

Letter I, II & II

First of all – peace to your love in the Lord!

I think, brethren, that the souls which draw near to the love of God are of three sorts, be they male or female.

There are those who are called by the law of love which is in their nature, and which original good implanted in them at their first creation. The word of God came to them, and they doubted not at all but followed it readily, like Abraham the Patriarch: for when God saw that it was not from the teaching of men that he had learnt to love God, but from the law implanted in the nature of his first compacting, God appeared to him and said, ‘Get thee out from thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee.’ (Gen. 12:1) And he went nothing doubting, but was ready for his calling. He is the pattern of this approach, which still persists in those who follow in his footsteps. Toiling and seeking the fear of God in patience and quiet, they achieve the true manner of life, because their souls are ready to follow the love of God. This is the first kind of calling.

The second calling is this. There are men who hear the written Law testifying of pains and torments prepared for the wicked, and of the promises prepared for those who walk worthily in the fear of God; and by the testimony of the written Law their thoughts are roused up to seek to enter into the calling, as David testifies when he says: ‘The law of the Lord is undefiled, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple.’ (Ps. 19:7) And in another place he says, ‘The opening of thy words giveth light and understanding unto the simple’ (Ps. 119:130); and much else, all of which we cannot mention now.

The third calling is this. There are souls which at first were hard of heart and persisted in the works of sin; and somehow the good God in his mercy sends upon such souls the chastisement of affliction, till they grow weary, and come to their senses, and are converted, and draw near, and enter into knowledge, and repent with all their heart, and they also attain the true manner of life, like those others of whom we have already spoken.

These are the three approaches by which souls come to repentance, till they attain to the grace and calling of the Son of God.

Now, as regards those who have entered with all their heart, and have made themselves despise all afflictions of the flesh, valiantly resisting all the warfare that rises against them, until they conquer – I think that first of all, the Spirit calls them, and makes the warfare light for them, and sweetens for them the works of repentance, showing them how they ought to repent in body and soul, until He has taught them how to be converted to God who created them. And he delivers to them works whereby they may constrain their soul and their body, that both may be purified and enter together into their inheritance.

First the body is purified by much fasting, by many vigils and prayers, and by the service which makes a man to be straightened in body, cutting off from himself all the lusts of the flesh. And

the Spirit of Repentance is made his guide in these things, and tests him by means of them, lest the enemy should turn him back again.

Then the Spirit that is his guide begins to open the eyes of his soul, to give to it also repentance, that it may be purified. The mind also starts to discriminate between the body and the soul, as it begins to learn from the Spirit how to purify both by repentance. And, taught by the Spirit, the mind becomes our guide to the labors of body and soul, as it begins to learn from the Spirit how to purify both by repentance. And, taught by the Spirit, the mind becomes our guide to the labors of body and soul, showing us how to purify them. And it separates us from all the fruits of the flesh which have been mingled with all the members of the body since the first transgression, and brings back each of the members of the body to its original condition, having nothing in it from the spirit of satan. And the body is brought under the authority of the mind, being taught by the Spirit, as St. Paul says: 'I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection'. (1 Cor. 9:17) For the mind purifies it from food and from drink and from sleep, and in a word from all its motions, until through its own purity it frees the body even from the natural emission of seed.

And, as I think, there are three types of motion of the body. There is that which is implanted in the body by nature, compacted with it in its first creation; but this is not operative if the soul does not will it, save only that it signifies its presence through a passionless movement in the body. And there is another motion, when a man stuffs his body with food and drink, and the heat of the blood from the abundance of nourishment rouses up warfare in the body, because of our greed. For this cause the Apostle said, 'Be not drunk with wine, where is excess.' (Eph. 5:18) And again the Lord enjoined His disciples, 'Take heed lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness' (Luke 21:34) or pleasure. Especially those who seek the measure of purity ought to be saying, 'I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.' (1 Cor. 9:27) And there is a third motion, from the evil spirits which tempt us out of envy, and seek to defile those who are setting out on the way of purity.

And now, my beloved children, in these three types of motion, if the soul exerts itself and perseveres in the testimony which the Spirit bears within the mind, both soul and body are purified from this kind of sickness. But if in regard to these three motions the mind spurns the testimony which the Spirit bears within it, evil spirits take authority over it, and sow in the body all the passions, and stir up and quicken strong war against it; till the soul grows weary and sick, and cries out and seeks from whence help may come to it, and repents, and obeys the commandments of the Spirit, and is healed. Then it is persuaded to make its rest in God, and that He is its peace.

These things I have said to you, beloved, that you may know how it is required of a man to repent in body and soul, and to purify them both. And if the mind conquers in this contest, then it prays in the Spirit, and beings to expel from the body the passions of the soul which come to it from its own will. Then the Spirit has a loving partnership with the mind, because the mind keeps the commandments which the Spirit has delivered to it. And the Spirit teaches the mind how to heal all the wounds of the soul, and to rid itself of every one, those which are mingled in the members of the body, and other passions which are altogether outside the body, being mingled in the will. And for the eyes it sets a rule, that they may see rightly and purely, and that in them there may be no guile. After that it sets a rule also for the ears, how they may hear in

peace, and no more thirst or desire to hear ill speaking, nor about the falls and humiliations of men; but how they may rejoice to hear about good things, and about the way every man stands firm and about the mercy shown to the whole creation, which in these members once was sick.

Then again the Spirit teaches the tongue its own purity, since the tongue was sick with a great sickness; for the sickness which afflicted the souls was expressed in speech through the tongue, which the soul used as its organ, and in this way a great sickness and wound was inflicted upon it, and especially through this member – the tongue – was the soul stricken. The Apostle James testifies to us and says, ‘If any man thinketh himself to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.’ (Jas. 1:26) And in another place he says, ‘The tongue is a little member, and defileth the whole body’ (Jas. 3:5) – and much besides, which I cannot all quote now. But if the mind is strengthened with the strength that it receives from the Spirit, first it is purified and sanctified, and learns discrimination in the words that it delivers to the tongue, that they may be without partiality and without self-will, and so the saying of Solomon is fulfilled, ‘My words are spoken from God, there is nothing forward nor perverse in them.’ (Cf. Prov. 8:8) And in another place he says, ‘The tongue of the wise is healing’ (Prov. 12:18); and much besides.

After this again the Spirit heals the motions of the hands, which once were moved in a disorderly way, following the will of the mind. But now the Spirit instructs the mind in their purification, that it may labor with them in almsgiving and in prayer; and the word is fulfilled concerning them which says, ‘Let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice’ (Ps. 141:2); and in another place, ‘The hands of the diligent make rich.’ (Prov. 10:4)

After this again the Spirit purifies the belly in its eating and drinking; for, so long as the desires of the soul were active within it, it was never satisfied in its greedy longing for food and drink, and in this way demons made their onslaught on the soul. About this the Spirit speaks by David, ‘With him that hath a high look and a proud heart I would not eat.’ (Cf. Ps. 101:5) And to those who seek purity in this, the Spirit assigns rules of purification, to eat in moderation sufficient for the strength of the body, but in so doing not to have the taste of concupiscence; and in this way the saying of Paul is fulfilled, ‘Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.’ (1 Cor. 10:31)

Then in regard to the sexual thoughts which are moved from below the belly, again the mind is taught by the Spirit, and makes discrimination between the three types of motion of which we spoke above, and perseveres in their purification, as the Spirit helps and strengthens it; and all the motions are quenched by the power of the Spirit, which makes peace in the whole body, and cuts off from it all passions. This is what St. Paul says: ‘Mortify your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil concupiscence’, and so on. (Col. 3:5)

After all this, it gives to the feet also their purification. At one time they were not making their steps aright according to God; but now the mind, being unified under the authority of the Spirit, effects their purification, that they should walk according to its will, going and ministering in good works, so that the whole body may be changed and renewed and be under the authority of the Spirit. And I think that when the whole body is purified, and has received the fullness of the

Spirit, it has received some portion of that spiritual body which it is to assume in the resurrection of the just.

This I have said concerning the sicknesses of the soul which are mingled with the members of the bodily nature in which the soul moves and works; and so the soul becomes guide to the evil spirits which by it have been working in the limbs of the body. But I have said that the soul has also other passions apart from the body; and this we will now demonstrate. Pride is a sickness of the soul apart from the body; so also are boastfulness, envy, hatred, impatience, sloth and the rest. But if the soul gives itself to God wholeheartedly, God has mercy upon it and gives it the Spirit of Repentance, which testifies to it about each sin, that it may not again draw near to them; and show it those who rise up against it and seek to prevent it separating itself from them, contending with it greatly that it may not abide in repentance. But if it endures and obeys the Spirit which counsels it to repentance, suddenly the Creator has mercy on the weariness of its repentance, and seeing its bodily toils, in much prayer and fasting and supplication and learning of the words of God, in renunciation of the world, in humility and tears and perseverance in contrition, then the merciful God, seeing its toil and submission, has pity upon it and delivers it

The end of the letter which the holy Antony sent to the brethren.

Letter II

My dear and honorable brethren, I Antony greet you in the Lord.

Truly, my beloved in the Lord, not at one time only did God visit His creatures; but from the foundation of the world, whenever any have come to the Creator of all by the law of His covenant implanted in them, God is present with each one of these in His bounty and grace by His Spirit. But in the case of those rational natures in which that covenant grew cold, and their intellectual perception died, so that they were no longer able to know themselves according to their first condition, concerning them I say that they became altogether irrational, and worshipped the creation rather than the Creator. But the Creator of all in His great bounty visited us by the implanted law of the covenant. For He is immortal substance. And as many as became worthy of God and grew by His implanted law, and were taught by His Holy Spirit and received the Spirit of Adoption, these were able to worship their Creator as they ought: of whom Paul says that 'they received not the promise' on account of us. (Heb. 11:39)

And the Creator of All, who repents not of His love, desiring to visit our sickness and confusion, raised up Moses the Lawgiver, who gave us the law in writing, and founded for us the House of Truth, which is the Catholic Church, that makes us one in God; for He desires that we should be brought back to our first beginning. Moses built the house, yet did not complete it, but left it and went away. Then again God raised up the choir of the Prophets by His Spirit. And they also built on the foundation of Moses, but could not complete the house, and likewise left it and went away. And all of them, being clothed with the Spirit, saw that the wound was incurable, and none of the creatures was able to heal it, but only the Only-begotten, who is the very Mind of the Father and His Image, who after the pattern of His Image made every rational creature. For these

knew that the Savior is the great physician; and they assembled all together, and offered prayer for their members, that is, for us, crying out and saying, 'Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?' (Jer. 8:22) 'We would have healed her, but she is not healed: now therefore let us forsake her and go away.' (Jer. 51:9)

But God in His abundant and unfeigned love came to us, saying by His Saints, 'Son of man, make to thyself vessels of captivity.' (Ezek. 12:3) And He, 'being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross: wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' (Phil. 2:6-11) Now therefore, beloved, let this word be manifest among you, that the bounty of the Father spared not His Only-begotten for our sakes, but delivered Him up for the salvation of us all (cf. Rom. 8:32): 'He gave Himself for our sins' (Gal 1:4), and our iniquities humbled Him, and 'by His stripes we were healed' (Isa. 53:5), and by the word of His power He gathered us out of all lands, from one end of the earth to the other end of the world, and made resurrection of our minds, and remission of our sins, and taught us that we are members one of another.

I pray you, brethren, understand this great dispensation, that He was made like unto us, apart from sin. (Heb. 4:15) And each of the rational natures, for which principally the Savior came, ought to examine his pattern, and know his mind, and discern between bad and good, so that he may be set free by His advent. For as many as are set free by His dispensation, are called the servants of God. And this is not yet perfection, but in its own time it is righteousness, and it leads to the adoption of sons. And Jesus our Savior understood that these were near to receiving the Spirit of Adoption, and that they knew Him, having been taught by the Holy Spirit; and He said to them, 'Henceforth I will not call you servants, but brothers and friends: for all things that the Father hath taught me, I have made known unto you and taught you.' (Cf. John 15:15) Therefore, being made bold in mind, since they knew themselves and their intellectual substance, they gave voice and said, 'Even though we have known Thee after the flesh, yet now we know Thee so no more.' (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:16) And they received the Spirit of Adoption, and cried out saying, 'We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.' (Rom. 8:17)

But let this word be manifest unto you, beloved: Whosoever has not prepared his own amendment, nor toiled with all his strength, let such a one know that for him the advent of the Savior will be unto judgement. For to some it is 'a savor of death unto death' and to some 'a savor of life unto life'. (2 Cor. 2:15) For He 'is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against.' (Luke 2:34) I beseech you, beloved, by the name of Jesus Christ, do not neglect your own salvation, but let each one of you rend his heart and not his garment (Joel 2:13), for fear lest we should be wearing this monastic habit in vain, and preparing for ourselves judgment. For behold, even now the time is near in which the works of every one of us shall be proved. And about the details of what I am saying, there are many other things to be written unto you. But it is written, 'Give occasion to the wise man, and he will be yet

wiser.’ (Prov. 9:9) I salute you all, from the least to the greatest. And may the God of peace keep you all, beloved. Amen.

Letter III

The rational man who has prepared himself to be set free through the advent of Jesus, knows himself in his intellectual substance. For he who knows himself knows the dispensations of the Creator and all that He does among His creatures. Dearly beloved in the Lord, our members and join theirs with the saints, I beseech you in the name of Jesus Christ, that God may give you the spirit of discernment, to perceive and know how great love I have towards you, that it is not a bodily love, but a spiritual, religious love. For concerning your bodily names there is no need to write to you at all, since they are transitory. If a man knows his true name, he will see also the name of truth. For this cause also while Jacob was wrestling all night long with the angel, his name was still Jacob; but when morning came, his name was called Israel, which means “Mind that sees God”. (Gen. 32:24-30)

I think you are not ignorant that the enemies of virtue are always plotting against the truth. For this cause not at one time only did God visit His creatures, but from the beginning there were some who were prepared to come to their own Creator by the Law of His covenant implanted in them, being taught by it to worship their Creator as is right. But by reason of the spread of infirmity, and the heaviness of the body, and evil cares, the implanted law dried up and the senses of the soul grew weak, so that men could not find themselves as they truly are according to their creation, that is to say, an immortal substance, which is not to be dissolved with the body; therefore this substance could not be set free by its own righteousness. For this cause God dealt with them according to His bounty by the writing of the Law, to teach them to worship the Father as they ought. God is One, that is to say, Unity of intellectual substance. You should understand this, beloved, that in all places where there is not harmony, men draw wars upon themselves, and raise up lawsuits among themselves.

And the Creator saw that their wound was grown great, and needed the care of a physician – and Jesus Himself is their Creator, and Himself heals them – and He sent forerunners before His face. And we are not afraid to say of Moses the Lawgiver that he is one of His forerunners, and that the same Spirit which was with Moses worked also in the choir of the saints; and they all prayed for the Only-begotten Son of God. John again is one of His fore-runners: and for this cause the Law and the Prophets were until John, and ‘the kingdom of God suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.’ (Matt. 11:12-13) And being clothed with the Spirit, they saw that none among the creatures was able to heal that great wound, but only the bounty of God, that is to say His Only-begotten, whom He sent to be the Saviour of all the world; for He is the great physician, who is able to heal the great wound. And they asked God, and of His bounty the Father of creatures spared not His Only-begotten for our salvation, but delivered Him up for us all and for our iniquities. (Rom. 8:32) And He humbled himself, and by his stripes we all were healed. (Phil. 2:8, Isa. 53:5) And by the word of His power He gathered us out of all lands, from one end of the world to the other end of the world, and raised up our hearts from the earth, and taught us that we are members one of another.

I beseech you, dearly beloved in the Lord: understand that this Scripture is the command of God. For it is a great thing for us to understand the form that Jesus accepted for us: for He became in all things like unto us, apart from sin. (Heb. 4:15) Now therefore it is right that we also should set ourselves free by His advent, that by His foolishness He may make us wise, and by His poverty may enrich us, and by His weakness strengthen us, and confer resurrection upon us all, destroying him that had the power of death. (Heb. 2:14) Now therefore it is right that we also should set ourselves free by His advent, that by His foolishness He may make us wise, and by His poverty may enrich us, and by His weakness strengthen us, and confer resurrection upon us all, destroying him that had the power of death. (Heb. 2:14) Then we shall also cease to call upon Jesus for bodily needs. The advent of Jesus helps us to do what is good, until we have destroyed all our vices. Then Jesus will say to us, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, but brethren.' (Cf. John 15:15) When therefore the Apostles attained to receiving the Spirit of Adoption, then the Holy Spirit taught them to worship the Father as they ought.

And to me, this poor prisoner of Jesus, this time to which we have come has brought joy and lamentation and weeping. For many of our generation have put on the robe of religion, and are become beasts – for them I weep. Know therefore that for such men the advent of Jesus becomes a great judgment. But do you, my beloved in the Lord, know yourselves, that you may also know this time, and prepare to offer yourselves as a sacrifice acceptable to God.

Truly my beloved in the Lord – for I write to you as men of understanding, who are able to know yourselves – you know that he who knows himself knows God: and he who knows God, knows also the dispensations which He makes for His creatures. Let this word be manifest to you, that it is no bodily love that I have towards you, but a spiritual, religious love: for God is glorified in the council of His saints. (Ps. 88 [89]:8 – Septuagint) Prepare yourselves while you have intercessors to pray to God for your salvation, that He may pour into your hearts that fire which Jesus came to send upon the earth (Luke 12:49), that you may be able to exercise your hearts and senses, to know how to discern the good from the bad, the right from the left, reality from unreality. Jesus knew that the devil derives his power from the material things of this world, and He called His disciples and said to them, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth', and 'Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow will take thought for itself.' (Matt. 6:19, 34) Truly, my beloved, you know that when there is a fair wind, the captain of the ship boasts; but it is in the time of violent adverse winds that every skilled captain is revealed. Know now of what kind is this time to which we have come.

Of the details for the word of freedom there were many things to say to you, But 'give occasion to the wise man, and he will be yet wiser.' (Prov. 9:9) I salute you, from the least to the greatest, in the Lord, Amen.