the will of God as regards our *degree* of grace and glory. True, we should esteem the things that make for the glory of God, but we should show the greatest esteem for those that concern the will of God. We should desire to love God more than the seraphs, but not to a degree higher than God has destined for us. St. John of Avila<sup>[78]</sup> says: "I believe every

saint has had the desire to be higher in grace than he actually was. However, despite this, their serenity of soul always remained unruffled. Their desire for a greater degree of grace sprang not from a consideration of their own good, but of God's. They were content with the degree of grace God had meted out for them, though actually God had given them less. They considered it a greater sign of true love of God to be content with what God had given them, than to desire to have received more."

This means, as Rodriguez explains it, we should be diligent in striving to become perfect, so that tepidity and laziness may not serve as excuses for some to say: "God must help me; I can do only so much for myself." Nevertheless, when we do fall into some fault, we should not lose our peace of soul and union with the will of God, which permits our fall; nor should we lose our courage. Let us rise at once from this fall, penitently humbling ourselves and by seeking greater help from God, let us continue to march resolutely on the highway of the spiritual life. Likewise, we may well desire to be among the seraphs in heaven, not for our own glory, but for God's, and to love him more; still we should be resigned to his will and be content with that degree of glory which in his mercy he has set for us.

It would be a serious defect to desire the gifts of supernatural prayer -- specifically, ecstasies, visions and revelations. The masters of the spiritual life say that souls thus favored by God, should ask him to take them away so that they may love him out of pure faith -- a way of greater security. Many have come to perfection without these supernatural gifts; the only virtues worth-while are those that draw the soul to holiness of life, namely, the virtue of uniformity with God's holy will. If God does not wish to raise us to the heights of perfection and glory, let us unite ourselves in all things to his holy will, asking him in his mercy, to grant us our soul's salvation. If we act in this manner, the reward will not be slight which we shall receive from the hands of God who loves above all others, souls resigned to his holy will.

## 7. Conclusion

Finally we should consider the events which are happening to us now and which will happen to us in the future, as coming from the hands of God. Everything we do should be directed to this one end: to do the will of God and to do it solely for the reason that God wills it. To walk more securely on this road we must depend on the guidance of our superiors in external matters, and on our directors in internal matters, to learn from them God's will in our regard, having great faith in the words of our Lord: "*He that heareth you, heareth me*<sup>[79]</sup>."

Above all, let us bend all our energies to serve God in the way he wishes. This remark is made so that we may avoid the mistake of him who wastes his time in idle day-dreaming. Such a one says, "If I were to become a hermit, I would become a saint" or "If I were to enter a monastery, I would practice penance" or "If I were to go away from here, leaving friends and companions, I would devote long hours to prayer." If, If, If -- all these if's! In the meantime such a person goes from bad to worse. These idle fancies are often temptations of the devil, because they are not in accord with God's will. Hence we should dismiss them summarily and rouse ourselves to serve God only in that way which he has marked out for us. Doing his holy will, we shall certainly become holy in those surroundings in which he has placed us.

Let us will always and ever only what God wills; for so doing, he will press us to his heart. To this end let us familiarize ourselves with certain texts of sacred scripture that invite us to unite ourselves constantly with the divine will: "*Lord, what wilt thou have me do*<sup>[80]</sup>?" Tell me, my God, what thou wilt have me do, that I may will it also, with all my heart. "*I am thine, save thou me*<sup>[81]</sup>." I am no longer my own, I am thine, O Lord, do with me as thou wilt.

If some particularly crashing misfortune comes upon us, for example, the death of a relative, loss of goods, let us say: "*Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in thy sight*[\[82\]](#)." Yes, my God and my Father, so be it, for such is thy good pleasure. Above all, let us cherish that prayer of our Lord, which he himself taught us: "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*[\[83\]](#)." Our Lord bade St. Catherine of Genoa to make a notable pause at these words whenever she said the Our Father, praying that God's holy will be fulfilled on earth with the same perfection with which the saints do it in heaven. Let this be our practice also, and we shall certainly become saints.

May the divine will be loved and praised! May the Immaculate Virgin be also praised!

- 1 Saggio Storico di Prof. Candido M. Romano, Roma Libreria Salesiano, 1896.
- 2 Col. 3:14.
- 3 St. Denis Areop. De Div. Nom. c. 4.
- 4 1 Kings, 15:22, 23.
- 5 Hab. 10:5-7.
- 6 John 6:38.
- 7 John 14:31.
- 8 Matt. 12:50.
- 9 Bl.H. Suso L 2, c. 4.
- 10 St. Teresa, Obras 4:27, 28.
- 11 Suso, Serm. 2. (Opera Colon Agrip.)
- 12 Matt. 6:10.
- 13 Acts 13:22.
- 14 Ps. 56:8.
- 15 Ps. 142:10.
- 16 Acts, 9:6.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Prov. 23:26.
- 19 St. August. in Ps. 131:3.
- 20 St. John Avil. Letters 41.
- 21 Isaias 45:6, 7.
- 22 Amos, 3:6.
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- 30 ML (Vitae Patrum) 73-402, etc.
- 31 Caesarius: Dial. distin. 10: cap. 9.
- 32 Anton. Panorm. De Dictis Alph. Bk. 4.
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- 43 Puccine, Vita. Part. 1. chap 59.
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- 48 St. Aug. Opera. Cap. 34 ML 40-966.
- 49 2 Peter, 3:9.
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- 58 1 Peter, 5:7.
- 59 Cant. 2:6.
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- 81 Ps. 118:94.
- 82 Matt. 11:26.
- 83 Matt. 6:10.