

65. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) was abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Clairvaux from 1115 until his death. An influential public figure, he supported Innocent II after the disputed papal election of 1130, worked to condemn Peter Abelard at the Council of Sens in 1140, and afterward took the lead in promoting the Second Crusade. Bernard also wrote brilliantly about the internal dynamic of the soul in its relation to God—a theme that typified twelfth-century spirituality—in such works as his masterpiece, Sermons on the Song of Songs, and this little treatise, On Loving God.

VI. 16. Briefly repeating what has been said so far, consider first how God merits to be loved, that there is to be no limit to that love, for he loved us first. Such a one loved us so much and so freely, insignificant as we are and such as we are, that, as you recall I said in the beginning, we must love God without any limit. Finally, as love offered to God has for object the one who is immeasurable and infinite—for God is both infinite and immeasurable—what, I ask, should be the aim or degree of our love? What about the fact that our love is not given gratuitously but in payment of a debt? Thus the Immeasurable loves, the Eternal loves, that Charity which surpasses knowledge loves; God, whose greatness knows no end, to whose wisdom there is no limit, whose peace exceeds all understanding, loves—and we think we can requite him with some measure of love? “I shall love you, O Lord, my fortress, my strength, my refuge, my deliverer” (Ps. 17:2-3), and whatever can be held desirable and lovable for me. My God, my help, I shall love you as much as I am able for your gift. My love is less than is your due, yet not less than I am able, for even if I cannot love you as much as I should, still I cannot love you more than I can. I shall only be able to love you more when you give me more, although you can never find my love worthy of you. For, “Your eyes have seen my imperfections, and all shall be written

down in your book” (Ps. 138:16), all who do what they can, even if they cannot do all they should. As far as I can see, it is clear enough to what extent God ought to be loved and that by his own merit. By his own merit, I say, but to whom is the degree of this merit really clear? Who can say? Who can understand it?

VII. 17. Let us see now how he is to be loved for our advantage. How far from the reality is our knowledge of it? Nevertheless, it is not right to keep silent about what has been seen, even if it falls short of the truth. When asking above why and how God is to be loved, I said the question may be understood in two ways: it may mean by what merit of his God deserves our love or what benefit do we acquire in loving him. Both questions it seems may be asked. After speaking of God’s merit in a way no doubt unworthy of him, but according to the gift I have received, it remains for me to speak of the reward insofar as it also will be given to me.

God Is Not Loved without a Reward

God is not loved without a reward, although he should be loved without regard for one. True charity cannot be worthless, still, as “it does not seek its own advantage” (1 Cor. 13:5), it cannot be termed mercenary. Love pertains to the will, it is

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SPIRITUALITY AND THEOLOGY IN THE LATIN WEST

not a transaction; it cannot acquire or be acquired by a pact. Moving us freely, it makes us spontaneous. True love is content with itself; it has its reward, the object of its love. Whatever you seem to love because of something else, you do not really love; you really love the end pursued and not that by which it is pursued. Paul does not evangelize in order to eat; he eats in order to evangelize; he loves the Gospel and not the food. True love merits its reward, it does not seek it. A reward is offered him who does not yet love; it is due him who loves; it is given to him who perseveres. When we have to persuade people in lesser affairs we cajole the unwilling with promises and rewards, not those who are willing. Who would dream of offering a man a reward for doing something he wants to do? No one, for example, pays a hungry man to eat, a thirsty man to drink, or a mother to feed the child of her womb. Who would think of using prayers or prizes to remind a man to fence in his vine, to dig around his tree, or to build his own home? How much more the soul that loves God seeks no other reward than that God whom it loves. Were the soul to demand anything else, then it would certainly love that other thing and not God.

18. Every rational being naturally desires always what satisfies more its mind and will: It is never satisfied with something which lacks the qualities it thinks it should have. A man with a beautiful wife, for example, looks at a more attractive woman with a wanton eye or heart; a well-dressed man wants more costly clothes; and a man of great wealth envies anyone richer than he. You can see men who already own many farms and possessions, still busy, day after day, adding one field to another, driven by an excessive passion to extend their holdings. You can see men living in homes worthy of a king and in sumptuous dwellings, nonetheless daily adding house to house, through restless curiosity building up, then tearing down, changing squares into circles. What about men promoted to high honors? Do we not see them striving more and more in an insatiable ambition to go higher still? There is no end to all this, because no single one of these riches can be held to be the highest or the best. Why wonder if man cannot be content with what is lower or worse, since he cannot find peace this side of what is highest or

best? It is stupidity and madness to want always that which can neither satisfy nor even diminish your desire. While enjoying those riches, you strive for what is missing and are dissatisfied, longing for what you lack. Thus the restless mind, running to and fro among the pleasures of this life, is tired out but never satisfied; like the starving man who thinks whatever he stuffs down his throat is not enough, for his eyes see what remains to be eaten. Thus man craves continually for what is missing with no less fear than he possesses with joy what is in front of him. Who can have everything? A man clings to the fruits of his work (however small they may be), never knowing when he will have the sorrow of losing them, yet he is certain to lose them some day. In like manner a perverted will contends for what is best, and hastens in a straight line toward what will afford it the most satisfaction. Rather vanity makes sport of it in those tortuous ways, and evil deceives itself. If you wish to accomplish in this way what you desire, to gain hold of that which leaves nothing further to be desired, why bother about the rest? You are running on crooked roads and will die long before you reach the end you are seeking.

19. The wicked, therefore, walk round in circles, naturally wanting whatever will satisfy their desires, yet foolishly rejecting that which would lead them to their true end, which is not in consumption but in consummation. Hence they exhaust themselves in vain instead of perfecting their lives by a blessed end. They take more pleasure in the appearance of things than in their Creator, examining all and wanting to test them one by one before trying to reach the Lord of the universe. They might even succeed in doing so if they could ever gain hold of what they wish for; that is, if any one man could take possession of all things without him who is their Principle. By the very law of man's desire which makes him want what he lacks in place of what he has and grow weary of what he has in preference to what he lacks, once he has obtained and despised all in heaven and on earth, he will hasten toward the only one who is missing, the God of all. There he will rest, for just as there is no rest this side of eternity, so there will be no restlessness to bother him on the other side. Then he will say for sure: "It is good for me to adhere to God" (Ps. 72:28). He will even add to

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that: "What is there for me in heaven and what have I desired on earth, if you?" (Ps. 72:25). And, also: "God of my heart, God, my lot forever" (Ps. 72:26). Therefore, as I said, whoever desires the greatest good can succeed in reaching it, if he can first gain possession of all he desires short of that good itself.

20. This is altogether impossible because life is too short, strength too weak, competition too keen, men too fatigued by the long road and vain efforts; wishing to attain all they desire, yet unable to reach the end of all their wants. If they could only be content with reaching all in thought and not in deed. They could easily do so and it would not be in vain, for man's mind is more comprehensive and subtle than his senses. It even anticipates the senses in all things and they dare not contact an object unless the mind approves its utility beforehand. I think this is what is alluded to in the text: "Test all and hold on to what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). The mind looks ahead for the senses and these must not pursue their desires unless the mind gives its consent. Otherwise, you do not ascend the Lord's mountain or stand in his holy place, because you have received your soul in vain, that is, your rational soul; while you follow your senses like a dumb beast, your sleepy reason offers no resistance. Those who do not think ahead run alongside the road, they do not follow the Apostle's counsel: "... run, then to win ..." (1 Cor. 9:24). When will they reach him whom they do not want to reach until they have tested all the rest? The desire to experience all things first is like a vicious circle, it goes on forever.

21. The just man is not like that. Hearing about the evil conduct of those who remain inside the circle (for many follow the wide road which leads to death), he prefers the royal road which turns neither to the right nor to the left. Finally the Prophet confirms: "The path of the just is straight, and straightforward for walking" (Isa. 26:7). These are the ones who take a salutary short-cut and avoid the dangerous, fruitless round-about way, choosing the shortened and shortening word, not desiring everything they see, but rather selling all they have and giving it to the poor. It is clear that "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). All run, indeed, but one must distinguish between

runners. At length, "The Lord knows the way of the just, the way of the wicked will perish" (Ps. 1:6). As a result, "Better is a little to the just than all the wealth of the wicked" (Ps. 36:16). As Wisdom says and folly learns, money never satisfies those who love it. Rather, "... they that hunger and thirst for justice will have their fill" (Matt. 5:6). Justice is the vital, natural food of the rational soul; money can no more lessen the mind's hunger than air can that of the body. If you see a hungry man open wide his mouth to the wind and puff up his cheeks with air to satisfy his hunger, will you not think he is out of his mind? It is no less folly to think a rational soul will be satisfied rather than merely puffed up by any kind of material goods. What do material things mean to the mind? The body cannot live on ideas or the mind subsist on meat. "Bless the Lord, my soul, he satisfies your desires with good things" (Ps. 102:1, 5). He satisfies with good things, he incites to good, maintains in goodness, anticipates, sustains, fulfills. He makes you desire, he is what you desire.

22. I said above that God is the reason for loving God. That is right, for he is the efficient and final cause of our love. He offers the opportunity, creates the affection, and consummates the desire. He makes, or rather is made himself lovable. He hopes to be so happily loved that he will not be loved in vain. His love prepares and rewards ours. Obliging he leads the way; reasonably he requites us; he is our sweet hope. Rich for all who call on him, although he can give us nothing better than himself. He gave himself to merit for us; he keeps himself to be our reward; he serves himself as food for holy souls; he sold himself in ransom for captive souls. O Lord, you are so good to the soul who seeks you, what must you be to the one who finds you? More wonderful still, no one can seek you unless he has already found you. You wish to be found that you may be sought for, and sought for to be found. You may be sought and found, but nobody can forestall you. Even when we say: "In the morning my prayer will come before you" (Ps. 87:14), we must remember that, without our first receiving divine inspiration, all prayer becomes lukewarm. Let us now see where our love begins, for it has been shown where it ends.

VIII. 23. Love is one of the four natural passions. There is no need to name them, for they are well known. It would be right, however, for that which is natural to be first of all at the author of nature's service. That is why the first and greatest commandment is: "You shall love the Lord, your God . . ." (Matt. 22:37).

The First Degree of Love: Man Loves Himself for His Own Sake

Since nature has become more fragile and weak, necessity obliges man to serve it first. This is carnal love by which a man loves himself above all for his own sake. He is only aware of himself; as St. Paul says: "What was animal came first, then what was spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:46). Love is not imposed by a precept; it is planted in nature. Who is there who hates his own flesh? Yet should love, as it happens, grow immoderate, and, like a savage current, burst the banks of necessity, flooding the fields of delight, the overflow is immediately stopped by the commandment which says: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). It is just indeed that he who shares the same nature should not be deprived of the same benefits, especially that benefit which is grafted in that nature. Should a man feel overburdened at satisfying not only his brethren's just needs but also their pleasures, let him restrain his own if he does not want to be a transgressor. He can be as indulgent as he likes for himself providing he remembers his neighbor has the same rights. O man, the law of life and order imposes on you the restraint of temperance, lest you follow after your wanton desires and perish, lest you use nature's gifts to serve through wantonness the enemy of the soul. Would it not be more just and honorable to share them with your neighbor, your fellow man, than with your enemy? If, faithful to the Wiseman's counsel, you turn away from sensual delights and content yourself with the Apostle's teaching on food and clothing, you will soon be able to guard your love against "carnal desires which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11) and I think you will not find it a burden to share with those of your nature that which you have withheld from the enemy of your soul. Then your love will be sober and just if you do not refuse your brother that which he needs of what you have

denied yourself in pleasure. Thus carnal love becomes social when it is extended to others.

24. What would you do if, while helping out your neighbor, you find yourself lacking what is necessary for your life? What else can you do than to pray with all confidence to him "who gives abundantly and bears no grudges (Jas. 1:5), who opens his hand and fills with blessings every living being" (Ps. 144:16)? There is no doubt that he will assist us willingly in time of need, since he helps us so often in time of plenty. It is written: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and the rest will be added thereto" (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31). Without being asked he promises to give what is necessary to him who withholds from himself what he does not need and loves his neighbor. This is to seek the kingdom of God and implore his aid against the tyranny of sin, to prefer the yoke of chastity and sobriety rather than let sin reign in your mortal flesh. And again, it is only right to share nature's gifts with him who shares that nature with you.

25. Nevertheless, in order to love one's neighbor with perfect justice, one must have regard to God. In other words, how can one love one's neighbor with purity, if one does not love him in God? But it is impossible to love in God unless one loves God. It is necessary, therefore, to love God first; then one can love one's neighbor in God. Thus God makes himself lovable and creates whatever else is good. He does it this way. He who made nature protects it, for nature was created in a way that it must have its creator for protector. The world could not subsist without him to whom it owes its very existence. That no rational creature may ignore this fact concerning itself or dare lay claim through pride to benefits due the creator, by a deep and salutary counsel, the same creator wills that man be disciplined by tribulations so that when man fails and God comes to his help, man, saved by God, will render God the honor due him. It is written: "Call to me in the day of sorrow; I will deliver you, and you shall honor me" (Ps. 49:15). In this way, man who is animal and carnal, and knows how to love only himself, yet starts loving God for his own benefit, because he learns from frequent experience that he can do everything that is good for him in God and that without God he can do nothing good.

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The Second Degree of Love: Man Loves God for His Own Benefit

IX. 26. Man, therefore, loves God, but for his own advantage and not yet for God's sake. Nevertheless, it is a matter of prudence to know what you can do by yourself and what you can do with God's help to keep from offending him who keeps you free from sin. If man's tribulations, however, grow in frequency and as a result he frequently turns to God and is frequently freed by God, must he not end, even though he had a heart of stone in a breast of iron, by realizing that it is God's grace which frees him and come to love God not for his own advantage but for the sake of God?

The Third Degree of Love: Man Loves God for God's Sake

Man's frequent needs oblige him to invoke God more often and approach him more frequently. This intimacy moves man to taste and discover how sweet the Lord is. Tasting God's sweetness entices us more to pure love than does the urgency of our own needs. Hence the example of the Samaritans who said to the woman who had told them the Lord was present: "We believe now not on account of what you said; for we have heard him and we know he is truly the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). We walk in their footsteps when we say to our flesh, "Now we love God, not because of your needs; for we have tasted and know how sweet the Lord is" (Ps. 33:9). The needs of the flesh are a kind of speech, proclaiming in transports of joy the good things experienced. A man who feels this way will not have trouble in fulfilling the commandment to love his neighbor. He loves God truthfully and so loves what is God's. He loves purely and he does not find it hard to obey a pure commandment, purifying his heart, as it is written, in the obedience of love. He loves with justice and freely embraces the just commandment. This love is pleasing because it is free. It is chaste because it does not consist of spoken words but of deed and truth. It is just because it renders what is received. Whoever loves this way, loves the way he is loved, seeking in turn not what is his but what belongs to Christ, the same way Christ sought not what was his, but what was

ours, or rather, ourselves. He so loves who says: "Confess to the Lord for he is good" (Ps. 117:1). Who confesses to the Lord, not because he is good to him but because the Lord is good, truly loves God for God's sake and not for his own benefit. He does not love this way of whom it is said: "He will praise you when you do him favors" (Ps. 48:19). This is the third degree of love: in it God is already loved for his own sake.

The Fourth Degree of Love: Man Loves Himself for the Sake of God

X. 27. Happy the man who has attained the fourth degree of love, he no longer even loves himself except for God. "O God, your justice is like the mountains of God" (Ps. 35:7). This love is a mountain, God's towering peak. Truly indeed, it is the fat, fertile mountain. "Who will climb the mountain of the Lord?" (Ps. 23:3). "Who will give me the wings of a dove, that I may fly away to find rest?" (Ps. 54:7). "This place is made peaceful, a dwelling-place in Sion" (Ps. 75:3). "Alas for me, my exile has been lengthened" (Ps. 119:5). When will flesh and blood, this vessel of clay, this earthly dwelling, understand the fact? When will this sort of affection be felt that, inebriated with divine love, the mind may forget itself and become in its own eyes like a broken dish, hastening towards God and clinging to him, becoming one with him in spirit, saying: "My flesh and my heart have wasted away; O God of my heart, O God, my share for eternity" (Ps. 72:26). I would say that man is blessed and holy to whom it is given to experience something of this sort, so rare in life, even if it be but once and for the space of a moment. To lose yourself, as if you no longer existed, to cease completely to experience yourself, to reduce yourself to nothing is not a human sentiment but a divine experience. If any mortal, suddenly rapt, as has been said, and for a moment is admitted to this, immediately the world of sin envies him, the evil of the day disturbs him, the mortal body weighs him down, the needs of the flesh bother him, the weakness of corruption offers no support, and sometimes with greater violence than these, brotherly love calls him back. Alas, he has to come back to himself, to descend again into his being, and wretchedly cry out: "Lord, I suffer violence"

(Isa. 38:14), adding: "Unhappy man that I am, who will free me from this body doomed to death?" (Rom. 7:24).

28. All the same, since Scripture says God made everything for his own purpose, the day must come when the work will conform to and agree with its Maker. It is therefore necessary for our souls to reach a similar state in which, just as God willed everything to exist for himself, so we wish that neither ourselves nor other beings to have been nor to be except for his will alone; not for our pleasure. The satisfaction of our wants, chance happiness, delights us less than to see his will done in us and for us, which we implore every day in prayer saying: "... your will be done on earth as it is in heaven . . ." (Matt. 6:10). O pure and sacred love! O sweet and pleasant affection! O pure and sinless intention of the will, all the more sinless and pure since it frees us from the taint of selfish vanity, all the more sweet and pleasant, for all that is found in it is divine. It is deifying to go through such an experience. As a drop of water seems to disappear completely in a big quantity of wine, even assuming the wine's taste and color; just as red, molten iron becomes so much like fire it seems to lose its primary state; just as the air on a sunny day seems transformed into sunshine instead of being lit up; so it is necessary for the saints that all human feelings melt in a mysterious way and flow into the will of God. Otherwise, how will God be all in all if something human survives in man? No doubt, the substance remains though under another form, another glory, another power. When will this happen? Who will see it? Who will possess it? "When shall I come and when shall I appear in God's presence?" (Ps. 41:3). O my Lord, my God, "My heart said to you: my face has sought you; Lord, I will seek your face" (Ps. 26:8). Do you think I shall see your holy temple?

29. I do not think that can take place for sure until the word is fulfilled: "You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength" (Mark 12:30), until the heart does not have to think of the body and the soul no longer has to give it life and feeling as in this life. Freed from this bother, its strength is established in the power of God. For it is impossible to assemble all these and turn them toward God's face as long as the care of this weak and wretched body

keeps one busy to the point of distraction. Hence it is in a spiritual and immortal body, calm and pleasant, subject to the spirit in everything, that the soul hopes to attain the fourth degree of love, or rather to be possessed by it; for it is in God's hands to give it to whom he wishes, it is not obtained by human efforts. I mean he will easily reach the highest degree of love when he will no longer be held back by any desire of the flesh or upset by troubles as he hastens with the greatest speed and desire toward the joy of the Lord. All the same, do we not think the holy martyrs received this grace, at least partially, while they were still in their victorious bodies? The strength of this love seized their souls so entirely that, despising the pain, they were able to expose their bodies to exterior torments. No doubt, the feeling of intense pain could only upset their calm; it could not overcome them.

XI. 30. But what about those souls which are already separated from their bodies? We believe they are completely engulfed in that immense ocean of eternal light and everlasting brightness.

The Condition of Souls after Death before the Resurrection

But if, which is not denied, they wish that they had received their bodies back or certainly if they desire and hope to receive them, there is no doubt that they have not altogether turned from themselves, for it is clear they still cling to something of their own to which their desires return though ever so slightly. Consequently, until death is swallowed up in victory and eternal light invades from all sides the limits of night and takes possession to the extent that heavenly glory shines in their bodies, souls cannot set themselves aside and pass into God. They are still attached to their bodies, if not by life and feeling, certainly by a natural affection, so that they do not wish nor are they able to realize their consummation without them. This rapture of the soul which is its most perfect and highest state, cannot, therefore, take place before the resurrection of the bodies, lest the spirit, if it could reach perfection without the body, would no longer desire to be united to the flesh. For indeed, the body is not deposed or resumed without profit for the soul. To be brief. "The death of his saints is

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precious in the sight of the Lord" (Ps. 115:15). If death is precious, what must life be, especially that life? Do not be surprised if the glorified body seems to give the spirit something, for it was a real help when man was sick and mortal. How true that text is which says that all things turn to the good of those who love God. The sick, dead and resurrected body is a help to the soul who loves God; the first for the fruits of penance, the second for repose, and the third for consummation. Truly the soul does not want to be perfected, without that from whose good services it feels it has benefited in every way.

31. The flesh is clearly a good and faithful partner for a good spirit, it helps if it is burdened; it relieves if it does not help; it surely benefits and is by no means a burden. The first state is that of fruitful labor; the second is restful but by no means tiresome; the third is above all glorious. Listen to the bridegroom in the Canticle inviting us to this triple progress: "Eat, friends, and drink; be inebriated, dearest ones" (Song 5:1). He calls to those working in the body to eat; he invites those who have set aside their bodies to drink; and he impels those who have resumed their bodies to inebriate themselves, calling them his dearest ones, as if they were filled with charity. There is a difference between those who are simply called friends, who sigh under the weight of the flesh, who are held to be dear for their charity, and those who are free from the bonds of the flesh, who are all the more dear because they are more ready and free to love. More than the other two, these last ones are called dearest and are so. Receiving a second garment, they are in their resumed and glorified bodies. They are that much more freely and willingly borne toward God's love because nothing at all remains to solicit them or hold them back. This neither of the first two states can claim because, in the first state the body is endured with distress, in the second state it is hoped for as for something missing.

32. In the first state, therefore, the faithful soul eats its bread, but, alas, in the sweat of its brow. While in the flesh it moves by faith which necessarily acts through charity, for if it does not act, it dies. Moreover, according to our Savior, this work is food: "My food is to do the will of my Father" (John 4:34). Afterwards, having cast off its flesh,

the soul no longer feeds on the bread of sorrow, but, having eaten, it is allowed to drink more deeply of the wine of love, not pure wine, for it is written of the bride in the Song of Songs: "I drank my wine mixed with milk" (Song 5:1). The soul mixes the divine love with the tenderness of that natural affection by which it desires to have its body back, a glorified body. The soul, therefore, glows already with the warmth of charity's wine, but not to the stage of intoxication, for the milk moderates its strength. Intoxication disturbs the mind and makes it wholly forgetful of itself, but the soul which still thinks of the resurrection of its own body has not forgotten itself completely. For the rest, after finding the only thing needed, what is there to prevent the soul from taking leave of itself and passing into God entirely, ceasing all the more to be like itself as it becomes more and more like God? Then only, the soul is allowed to drink wisdom's pure wine, of which it is said: "How good is my cup, it inebriates me!" (Ps. 22:5). Why wonder if the soul is inebriated by the riches of the Lord's dwelling, when free from worldly cares it can drink pure, fresh wine with Christ in his Father's house?

33. Wisdom presides over this triple banquet, composed of charity which feeds those who labor, gives drink to those who are resting, and inebriates those who reign. As at an earthly banquet, edibles are served before liquid refreshments. Nature has set this order which Wisdom also observes. First, indeed, up to our death, while we are in mortal flesh we eat the work of our hands, laboriously masticating what is to be swallowed. In the spiritual life after death, we drink with ease whatever is offered. Once our bodies come back to life we shall be filled with everlasting life, abounding in a wonderful fullness. This is what is meant by the Bridegroom in the Canticle saying: "Eat, my friends, and drink; dearest ones, be inebriated" (Song 5:1). Eat before death, drink after death, be inebriated after the resurrection. It is right to call them dearest who are drunk with love; they are rightly inebriated who deserve to be admitted to the nuptials of the Lamb, eating and drinking at his table in his kingdom when he takes his Church to him in her glory without a blemish, wrinkle, or any defect of the sort. By all means he will then intoxicate his dearest ones with the torrent of his

delight, for in the Bridegroom and bride's most passionate yet most chaste embrace, the force of the river's current gives joy to the city of God. I think this is nothing other than the Son of God who in passing waits on us as he in a way promised: "The just are feasting and rejoicing in the sight of God, delighting in their gladness" (Ps. 67:4). Here is fullness without disgust; here is insatiable curiosity without restlessness; here is

that eternal, inexplicable desire knowing no want. At last, here is that sober intoxication of truth, not from overdrinking, not reeking with wine, but burning for God. From this then that fourth degree of love is possessed forever, when God alone is loved in the highest way, for now we do not love ourselves except for his sake, that he may be the reward of those who love him, the eternal recompense of those who love him forever.

66. Thomas of Celano, *First Life of Francis of Assisi*

The son of a wealthy merchant, Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) undertook a literal obedience to the gospel such as some of the urban heretics of his time had done; but he cast himself instead as an obedient son of the church, and obtained Pope Innocent III's approval of his new religious order, the Friars Minor, in 1209. At the time of Francis's canonization in 1228, Pope Gregory IX (who as Cardinal Hugolino had been the order's first protector) commissioned the friar Thomas of Celano to write this vita, which carefully charts the emergence of Francis's sense of calling and the origins of the order.

[After years of vanity and frivolous behavior, in his mid-twenties Francis has become more serious. Having begun to devote himself to prayer to discover the will of God for his life, one day he sets out for Foligno.]

8. . . . [Francis] prepared his horse, mounted, and taking with him scarlet cloths [from his father's inventory] to sell, arrived in a hurry at the city called Foligno. There, as a successful merchant, he sold as usual all the goods he had brought, then got a price for the horse he had been riding, and left it behind. So having laid aside his burdens, he turned back, pondering with a devout mind what to do with the money. Soon, in a marvelous way, he was turned completely to the work of God, and feeling that to carry that money even for an hour would sorely oppress him, he hurried

to get rid of it, considering all its benefits to be as so much sand. And as he was returning toward Assisi, he found by the wayside a church that had been built long ago in honor of St. Damian, but was in danger of collapsing soon from excessive age. 9. When Christ's new knight came to it he was moved with compassion for such need, and went in with awe and reverence. Finding a poor priest there, he kissed his hands with great faith, offered him the money he was carrying and explained, in order, his plans. The priest was amazed and, wondering at such a sudden change of circumstances, refused to believe what he heard. And because he thought he was being made sport of, he would not keep the offered money—for almost the day before, so to speak, he had seen Francis living riotously among his kinsfolk and acquaintance and surpassing the others in folly. But with obstinate persistence

SOURCE: *The Lives of S. Francis of Assisi by Brother Thomas of Celano*, tr. A. G. Ferrers Howell (London: Methuen, 1908), 10-12, 14-20, 22-24, 31-38, 42-45, as revised with reference to *Vita prima s. Francisci Assisiensis*, ed. a pp. Collegii S. Bonaventurae (Quaracchi: Ex typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1926).