

Five Inspiring Essays
by Mystical Thinkers
of the 17th Century

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

FRANÇOIS **FÉNELON**
MADAME **GUYON**
PÈRE **LACOMBE**



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The providence of God among the churches seems to call to the present time for further light upon the subject of a higher experience than that usually attained by the members of our Christian societies. Among the teachers who have been, from time to time, anointed for this work, François Fénelon and Madame Guyon are justly held in high estimation. While some people, perhaps, have had a more interior experience, few, if any, have so joined to the deepest devotion a power of spiritual analysis that eminently fitted them for the office of instructors.

The extracts from Fénelon given here under the title *Christian Counsel* have been translated from *Avis Chrétiens*, contained in the fourth volume of the Paris edition of his works in ten volumes (1810). The *Spiritual Letters* are from the same source.

The translation of the *Method of Prayer* is that which commonly passes under the name of Thomas Digby Brooke. It has been carefully compared and corrected by the editions of the *Opuscules*, published in Cologne (1704) and Paris (1790). *On the Way to God* and *Spiritual Maxims*, which follow, have been translated from the Paris edition of 1790.

It was at first proposed to have prefixed to the selections an account of the lives of the authors, but the design was subsequently abandoned. The very unsatisfactory character of a mere sketch, the space that would be demanded by anything like a fitting biography, and the very accessible form in which the materials have been lately placed by Professor Upham are some of the reasons that contributed to the change.

As this little work is intended to be simply a devotional, matter of a purely sectarian or controversial character has been omitted as far as possible.

And now, beloved reader, one word in conclusion, from the love of God to you. God has led you, in His providence, to open this book that He may do you good. If through His infinite mercy you have had a personal experience of the matters written here, your heart will be filled with thanksgiving and praise as you read. What has God wrought! If not, you will find many things strange, and it would not be surprising if you should be ready to pronounce some things untrue. But beware of being wise in your own conceit! The Spirit of God who searches the deep things of God alone can decide.

Do not distrust the reports of these spies whom God has sent before you into the Promised Land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey; true, the children of Anak are there, in whose sight we are but as grasshoppers, but they are bread for us. The Lord God will fight for us, and He will surely bring us into that exceedingly good land.

The natural man does not receive the things of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. If, then, you have not experienced the things that follow, do not think it strange that they should seem foolish and false; in God's own time, they will be perceived, if you follow on to know.

If you will be advised by one who knows nothing and who is least in the household of faith, you will deny nothing, reject nothing, and despise nothing, lest you be found fighting against God. You will receive nothing but what is accompanied by the *amen* of the Spirit of God in your heart; all else will be as the idle wind. Reading thus, in absolute dependence, not upon man's wisdom or teaching but upon the utterances of the blessed Spirit within, you will infallibly be guided into all truth. Such is the promise of Him who cannot lie. And may His blessing rest upon you!

CHRISTIAN COUNSEL

By François Fénelon

“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”

—Revelation 3:18

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ON THE LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THERE IS IN THE WORLD

What men stand most in need of is the knowledge of God. They know, to be sure, by dint of reading, that history gives an account of a certain series of miracles and marked providences. They have reflected seriously on the corruption and instability of worldly things. They are even, perhaps, convinced that the reformation of their lives on certain principles of morality is desirable in order for their salvation. But the whole of the edifice is destitute of foundation; this pious and Christian exterior possesses no soul. The living principle that animates every true believer—God, the All in All, the Author and the Sovereign of all—is wanting.

He is, in all things, infinite—in wisdom, power, and love—and it is no wonder that everything that comes from His hand should partake of the same infinite character and set at naught the efforts of human reason. When God works, His ways and His thoughts are declared by the prophet to be as far above our ways and our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth. (See Isaiah 55:9.) He makes no effort when He would execute what He has decreed, for to Him all things are equally easy. He speaks and causes the heavens and the earth to be created out of nothing with as little difficulty as he causes water or a stone to fall to the ground. His power is co-extensive with His will; when He wills something, it is already accomplished. When the Scriptures represent Him as

speaking in the creation of the world, it is not to be understood as signifying that it was necessary that the word of command should issue from Him in order for the universe He was about to create to hear and obey His will; that word was simple and interior, neither more nor less than the thought that He conceived of what He was about to do and the will to do it. The thought was fertile, and without being rendered exterior, it birthed from Him, as the fountain of all life, the sum of the things that are.

His mercy, too, is His pure will. He loved us before the creation of the world; He saw and knew us, and He prepared His blessings for us. He loved and chose us from all eternity. Every new blessing we receive is derived from this eternal origin. He forms no new will respecting us; it is not He who changes but we. When we are righteous and good, we are conformable to His will and agreeable to Him; when we depart from well doing and cease to be good, we cease to be conformable to Him and to please Him. This is the immutable standard that the changeable creature is continually approaching and leaving. God's justice against the wicked and His love toward the righteous are the same thing; it is the same quality that unites Him to everything that is good and is incompatible with everything that is evil. Mercy is the goodness of God, beholding our wickedness and striving to make us good. Perceived by us in time, it has its source in the eternal love of God for His creatures.

From Him alone proceeds true goodness, which is unfortunate for those presumptuous souls who seek it in themselves! It is God's love toward us that gives us everything, but the richest of His gifts is that we may love Him with that love that is His due. When He is able, by His love, to produce that love in us, He reigns within; He constitutes within us our life, our peace, and our happiness; and we then already begin to taste that blissful

existence that He enjoys. His love toward us is stamped with His own character of infinity. It is not like ours, bounded and constrained. When He loves, all the measures of His love are infinite. He comes down from heaven to earth to seek the creature of clay whom He loves; He becomes creature and clay with him; He gives him his flesh to eat.

These are the prodigies of divine love in which the infinite exceeds all the affection we can manifest. He loves like a God, with a love utterly incomprehensible. It is the height of folly to seek to measure infinite love by human wisdom. Far from losing any element of its greatness in these excesses, He impresses upon His love the stamp of His own grandeur, while He manifests a delight in us that is bounded by only the infinite. How great and lovely He is in His mysteries! But we lack eyes to see them and have no desire to behold God in everything.