

## The Spirituality of Saint Lawrence of Brindisi: Apostolic Doctor of the Church

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*"La spiritualità di S. Lorenzo da Brindisi dottore apostolico della Chiesa"*

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### Introduction

Faced with the task of dealing with the mysticism of Saint Lawrence of Brindisi, we find ourselves with a fact admitted by all who have set out to study—more or less eagerly—the characteristics of his spirituality. Unlike other authors such as Saint Teresa of Avila, this great saint and outstanding gift of God to the Capuchin Order and the Church left us no work or sermon among his many writings that speaks directly of his concept of the spiritual journey in his own life or that of others.

Thus we can say that almost the only source of information on the spirituality of the Apostolic Doctor is his life, carefully observed, as is the rule in the canonization processes of privileged souls, by many witnesses who knew him.

The most critical and exhaustive modern biography, by Father Arturo of Carmignano di Brenta, was published a few years before Saint Lawrence was declared a Doctor of the Church.<sup>1</sup> It devotes a long chapter to the characteristics of Lawrence as a Franciscan saint.<sup>2</sup> Among the elements frequently documented are these: spiritual Christ-centeredness, poverty and austerity, joyful suffering, deep humility, peace and happiness, seraphic love,

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<sup>1</sup>M. da Carmignano di Brenta, *San Lorenzo da Brindisi, Dottore della Chiesa universale (1559-1619)*, 4 vols., Venice-Mestre 1960-63.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. II, 387-476.

devotion to the sufferings and cross of Christ, the marvel of the Mass, eucharistic devotion, long Masses, living miracle, raptures and tears, and supernatural phenomena. And with regard to Mary: the great flame, supernatural instinct, all grace through Mary, tenderness of a son, Jesus and Mary *semper in corde, semper in ore*, apostle of Mary.

This charismatic figure of Lawrence, transmitted by history and established in the official testimonies of his beatification and canonization, has always appeared as an example of devotion to the Eucharist and to Mary. When, after three long centuries, his works were published between 1928 and 1956 (no one ever imagined they were so voluminous), the event created unusual interest, as was to be expected.<sup>3</sup> Studies of his Christology and Mariology especially were most highly regarded and commented upon and contributed to his being declared a Doctor of the Church.<sup>4</sup>

But some authors were interested in whether his spiritual doctrine might perhaps be revealed in his preaching. I intend to refer to three of them in particular in order to see the course they have mapped out and whether it is possible to move ahead in research on the subject.

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<sup>3</sup>S. Laurentii a Brundusio, Ordinis FF. Min. S. Francisci Capuccinorum, *Opera omnia* (a Patribus Min. Capuccinis Provinciae Venetae e textu originali nunc primum in lucem edita notisque illustrata, Summo Pontifici Pio XII dicata), I-X/2, Patavii (ex Orricina typographica Seminarii) 1928-1956: I. *Mariale*, 1928, 1964 (xxiii-649 pp.); II/1-3. *Lutheranismi hypotyposis*, 1930-1933 (xlv-524, xviii-534, xiv-436 pp.); III. *Explanatio in Gnesim*, 1935 (xxvi-596 pp.); IV. *Quadragesimale primum*, 1936 (xxiv-585 pp.); V/1-3. *Quadragesimale secundum*, 1938-1940 (vii-605, 492, xiii-541 pp.); VI. *Quadragesimale tertium*, 1941 (xiv-779 pp.); VII. *Adventus*, 1942 (xiv-582 pp.); VIII. *Dominicalia*, 1943 (xiii-757 pp.); IX. *Sanctorale*, 1944 (xiv-675 pp.); X/1. *Quadragesimale quartum*, 1954 (xiii-714 pp.); X/2. *Sermones de tempore adiectis opusculis*: I. *De rebus Austriae et Boemiae*, II. *De numeris amorosis*, 1956 (xi-528 pp.); *Epistolae et Ordinationes*, 1964 (85 pp).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Felix a Mareto, *Bibliographia Laurentiana. Opera complectens an. 1611-1961 edita de Sancto Laurentio a Brindisi, Doctore Apostolico*. (Subsidia scientifica Franciscalia. Cura Instituti Historici Capuccini, n. 1) Rome 1962; G.M. Roschini, *La Mariologia di S. Lorenzo da Brindisi*, Padua 1951; *Commentarii Laurentiani Historici*, Institutum Historicum Ord. Fr. Min. Cap., Rome 1959; H. Borak, *Theologia historiae in doctrina S. Laurentii Brundusini*, in *Laurentianum* I (1960) 31-97; Bernardino de Armellada, *Laurentius von Brindisi, OFM Cap, b. Kirchenlehrer (+1619)*, in *Marienlexikon*, St. Ottilien 1992, vol. 4, 32-3. – The most recent and ample bibliography is found in: *Bibliographia Franciscana* (Rome: *Collectanea Franciscana*. Sectio bibliographica a Sodalibus Instituti Historici O.F.M.Cap.), XII (1958-1963) 544-59; XIII (1964-1973) 646-9; XIV (1974-1980) 403; XV (1981-1985) 385; XVI (1986-1989) 322; XVII (1990-1992) 227; XVIII (1993-1994) 213; XIX (1995) 213, in which is described the work of Giorgio Basso, *Bibliografia laurenziana: Opere scritte dal 1961-1994 su san Lorenzo da Brindisi*, Vatican City, 1995 (pro manuscripto); XX (1996) 169; XXI (1999) 162.

The first author was Father Constantin de Plogonne, with a two-part work, "La doctrine spirituelle de saint Laurent de Brindis." The study, written before all the volumes of Lawrence's works had appeared, describes itself as an "attempt at a provisional synthesis of the basic features of his spiritual doctrine."<sup>6</sup> It focuses especially on the biblical aspect. "A preacher of the Word of God," Lawrence is regarded as possessing "a vast and profound knowledge of the sacred books," more so than any other Father or Doctor of the Church.<sup>8</sup> He has a wonderful way of moving from the literal sense to the spiritual sense, through "a mystical interpretation that is sometimes very personal, yet never fanciful."<sup>9</sup>

Saint Lawrence refers to the causes of the divine life in us and compares it to a building, with God as chief architect and human beings as workers responsible for the divine work.<sup>10</sup>

The journey to holiness takes place in four stages, according to the picture presented in the *Letter to the Romans* (8:29-30): predestination, call, justification, glorification. He focuses his attention primarily on justification, understood in the broad sense as representing the whole process of Christian asceticism, which involves our active and passive cooperation.<sup>11</sup> "Christian holiness will be first of all the effect of God's holiness.... The divine sanctifying activity in the soul is somewhat similar to the operation of the Holy Spirit in Mary at the moment of the Incarnation."<sup>12</sup> Like Mary, we also must be pure in body and soul: "God demands this twofold purity, not only in the most holy Virgin, but also in every faithful soul."<sup>13</sup> Saint Lawrence actually speaks of three kinds of holiness: 1) *sufficient*, which is that of all the faithful who keep the commandments; 2) *perfect*, which is that of religious who are consecrated totally to God; 3) *excellent*, which is that of the apostles when they were filled with the Holy Spirit. This division seems to be dealing with different states or vocations that make up the mystical

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<sup>5</sup>Constantin de Plogonne, "La doctrine spirituelle de saint Laurent de Brindis," in *Etudes Franciscaines* 51 (1939) 225-42; 359-78.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 225.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 226.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 229.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 232.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 233.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 234.

<sup>13</sup>S. Laurentii a Brundusio, *Opera omnia*, I. Mariale, 484.

body, while elsewhere Lawrence refers to the three traditional stages of the spiritual journey: beginners, proficient, and perfect.<sup>14</sup>

What we have, then, is a spiritual doctrine that is nothing else than the Word of God explained according to the ability of the audience and taking into account the circumstances and various situations of people in their time and place.

As is evident, we find nothing in this entire description of the spiritual life to explain sufficiently what might be considered the specifically mystical dimension of the life of grace: the sublimation of cognitive activity in a passive state in which affection dominates. Of course Constantin did not have available all of Saint Lawrence's works, such as the *Sanctorale* and the Sermons for the Easter Season and Pentecost, where the theme of the Holy Spirit might have provided him with new perspectives.

Lazaro Iriarte is the second author to deal with the subject of the spirituality of Saint Lawrence of Brindisi.<sup>15</sup> For him, Constantin of Plogonnec's work represents an "ingenious effort," inasmuch as "Saint Lawrence wrote no treatise on the ways of the spirit, nor did he leave in his writings any important treatises from which we might characterize his personal spirituality or his ideas."<sup>16</sup> Consequently, Lazaro tries to characterize the spirituality of Saint Lawrence from the richest source, namely, "his life itself." He gives us this description:

Gentle and amiable by nature, moral balance was a constant in all of Lawrence's life. Already as an adolescent he was a contemplative in the Franciscan spiritual milieu. Christ crucified and the Blessed Virgin were the center and source of his meditation and his ecstatic raptures. Concretely, his devotion to the Eucharist was to make him unique in Catholic hagiography. He prolonged his celebration of Mass for hours, in a contemplation that manifested itself externally in the fire seen in his face and the tears that flowed uninterruptedly.<sup>17</sup>

Study, especially of Sacred Scripture, was for him a prayer in which grace and nature went hand in hand. "This habit of prayer continued, and his incredible activity did not prevent him from appearing externally with a happy face, unshakable serenity, and Franciscan naturalness."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. C. de Plogonnec, op.cit., 236.

<sup>15</sup>Lazaro Iriarte de Aspurz, "Espiritualidad de San Lorenzo de Brindis," in *Estudios Franciscanos* 53 (1952): 221-34.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 223.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

For the Capuchin Order, Saint Lawrence of Brindisi is “the prototype of completeness and maturity,”<sup>19</sup> who had experienced the Franciscan reform at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. As Lazaro notes: “Saint Lawrence has rightly been called the *Saint Bonaventure* of the Capuchin Reform.”<sup>20</sup>

Lazaro finishes his study with some comments on the Franciscan orientation of Lawrence’s doctrine. In general it must be said that we find in him none of the “systematized Franciscanism of which modern Franciscan scholars are so fond.” His sermons on Saint Francis, addressed like all the others to the people, simply present the Seraphic Father “as a perfect imitator of Christ and a great saint.”<sup>21</sup> In any case, “on the ladder of the virtues and especially in the place occupied by imitation of Christ crucified through poverty in his exhortations to virtue...Saint Lawrence is a true disciple of Saint Bonaventure.”<sup>22</sup>

Ilario of Wingene, whose intent is to sketch the basic lines of Lawrence’s spirituality,<sup>23</sup> regards the studies described above as inadequate. He uses the work of Isidore Mausolf, who catalogues all the biblical citations found in the works of Saint Lawrence according to chapter and verse of Sacred Scripture. Ilario’s task is to arrange in chapters some points of the spiritual doctrine of Saint Lawrence, simply referring to the passages in his works in the hope of making it easier for scholars to continue their research and state more explicitly what is his spiritual doctrine.

Each section is amply illustrated with systematic statements, whose agreement with the thought of Saint Lawrence is assured through the above-mentioned references to his works. The first theme is the universal call to holiness, which, as the author remarks, was emphasized by Vatican II after a period of alleged neglect. This also seems to have been the prevailing attitude of late-sixteenth-century preachers, who proposed the simple fulfillment of strict duties in order to be saved, with no concern for meaningful progress in the spiritual life. Saint Lawrence, like Saint Francis de Sales, reawakened an awareness of the universal call to holiness so clearly expressed in Sacred Scripture.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 224.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 225.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 233.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 233-34.

<sup>23</sup>Hilarius a Wingene, “Spiritualitatis laurentianae lineamenta fundamentalia,” in *Laurentianum* 10, (1969): 413-33.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Ibid., 417.

The author believes he has reached the marrow of Saint Lawrence's spiritual doctrine, noting that in the end the saint reduces the spiritual life to charity: adored, meditated on, and loved in God three and one, and in the incarnate Word. In charity or love we vitally resemble Christ through prayer and the exercise of all the virtues, which we must make known to our brothers and sisters.<sup>25</sup>

This third work is the last piece of real research and not just a summary reference, like those in dictionaries of theology<sup>26</sup> or spirituality.<sup>27</sup> But I think it does not yet succeed in giving us a true idea of the characteristics of Lawrence's spirituality. With an a priori plan, it is full of references to passages in the works of Saint Lawrence where the theme is mentioned, but it does not take into account the actual context. It also lacks essential aspects it has not even considered.

I am not claiming that my work is better than that of the authors cited. But it does have two advantages: it uses all the works of Saint Lawrence and it comes from an immediate reading of the texts in their context. It examines all the sermons in the *Quadragesimalia* and the *Sanctorale*. It considers especially the sermons on the Holy Spirit in Volume X, which contain the texts that deal most directly with Saint Lawrence's deep spirituality.

From all these works I have tried to draw concrete doctrinal points relevant to the reality of the spiritual life, and ultimately to mysticism as traditionally described.

## I. The Spiritual Life

### Let God be God

The first characteristic of Saint Lawrence's spirituality is total humility before God, what we call today letting God be God, not wanting to impose on him our standards or human demands. That is why in his sermons Lawrence often considers the divine plan from which flows, and in which is found, the deepest meaning of the material and spiritual life of the world and of each of us. In this sense Lawrence is profoundly trinitarian and

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 430-31.

<sup>26</sup>L. Lehmann, "Laurentius v. Brindisi," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 6, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1997, col. 685. Bernardino de Armellada, "Lorenzo da Brindisi (1599-1619), in *Lexicon. Dizionario dei teologi*, (Casale Monferrato :Piemme, 1998), 810-2.

<sup>27</sup>The entry "Lorenzo da Brindisi (santo)", in the *Dizionario di Mistica*, Vatican City, 1998, 759, is very short and rather poor.

also Christ centered in a Franciscan way.<sup>28</sup> Everything begins with God's loving decision to create us in his image and likeness. This means that God, who first of all has foreseen the Incarnation of the Word in Christ the firstborn of all creation, predestines us to reproduce this model of divine sonship and so attain life with him in the perfection of love, in perfect charity. It is the series described by Saint Paul in the *Letter to the Romans* (8:29-30): "For those he foreknew he also predestined.... And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified." The mysterious order of the divine intention, in which all depends on God, is followed by the order of execution, in which God gives us the responsibility of cooperating with his grace. Here Lawrence will place the drama of the spiritual life concretely in the moment of justification and progressive sanctification.<sup>29</sup>

### Divinity of the Holy Spirit

If the first given fact of our spiritual life is God, his intervention occurs in a trinitarian dimension, as it were, since our justification and

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<sup>28</sup>*Opera omnia*, V, *Quadragesimale secundum*, part 2 (Monday of the Fourth Week in Lent), 333: "As for us, brothers, we have been created in the image and likeness of Christ" (cf. also *Opera omnia*, III, *Explanatio in Gnesim*, 198-9). – VI, *Quadragesimale tertium* (Thursday after Ash Wednesday), 37: "God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Gn 1:27). Christ the man is the image of the entire Trinity, the exemplar of human nature even in predestination, as Paul says: *Those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers; he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation* (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15). Therefore he created us in the image of Christ, like Christ, in order that we might be like Christ the man in nature, grace and glory. Christ the Son is God's firstborn, not only by reason of his divinity, but also his humanity."

<sup>29</sup>*Opera omnia*, IX, *Sanctorale* (Feast of Saint Luke the Evangelist), 193: "It is not enough to have the habit of the virtues; we must also have works and constantly practice the spiritual virtues by means of works, just as artisans practice their trades by means of works. Otherwise of what use would they be?" X, part 2, *Sermones de tempore* (Sexagesima Sunday), 194-95: "In Matthew it says: *It produced fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty* (Mt 13:8), according to the variety of merits. Thus it says: *Those who with a good and perfect heart, hearing the word, keep it* (Lk 8:15), etc.; those who work with a good heart, reap thirty-fold; those who work with a better heart, sixty-fold; those who work with a perfect heart, a hundredfold according to God's good will, by observance of the commandments: *If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments* (Mt 19:17), according to God's good pleasure, by voluntary observance of the counsels: *If you wish to be perfect* (Mt 19:21), which really means to desire from the heart the perfection of the proficient; finally in God's perfect will, by the exercise of the perfect, exemplary, heroic virtues; such were the apostles and apostolic men."

sanctification are attributed to the person of the Holy Spirit. Lawrence will often insist on the personal and divine nature of the Holy Spirit, ascribing to every dimension of our relationship with God an air of intimacy and dialogue that excludes any suggestion of abstraction or impersonality in the divine gift. Being God, he says, the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine nature the faithful on whom he descends.<sup>30</sup> For Lawrence, the Holy Spirit's greatness lies precisely in the fact that he is God, and Lawrence wishes to emphasize this by saying that he is greater than Christ the man. Indeed, Christ was conceived through the power of the Spirit.<sup>31</sup> The effects produced in the sanctification of human beings also prove that the Holy Spirit is God, because only God can work the wonders of the supernatural virtues in us.<sup>32</sup>

He is necessary for salvation and for the entire Christian life, as Saint Paul declared: "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). And especially, notes Lawrence, by the Spirit of faith, hope, and love.<sup>33</sup>

The main purpose of the Holy Spirit's mission in the Church, says Lawrence recalling the words of Christ, is the glorification of Jesus, the purification, illumination and perfection of the apostles for their mission as

<sup>30</sup>*Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Feast of Pentecost), 63: "Since the Holy Spirit is God, he transforms into the divine nature, as it were, all of Christ's faithful upon whom he descends today."

<sup>31</sup>*Opera omnia*, X, part 2, *Sermones de tempore* (Feast of Pentecost), 307-8: "The divinity of the Holy Spirit is shown, first, by the fact that he is called God in Sacred Scripture..., even more by the fact that the Holy Spirit is never associated with creatures as a created thing, but with the Creator.... The Holy Spirit is shown to be greater than Christ the man, for Christ was also conceived by his power: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you* (Lk 1:35), and *For that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit* (Mt 1:20)."

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 308: "[T]he divinity of the Holy Spirit is shown from today's works, as a cause from its effects, a tree from its fruit; for the power that worked in the apostles today can only be divine. Thus Paul in *1 Corinthians 12*, speaking of these things says: *There are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of these in everyone*; and finally, after listing all these divine works, he concludes: *But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes* (vv. 4, 6, 11). Thus *the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit* (Rom 5:5). Thus *the fruit of the Spirit love, joy, peace* (Gal 5:22). Only God can work in our hearts and pour into them the supernatural virtues. Therefore, since the Holy Spirit is by nature true God, today's gift is obviously infinite."

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 301: "The Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation and the Christian life, for no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3); especially the spirit of faith, hope, and love, which makes us victors over the world, the flesh and Satan."



Jesus' witnesses.<sup>34</sup> Then the Spirit in the Church becomes the source of faith, hope, love, and all the other virtues. Through the knowledge and love of God he will strengthen and perfect the image of God in us. In this way our inner self will have the vital energy of a child of God, which Lawrence finds suggested by Saint Paul who says: "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.... If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom 8: 13-14).<sup>35</sup>

Lawrence describes again the effects of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. First, he sets in motion the practice of the virtues: moderation and patience toward ourselves, love and mercy toward our neighbor, piety and fervent devotion toward God, living soberly, justly, and piously. The Holy Spirit moves us to this by instructing our understanding, moving and enkindling our affection.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>*Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Feast of Pentecost), 76: "The Holy Spirit comes first to make known the glory of Christ: *He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you* (Jn 16:14)... to purify, illumine and perfect the apostles in all the virtues, to sanctify and deify them, as it were; fourth, to rule, govern and defend the Church." – *Ibid.*, 73: "The divine seraph of the Holy Spirit descended, purifying and sanctifying the apostles, filling them with divine wisdom to proclaim the glory of Christ."

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 77-8: "The Holy Spirit comes...to rule, govern, and defend the Church...; to fill the world with faith, love, and all the virtues, with the knowledge and love of God, after all vice and error have been eliminated; to renew and perfect the image of God in us.... Today our inner self is given life that it might live the divine life.... He comes to be our leader on the way to salvation, like the pillar of cloud and fire for the people of God in the desert: *Let your good Spirit lead me on the right path* (Ps 143:10). The Holy Spirit descended not only upon the apostles, but upon all Christ's faithful, for just as *they were all in one place* (Acts 2:1), so they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.... Brothers, everyone lives either according to the spirit, or according to the flesh; we are filled either with the Holy Spirit, or the spirit of Satan, the wicked spirit, the unclean spirit; either with the spirit of God, or the spirit of the world: *Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him* (Rom 8:9); *Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God* (v. 14); *If by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live* (v. 13)."

<sup>36</sup>*Opera omnia*, X, part 2, *Sermones de tempore* (Feast of Pentecost), 306: "The Holy Spirit is in our heart and soul as our soul is in our body, to which it gives life, feeling, movement, health, strength, and even sweetness and delight in the present life. Just as it can be shown that the soul dwells in the body from the vital senses and activities, so it can be shown that the Holy Spirit dwells in the soul from the spiritual life and acts of virtue, especially moderation and patience toward ourselves, love and mercy toward our neighbor, piety and fervent devotion toward God, living soberly, justly and piously (cf. Tit 2:12). For this reason the Holy Spirit often moves the mind, instructs and teaches the understanding, moves and enkindles affection."

## Faith – Love – The Holy Spirit: Fire and Wind

The first infused virtue of the Holy Spirit is faith, without which no justification is possible. Like Saint Paul, Saint Lawrence often uses the word “faith” in the pregnant sense, seeing it as the inspiring principle of the development of the spiritual life in all the virtues. Commenting on the plea of the centurion at Capernaum, he writes:

Faith contains in itself all the mysteries of sacred theology, both mystical and symbolic, all the hidden things of God as the author of nature and the source of grace and glory, inasmuch as he is God. Faith perfects us in all the virtues; it enables us to approach God with great trust and confidence, having known his goodness and mercy. But he is also fire and thus warms all those who draw near to him and transforms them into himself through love.<sup>37</sup>

Faith, continues Lawrence, is the reason for prayer and the reason why it is heard by God. It also causes us to love our neighbor and pray for his salvation; it is the cause of true humility and piety; finally, it is the cause of eternal life.<sup>38</sup>

According to Lawrence, the entire spiritual life is centered on undivided love of God and of our neighbor for God’s sake. He often compares this love to fire. Sacred Scripture is reason enough to justify his preference for this analogy.<sup>39</sup> In one sermon on fraternal charity he praises

<sup>37</sup>*Opera omnia*, V, *Quadragesimale secundum*, part 1, (Thursday after Ash Wednesday), 149: “Faith contains in itself all the mysteries of sacred theology, both mystical and symbolic, all the hidden things of God as the author of nature and the source of grace and glory, inasmuch as he is God. Faith perfects us in all the virtues; it enables us to approach God with great trust and confidence, having known his goodness and mercy. Thus it says that *a centurion approached him* (Mt 8:5): *Come to him and be enlightened* (Ps 34:6), for *God is light* (1 Jn 1:5); but he is also fire and thus warms all those who draw near to him and transforms them into himself through love: *Whoever is joined to God becomes one spirit with him* (1 Cor 6:17).”

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 149-50: “[The centurion] not only approached, but was *appealing to him*. When we find ourselves in distress, faith causes us to have recourse to God, to pray insistently. Therefore faith is the reason for prayer and the reason why prayer is heard: *As you have believed, let it be done for you*. It also causes us to love our neighbor and pray for his salvation: *Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully* (Mt 8:6); it is the cause of true humility: *Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof*. It is the cause of much devotion to God: *He loves our nation and built the synagogue for us* (Lk 7:5); finally, faith is the cause of eternal life; thus Christ, admiring the centurion’s faith, said: *Amen, I say to you... many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...in the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 8:11).”

<sup>39</sup>*Opera omnia*, VI, *Quadragesimale tertium* (Thursday after Ash Wednesday),

the qualities of fire, after citing Deuteronomy (4:24), where God is identified with fire: "Our God is a consuming fire." Fire, he says, possesses supreme power, for it is heat that gives rise to all life in nature. Its brightness, its splendor, its beauty are wonderful; it is the unique ornament of the universe; it is supremely useful, supremely beautiful; and it is more generous than all other things because it communicates itself totally with perfect ease.<sup>40</sup>

It is not strange that God delights in fire, not only because, like the light and the sun, it is an image of the divine nature, but also because it is a most fitting image of love and charity. Christ himself was foretold by Malachi (3:2) as fire, and he himself says in Luke (12:49) that he came "to cast fire upon the earth."<sup>41</sup> The power of this fire of love was prefigured in

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49: "Cherubim were placed there to guard the way to the tree of life, with sword in hand and whirling fire; Abraham going forth to slay his son Isaac, was himself carrying a sword and fire in his hands: a sword to mortify the senses, to slay Isaac, fire to burn him as a holocaust; fire is burning love for God." Ibid., "The holy prophet Ezekiel saw God in a fiery chariot and also borne aloft by fiery living creatures (cf. Ez 1:4ff; 10:1ff); likewise Daniel: *The Ancient of Days sat... His throne was like flames of fire, the wheels of it like a burning fire; a swift stream of fire issued forth from before his face* (Dn 7:9-10), like a great river of light from the face of the sun. It is amazing how much God delights in fire. He appeared to Abraham in flames of fire (cf. Gn 15:17-18), to Moses in the flames of the burning bush (cf. Ex 3:2-6), to all the people, when he gave the Law in the desert, as in a fiery furnace (cf. Ex 19:16ff); he wanted the fire that he himself sent from heaven to be kept always burning on the sacred altar (cf. Lev 6:12-13); finally, he sent the Holy Spirit in flames of fire (cf. Acts 2:3-4)."

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., (Friday after Ash Wednesday), 51-52: "He wished to be called *fire: Our God is a consuming fire* (Dt 4:24), indeed to make known first the supreme excellence, power, wisdom and goodness of the divine nature; for nothing in the physical world is more noble than fire. Light is a property and effect of fire: if you produce a spark of fire from flint and steel, tiny though it may be, it emits light in the darkness. All the ancient philosophers, who were well-versed in the things of nature, taught that the stars and sun are actually flames of fire. Thus a ray of sunlight, refracted in a concave mirror and reflected back, kindles a fire; likewise, if you add tinder to a ray of sunlight that has passed through a glass of frozen water, it will catch fire; fire produces great heat. The power, strength and efficacy of this element are supreme, for it is heat alone that gives rise to any of the things of nature; its brightness, splendor and beauty are wonderful, it is the unique ornament of the universe; it is supremely useful, supremely good; it is so generous that it bestows itself, communicates itself and lavishly gives itself to anything whatsoever with perfect ease."

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 52: "Not only for this reason does God take such great delight in fire, which, like the light and the sun, is an image of the divine nature, but also because fire is an image of love and charity. God is fire, *God is love* (1 Jn 4:8, 16). For this reason, in Sacred Scripture the angels are also called *fire*. *You make your angels spirits and your ministers a burning fire* (Ps 103:4); and those supreme spirits, who in Isaiah stand before the throne of God, are called *Seraphim*, which means burning.

the six-winged seraph (Is 6:2), inasmuch as love cannot exist in this world without six wings, that is, faith, hope, and the four cardinal virtues.<sup>42</sup>

Everything is love, as Lawrence will often repeat. As fire permeates iron and makes it like itself, so love makes us like God.<sup>43</sup>

The analogy of wind and fire is often repeated, especially in the sermons on the Holy Spirit. Like wind, the Holy Spirit comes to refresh; like fire, he comes to give warmth and kindle fervor.<sup>44</sup> Lawrence's mind is obviously not limited to these comparisons. The immensity of Scripture, with its vast number of spiritual senses, brings to Lawrence's mind many other figures. He is like water because he quenches our thirst and extinguishes the flames of worldly desires. He is symbolized by the dove, the cloud, the wind that drives the ship's sails, by the tongues of fire that cause the apostles to speak and proclaim the wonders of the Lord.<sup>45</sup>

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One of them, in order to cleanse the lips of Isaiah and sanctify him, took a burning coal from the altar that stood before the Lord and was full of burning coals. Christ our Lord himself is also called *fire*, as we read in Malachi: *And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire...for he is like a refining fire* (Mal 3:1-2). Does he not say that the only reason he came into the world was to kindle a fire: *I came to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled* (Lk 12:49)?”

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., (Tuesday after the Third Sunday of Lent), 372: “A soul endowed with divine love is truly a seraph, for love is the fire of divine love; but a six-winged seraph, since love cannot exist in this world without faith and hope, and without the four cardinal virtues.”

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., “Love makes us like God, since *God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God and God in him* (1 Jn 4:16). The heat of the fire makes the iron like the fire. But in God there are two things: supreme love for sinners and supreme hatred for sin, that he might destroy the sin but save the sinner. He demands the same of us.”

<sup>44</sup>*Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Feast of Pentecost), 76: “Just as air is necessary for breathing, and without it we cannot live, so also the Holy Spirit: without him nothing can live in the presence of God. Wind is a vapor emitted by water; only if water becomes light is there wind, since it is a vapor. But since the Holy Spirit was promised in water, he came with wind...Moreover, in the winter fire brings us great comfort, and in the summer the wind and gentle breeze. The Holy Spirit is the gentle breeze, stirred up by the angelic son of God, that refreshed the three holy youths in the Babylonian furnace.” *Opera omnia*, X, part 2, *Sermones de tempore* (Feast of Pentecost), 298: “These things are especially necessary: air for breathing and wind for sailing large ships, and indeed just as the soul is necessary for life. Thus the Lord breathed on the apostles and said: *Receive the Holy Spirit* (Jn 20:22), that he might be like the soul of our soul, for the Holy Spirit produces marvelous effects in the soul, just as the soul itself in the body.”

<sup>45</sup>*Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Feast of Pentecost), 64: “The Holy Spirit appeared in many forms and under many images, since many are the effects produced in the soul. He appeared in the form of a dove above Christ at his baptism,

By means of these tongues of fire of the Spirit, says Lawrence, the world is cleansed, enlightened and made perfect according to God: cleansed from the filth of idolatry, enlightened by faith with divine knowledge, and perfected in adoration of God in spirit and in truth.<sup>46</sup>

Lawrence never tires of recalling the symbols of fire and wind to emphasize the Holy Spirit's power in our spiritual life. The soul passes through situations of winter cold or burning summer heat. The Holy Spirit, like fire or like a refreshing breeze, helps us to preserve harmony and inner peace.<sup>47</sup> Later we will find new applications of this analogy of fire as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and grace, as well as charity.

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above the apostles in the form of a bright cloud at the transfiguration; he was given to the apostles by Christ in the form of breath, and today he descends like wind and tongues of fire. He descends in the form of a dove, because he justifies us, making us simple as doves in evil and fruitful in good; in the form of a cloud he protects us from the burning heat of divine justice and sends down upon our souls the dew and rain of divine consolation; in the form of breath, because he is the life of the soul according to God; in the form of a strong wind, because he leads the ship of holy Church through the sea of this world to the port of paradise; and finally, in the form of fiery tongues, because he makes us fluent in words to speak of the wonders of God, and fervent in love for God and our neighbor." *Ibid.*, 71: "This divine gift has many names in Sacred Scripture. Sometimes it is called water: *I will sprinkle clean water upon you (Ez 36:25); sometimes a spring: The water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life (Jn 4:14); sometimes breath or wind: The wind blows where it will (Jn 3:8); sometimes fire: I have come to cast fire upon the earth (Lk 12:49); sometimes the finger of God: If it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (Lk 11:20); This is the finger of God (Ex 8:19); sometimes the power of the Most High: The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you (Lk 1:35); Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (Lk 24:49); You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you (Acts 1:8). But in today's gospel he is called Paraclete, Holy Spirit, teacher of all truth: The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you (Jn 14:26); and again: When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth (Jn 15:26)."*

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 64-5: "By means of these tongues the world is cleansed, enlightened, and made perfect according to God: cleansed from the filth of idolatry, enlightened by the true light of divine knowledge through faith, and perfected by the devout worship of true religion toward God; now, true worshipers worship God in spirit and in truth, for *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24).*"

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 64: "Since the Holy Spirit is God, he comes today with wind: with wind to cool, with fire to warm; to cool the heat of carnal desire, to warm cold hearts with divine love. The Holy Spirit produces both these effects: he extinguishes the fire of sensual love, which fills the world: *All that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 Jn 2:16).* The Holy Spirit is called *water: I will sprinkle clean water upon you (Ez 36:25); Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'*

These symbols, often recalled, really help us to understand the necessity of the Holy Spirit for our spiritual life. Water, fire, and air are indispensable for our physical life. The same with the Spirit: Lawrence refers to Jesus' gesture of breathing upon the apostles as he says to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22). This means that the Holy Spirit is the soul of our soul, producing wonderful effects in it, just as the soul acts on the body.

### Mystery of the Fatherhood and Motherhood of God

Some of the insights about God's love that we find in Lawrence's sermons are full of spiritual beauty. After pointing out that the feast of the sending of the Holy Spirit concludes the series of the Church's celebrations—Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ—in the presence of the mystery of all these feasts, Lawrence turns his gaze to the origin of the entire mystery of our salvation: the Father. He explains that the name "father" denotes love, charity, goodness, intimate affection. The Father sends the Holy Spirit because he is the Father of infinite goodness and love. He is first of all the Father of Christ, but He is also our Father, and He sends his Spirit to us, His children and Christ's brothers and sisters.<sup>48</sup> As at Pentecost the Spirit descends upon Jesus' disciples gathered in common prayer. He comes to fill our souls with his spiritual and heavenly

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*He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive (Jn 7:37-39). He is called water, because he quenches thirst and extinguishes all the fire of worldly desire; but fire, because he kindles a thousand flames of divine love in human hearts." Opera omnia, X, part 2, Sermones de tempore (Feast of Pentecost), 298-99: "The effects of this gift are purgation, illumination, perfection, for he makes us perfect in virtue and holiness of life; but he especially produces in us the effects of water and fire: he refreshes and he warms."*

<sup>48</sup>*Opera omnia, VIII, Dominicalia (Feast of Pentecost), 65-66: "After we have celebrated the feasts of the incarnation, passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ, today we celebrate the feast of the sending of the Holy Spirit....God, who sends and gives this Holy Spirit, is called Father, which is a name that denotes love, charity, goodness and intimate and innate affection; therefore God sends the Holy Spirit, because he is the Father of infinite goodness and love. God is called the Father of Christ and our Father: the Father of Christ through eternal generation and our Father through temporal generation; the Father of Christ by nature, our Father by grace, because God is infinite goodness, whose nature, like that of light and fire, is to communicate himself; therefore God is called light (cf. Is 60:19-20; Mich 7:8; 1 Jn 1:50) and fire (cf. Dt 4:24; Heb 12:29). He is the Father of Christ and our Father." Ibid., 67: "God sent the Holy Spirit to Christ's faithful, the Father to his children, Christ's brothers and sisters; for all the faithful are children of God: I said, 'You are gods, children of the Most High all of you' (Ps 82:6). If a father sends, he certainly sends to his child, for the father is related to his child. See how you might be a child of God if today you are willing to receive the Holy Spirit with the apostles."*

gifts, to cleanse us from our sins, to teach us the whole truth, to make us good and holy.

He had descended first upon the man Christ in the incarnation, deifying Him and bestowing on Him the fullness of grace and virtue. In a similar way, He descended upon the apostles at Pentecost, and then upon the faithful, making them like Christ, wholly divine. Through the Holy Spirit the faithful become stronger than Samson, wiser than Solomon, holier than the patriarchs, more just than the prophets, equal to the angels and the seraphic spirits.<sup>49</sup>

One example of Lawrence's ability as a theologian, poet, and mystic is seen in his comparison between God the Father and the sun. Light and heat are given off by the sun. God the Father, the Sun of Justice, also gives us His two precious gifts: the gift of light in the Incarnation of his Son, and the gift of fire in the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup> Still another image is that of the human body with its two great spiritual powers, sight and love, associated with the two noblest organs, the eyes and the heart. According to Lawrence, Jesus Christ is like the eye of God through which the Father sees all things, and the Holy Spirit is like the heart of God through which the Father loves all things. Thus, in the Incarnation, the Father gives us his Son

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 67: "He comes to make those who are carnal spiritual, to be the spirit of our spirits, to fill our souls with spiritual gifts and heavenly charisms." Ibid., 68: "Just as in the incarnation the Holy Spirit deified the man Christ with every fullness of his grace and virtue, so today [He deified] the apostles, whom He made totally like Christ, wholly divine. Just as God took some of Moses's spirit and gave it to the seventy elders of Israel, making them like Moses that they might rule the people of God, so today God took some of Christ's Spirit and gave it to his apostles, that they might be rulers of the Church. By this Holy Spirit given today to Christ's faithful, they become stronger than Samson, wiser than Solomon, holier than the patriarchs, more just than the prophets, equal to the angels and the seraphic spirits."

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 70-1: "The sun bestows two great gifts upon the world: the gift of light, which is the ornament and beauty of the entire universe, and the gift of vital and life-giving warmth, by which it gives and preserves the life of all living things on earth, and brings forth rocks, metals, and all minerals under the earth. In the same way God, the supreme *Sun of Justice* (Mal 4:2), bestowed the two greatest gifts of all upon the human race: the one, by which He gave the world His only-begotten Son, who proceeds from him as a ray from the sun, and the other, by which today He sent the Holy Spirit, who is the warmth of the divine Sun and divine fire, and so he descended today in fire. Christ came as light, for He said: *I am the light of the world* (Jn 8:12), to enlighten the world with the knowledge of truth: *For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth* (Jn 18:37). The Holy Spirit came to kindle the hearts of the faithful with the fire of divine love and the warmth of that burning love, which is *strong as death* (Sg 8:6)."

to be our light, the light of the world, and at Pentecost He fills us with His Spirit, gives us His heart that we might love with His very own heart.<sup>51</sup>

Lawrence enjoys going through sacred history, both the Old and the New Testament, seeing in all the divine interventions a constant and varied witness to God's gifts, which were signs of his great and definitive gift: the light of Christ and the love of the Holy Spirit. And he concludes with what must be the conclusion of every thankful person: if God, with his Spirit, gives us his heart, his love and his soul, we must live a superhuman, divine life.<sup>52</sup>

Elsewhere Lawrence uses the symbol of the seraph that purified the lips of the prophet Isaiah and the prophetic spirit of Moses imparted to the seventy elders of Israel as foreshadowing the messianic gift of Pentecost. God the Father takes the Spirit of Christ in whom the fullness of the divinity dwells bodily (because he was given the Spirit without measure), and pours that Spirit upon the apostles and then upon all Christ's faithful, who thus become like Christ. They are transformed into new persons. The superhuman and super angelic power, wisdom, and goodness of Christ will be the norm of action for all who are sanctified by the Spirit.<sup>53</sup> To this

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 70-1: "Two things in the human body are most precious: the eye in the head and the heart in the chest. Christ is like the eye of God by which the Father sees all things; the Holy Spirit is like the heart of God by which he loves all things. Therefore today God takes his own heart and gives it to us as a gift. What is impossible for us, was possible for God who can do all things. Since he gave us his own heart, why can he not give us all things with his heart? When the king or emperor's only son returns to his country after many deeds and distinguished victories, his father will crown him and make him king. After the coronation, when he has received the oath of fidelity from the princes, he opens his treasures and with royal generosity and magnificence scatters gold and silver coins, bearing the king's perfect image and inscription, to all the people. That is what God did today when he crowned Christ, his only-begotten Son, king in heaven. Christ, true God, gave his Church and his faithful a great gift today: *He has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature (2 Pt 1:4).*"

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 72: "In Sacred Scripture the Holy Spirit is often called *Spirit of God, Spirit of the Lord*, because he is the soul of God, the heart of God, the very love of God. In every way God has given many and great signs of his love for us; today he gives us his own heart, his own love, his own soul by which God himself lives. Who has ever given his son or bride the heart from his chest, except—by a miracle—a loving father or bridegroom? But if today God gives us his Spirit, his soul, we must live a divine and superhuman life. Therefore we lead a life more noble than that of the beasts, because we have a rational soul, which is more noble than that of an animal."

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 73: "The Seraph descended from heaven with a burning coal to cleanse the lips of Isaiah, so that with cleansed lips he might preach the glory of Christ. The same thing happened today. When Isaiah saw in heaven the glory of



evocative image of God the Father, Lawrence adds another and more moving image, that of a mother who nurses her child from her own breasts, which are both nourishment and comfort for the little one.<sup>54</sup> Here we see Lawrence's ability to link tenderness and theology. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are pictured as the breasts of God the Father—now Mother—offered to us as supernatural food and spiritual consolation. Food and consolation obviously recall the sacraments of the Eucharist and confirmation, which are illustrated with the appealing beauties of motherhood. The idea of God as mother, so frequent in the Old Testament and so fashionable in today's new awareness of feminine values, finds a great promoter in the Apostolic Doctor.

### Human Cooperation

But the Holy Spirit needs our cooperation if his supernatural and life-giving power is to grow and never dwindle.<sup>55</sup> Lawrence returns to the

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Christ: *I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne* (Is 6:1); *My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts* (Is 6:5), then, divinely cleansed by the Seraph, he was given the spirit of prophecy (cf. Is 6:7). After Christ *was taken up to heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God* (Mk 16:19), the divine Seraph of the Holy Spirit descended and cleansed and sanctified the apostles, and filled them with divine wisdom to preach the glory of Christ. Today, any one of the apostles, like another Jeremiah, is given to the kings and princes of the world and to all nations as a fortified city, a pillar of iron, and a wall of brass (cf. Jer 1:18). Today, just as God once took some of Moses' spirit and gave it to the seventy elders of Israel, making those, upon whom the divine Spirit breathed, like Moses, so he took some of the Spirit of Christ, *in whom dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily* (Col 2:9) and to whom the Spirit is given without measure (cf. Jn 3:34), and gave it to the apostles and Christ's faithful, making them like Christ."

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 74: "God is bountiful and gives extravagantly of himself. It was not enough for him to give us his Son; he also wished to give the Holy Spirit. He is called in Sacred Scripture *El Shaddai* or *God of breasts* (cf. Gn 17:1; Ex 6:13; Is 66:12): *Your breasts are better than wine* (Sg 1:1). The Son and the Holy Spirit are like God's two breasts. When a loving mother nurses her infant with one breast, she holds out the other breast to suck milk. Breasts are such comfort to infants that a child will want hardly anything else. So sometimes the Son, sometimes also the Holy Spirit is called Comforter or *Paraclete*: *I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete* (Jn 14:16)."

<sup>55</sup>*Opera omnia*, V, *Quadragesimale secundum*, part 1 (Ash Wednesday), 119: "We must divide the light of virtues and good works from the darkness of vices, and therefore we must diligently examine our good works to see with what mind and intention they are performed.... For our works to be pleasing to God they must be done out of love, or else like counterfeit money they will be of no value." *Opera omnia*, VI, *Quadragesimale tertium* (Monday of Holy Week), 643: "Faith must be joined to works of justice.... Justice must measure up to faith and faith to justice, so that our deeds may correspond to our words and our words to our deeds." *Opera*

analogy of fire. The Holy Spirit with his grace is fire, but we must see to it that the fuel keeps on burning in our soul. Like material fire, the fire of the Holy Spirit in our soul can also be extinguished in various ways: through lack of fuel, smothered by water, blown out by a gust of wind like the flame of a lamp. We will lack fuel if idleness and sloth cause us to omit our spiritual exercises and neglect good works; we will smother the spiritual fire with concerns that are too-worldly, or if the winds of evil thoughts and carnal desires weaken it and end up blowing out our lamps.<sup>56</sup>

Faced, on the one hand, with the Protestant doctrine that denies the value of works in our justification,<sup>57</sup> and in opposition to a quietist mysticism that leaves the process of sanctification to God, our attitude being one of spiritual idleness and sloth, Lawrence constantly insists that all must cooperate in the entire process of their justification and sanctification. Jesus' words, *Nolite fieri sicut hypocritae* ["Do not become like the hypocrites]" (Mt 6:16) are understood by Lawrence in a reflexive sense: "Do not *make yourselves...*" He sees this as an appeal to our responsibility to construct ourselves spiritually. This, he points out, is our privilege as human beings, as opposed to other creatures who lack the ability to decide in their own

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*omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost), 176: "Each of us must work out our own salvation with great fear and trembling, and by constantly performing good works make firm our call and election (cf. 2 Pt 1:10)." *Opera omnia*, IX, *Sanctorale* (Feast of Saint Luke the Evangelist), 193: "It is not enough to have the habit of the virtues; we must also have works and constantly practice the spiritual virtues by means of works, just as artisans practice their trades by means of works. Otherwise of what use would they be?"

<sup>56</sup>*Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Feast of Pentecost), 69-70: "You should also know that the Holy Spirit descended in fire to help us understand that, just as fire can easily be extinguished, so we can easily lose the grace of the Holy Spirit. Fire is extinguished by a lack of combustible material, a lamp by lack of oil; it is extinguished by pouring on water or soil, which suffocates it; it is also extinguished by the wind, which can very easily extinguish torches and lamps. Thus the grace of the Holy Spirit is lost by laziness and apathy, by omitting spiritual exercises and ceasing to do good works; it is lost by excessive care and concern for worldly things, which are the thorns that choked the householder's sowing (cf. Mt 13:7; Mk 4:7; Lk 8:7), and lastly by the wind of evil thoughts and carnal desires."

<sup>57</sup>*Opera omnia*, IX, *Sanctorale* (Feast of Saints Philip and James, Apostles), 12: "The innovators go completely astray...when with this doctrine [justification by fiducial faith alone] they abolish prayer, fasting, almsgiving, good works, and whatever means God has established to obtain salvation. I am surprised that they have not also abolished baptism as a means; for if faith is sufficient, what need is there for baptism?" Lawrence deals amply and in great depth with the topic of faith and works, especially in *Opera omnia*, II, *Lutheranismi Hypotyposis*, part III, *Hypotyposis Polycarpi Laiserii*, 202-35.

regard. But we, with our freedom and in cooperation with grace, have been given by the Lord "the power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12).<sup>58</sup>

It is a journey that begins in faith, by means of which the Holy Spirit enlightens us, placing before us our model Christ, who dwells in our hearts through faith (Eph 3:17) and whom we must reproduce ever more perfectly in our lives.<sup>59</sup>

## Prayer

Our life in God involves a dialogue or mutual relationship in gratitude and love. This takes place especially in prayer. Lawrence is utterly convinced of this. Commenting on the gospel passage where Jesus says that God's house is a house of prayer, Lawrence remarks: "God is said to dwell in a house of prayer, because he acts in our soul especially when we give ourselves to prayer." It was during prayer that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the Jordan; he was in prayer when he was transfigured, and the apostles were gathered in prayer when they received the Holy Spirit.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup>*Opera omnia*, V, *Quadragesimale secundum*, part 1 (Ash Wednesday), 119-20: "Do not make yourselves. What, I ask, is this *Do not make yourselves*? Surely we cannot make ourselves! But yes, humans are uniquely privileged in that they can make themselves as they please. God is eternal and cannot make himself; the world was made by God and cannot make itself differently: earth must be earth; likewise heaven and certainly an angel. But we have been given the power that if we wish to be earth, we can be earth; if heaven, heaven; if an angel, an angel; if God, God, for: *Whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him* (1 Cor 6:17); *he gave them power to become children of God* (Jn 1:12). This is the meaning of *Do not make yourselves*: you can be saints of God, angels of God, like God himself; do not make yourselves like hypocrites and demons. If you had the power to make yourself either gold or mud, which would you choose?"

<sup>59</sup>*Opera omnia*, VI, *Quadragesimale tertium*, (Thursday after Ash Wednesday), 37: "God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him (Gn 1:27). Christ the man is the image of the entire Trinity, the model for human nature even in predestination, as Paul says: *Those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters* (Rom 8:29); *he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation* (Col 1:15). Therefore, he created us in the image of Christ, like Christ, that we might be like Christ the man in nature, grace, and glory. Christ the Son is God's firstborn, not only by reason of divinity, but also humanity." *Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicale primum* (Feast of Pentecost), 68: "The Holy Spirit came to accomplish all these things, just as we see them already fulfilled in Christ's holy Church, which has been formed by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the faithful and all who truly believe in Christ. The Holy Spirit descended in fire in order to make us completely spiritual and warm us by his divine warmth, for it is the nature of fire to change everything into itself; and also that we might know how to kindle in ourselves this divine fire."

<sup>60</sup>*Opera omnia*, VI, *Quadragesimale tertium*, (Monday after the Fourth

Lawrence found further scriptural proof in the mission of Isaiah: "While in prayer he was purified, illumined, sanctified by the seraphic spirit, and made a perfect prophet of God and most holy herald of the divine Word" (cfr. Is 6:6ff).<sup>61</sup> Prayer, then, fills every part of the spiritual journey of our life in God: it purifies, illumines, and perfects. Prayer is the constant attitude of the angels and saints in heaven, a dialogue of love with God himself. The life of all the saints in the Church on earth must be the same.<sup>62</sup>

Lawrence's description of prayer is very interesting. Prayer is like a perfume made up of many fragrances, and it rises to God like a sweet-smelling emanation when our mind is lifted to him.<sup>63</sup> After defining it with Saint John Damascene as "the ascent and raising of the mind to God," he

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Sunday of Lent), 463: "God is said to dwell in a house of prayer, because he acts in our soul especially when we give ourselves to prayer. The Lord was baptized in the Jordan while he was praying. The heavens opened above him, the Holy Spirit descended, and the voice of the Father was heard. Prayer is like a magnet that attracts iron; it attracts to itself God the Holy Spirit: *He will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him* (Lk 11:13); it attracts to itself the heart of God: *My eyes and my heart shall be there always* (1 Kg 9:3). The Lord was transfigured while in prayer, and Moses and Elijah *appeared in glory* (Lk 9:30-31), for Moses was illumined with divine light while praying (cf. Ex 34:29ff) and Elijah taken up to heaven (cf. 2Kg 2:11); the Lord was comforted by an angel while in prayer; thus comforted, he went forth to meet the Jews who were seeking to kill him."

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 464.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.: "Prayer purifies, illumines, perfects. Just as prayer is the life of the angels and blessed in heaven, so it is also the life of all the saints on earth, in the Church. Christ in the desert for forty days devoted time to prayer; others, as we read, spent the night in deserted places, praying; this was John the Baptist's life in the desert. The apostles said: *We shall devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word* (Acts 6:4); thus *they were persevering with one mind in prayer* (Acts 1:14), and while gathered in prayer they received the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (cf. Acts 2:1-4) with all fullness of grace. Thus prayer is obviously a divine virtue; it is the life of God's saints and elect."

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 465: "In the Apocalypse we read that the angel of the Lord was standing beside the golden altar, beside the altar of incense, *holding a golden censer* in his hand (Rv 8:3), full of fragrant odors *which are, it says, the prayers of the saints* (Rv 5:8), as David also says: *Let my prayer, O Lord, be directed as incense in your sight* (Ps 141:2), referring to the fragrant incense, most pleasing and acceptable to God, in which he wondrously declares that it is a prayer, by whom it is made, to whom and when it is made. What is prayer? *Incense* says the Royal Prophet; fragrant odors, says John, for the incense that was offered to God was not plain incense but a mixture composed of several kinds of fragrant spices (cf. Ex 25:6; 30:34-38); incense means the smoke of the incense rising from the fire: *Like a pillar of smoke of aromatic spices, or myrrh and frankincense, and of all the powders of the perfumer* (Sg 3:6). This means that pure and holy prayer is as pleasing to God as the sweetest odor: *For your voice is sweet...* (Sg 2:14).

adds that prayer includes acts of many virtues. Indeed faith, hope, charity, fear of God, humility, piety, adoration, thanksgiving, knowledge, and love of God all come together in prayer.<sup>64</sup> But this ascent requires that the soul lay aside all bodily and everyday concerns, all anxiety of mind.<sup>65</sup>

In the same sermon he appeals to the teaching of Jesus. The invocation "Our Father" places us in the presence of love and infinite goodness, for God, like a true father, is all love and compassion. And to say that He is "in heaven" means that He is the greatest, the almighty One who governs the universe with infinite power. "If we would keep in mind this reality!" exclaims Lawrence. God is truly present to us when we speak to Him in prayer; He truly hears our prayer, even though we pray only with our heart and mind. And not only is He present, not only does He hear us; he is able and desires to accede willingly and with greatest pleasure to our requests.<sup>66</sup>

Then, going back to the liturgy of the Old Testament and the heavenly liturgy described in the Apocalypse, Lawrence again compares prayer to incense offered to God. Those who pray become priests of the Lord. They must approach the Holy One clothed with inner purity and

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 465-6: "Prayer is the ascent and raising of the mind to God (cf. Saint John Damascene *De fide Orthodoxa*, bk. 3, ch. 24 [PG 94, 1090]), which is indicated by the ascent of the angels on Jacob's ladder (cf. Gn 28:12). Thus the temple of God was built upon a mountain (cf. 2 Chr 3:1): *Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob* (Is 2:3). This act of prayer consists of acts of many virtues; for faith, hope, love, fear of God, humility, piety, religion, thanksgiving, knowledge, and love of God all come together in prayer. Thus an odor consists of many fragrant aromas."

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.: "This smoke of sweetest odor ascends to the Lord when our mind is raised to God. Moses ascended the mountain to God (cf. Ex 19:3); Abraham ascended the mountain to sacrifice Isaac (cf. Gn 22:1-9); David also calls prayer a *sacrifice: The lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice* (Ps 141:2). Abraham, wishing to ascend the mountain to offer that sacrifice to God, left the donkey and servants at the foot of the mountain (cf. Gn 22:1-5). Our soul, about to ascend to God through prayer, must lay aside all concern for the things of the body and everyday life, all anxiety of mind."

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 467: "The Lord taught that when we pray we should say: *Our Father who art in heaven* (Mt 6:9). He is *our Father*: love and goodness; He is *in heaven*, He is the greatest, He is all-powerful, He governs the universe: power; *Our Father who art in heaven*, God the best and greatest. If we would keep in mind this reality: God, to whom we speak when we pray, is truly present and truly hears our prayer, although we pray only with our heart, soul, mind...; not only is He present and hears what we are asking for when we pray, but He is able and willing to grant most easily and gladly what we ask for and desire...."

holiness, as symbolized by the white and precious vestments of the offerers described in the biblical passages cited.<sup>67</sup>

Meditating on the gospel passage of the Canaanite woman who begs Jesus with such great faith and persistence, Lawrence will say that the spiritual life cannot remain static and inactive. He uses the analogy of natural life, which is maintained in the body only through an internal activity that is perceived externally, for example the heartbeat or respiration. And so, when it comes to the spiritual life, the Holy Spirit cannot remain idle in us. He is fire, and like fire he is extremely active and vigorous. Therefore He must stimulate prayer, the primary element in our spiritual life. That is why prayer is most pleasing to God and supremely useful and agreeable to us.<sup>68</sup>

Obviously, Lawrence could not forget the theme of the efficacy of prayer directed to God to obtain things we desire. But here he refers profoundly, though briefly, to the loving dialogue in which God delights, as alluded to in the *Canticle of Canticles*: "Let your voice sound in my ears" (2:14).<sup>69</sup> Prayer, repeats Lawrence, is never fruitless, even if we do not receive the thing we asked for. There is always an increase of grace and love.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 467-68: "But who was offering incense? John says that a holy, pure, undefiled, immaculate priest, an angel was burning incense before the Lord. Our bodies are called by Paul *temples of the Holy Spirit* (cf. 1 Cor 6:19); therefore our soul is a priest of God, for in the Apocalypse the twenty-four elders, who were holding in their hands *harps and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*, say to Christ: *You made us a kingdom and priests for our God* (Rv 5:8-10). But the priest wears a bright garment made of linen; the linen, says John, *represents the righteous deeds of the saints* (Rv 19:8). The unclean were prevented from entering the sanctuary of the Lord; the priest who was about to offer sacrifice and incense to the Lord first washed himself with pure and holy water. Therefore whoever approaches God in spirit must approach like the priest, wearing the sacred vestments: *Let your priests be clothed with justice, and let your saints rejoice* (Ps 132:9), for the sacred vestments signified justice and holiness."

<sup>68</sup>*Opera omnia*, X, part 1, *Quadragesimale quartum* (Thursday of the First Week of Lent), 136: "Natural life is recognized in actions, for the soul cannot remain within the body without any operation; some action on its part is always perceived, at least the heartbeat or breathing. So also in the spiritual life, the Holy Spirit cannot remain one who is lazy and does nothing, for fire is by nature especially noble, active, vigorous. Moreover, the spiritual life consists especially in prayer."

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 138: "The Lord delights most of all in devout prayer and perseverance in prayer, for devout prayer is a most sweet song in the Lord's ears: *Let your voice sound in my ears, for your voice is sweet* (Sg 2:14)."

<sup>70</sup>*Opera omnia*, X, part 2, *Sermones de tempore* (Fifth Sunday after Easter), 264: "He says through Isaiah, chapter 56: *I will make them joyful in my house of prayer*

This “mystical” path of perfection is willed by God for all people. Lawrence hints at this when he speaks of Jesus’ praise of John the Baptist and expresses the desire that all should resemble this man in not being like a reed shaken by the wind (Mt 11:7), but rather steadfast in faith and the love of God. Thus he sums up the course of the spiritual life, even to perfect sanctity like that of the angels, as valid for all:

Having laid the foundation of a steadfast will, with hearts determined to serve God in holiness and justice all our days (Lk 1:75), we must begin with mortification and penance so that, from this state of beginners, which consists in cleansing from vices, we might pass to the prophetic life, the illuminative life with its splendors of knowledge of the divine light, and finally arrive at the angelic life, which consists of perfect holiness and grace, so that our citizenship might always be in heaven.<sup>71</sup>

### The Three Ways

We have already seen in the previous reflections the triple sequence: *purification, illumination, perfection*. This is a good indication of the schema or framework in which Saint Lawrence develops his teachings on the spiritual life. We are referring to the traditional triad normally used to describe either the dynamic aspect of growth in that life—beginners, proficient, and perfect—or the static aspect of the three hierarchical vocations in the Church, namely, ordinary Christians, religious, and the apostles and their successors.<sup>72</sup>

Explicitly or implicitly, this schema considers primarily the course of a spiritual life that must not stop. Instead it must constantly set for itself a

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(Is 56:7). Thus prayer is never without fruit, for it is always worthy, even though it does not always obtain what is asked for. Often, that prayer is much better with respect to the grace obtained or to be obtained through it, and much more useful to us, although we may not know it, especially when we ask in prayer for temporal things or some grace that is unnecessary, indeed less useful for salvation, as when Paul begged to be freed from the angel of Satan.”

<sup>71</sup>*Opera omnia*, VII, *Adventus secundus* (Second Sunday), 224: “How happy and truly blessed we would be, if we were like this divine man, not like a reed shaken by the wind, but steadfast in faith and the love of God!” Ibid., 225: “Having laid the foundation of a steadfast will, with hearts determined to serve God in holiness and justice all our days (Lk 1:75), we must begin with mortification and penance so that, from this state of beginners, which consists in cleansing from vices, we might pass to the prophetic life, the illuminative life with its splendors of knowledge of the divine light, and finally arrive at the angelic life, which consists of perfect holiness and grace, so that our citizenship might always be in heaven.”

<sup>72</sup>See notes 34, 46 and 47, above.

new goal: a perfection that is full and complete in God alone, a perfection that became a model for us in the highest created summit reached in Christ and, in another dimension, also in Mary.

We find a description of this spiritual reality in the *Mariale*, in the third sermon on the Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus in the temple. "The mystery of the purification," says Lawrence, "takes place by reason of the excellent grace of the Holy Spirit, which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The tree of virtue is first planted, then it grows, and when it has reached perfection it produces marvelous fruit."<sup>73</sup>

But each theoretical statement is always abundantly backed up with citations from the sacred text (in this I think he cannot be compared to any other sacred writer). Thus Psalm 111:10 teaches us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," so that, as Saint Peter writes (1 Pet 3:11) citing Psalm 37:27, the soul becomes justified and sanctified in order to "turn from evil and do good." But the soul cannot be satisfied with this. Grace causes it to feel a desire for perfection, intensifying in it a hunger and thirst for justice in the face of the divine invitation: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).<sup>74</sup> In this spiritual journey we reach a relative goal (it is always increasing), which is nothing else but perfect love. "The aim of this instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith" (1 Tim 1:5). Certainly, "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" are excellent virtues, "but over all these is love, which is the bond of perfection" (Col 3:12, 14).<sup>75</sup> Perfect love, says Lawrence, is a gift of God, whose love (as Saint Paul says) has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>*Opera omnia*, I, *Mariale* (Purification, sermon 3), 535.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 536: "The beginning of grace is the fear of the Lord, for he says: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* (Ps 111:10); thus the soul is justified and sanctified, that it may *turn from evil and do good* (1 Pt 3:11; Ps 37:27). The middle is a burning desire for perfection, a hunger and thirst for justice: *If you wish to be perfect* (Mt 19:21). *Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mt 5:48)."

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*: "The end is perfect love, for *the end of the commandment is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith* (1 Tim 1:5). *Above all these things have love, which is the bond of perfection* (Col 3:14). Perfect love loves God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and strength, so that we love nothing contrary to God, nothing above God, nothing equal to God, but indeed love God above all things."

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*: "Perfect love is a gift of God, for *the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5)."



An example of this purification is Mary, who arrives at the highest summit of holiness most perfectly purified by the Holy Spirit. The holy elder Simeon also travels this path to perfect charity.<sup>77</sup>

Commenting on the solicitude of the three women—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome—who bought aromatic oils to go and anoint the body of Jesus, Lawrence sees them as representing all souls in the states he calls beginners or penitents, proficient or active, and perfect or contemplative.<sup>78</sup> If in a certain sense he sees them as three distinct vocations—as we mentioned before—there is also a clear reference to the three attitudes, which are not mutually exclusive, but rather constitute the dynamic of the entire Christian life.<sup>79</sup> Thus, no one is excluded from the obligation to do penance and practice the cardinal virtues, and all are obliged to practice the theological virtues, which find their supreme perfection in the love of God.

## Gifts

God's gift to us, in the Holy Spirit, is God himself. And it is love, because God is love. But love, like light refracted in a prism, becomes varied, many-colored. Thus Lawrence, like the Bible and Tradition, likes to reflect

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.: "The Blessed Virgin was most perfectly purified by God through the Holy Spirit. In Simeon we see the beginning, the middle and the end of holiness: the beginning, because he was *just*; the middle, because he was *eulabis, religious, devout*, a worshiper and servant of God, *awaiting the consolation of Israel*; the end, because *the Holy Spirit was in him* through perfect love."

<sup>78</sup>*Opera omnia*, V, *Quadragesimale secundum*, part 3 (Easter Sunday), 414: "Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint Jesus... (Mk 16:1-7). These three holy women signify the entire holy Church, which has been joined to Christ, as to its bridegroom, by faith, hope and love. Every faithful soul, if it is truly a bride of Christ through living faith and love, must be one of these three women: either Mary Magdalene, or Mary, the mother of James, or Salome; it must be either in the state of beginners and penitents, or in that of the proficient and active, or that of the perfect and contemplatives. The state of life of the first consists in works of penance, that of the second in works of the cardinal virtues and love of neighbor for God's sake, and that of the last in acts of the theological virtues, especially love of God."

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 414-15: "What is apparent in these three women is their wonderful devotion and love for Christ, whom they loved not only when he was alive, but even when he was dead, whom they continued to love not only affectively, but also effectively, for they bought costly spices and precious ointments. Together with their great devotion we also see their great generosity in honor of Christ... *on entering the tomb, they saw the stone rolled back* (Mk 16:4-5), and they found an angel of the Lord sitting there, and Christ, not dead but alive. For this reason they found much more than they were expecting."

in his sermons this many-colored variety of God's Gift. In the Pentecost event the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, comes like wind that fills the house, that is, the whole Church. The Spirit is essentially love, the total and infinite love in which the Father and Son love each another eternally. And this Spirit, this love is that which fills the hearts of the faithful. He imparts holiness, because He is holy; He brings consolation, because He is the Consoler, the Paraclete. He fills with knowledge of the truth, because He is the Spirit of truth; master and teacher, He fills souls with his gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel and fortitude, knowledge and piety, fear of the Lord.<sup>80</sup> Although He is spirit or wind (*ruab*), He is not a hurricane that comes to bring terror; He is like a gentle and consoling breeze. Although He is fire, He is not a destroying inferno—unless to destroy sin—but He enlightens the mind and enkindles hearts with the fire of divine love.<sup>81</sup>

Lawrence's admiration never ends. In a homily for Pentecost he calls the gift of the Spirit the "miracle of miracles." Through the Holy Spirit we become workers of greater and more divine miracles.<sup>82</sup> Later Lawrence speaks in terms of spiritual usefulness. The gift of the Spirit is supremely useful, both to the apostles and to the whole Church. Useful, he explains, because He is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, who gives us judgment and intelligence to judge rightly and to seek with discernment. As the Spirit of counsel, He imparts prudence in the use of things. With fortitude He strengthens our minds, and our hearts acquire the strength of a lion. As the Spirit of knowledge, He facilitates the practical knowledge of

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<sup>80</sup>*Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Feast of Pentecost), 61: "This house filled with that Spirit is the Church.... First he fills the hearts of the faithful with divine charity, divine love, that we might be one spirit with God through love; the Spirit fills us with all holiness, because he is the Holy Spirit, that we might be like God according to our inner self; he fills us with all consolation, because he is the *Paraclete* or Consoler; he fills us with all knowledge of the truth, because he is the Spirit, master and teacher of all truth. That Holy Spirit is *the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of knowledge and piety...the Spirit of the fear of the Lord* (Is 11:2-3)."

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*: "The Holy Spirit did not come with a loud noise to strike fear, as when God came to give the Law on Mount Sinai (cf. Ex 19:16-19), but with a gentle sound to console, for *the Lord was not in the earthquake*, the Lord was not in the storm...." – *Ibid.*, 62: "Out of his infinite and burning love, The Holy Spirit, the supreme Seraph, descends today in tongues of fire upon Christ's faithful, to cleanse their lips and their hearts, to enlighten their minds with the light of heavenly wisdom, to enkindle and inflame their hearts with the fire of love."

<sup>82</sup>*Opera omnia*, X, part 2, *Sermones de tempore* (Feast of Pentecost), 297: "This work today can truly be called the miracle of miracles, for it makes us workers of the greatest and most divine miracles."

what is useful and necessary. And finally, as the Spirit of piety and fear of the Lord, He infuses true piety, religion and holiness, without which all the previous things are worthless. In this way the Holy Spirit perfects the soul's two powers of intellect and will.<sup>83</sup>

### Facility and Progress according to Saint Bonaventure

Already through the prophet Ezekiel the Lord had promised: "I will put my Spirit within you and make you live by my statutes" (36:27). But the Holy Spirit not only makes it easier for us to observe God's law; He even makes it possible for us to fulfill it joyfully. We can also see the kernel of the whole Gospel, when Jesus himself "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (Lk 10:21), declaring that the yoke of his teaching is easy and the burden of his service is light.<sup>84</sup>

It seems that gifts of the Holy Spirit, as Lawrence sees them, cannot be catalogued into a rigid structure of spiritual realities that would paralyze the activities of the virtues. In that case, the Holy Spirit's sole task would be to move the ship of our soul with his breath, as the Thomist school maintains. Lawrence's view would be closer to that of Saint Bonaventure. According to the Seraphic Doctor, the gifts, like the virtues, are a strengthening of our powers to operate supernaturally in our spiritual life. But there is one difference. The virtues prepare us for the spiritual life that is basic and necessary for salvation, whereas the gifts facilitate a more perfect

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 297-98: "What we have today is not only a miracle, but also a great, a truly divine gift; a gift useful beyond measure and needed by the apostles and by the whole Church. Useful, because Christ said: *It is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Paraclete will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you* (Jn 16:7); useful, because He is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, giving us judgment and the ability to judge rightly and acquire intelligently; He is the Spirit of counsel for the greatest prudence in the use of things; the Spirit of fortitude, giving us strength of mind and the heart of a lion; the Spirit of knowledge, that is, the practical knowledge of necessary and useful things; and finally the Spirit of piety and fear of the Lord, that is, the Spirit of true piety, religion, virtue and holiness, without which all higher things are worth nothing. Thus He perfects us in both parts of our mind and soul: the intellect and the will."

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 305-06: "Since the way of virtue, which consists in observance of all the divine laws, is most necessary for salvation: *If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments* (Mt 19:17); and since, because nature is corrupt, the way of virtue is arduous and very difficult, for vice delights but the virtues seem insipid and bitter—and for this reason, while we praise virtue, we all live in vice, in the seductive sweetness of the vices—the Holy Spirit makes the yoke of the divine law easy and its burden light (Mt 11:30); in order that we might more easily observe God's commandments, even with delight, He says: *I will place my spirit within you and make you walk in my commandments* (Ez 36:27)."

supernatural activity. The gifts come from the overflowing abundance of the divine generosity. For this reason they especially deserve to be called gifts, because they confer on our natural powers, already raised by grace, and on the virtues, the ability to carry out with ease all that is excellent in the service of Christ. We might say that this supererogation is a mark of God's generosity beyond what is necessary for salvation. There is always a free space in which love moves. This does not mean we should not aspire to higher perfection.<sup>85</sup>

## II. The Mystical Dimension in the Spiritual Life

### Difference between Life and Writings

Now we come to a question that is particularly relevant to our subject. Is the mystical dimension, which certainly characterized Lawrence's life as is apparent from the external phenomena, really reflected in his writings?

The few authors who have touched on the question are rather negative. Certainly, as we said at the beginning, there is no work of Lawrence or lines in his sermons in which he intends to describe directly the mystical life as defined by spiritual writers.

For example, according to Egon Harvey, mysticism in the strict sense is "an experience of God that is in some way direct, intuitive, beyond the normal operations of the senses and intellect...union with the person of God, from which arises a loving knowledge, a secret wisdom that astounds the memory and fascinates the intellect because it surpasses abstract and intellectual knowledge."<sup>86</sup> Giovanni Moiola, in his article "Christian Mysticism," tells us what he means by the term "mystical":

It is that moment or level or expression of the religious experience in which a specific, religious mode is lived as an experience of interiority and immediacy. We can even, and perhaps better, speak of a particular, religious experience of union-communion-presence, where what is known is reality, the *datum* of that union-communion-presence rather than a

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<sup>85</sup>Cf. Bernardino de Armellada, *Introduzione to the Opere di San Bonaventura. Sermoni teologici*, 2 (Conferences on the ten commandments and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit), Città Nuova editrice, Rome 1995, 16-25.

<sup>86</sup>E. Harvey, *I mistici e la mistica. Antologia della mistica cristiana*, ed. L. Borriello, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995, 15.

reflection, conceptualization, or representation of the lived religious *datum*.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, I cite the description of Charles André Bernard, who says:

The Christian spiritual life presents a general aspect of receptivity with respect to the activity of God, and this receptivity, exercised through the gifts of the Spirit, can assume a passive character when we experience God's intervention in our interior life. It is this aspect of passivity, as experienced, that constitutes the mystical dimension of the spiritual life.<sup>88</sup>

In this regard, we have the following comment by Lawrence, which can well be interpreted as referring to the mystical dimension of the spiritual life in his thought: the presence of the Holy Spirit is perceived in the soul's readiness to carry out the divine commands. His impulse or thrust is like that of the wind on a sailing ship, which can be strong and violent, yet the ship sails the seas effortlessly and in fact seems to fly with a favorable wind, without which it could not move forward.<sup>89</sup> Progress in the spiritual life requires a twofold transforming activity, which Lawrence sees in the twofold spirit of judgment and ardor considered by Isaiah: judgment in knowledge, ardor in love.<sup>90</sup>

As we can see, in the mind of Lawrence the Spirit's sanctifying touch, that is, the grace that through Him fills the soul, possesses an

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<sup>87</sup>G. Moiola, "Mistica cristiana," in *Nuovo Dizionario di Spiritualità*, ed. S. de Fiore and T. Goffi, Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo [Milan], 1985, 985.

<sup>88</sup>C. A. Bernard, *Introduzione alla teologia spirituale*, Edizioni Piemme, Casale Monferrato (Al)<sup>2</sup> 1996, 135.

<sup>89</sup>*Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Feast of Pentecost), 75-76: "In order to show his strength and power, the Holy Spirit came in a mighty wind and fire, for great is the power of either substance; His necessity, too, because fire is very necessary for the world and wind for those who sail; but we are sailing through the sea of this world to the port of paradise...." *Opera omnia*, X, part 2, *Sermones de tempore* (Feast of Pentecost), 299: "[The presence of the Holy Spirit] is also known from the soul's readiness to carry out the divine commands: *I will place my spirit within you and make you walk in my commandments* (Ez 36:27); *Your good Spirit shall lead me* (Ps 143:10). A ship, although large and heavily laden, moves easily through the sea and almost seems to fly when the breeze is blowing and the wind, without which it cannot sail, is favorable; the swift progress of a ship is the sign of a strong wind."

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 300: "The soul is cleansed by this divine fire, as Isaiah says: *If the Lord shall wash away the filth of the daughters of Zion...by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of ardor* (Is 4:4). The spirit of judgment refers to the intellect, the spirit of ardor to the will; the spirit of judgment to knowledge, the spirit of ardor to love or charity; thus is our soul purified."

inexorable dynamism on God's part. The soul is driven toward the height of mystical perfection and, like a sailing ship, lets itself be carried by the breath of the Spirit. We detect behind Lawrence's words that summit of the mystical life expressed in this desire of the Spanish Franciscan Juan de los Angelos: "Would that I had been told to navigate and yet, once upon the high sea, did not have to row!"

### Mystical Contemplation

If the spiritual life expresses itself essentially in prayer, the mystical life manifests itself in mystical prayer. Again, according to Bernard:

The primary characteristic of mystical prayer is seen through the attitude of the will of the one praying. While at first the person chose how to apply the prayer and produced distinct acts of intellect, memory, and love, now the person feels passive. The mind applies itself to the mystery of God or one of his attributes, no longer by choice but moved by grace.<sup>91</sup>

In his sermons Lawrence refers many times to situations or spiritual attitudes that reflect this kind of prayer as experienced by some of the biblical figures and as the norm of Christian perfection.

One example is John the Evangelist. Just as this apostle, after following Jesus, rested upon the Lord's bosom, so must we pass from the work of activity to the quiet of contemplation. To contemplate in this way means to rest completely in God, letting go of all earthly cares and entering into the divine mysteries, moved by humble piety rather than arrogant curiosity, by love and charity rather than vain or proud probing of the divinity.<sup>92</sup>

Jesus' praise of Mary's contemplative choice emphasizes the superiority of sweet rest in contemplation of the Lord over the bitterness of anxious work, which ought to tend toward rest in God with Christ, even in

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<sup>91</sup>C. A. Bernard, *op.cit.*, 141.

<sup>92</sup>*Opera omnia*, IX, *Sanctorale* (Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist), 439-40: "When it says that John was following Christ, this signifies his perfection in the active life; but when it says that *he reclined on the chest* of Jesus, this signifies his perfection in the contemplative life.... John first followed Christ and later *reclined on his chest*; thus from the labor of activity we must pass to the quiet of contemplation; thus God first made a body for Adam, then a soul. We must rise from earth to heaven, from the moon to the sun, from the movable heaven to the immovable empyrean, from time to eternity. For the work of divine contemplation is to rest completely from earthly cares in God, to plumb the heavenly and divine mysteries out of humble piety, not arrogant curiosity, out of love and charity, not vain and proud probing of the divinity."

this life.<sup>93</sup> Lawrence points to it in his commentary on the words of Jesus, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." As soon as the soul is purified and enlightened, by its very nature it hastens to love and seek the supreme good, toward a state in which it possesses and enjoys the greatest happiness. This is the summit of perfection, reached with the guidance and help of Christ.<sup>94</sup>

### Experience of God

All spiritual writers know that conscious and life-giving contact with God occurs in prayer, which is why mystics measure the stages of perfect union with God through the experience of God in prayer. No doubt Lawrence had a similar experience of God in the ecstasies or raptures into which he was normally transported during the celebration of Mass, a unique phenomenon in the history of Christian mysticism. Although we find no detailed statement of these steps in his writings, as we do for example in Saint Teresa, it is not hard to see at least an implicit connection with his experience in his comment on the verse of Hosea: "They shall be converted that sit under His shadow; they shall live on wheat and they shall blossom as a vine; His memorial shall be like the wine of Lebanon" (14:8, Vulgate). Lawrence understands this as referring to those who have turned to the Lord. Sanctified, they shall sit in God's shadow, like the bride in the Cantic of Canticles (2:3): "I sat down in the shadow of him whom I

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 444: "If what the Savior says is true, that Mary's part is better than Martha's: *Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; and yet only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the best part, and it will not be taken away from her* (Lk 10:41-42), then no doubt Christ gave the better part to John rather than to Peter, just as sweet rest is better than bitter labor, life better than death, God better than the world, the Church Triumphant in paradise better than the Church Militant in this world."

<sup>94</sup>*Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Fourth Sunday after Pentecost), 122: "He asked him to put out a little from the land (Lk 5:3): he asks for this first, so that our minds and hearts might be purified from love of the world; next, sitting down, he will teach, enlightening our minds to recognize heavenly things and those goods that are true and eternal; then he will give the order: *Put out into the deep* (Lk 5:4), ascend to the summit of divine perfection: *Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mt 5:48). As soon as the soul is purified and enlightened, by its very nature it hastens to love and seek the supreme good with all its strength, as Solomon showed. In the book of Proverbs he cleansed the soul, and in the book of Ecclesiastes he enlightened it with the knowledge of true happiness; then in the Sgicle of Sgicles he showed the desires of the cleansed and enlightened soul: *Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, for your breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointments* (Sg 1:1-2)...the nature and degree of happiness enjoyed by those who have already reached the summit of perfection, with Christ their leader stretching out his hands to help them."

desired, and his fruit was sweet to my mouth." In other words, they shall rest under God's divine and fatherly protection. They shall sit at a table prepared and set for a feast; they shall live on wheat and shall be fed with the best of bread in the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>95</sup> The following quotations from the Psalms, "How sweet are your words to my palate" (119:103), and "Sweeter than honey and the honeycomb" (19:11), are linked to the words of the Canticle, in which Lawrence sees the purified and illumined soul in its desire to attain total intimacy with God: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, for your breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointments" (1:2, Vulgate).<sup>96</sup> Although the expression "nuptial union with the Lord" is missing, there is a clear reference to the full reality.

### Joy in Suffering

Joy in suffering is a fruit of the gift of fortitude and a sign of the highest spiritual perfection. In a certain sense, Lawrence considers the Holy Spirit's work in this regard as a special grace of the New Testament. In one homily he points out how the Holy Spirit, although He was given by the Father even before the time of Christ, appears in the New Testament with a title never found in the Old: Consoler or Paraclete.<sup>97</sup> We must not think this

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<sup>95</sup>*Opera omnia*, IX, *Sanctorale* (Saint Matthew the Apostle), 153: "This is what we read in Hosea: *They shall be converted that sit under his shadow; they shall live on wheat and they shall blossom as a vine; his memorial shall be as the wine of Lebanon* (14:8). These words contain a figure of speech, called *hysteron proteron* in Greek, in which the last thing is placed first. For we are not to understand that those who were first sitting under God's shadow shall be converted, but rather that those who have been converted shall sit under God's shadow, as the bride says in the *Sgicle of Sgicles*: *I sat down under the shadow of him whom I desired, and his fruit was sweet to my palate* (2:3); in other words, those who have been converted shall rest under God's divine and fatherly protection; they shall sit at a table prepared and set for a feast, they shall live on wheat, they shall be fed with the best of bread in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist: *His memorial shall be as the wine of Lebanon*, in other words, the most excellent and best wine, the kind of wine made on Mount Lebanon, the sweetest-tasting; his memory, in other words, the memory of God shall be to those who have been converted like the best-tasting wine, for: *I remembered God and was delighted*, says the Psalmist (Ps 77:4); and elsewhere: *How sweet are your words to my palate, more than honey to my mouth!* (Ps 119:103); *sweeter than honey and the honeycomb* (Ps 19:11)."

<sup>96</sup>See note 94, above.

<sup>97</sup>*Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Feast of Pentecost), 72: "In today's Gospel he is called *Paraclete*, a name never given to him in the Old Testament. We often read *Spirit of God* (cf. Gn 1:2, 41:8; Ex 33:3; Num 24:2; 2 Chr 15:1; 24:20; Job 33:4), *Spirit of the Lord* (cf. Jg 3:10, 6:34; 1 Kg 10:10; Wis 1:7; Is 11:2, 40:7, 13, 61:1, 63:14), *Holy Spirit* (Wis 1:5, 9:17; Ps 51:13), *good Spirit* (cf. Ps 142:10), *right Spirit* (Ps 51:12), *perfect Spirit* (Ps 51:14). But we never read *Paraclete*, that is, Consoler, for the Father is the *Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our*



is an empty title, stresses Lawrence. His consoling and joyful activity was experienced from the beginning by the apostles when they were brought before the Sanhedrin and whipped: "So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name of Jesus" (Acts 5:41). Saint Luke also tells us that, immediately after receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles and first converts "went to the temple, broke bread in their homes, eating their meals with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46).<sup>98</sup> Indeed, this spiritual joy leaps from the pages of the New Testament. Here Lawrence recalls Romans 14:17, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit," then Galatians 5:22, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace..." and also First Thessalonians 1:6, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit."<sup>99</sup>

The comfort and joy that characterize life according to the Spirit is an aspect to which Lawrence devotes detailed comments. The sweetness of the Spirit is already foretold and foretasted by the sacred author of Wisdom, when he exclaims: "How good and sweet is your Spirit, O Lord!" (12:1 Vulgate). Through the Holy Spirit our minds are enlightened, our hearts enkindled, and our spirits inflamed so that they can share, feel, and taste the heavenly consolations.<sup>100</sup> But the Holy Spirit's activity is not reserved

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*affliction* (2 Cor 1:3-4). – *Opera omnia*, X, part 2, *Sermones de tempore* (Feast of Pentecost), 304-05: "Because the Holy Spirit is sent in a new manner, he is also given a new title. We often read that the Holy Spirit was given from the beginning...; thus the patriarchs and prophets were filled with the Holy Spirit...; thus John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit *even from his mother's womb* (Lk 1:15); but we never read that he was given with such a great abundance of heavenly gifts and divine charisms.... Just as he came in a new manner, so he was given a new title; for we never read in the Old Testament that he was called *Paraclete*."

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, 305: "Nor is it an empty title; for the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, *left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus* (Acts 5:41); we also read that they *broke bread in their homes, eating their meals with gladness and simplicity of heart* (Acts 2:46)."

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*: "We often read about the joy of the Holy Spirit: *The kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Rom 14:17); *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace* (Gal 5:22); likewise: *You became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit* (1 Thes 1:6)."

<sup>100</sup>*Opera omnia*, X, part 2, *Dominicalia* (Fifth Sunday after Easter), 264: "[The gift of the Holy Spirit] is supremely useful to us...to enlighten our minds, enkindle our hearts, and inflame our spirits: *Were not our hearts burning?* (Lk 24:32); so that they can share, feel, and taste the heavenly consolations: *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet* (Ps 34:9)."

exclusively to enjoyable or loftier moments in the spiritual life. For this reason Lawrence repeats that His influence extends to the entire process of purification, illumination, and perfection in virtue and holiness of life.<sup>101</sup> But Lawrence certainly saw prayer as the proper place for the soul to be gradually transformed until it attains nuptial intimacy, which he also describes with expressions from the *Canticle of Canticles*.<sup>102</sup>

The words of Psalm 34:9, "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet," are linked by Lawrence to the experiential knowledge of the Spirit promised by Jesus to his disciples: "The Father will give you another Consoler to be with you always, the Spirit of truth.... You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you" (Jn 14:16-17).<sup>103</sup>

### Franciscan and Apostolic Mysticism

As a kind of appendix to my study I wish to point out the Franciscanism in Lawrence's spirituality. First of all, it is not insignificant that in his sermons on Saint Francis he dwells exclusively on the statement that the holy founder was a perfect image of Christ in soul and body.<sup>104</sup> Speaking of the typology of the mystical life, Bernard contrasts a mysticism of the "inner way," which is anthropological in nature and can thus be compared with the mystical forms of other religions, with what he calls a mysticism of "conformity to Christ," which is purely Christian. Here the mystic places himself at the center of the mystery of Christ, the incarnate Word and Redeemer, and seeks to be conformed to Him (for example through insistence on a particular virtue) as a spiritual strategy. Bernard

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<sup>101</sup> *Opera omnia*, VIII, *Dominicalia* (Feast of Pentecost), 64: "By these tongues of fire the world is purified, illumined, and made perfect according to God." *Opera omnia*, X, part 2, *Sermones de tempore* (Feast of Pentecost) 298-99: "The effects of this gift are cleansing, illumination and perfection; it perfects us in virtue and holiness of life; it changes us into other persons."

<sup>102</sup> See notes 94 and 95, above.

<sup>103</sup> *Opera omnia*, X, part 2 *Sermones de tempore* (Feast of Pentecost), 302: "The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit, because it neither sees him nor knows him; because it is blind, it cannot see the light of heaven; but you know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you (Jn 14:16-17). You will know through experiential knowledge: Taste and see that the Lord is sweet (Ps 34:9)."

<sup>104</sup> *Opera omnia*, IX, *Sanctorale* (Feast of Seraphic Father Saint Francis), 173, 182-3: "God is wonderful in his saints (Ps 68:36)...But he is wonderful above all in Francis, to whom the name 'holy' belongs in a special way, just as he was specially made to the image and likeness of Christ...By a singular favor he was found worthy, by divine help, to become like a crucifix in external bodily form. All the saints are like Christ, but Francis, by a unique favor, was resplendent in soul, body, virtues, dignity, and works."

recalls Saint Francis and his gospel radicalness. Then he describes another type that he calls apostolic mysticism: "It is less well-known inasmuch as apostolic mystics have not worked out a theology of their inner life. It strives to participate in God's activity in the world of history, and thanks to it, strives for union with God as Creator and Savior.... Apostolic mysticism is easily linked to that of conformity to Christ."<sup>105</sup>

We could not give a better outline of the spiritual reality of Saint Lawrence, Apostolic Doctor, who speaks to us everywhere of the life of grace, of love as fire through which the Holy Spirit transforms us into an ever-closer identification with Christ. This is why we were created, and this is why the Holy Spirit works in us.<sup>106</sup>

### **Primacy of the Affective**

Another doctrinal feature of the Franciscan spirit is the primacy of love in our spiritual union with God in Christ. On this subject it is enough to recall the teaching of Saint Bonaventure on the mystical life, which, according to him, reaches its consummation in the exercise of the gift of wisdom:

Wisdom, more properly speaking...refers to experiential knowledge of God. In this way it is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, whose activity consists in tasting the divine sweetness. But since spiritual tasting, in which there is delight, necessarily requires an act of love in order to be joined [to the object] and an act of knowledge in order to grasp it, as the Philosopher says, "Delight is the coming together of two things that agree..." Therefore the activity of the gift of wisdom is partly cognitive and partly affective, inasmuch as the tasting or savoriness itself is experiential knowledge of something good and something sweet. Hence the principal activity of wisdom in the strictest sense is by the affective power.... That is also why wisdom cannot be excessive, because excess in experiencing the divine sweetness is praiseworthy rather than blameworthy, as can be seen in holy and contemplative men, who, because of the excess of sweetness, are sometimes lifted up in ecstasy, sometimes raised even to rapture, although this happens to very few. Therefore it must be granted that the principal activity of the gift of wisdom is on the part of the affective power.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> C. A. Bernard, *op.cit.*, 138-9.

<sup>106</sup> See notes 27 and 59, above.

<sup>107</sup> Saint Bonaventure, III *Sent.*, d. 35, art. un., q. 1.

Lawrence learned this seraphic doctrine and lived it with burning awareness. This radical attitude appears explicitly from time to time, as in the following passage, when he writes:

Since the Lord excluded true happiness from the world, he placed it in heaven; not in the knowledge and understanding of things, like Aristotle...who placed it in the intellect, wholly neglecting the will, which is the better and more excellent part of the soul, and to which the intellect is ordained as knowledge to appetite. Since an unknown good cannot be loved or desired, we have been given knowledge that we might seek and acquire it. And since happiness consists in enjoyment of the good, the good is not an object of the intellect, but of the will; the soul is not led toward the good by knowledge, but by love and desire.<sup>108</sup>

### Love above All

On the other hand, it is a fact that Lawrence does not spend time describing intermediate attitudes or states on the way to holiness. He points constantly to the final goal: to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, through identification with Christ in love, which sums up all the virtues. Lawrence offers a rule to determine whether we have charity: do we love our enemies as the Gospel says: "Love your enemies...that you may be children of your heavenly Father" (Mt 5:44-45). Love of enemies is the sign of heroic virtue by which we acquire the highest degree of nobility before God. What greater thing can we imagine than to be children of God?<sup>109</sup> Christ asks us to love not only God, ourselves, and our neighbor to whom we are united in friendship; he also asks us to love our enemies for God's sake, and thus we will know whether we love God with true love. Such love becomes the test, like the crucible for gold.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>*Opera omnia*, X, part 1, *Quadragesimale quartum* (Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent), 223.

<sup>109</sup>*Opera omnia*, VI, *Quadragesimale tertium* (Friday after Ash Wednesday), 64: "Christ teaches a wonderful alchemy...how to change mud into gold, an enemy into a faithful friend and beloved brother...*Love your enemies*, he says; so act that by your love and gifts you might make them your best friends. And if, at minimum, it turns out well for you according to your wish, you will, at minimum, have lost a work: *That you may be children of your Father who is in heaven* (Mt 5:44-45): before God, by your heroic virtue, you attain the highest degree of nobility. God himself can neither offer nor promise anything greater or more sublime."

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 67: "Christ demands this love of us, for he wants us to love not only God, ourselves, and our neighbor to whom we are united in friendship, but also our enemies...He wants us to love our enemies for God's sake, and thus know whether we love God with true love—we can love God with a kind of natural love—for

If we consider the statement that “mystical experience is not the essential thing in Christianity, and not necessarily the highest gift,” since “the essential thing is charity, on which alone is perfection measured,”<sup>111</sup> we will understand even better that Lawrence always looks directly at the final goal of Christian life, the perfection of love, insisting on charity as the fulfillment of all the virtues and gifts.

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charity is supernatural. It seems like real gold, but it is not; real gold is tested in the furnace...”

<sup>111</sup>G. Moioli, *op.cit.*, 987.