

## CREATION AND GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD.

### **Why is God called the Creator of heaven and earth?**

*God is called Creator of heaven and earth, because, by his word, he made heaven and earth out of nothing.*

The word "Creator" means one who can produce something out of nothing. The most skillful workman is not able to create anything; he can only give a certain new form to such things as already exist. Man needs stones, mortar, and lumber, to build a house; silver and brass, to make a watch. Physicians, machinists, chemists, nay, even jugglers, make some surprising things, which suppose superior genius; but they do not make these things of nothing: they must have tools, instruments, substances, wherewith they may work. The most curious thing that was ever made was probably Vaucanson's duck. That famous mechanician amused himself with making a little duck, in which he concealed a great number of very fine springs, most skillfully disposed. When he had finished, people came from all parts to admire his automaton. The duck was thrown into the water, and every one could see it swim by itself, open its wings, shake them briskly, pick up grain with its bill, swallow, digest and pass it out, just as a live duck would do. We may suppose that the spectators were all amazed; they clapped their hands, and felicitated Vaucanson on his wonderful genius. And yet, what is that to the works of God, who, by a single act of his all-powerful will, created all this vast universe out of nothing? He made heaven, that beautiful place where the angels and saints dwell. He made the sky above, and all the bright heavenly bodies the sun, the moon and the stars. He also made the earth where we dwell, clothed it with beautiful flowers, trees, and all kinds of plants, and filled it with so many various animals. To enable us to form some great idea of God's power of drawing the universe out of nothing, let us remember that, although this earth of ours is only one of a vast system of planets, yet it is twenty-seven thousand miles in circumference, and it would take two years and a half to traverse it completely, at the rate of thirty miles a day.

The sun, being nearly three millions of miles in circumference, could not be traversed, at the same rate of speed, in less than two hundred and seventy-four years; yet this sun, so immeasurably greater than our earth, is supposed to be immeasurably less than certain of the fixed stars. Let us reflect, again, that the sun is distant from us at least ninety-five million miles. It is impossible to conceive in the mind so vast a space. Yet there are planets twenty times farther removed from us than the sun; and even their distance is nothing, humanly speaking, in comparison with that of the fixed stars. The light of some of those stars, according to the opinion of astronomers, has not yet reached us, although it has been travelling towards us at the rate of twelve millions of miles a minute since the creation of the world. And each of those stars is the center of a planetary system vastly greater than our own. Now, those millions of worlds that bewilder calculation, or even conception, were created by God out of nothing: "He spoke, and they were made; he commanded, and they were created. (Ps. cviii, 5.)

There have been, and there are still, men who have impiously asserted that the world made itself, or was made by chance, or is eternal, or is but one substance which is called God that all other things are but different modifications of God. The folly and absurdities of those impious men are evident even to the dullest minds. How could the world make itself, or have existence, unless it had it from another? Or how could this vast and beautiful universe, those grand, magnificent heavenly bodies, the countless living animals, and man himself, have been made by chance, which is nothing? Did chance ever make the spring and wheels of a watch, put them together, and make them tell the time? Or did chance ever

build a house and furnish it? If, then, it requires an intelligent being, that is, a being capable of thinking and knowing, to make a watch or build a house, how much more does it require an almighty and all-wise Being to make this vast universe and all that it contains?

There are also many convincing proofs to show that the world is not eternal, but had a beginning: for we know from history the origin of families, of kingdoms, of nations; we know the period at which the earth began to be peopled. So that, according to history, the origin of the world cannot be traced farther back than six thousand years, as related by Moses in Holy Scripture. (*Note that this number of 6,000 is not a dogma of faith, Moses could have skipped generations, for it is just as true to say that you are descended from your grandparents as from your parents. However it is nearly impossible that men have been on the earth for more than 10,000 years*) The impiety of those who have made such foolish assertions concerning the existence of the world, has been solemnly torn down by the Vatican Council: "If anyone," say the fathers of that council, "confess not that the world and all things, both spiritual and material, which are contained in it, have, in their whole substance, been produced by God out of nothing ... let him be anathema." (Canon 5: Of God, the Creator of all things.)

But nothing is more absurd and more impious than the assertion that the world is but one substance which is called God, and that all other things are but modifications of that God. Those who make this assertion are called pantheists. If all things in the world are but modifications of that one substance called God, they must, of course, adhere to that substance as to their subject. Hence, if a man is sick, a portion of the Divinity is sick; and if another man is well, that portion of the Divinity is well. What folly greater than this! Assuredly, if the philosopher is not governed by the power of religion, his conduct will be absurd and even despicable to the most ignorant individual of the lowest rank. The venerable Father Clement Hofbauer, C. SS R., possessed great power of attracting the young and the intellectual. Several of his confreres and pupils who were leading holy lives under his guidance, spoke to him about Professor Madlener, of the university of Vienna, who was known to be a pantheist. "Father," they said, "he is a splendid man, so kind and so intellectual. O! if you could only catch him!" Hearing that Madlener was sick, Father Clement presented himself at his bedside. But he was not a welcome guest. As he could do nothing with the ungracious invalid, he took up a piece of chalk and wrote on the foot-board of the bed, "A portion of the divinity is sick." The reflections drawn from this absurd announcement led to the conversion of Professor Madlener. He became a most fervent Redemptorist Father. (Life of the Venerable Clement Hofbauer.) The impiety of the pantheists has been condemned by the fathers of the Vatican Council, in the following words: "If any one shall say that the substance and the essence of God and of all things are one and the same; or if any one shall say that finite things both corporeal and spiritual, or, at least, spiritual, have emanated from the divine substance; or that the divine essence, by the manifestation and evolution of itself, becomes all things; or, lastly, that God is a universal or indefinite being, which, by determining itself, constitutes the universality of things, distinct according to genera, species, and individuals, let him be anathema."

### **In how many days did God create the world?**

*God created the world in six days, or periods of time. (Gen. i.)*

God is infinite in power. He could, then, have created all things in one single instant. He chose, however, six days to put into order the whole work of creation. He first created at once all the matter of which the world is composed, and this is creation, properly so called, and afterwards he was employed six days in

arranging that vast matter, and in forming from it the different kinds of material creatures of which the world is composed. No doubt, God can do as easily one thing as another, because he is all-powerful; in itself, however, it is far easier to arrange matter, already existing, than to draw it from nothing. If God, then, in one single instant, did that which is most difficult, and was employed six days in doing that which is less difficult, it follows that he wished to teach us that, in arranging the whole universe, he acted neither through impotence nor through weakness, neither through constraint nor through necessity, but only as it pleased and when it pleased him. Hence the fathers of the Vatican Council teach: "If any one shall say that God created, not by his will, free from all necessity, but by a necessity equal to the necessity whereby he loves himself, let him be anathema."

No one can tell the number of years which have elapsed since that moment when God at once created all the matter of which the world is composed. We are told in Holy Scripture that, "in the beginning, God created heaven and earth." By these words, "in the beginning," we are to understand an indefinite period prior to that time in which the earth, created in the beginning of things, was arranged in order. By these words, "in the beginning," then, is not meant the beginning of the first day, but the beginning of time. Before the first creation time did not exist it only began to exist from the moment that God created heaven and earth; that is, drew from nothing the materials of the universe, that immense quantity of matter which his divine power unfolded, and from which he arranged, both the earth on which we dwell, and all the heavenly bodies. But that immense quantity of matter was but a vast chaos. "The earth," says Holy Scripture, "was void and empty (that is, invisible and without shape or form); darkness was spread over the face of the abyss, and the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters." (Gen. i.) This chaos, this immense mass of matter, is to receive, under the hand of Almighty God, various forms in succession.

This is the explanation, too, given by St. Augustine. "Heaven and earth," he says, "are here called *materia prima* (the first material), from the fact that from it heaven on the second day, and the earth on the third day, were to be formed." (Lib. i, De Gen. contra Manich., c. vii.) And again: "That rude matter which God made out of nothing was called at first heaven and earth, not because these already existed, but because they could be; for heaven and earth are described as being made afterwards: just as if, in considering the seed of a tree, we should say that the roots are there, and also the trunk and the leaves, and the fruit and the branches, not that they already exist, but because thence they will spring." (Lib. i, De Gen. ad. lit., c. xiv.) By heaven is meant the first crude matter, out of which God, on the second day, formed the highest heaven, the empyrean, called by St. Paul the heaven of heavens, the abode of the blessed. And this is the opinion of Venerable Bede, and St. Basil and St. Thomas. The creation, then, detailed in the first chapter of Genesis, beginning with the so-called creation of light, is the bringing of order out of confusion, and the peopling of a world which was before unpeopled.

On the first day, God converted a large portion into luminous matter, and separated this luminous matter from that which was not so: "Let there be light, and there was light." The light here spoken of was not the light of the sun. The most learned men admit as certain that luminous matter exists quite independent of luminous bodies. This luminous matter, they say, is a certain fluid called ether, which extends through space, and surrounds and penetrates all bodies. When this ether is made to vibrate, a succession of undulations in its substance follows and produces light. This view of the subject is confirmed by the recent experiments made by Young, Arago, Fresnel, and others (*Note, science discovers new laws which may make older discoveries not as clear as they were thought to be. I am not*

*vouching for the science experiments here put forth. This is not part of the Bible but one person's way of understanding what it means that light was created before the sun).* And "God saw that the light was good," that is, suited the purpose for which he had produced it, "and he separated the light from the darkness. He called the light Day, and the darkness Night. And there was evening and morning one day." (Gen.)

On the second day, God formed the terrestrial atmosphere, or the aerial region, which, on account of its apparent proximity to the starry region, received the name of heaven, or firmament. In this region he caused a great mass of water to ascend in the form of clouds, and the other portion of watery matter remained mixed with the earthy matter. This we are told in these words of Holy Scripture: "And God said: Let there be a firmament made amidst the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made a firmament, and divided the waters that were under the firmament from the waters that were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament heaven; and the evening and the morning were the second day." This second day consisted, as well as the first, of a time of darkness, and of a time of light.

On the third day, God made the waters on the earth gather into one place, in order that the earth might become visible. All on a sudden, the waters collected in one place, and the dry land appeared. This great collection of water God called seas. The earth being separated from the water, it now becomes at once fruitful in all kinds of plants, flowers, trees, etc., which possess the property of bearing seeds, in order to propagate and multiply their species. This we are told in the following words of Holy Scripture: "God also said: Let the waters that are under the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear. And it was done so. And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering together of the waters he called seas. And God saw that it was good. And he said: Let the earth bring forth the green herb, and such as may seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind, which may have seed in itself upon the earth. And it was so done. And the earth brought forth the green herb, and such as yieldeth seed according to its kind, and the tree that beareth fruit, having seed each one according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day." (Gen. i, 9-13.)

On the fourth day, God formed the sun, the moon, the planets, the comets, the stars and all the heavenly bodies, from the materials which had existed since the first day of creation. God formed these materials into globes of different kinds and of various sizes. He placed them at certain distances from one another and gave each one of them its peculiar movement. "And God said: Let there be lights made in the firmament of heaven, to divide the day and the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years. To shine in the firmament of heaven, and to give light upon the earth. And it was so done. And God made two great lights: a greater light to rule the day; and a lesser light to rule the night: and the stars. And he set them in the firmament of heaven to shine upon the earth, and to rule the day and the night, and to divide the light and the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day."

On the fifth day, God formed and gave life to the different kinds of fishes, and to all the various sorts of birds. God also said: "Let the waters bring forth the creeping creature having life, and the fowl that may fly over the earth under the firmament of heaven. ... And God saw that it was good, and he blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the waters of the sea; and let the birds be multiplied on the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day." (Gen. i, 20-22.)

In the first part of the sixth day, God ordered that every kind of living animals should come forth from the substance of the earth; and at the command of God living animals of every kind came forth from the earth. God said: "Let the earth bring forth the living creature in its kind, cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth, according to their kinds. And it was so done. And God made the beasts of the earth, according to their kinds, and cattle, and everything that creepeth on the earth, after its kind. And God saw that it was good." (Gen. i, 24, 25.) If it required an infinite intelligence and an infinite power to bestow on different vegetable substances that ineffable form and organization which we so much admire, how much more must an infinite intelligence be required to conceive and put into operation the still more admirable mechanism which we observe in the different kinds of animals which inhabit the earth, the air, and the waters!

In the second part of the sixth day, God formed and created man to be the king of the earth. "Again, God said: Let us make man to our image and likeness: and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts, and the whole earth. ... And God created man to his own image: male and female he created them. And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth. ... And God saw all the things he made, and they were very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. So the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the furniture of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work, which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done." (Gen. i, ii.)

This short account of the creation of the world and of man was faithfully preserved in the memory of man, owing to the long lives of the patriarchs; who transmitted to their posterity, for many ages, the account of whatever interesting events they had either witnessed themselves, or heard from their fathers. This tradition Moses committed to writing, assisted by the Holy Ghost. ...

Now, if it is asked, "What time has elapsed since God created the world?" we cannot know with certainty how many years have passed away since God began the work of creation; but, since he finished that work, that is, from the creation of man, we can count nearly six thousand years. Holy Scripture tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; that, in that early creation, there was no order, but, on the contrary, a vast chaos, an immense abyss, over which the Spirit of God moved, but it does not tell us how long it pleased God to leave the element in that state. The Scripture also tells us that afterwards God arranged his work in order, and was employed six days in perfecting it. But were those days just as long as our days, or were they indefinite periods of time? St. Augustine says: "We should not hastily pronounce on the nature of the six days of creation, nor assert that they were similar to our ordinary days." (Gen. B. iv, No. 44.) ...

The word day (iom) is often used in Scripture in the sense of period (Gen. ii, 17; Ex. x, 18; xxxii, 34; Isa. xi, 16; and especially, Gen. ii, 4). In the Mosaic account of the creation especially, the word day must have an indefinite sense, as being not the day of man, but the day of God, with whom one day is as a thousand years. It must be granted that, in the Mosaic account of the creation, the word day has the same sense for the six days of the creation, and that the first, second, or third days are not different sorts of days, in a word, that those days are similar, since the terms which Moses, uses are identical. So much is clear. Now, it was only on the fourth day that the luminaries were formed, in order that they might "divide the day and the night" and "be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years." The three preceding days were not days that had their morning and evening, their separation of day and

night, since the luminaries which make these divisions did not yet exist. It is impossible to understand these first three days as meaning literally, "And there was morning and there was evening, one day." How, then, are we to understand them, unless as meaning, "And of the beginning and of the end was composed the first epoch" or, as Moses says, "the first generation"?

But, if we are obliged so to understand the first three days, we can hardly escape the conclusion that we must so understand the other three, and that the six days being, as we have seen, similar, are not six days, but six epochs of undetermined duration. St. Augustine, St. Athanasius, Origen, St. Thomas of Aquin, and Bossuet, favor this interpretation.

Moreover, according to the narrative of Moses, each of the six days lasted "from the evening to the morning." Now, it is not mentioned that the seventh day ended at the morning of another. And this seventh day still lasts, according to the belief of the fathers of the Church; it has lasted for nearly six thousand years, and will only end from the evening of time to the morning of eternity; or, rather, it will never end, but become one with the eternal day. Now, as the first, second, third, and seventh days of Genesis were not considered by the author of Genesis as ordinary days, it is difficult for anyone to maintain that he did consider as such the fourth, fifth and sixth days. This theory is allowed by the Church to be taught in her universities. We do not have certainty.

If we ask why the Church has allowed this full liberty of discussion, St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, gives the following reply: "In matters of faith we must make a twofold distinction. There are certain things which, in themselves, belong to the substance of faith, such as, that God is Three, and One, and the like, in which no one is allowed to think differently; and some things there are which belong only accidentally to the faith, inasmuch as they are found in Scripture, which faith teaches to have been promulgated at the dictation of the Holy Ghost; and these, indeed, may without danger be unknown to those who are not obliged to know Scripture, such, for instance, as many points of history: and even on these points the saints have differed, giving various explanations of the divine Scripture.

Thus, with regard to the origin of the world, **there is something which belongs to the substance of faith, viz., that the world came into being by the creative act of God, and in this all the saints agree;** but as to the particular mode and order in which it was made, this belongs but accidentally to the faith, inasmuch as it is contained in Scripture, keeping to the truth of which, the saints have given various interpretations. (In 2dm. Sent. Dist. xii, a. 2.)

The system of those, however, who consider the six days of creation as ordinary days, and who maintain that the arrangement of the universe took place in those six days, seems to appear more in conformity with the literal meaning of the words of Genesis: "Six days thou shalt labor, and do all thy works, but on the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. ... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and the sea, and all the things that are in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the seventh day and sanctified it." (Ex. xx, 9-11.) If the Sabbath-day, then, be a natural day of twenty-four hours, the other six days of creation must be considered so, too, and not as unlimited periods; for no distinction is made between the days of the creation and the Sabbath-day. To this opinion the following reply is made: To be his imitator, God, indeed, commanded man to work during six periods (days), and to rest on the seventh. But the divine periods may have been very great the human periods very small. Man's imitation of God should be a miniature one. "Be ye perfect," says our Lord in the Gospel, "as your heavenly Father is perfect:" in which words our Lord does not mean to say that we

should attempt to be as perfect as his Father, which is impossible; but that we should imitate his perfections as much as possible.

**As the holy Catholic Church has not pronounced anything with regard to this matter, one may, without censure, believe that those six days of creation were indefinite periods of time, or natural days like ours.**

We do not profess to be able to understand all the difficulties which may be raised. We are not bound to give an account of all difficulties in Scripture any more than in revelation, or in revelation any more than in science. We are not ashamed to say with St. Augustine: "Let us believe and immovably affirm that in Scripture falsehood has no place."

We neither derive our religion from the Scriptures, nor does it depend upon them. Our religion was in the world before the New Testament was written.

This faith teaches us that God did not place us in this world to seek and find our happiness in understanding everything in nature, much less in understanding things that are above our understanding. We are to believe that the Catholic Church is divinely established, and that we are saved by believing her. After death, we shall see that we were great fools for losing so much time in troubling ourselves about ever so many useless things, a time which was given us for better and more meritorious purposes.

From the words, "God rested," we are not to conclude that God was tired and needed rest. The meaning of these words is that, after having made nature to pass through six successive labors, which brought it to the time when man took possession of it, he stopped the whole series. He blessed it, and sanctified it, and stamped it with that solemn regularity, that invariable harmony even in its variety, that calm, that order, that profound repose, which has marked its course for six thousand years, and which is the image of the unutterable peace and repose which reign in the bosom of its Author.

### **Why did God create the world?**

*God created the world to make known his goodness, ~by communicating to creatures the riches of his bounty.*

To explain this great truth, I shall have recourse to the following parable. There was once a celebrated architect, who built a most magnificent palace. When the costly edifice was completed, he gave it to good people for their dwelling. But they soon behaved badly and were a scandal to all their neighbors, who often said to one another: "Why was so splendid a palace built for such wicked people?" At last the king and the queen arrived, and took possession of the palace. They forgave the servants for their bad behavior, and tried to make them good again. Then the people said: "Now we understand why this magnificent building was erected: it was for the king and the queen" The architect in this parable is God the Father. He built a magnificent palace the world. He put into it Adam and Eve. They soon behaved badly, and now it was said by the angels: "Why was so splendid a palace, the world, created for these wicked people" At last, the king and the queen arrived, that is? Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin, his Mother. They pardoned the servants and tried to make them good again, and the angels exclaimed: "Now we understand why this great and splendid palace, the world, was created: it was for Jesus Christ and his Mother the king and the queen of the world."

God decreed from all eternity to create the world as a dwelling-place for men, where he wished to manifest to them his goodness by communicating to them the riches of his bounty. But they were to make themselves worthy of those riches by leading a holy life, a life of obedience to his will. But God foresaw from all eternity that men would not live according to the end of their creation. God, then, would have been frustrated in his design of creating the world and men, had he not decreed, from all eternity, the incarnation of his Son, and, consequently, the creation of his Mother, for the redemption of men. It was then principally for the sake of the Redeemer and his Mother that the world was created, for they were to come into this world for man's justification and glorification, which were to be operated through Jesus Christ and his Mother: "For the order of nature," says St. Thomas, "was created and established for the order of grace." The principal end of the creation of the universe, I say, is Christ, his Mother, and the elect, in order that the elect may receive the grace and glory of God here below through Christ and his Mother. Although it be true that Christ and the Blessed Virgin are, so to speak, certain parts of this world, which is prior to them in material existence, yet, if considered in their final end, they are prior to the world. For this reason, St. Paul calls Jesus Christ, "the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things he may hold the primacy. Because in him it hath well pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, making peace through the blood of the cross, both as to the things on earth, and the things that are in heaven." (Col. i, 18-20.)

In like manner, the holy Church applies to the Blessed Virgin the words of Holy Scripture: "I came out of the mouth of the Most High, the first-born of all creatures. I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth." (Ecclus. xxiv, 5, 6.) She gave to the world that never-failing light, Christ, the Sun of Justice, and through him the light of faith: "And he that made me rested in my tabernacle." (Ibid, xxiv, 12.)

There is, then, a certain mutual dependence between the creation of the world, and the nativity of Christ and the Blessed Virgin. For God did not wish that Christ and the Blessed Virgin should be born except in this world; and again, he did not wish that this world should exist without Jesus Christ and his Mother: nay, it was on their account principally that he created it. They being, then, the final reason for the creation of the universe. God also wished that all men should be dependent on them. He decreed to institute through them the order of grace; that is, he decreed that, through Jesus Christ and his Mother, men should receive in this world all kinds of spiritual and temporal blessings, should be rendered holy here below, and enjoy God's own happiness in heaven.

Let us look around us in the world; let us look up to the heavens. There we behold the sun, the moon, the twinkling stars. God the Father has made them all for us, to give us heat and light. Let us look around us upon the earth, with its snowcapped mountains, its tangled forests, its smiling meadows, and let us remember that God the Father has made all these beautiful things for love of us, for our own use and benefit. Let us look upon ourselves, our body and our soul. God has given us a being far superior to all that we can see in nature. He has given us a soul that can never die; He has made us like Himself, free, intelligent, immortal. But, more than all this, God the Father gave us His only-begotten Son in the manger of Bethlehem, and upon the cross. God the Son gives Himself to us at each holy Mass, and in each Holy Communion; and God the Holy Ghost gives Himself in baptism, in confirmation, and whenever we receive a sacrament worthily. God has also prepared for us a heaven where we may reign with Him as kings and queens, in never-ending happiness, in the brightness of his eternal glory; for He has promised even to give himself to us as our exceeding great reward. "God," exclaims St. Augustine, "has given the earth; He has given heaven; He has given His kingdom; He has given Himself: what more has



He to give? Allow me to say it: How prodigal art thou of thyself!" Let us then always look upon all we have and are as so many blessings which the goodness of God has bestowed upon us, that we may become more and more worthy of all kinds of spiritual and temporal benefits. (*As in the Mass when the priest blesses the water at the Offertory, wonderfully created, and more wonderfully recreated*)

### **How long will this world last?**

*The world will last as long as God is pleased to preserve and to govern it. The day of its destruction is known to God alone.*

The world in which we live is the temple of God. The earth, with all its thousands of flowers, forms the carpeted floor. The blue sky above, with its millions of twinkling stars, is the vaulted dome. God created this temple for man, in order that man might worship Him therein as the Lord of heaven and earth, and do His holy will in all things. God will preserve this temple as long as men are faithful to Him. But this temple is of no use as soon as man ceases to worship God, and refuses to obey Him. About four thousand years ago all men, except Noe and his family, had fallen away from God; God then drowned the world in the universal deluge. A time will come when all men, with the exception of a small number, will abandon God and follow their evil inclinations. It is then that God will destroy the world as a useless building. But when will that destruction take place? We know, for certain, that "heaven and earth shall pass. ... But of that day and hour no one knoweth, no, not the angels, but the Father alone." (Matt, xxiv, 36.) When God intends to do something extraordinary, he generally prepares men for it by revealing to them beforehand what he is about to do. Thus we know that, when he intended to destroy the world by the deluge, he made it known through Noe a hundred years before this dreadful event took place. Again, when the Son of God had become man, and was about to make himself known as the Redeemer of the world, he sent St. John the Baptist to prepare the people for his coming. When he intended to destroy Jerusalem, he foretold its destruction, by the prophets. Jesus Christ has also described the signs by which men may know when the end of the world is at hand. God acts thus with men, because he does not wish to overwhelm them by his strange and wonderful dealings. One of those signs which will precede the end of the world is the universal apostasy from the faith and from the obedience to the pope, into which, according to St. Paul, Christians will fall. (1 Tim. iv, 1; 2 Thess. ii, 8.) Another sign will be the coming of Antichrist, who will come during that great apostasy from the faith. Another sign will be the coming of Henech and Elias, who are still alive. They will come at the time of Antichrist to preach to the faithful, especially to the Jews, to convert them. As apostasy from the faith is daily becoming more and more general, there can be no doubt that the end of the world is approaching very fast. Let us always bear in mind that, if we are not fervent Catholics, we occupy this world in vain; and God will cast us out of it into hell, as he cast the rebellious angels out of heaven into everlasting torments.

### **How does God preserve the world?**

*God preserves the world by the same power of his will with which he created it.*

We have seen that God in the beginning created the crude mass out of which he formed, in six days, heaven and earth. Whatever, in those six days of creation, was ordered by his all-powerful will to take place, was ordered at the same time, and by the same act of his will, to continue so to the end of time. When he ordered light to separate from the darkness, He willed, at the same time, that night and day should continue their constant succession to the end of time. When He ordered the waters to gather together in their allotted place, He willed, at the same time, that they should stay there to the end of

time. When he commanded the earth to be clad with verdure, and the trees to bring forth fruit, He willed, at the same time, that this should be so to the end of the world; and every creature forthwith acted in obedience to the divine summons, the promptness and fulness of which obedience will be seen to the end of the world. Behold, God commanded the sea not to overflow its bounds; and it has ever since reverently kept itself within the limits marked out by its Creator! God commanded the sun, the moon, and the stars to rise and set regularly, and keep in their path; and they have ever since done so. God commanded the earth to produce every variety of trees and plants, and every kind of fruit and grain; and the earth has ever since continued to do so.

It is, then, by that same powerful act of God's will by which the world was drawn from nothing into existence, that it has continued and will continue to exist to the end of time. "God," says St. Paul, "upholds all things by the word of his power." (Heb. i, 3.) "And God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good" (Gen. i? 34), so good as to remain good to the end of time.

### **How does God govern the world?**

*God governs the material world, and all irrational creatures, according to the laws of his omnipotence and wisdom, but he governs all rational creatures according to the laws of his goodness and justice.*

God created the world, and, in order to preserve and govern it, he has placed in nature certain powers, he has laid down certain laws. All irrational creatures obey these laws of God's wisdom and power, and it is thus that God governs them, according to what the Wise Man says: "God, with a certain law and compass, enclosed the depth; he compassed the sea with its bounds, and set a law to the waters, that they should not pass their limits. (Prov. viii, 27-30.)

But as to all rational creatures, angels and men, God wishes to govern them by the laws of His goodness and justice. The law of God's goodness for man is that man shall always glorify God by doing His holy will, and thus become, as it were, one with God, by partaking of His perfections, of His peace, and of His joy here below, and far more so in heaven. The law of God's justice for man is, that, if man refuses to do God's will on earth, he shall, for all eternity, be subjected to the torments which God's justice has decreed for all rebellious creatures. Man, then, being endowed as he is with free will, is left free to make a right use of the noble gift of his liberty, or to abuse it to lift up his head and say, "I will not serve," I will not render obedience to the commands of the Most High. He, therefore, who shall not glorify in heaven God's infinite goodness bestowed on the good use of the free will, shall glorify God's infinite justice in hell, merited by the abuse of this same free will. "All irrational creatures," says St. Jerome, "show a sense of their Maker, by ever holding themselves in readiness to obey the laws and commands of God; for, though many of them be wanting in life and feeling, they still have an instinct which impels them to do the will of Him who made them." (Lib. i, in cap. viii, Matt.) Man alone, gifted with reason, can be found to show more want of reason than beings which are deprived of reason and feeling, by withdrawing from submission to God's holy will. What monstrosity can ever equal this? "See, then," exclaims St. Paul, "the goodness and the severity of God: towards them, indeed, that are fallen, the severity; but towards thee, the goodness of God, if thou abide in goodness." (Rom. xi, 22.)

### **If God governs all things according to his will, does he also will the evil of this world?**

*No ; God wills no evil, but he permits it: 1. in order not to interfere with the free will of man; 2. to manifest his wisdom, by drawing good from evil.*

All things that happen in this world, except sin, happen by the order and will of God. God is neither the cause nor the author of sin; for, as it is against the nature of fire to cool, and of light to darken, so, also, it is far more repugnant to the infinite holiness and goodness of God to love evil, or to be the cause of it. "Thy eyes are pure, O Lord!" says the Prophet Habacuc; "thou canst not look upon evils, nor behold iniquity." (i, 13.) To express our aversion for a thing, we say, "I cannot bear the sight of it." In like manner, to express the great horror which God has of iniquity, the prophet says, God cannot bear the sight of it. Holy Scripture speaks, in innumerable places, of the hatred which God bears to sin. It is, then, of faith that God is neither the cause nor the author of sin. But God permits moral evil that is, disobedience, in justice; in a word, sin. Having created man a free agent, he will not prevent him from exercising the privileges of free will.

But, sin alone excepted, all other things, such as sickness, pains, afflictions, misfortunes, etc., happen by the order and will of God. This is an undeniable truth. What the pagans believe about chance is but a mere chimera or impossibility. Chance, or fortune, never bestows upon us those goods which are commonly called the goods of fortune; it is God alone who distributes them. The Holy Ghost teaches us this truth by the Wise Man, who says: "Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God." (Eccclus. xi, 14.) He has ordained and regulated all things from all eternity. He has taken an account of every hair of our head, and not one of them shall fall to the ground without his will. "Are not two sparrows," says Jesus Christ, "sold for a farthing? And not one of them falls to the ground without the permission of your heavenly Father." (Matt. x, 19.) In regard to God, there is no such thing as chance. It is by the very will of God that all those things are regulated in which chance seems to have a share. "They draw lots," says the Wise Man, "but it is by God that they are directed." (Prov. xvi, 33.) Let us never imagine that anything happens by chance; what seems most of all to depend upon chance is an effect of his unalterable will, which adjusts all things for his wise purposes. "The lot fell upon Matthias" (Acts i, 26), says St. Luke: without doubt it was not by chance that the lot fell on him, but by a particular disposition of divine Providence, which, from all eternity, had destined Matthias for an apostle, and made use of lots in his election to the apostleship.

A man once sent two servants by different roads, wishing them to meet each other. When they met they thought it was accidental or by chance, but it was not chance to the man who sent them. So it is precisely the same in things which seem to us to happen here below by chance. In regard to ourselves, who see things happen contrary to our expectation, and without ever having so much as thought of them, it is an effect of chance. But, in regard to God, it is an execution of his eternal decrees for purposes which are known to him alone.

What we have just said, namely, that all misfortunes and sufferings come from God, is a truth so firmly supported by the authority of Holy Scripture that it would be useless to dwell on it any longer, if the devil, by his vain subtleties, did not endeavor to obscure it, and render it doubtful. For, from the truth, that God is neither the cause nor the author of sin, he draws a false conclusion, making some believe that the evils which happen by natural causes, or come from irrational creatures, such as sickness, hunger, thirst, heat and cold, come, indeed, from God, because the causes from which they proceed are incapable of sin; but that the evils which happen by means of man, such as robberies, slanders, maltreatment, etc., do not come from God, but proceed only from the malice of man. This opinion is a very dangerous error. To do away with it, we must remember that in every sinful action two things occur, namely: the exterior action and the malice of the will. God is the cause and author of the exterior action itself, because the life and strength required to perform it are from God: but man alone is the

cause and author of the malice of his will, which induces him to do what God has forbidden. To illustrate: There is a certain man. He kills his neighbor in a duel. To kill him, he must have a sword in his hand; he must lift up and stretch out his arm, and perform several other natural motions which may be considered in themselves, and are quite distinct from that malicious will which caused him to kill his fellow-being. God is the cause of the physical motions; he produces them, as he produces all other effects which proceed from irrational creatures: for, as they cannot move themselves or act without God, so neither can man, without God's help, move his arms, or put his hand to the sword. Besides, there is nothing in this kind of natural actions or motions that is bad; for, were a man to make use of them either for his own defense, or in a just war, or were he, as a minister of justice, to kill another, he would undoubtedly commit no sin whatever. But what makes the action sinful is the malice of the will which induces him to commit the murder, which, it is true, God might prevent, but does not prevent, but permits it by a secret judgment of his providence. So that we say, in truth, that God neither is nor can be the cause or the author of the crime. But as to all other evils, whether they proceed from natural causes and irrational creatures, or whether they come from men or from any other source whatsoever, we must believe for certain that they come from God, and happen to us by the decrees of his divine wisdom. It is God who moves the hand of him who strikes us; it is God who moves the tongue of our neighbor who gives us injurious language. "There is no evil in the city," says the Prophet Amos, "which the Lord hath not done." (Amos iii, 1.) When God speaks in Holy Scripture of the chastisements which he intended to inflict upon David for his crimes, He makes Himself the author of all those evils which were to come upon him by means of his son Absalom. "It shall be" says he, "from your own family that I shall raise up evil upon you. I will take away your wives before your face, and will deliver them up to your neighbors. You have sinned in private; but I will accomplish what I have said in the presence of all the people of Israel, and in the sight of the sun." (2 Kings xii.) It is for this reason that impious kings and emperors who inflict so many cruelties upon the people of God, are termed in Holy Scripture the instruments of divine justice. As God often makes use of the devil to try the faithfulness of his servants, or to chastise men for their sins, as we see in the history of Job and of King Saul, so, also, can he make use of wicked men to try our virtue, or to punish us for our sins.

"My servants," said our Lord to St. Catharine of Sienna, "by persevering in the consideration that all things which happen and which they endure proceed from me, and not from their neighbor, feel animated with unconquerable patience, which baffles every attack; so that they suffer everything, not only with a tranquil mind, but also with a cheerful heart, because in all things, whether exterior or interior, they taste the sweetness of my unspeakable love. To believe and to consider that I order all things sweetly, and that everything proceeds from the profound source of my love, is to give true honor to my goodness."

God permits the evils of this world to manifest his wisdom, by drawing good from evil. We will illustrate this great and consoling truth by a few examples. God permitted the fall of our first parents, which is the source of all the evils of this world. Now, what good has the wisdom of God drawn from this great evil? Wishing to repair the fault of our first parents, the wisdom of God invented, and the power of God accomplished, two of the greatest works that he could invent and accomplish, namely: the incarnation of Christ, and the maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Thomas Aquinas asks whether God can make creatures which surpass in perfection those already created: and he answers, He can, except the incarnation of Christ and the maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In other words, God can create numberless worlds, all different from one another in beauty: but he cannot make anything greater than

the works of the incarnation of Christ and of the maternity of the Blessed Virgin. Why can He not? Because God himself is most intimately united to each of these works, and is their object. Most assuredly, there is nothing greater than God. Hence there cannot be a work greater than any of these works with which his divinity is so intimately united. As there can be no man more perfect than Christ, because He is the man-God, so, also, no mother can be made more perfect than the Mother of God. These works are, in a certain sense, of infinite dignity, on account of being so intimately united to God, the infinite good. There cannot, then, be anything better, greater or more perfect, than the works of the incarnation of the Son of God and of the maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, because there cannot be anything better or greater than God Himself. Now, had our first parents remained innocent, the Son of God would not have become man for us, and, consequently, we would have no Mother of God, and the Lord of heaven and earth would not dwell with us a man-God in the Blessed Sacrament. Hence it is that the Church exclaims during the Easter Vigil: "Happy fault of our first parents, on account of which we have received so great a Redeemer!" so that, "where sin abounded, grace did more abound." (Rom. v, 20.)

Another instance to show how God knows to draw good from evil is the following: The Patriarch Jacob had twelve sons. One of them, called Joseph, was a very good son. One day, he told his father of some very wicked thing that his brothers had done. They were very angry, because Joseph had done his duty in informing against them. They said they would take revenge on him. One day, when they were minding the sheep in the country, Joseph came to see them. When they saw Joseph coming, they said to one another: Let us kill him. While they were thinking of killing him, some merchants happened to pass by. So they thought they would sell their brother Joseph to the merchants. Joseph cried and sobbed, and asked them to have pity on him, and not to sell him. But they had no pity for their brother. They sold him to the merchants for twenty pieces of silver. The merchants carried Joseph far away, into the land of Egypt. Now, let us see what good the wisdom of God drew from the crime of Joseph's brothers. Some years had passed, and a frightful famine had come over the land where Joseph's father and brothers were living. There was no bread to eat. On hearing that corn was sold in Egypt, they took sacks and went there to buy it. Having come into Egypt, they went to the house of the ruler, because all the corn belonged to him. There they found that the ruler was their own brother, Joseph, whom they had sold. Joseph cried through joy to see his brothers again. He gave them plenty of corn. He told them not to be afraid for having sold him, because it had been God's will that he should be sold to go into Egypt, to provide corn for them during the famine. So the good which God drew from the crime of Joseph's brothers was to save Joseph and his father and brothers from dying of hunger in the famine.

There are many saints in heaven. Some of these led, for some time, very sinful lives on earth. After their conversion, they began to love God, to labor for his glory, and the salvation of souls, far more than many an innocent soul ever did. Why? Because, when they reflected on the goodness of God which had kept them out of hell and waited for their conversion, they felt so much touched and overcome by this divine mercy, that they were ready to take upon themselves every hardship and cross in order to please him. Their sins were so many tongues which God used to tell them how ardently they should love him; they were so many incentives by which God spurred them on to pass through every difficulty and labor for His sake; they were so many weights by which God kept them humble and despicable in their own eyes; they were so many reasons which God used to make them kind, affable, charitable, and indulgent towards other poor sinners. Witness the good thief on the cross; witness St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Margaret of Cortona, and many other saints. How true, therefore, is what our Lord said to

St. Catharine of Sienna! "I wish," he said to this saint, "that you should often meditate upon me, your God, whose wisdom and knowledge are infinite; who see and penetrate everything at a glance; who cannot be deceived, nor disturbed by any error; who govern you, and, at the same time, heaven and earth, because I am God, the most wise Being. And in order that you may understand something of the effects of this wisdom of mine, you must remember that, from the evil of guilt and punishment, I can draw a good which by far surpasses the extent of the evil itself." Let us see now what good God draws for us from those trials which we also call evils, but which, viewed in the light of faith, prove rather to be true blessings.

First. The trials which God inflicts on us in this life are often designed to be the means of temporal prosperity. Joseph was sold as a wretched slave, by his brothers, to the Ishmaelites. Loaded with chains in a dark dungeon, he bewailed his hard fate. Who could have imagined that the ignominy of chains and the disgrace of slavery were destined to be the means of leading Joseph to the throne, and of obtaining for him the viceroyalty of Egypt? Yet, so it was. Whilst no one thought of it, God, in his wisdom, was secretly preparing to turn the shame of a prison into the glory of the highest honors.

Saul lost his beasts of burden, and taking the loss for a great misfortune, full of anxiety, he scoured the plains, climbed the hills, traversed the forests, in quest of his beasts. Who would have divined that, on that very day, Saul was to find the royal crown and throne of Israel, instead of a few worthless animals? Yet, so it was. God, who foresaw it, was making ready to compensate the loss with the gain of a kingdom.

Secondly. As, in the bitter medicines which the doctor gives, there is health, so, in the misfortunes which God sends us, there are blessings. The greatest blessings come in the shape of the greatest misfortunes. One day, there was great crying in the town of Bethlehem. A great number of poor babes had been killed. A cruel king, called Herod, wanted to kill the Infant Jesus, but he did not know which of the babes was the intended victim. So he commanded the soldiers to kill all the babes. Then there was great weeping and lamentation in Bethlehem. The mothers would not be consoled, because their children had been killed. But, as I have said, in the misfortunes which God sends, there is a blessing. Those mothers were very sorrowful when they saw their infants dead, for they knew not that death was a blessing for their little ones. Because they died for the sake of the Infant Jesus, they are happy forever with him in heaven.

St. Francis of Sales was in a town called Ancona. He wanted to sail across the sea to Venice. Seeing a boat, he went to the captain and paid the price of a place in the boat. Then he went on board and sat down, waiting for the boat to set off. While he was sitting there, a person came and told him that he could not have a place, because all the boat had been hired by someone else. Francis begged that he might be allowed to stay, because he would take up very little room, and he was in a great hurry to go. However, he was not listened to. So he was obliged to take his things and go out of the boat. He thought it a great misfortune that he had lost such a good opportunity of going on his journey. He stood for a while on the land, watching the boat set off. A fine wind filled the sails, and carried the boat quickly over the water. The sun was bright, and the weather calm. But, when the boat was far out at sea, the weather began to change. Dark clouds covered the sky, the thunders roared and the lightnings flashed around the boat. It was tossed about by fierce winds. For a while, the sailor struggled against the storm. But the waves of the sea dashed over them. At last, St. Francis saw the boat sink down into the sea. Everybody in the boat was drowned! St. Francis then saw that the loss of his place in the boat was a

great blessing. If he had been in it, he would have been drowned. He learned ever afterwards to believe that the losses and sufferings which God sent him were for his greater good.

**Why, then, have the just often to suffer in this life?**

*That they may expiate their faults, increase their merits and their reward in heaven.*

It is a particular instance of the goodness of God to ordain that, by sufferings, we should expiate our sins. The Holy Ghost himself assures us of it, and instructs us that the day of tribulation is, in a special manner, and preeminently, the day of forgiveness: "In the time of tribulation, thou forgivest the sins of them that call upon thee." (Tob. iii, 13.) In the order of divine justice our sins deserve punishment; sooner or later we must undergo it, either as penitents in this life, or as reprobates in the next; but, with this dreadful difference, that the punishments of this life are short and meritorious, and those of the other everlasting and fruitless. Is not this a great advantage, cheaply bought at the cost of a trifling evil? What? An eternity of frightful torments reduced to some passing affliction! The dreadful scourges of an omnipotent arm which strikes to kill, changed into the temperate strokes of a paternal hand which only chastises to amend! Holy Job was well convinced of this truth, and therefore he begged God not to spare him, but to crush him with the weight of afflictions in this world, rather than make him suffer in the next. (Job. vi, 8.)

God also, by afflictions, increases the virtue of the just, and, consequently, the merit and reward of virtue. We may say that sufferings give occasion to the practice of all virtues. By afflictions faith becomes more lively, hope more strong, charity more ardent; humility, patience, resignation, strike deeper root, and bring forth more abundant fruit. The just man will, perhaps, often ask God to be freed from his sufferings and temptations; but God, jealous of his honor, and of the salvation and sanctification of that soul, will say to it what he said to St. Paul, "Power is perfected in infirmity." (2 Cor. xii, 9.) It is more advantageous for you to bear the weight of your sufferings than to be exempt from them. You will be put to new trials, you will be exposed to new combats. But if you have a new occasion of fighting, you also will have new subjects of merit, of reward, of triumph. You shall engage under my eye; I will be your strength in battle. Arm yourself with courage. More merit is acquired in a quarter of an hour's sufferings, than in several years of consolation.

If we see Job sitting on a dunghill, Joseph loaded with chains in a dungeon, David reviled by Semei, in a word, if we see a just man suffering, we immediately cry out in astonishment, How unhappy, how much to be pitied is that man! Blind mortals as we are, we call those unhappy who suffer; whilst Jesus Christ says, "Blessed are they that mourn." (Matt, v, 5.) Where is our faith? If God afflicts the just man, it is because he loves him; for, if he loved him less, he would treat him as he does the fortunate men of this world: he would permit him to enjoy the pleasures of this world, to be deluded with the world, to be perverted with the world; and the day would come when he would judge, condemn, and punish him with the world. Sufferings are the mark of the elect. Whoever shall not be stamped with this sacred character shall never enter into that kingdom which Christ gained for us by his sufferings. We are all children of Calvary. It is there that Jesus Christ regenerated us with his blood. This tender, this dying Father left us no other inheritance, at his departure out of this world, than his cross and his grace. Let us accept this precious pledge of his love with a grateful heart; let us preserve it with humility and care. We shall one day gather with joy the undying fruit and reward of it. The saints never felt more happy than when God sent them afflictions. They believed most firmly that, the more they suffered in this life, the greater would be their reward in the next. Hence the martyrs went with the greatest joy to the place of

execution, remembering what our dear Lord has said: "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you untruly, for my sake. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." (Matt, v, 11, 12.)

### **Why do the wicked often prosper in this world?**

*Because even the wicked sometimes perform some good works; for which God rewards them in this life, as heaven cannot be theirs in the next.*

We often meet persons who, weighed down by misery, complain of God, and break out into exclamations like these: When I cast my eyes on this great world and see all that passes in it, I look for a providence; but it seems to have vanished, its splendor disappears from my eyes. I behold such an unequal distribution of the goods of this world! Some have all things, and others have nothing. Some are born in plenty and roll in riches; others groan in misery, and only feed on the bread of affliction. Some seem to have come into the world to be happy; and others, at their birth, to have had the fatal decree written on their forehead, that nothing shall prosper with them. All, nevertheless, are children of this divine providence. How am I to understand so strange an inequality in their situation? Why is this man a king, and that man a subject? Why is this man endowed with power to command as a master, and that other compelled to serve as a slave? Why, being all children of God, are they not all made equal? And why, being destined to the same end, are they not conducted through the same path?

My good friend, you judge of things according to human appearances. You ask whether this inequality of situation and fortune is the work of providence? Has providence ordained, you say, that some shall be rich, some poor, that some shall be sovereigns, and others subjects some masters, and others slaves? Suppose there was perfect equality in the fortunes and conditions of men. Tell me, then, how mankind, how civil society, and the union of its members could possibly subsist? Found two cities, one composed of the great and rich, the other entirely of the low and poor. The establishment of the poor, you easily understand, would soon fall to ruin. But would that of the rich have a longer duration? In this equality of rank and fortune, where all are upon the same footing, all equally rich and at their ease, who would take upon himself the painful and laborious, yet necessary, tasks of life, whilst others should be employed only in quiet and honorable functions? Who, in the quality of a laborer, would water the ground with his sweat, whilst others are reposing in the bosom of luxury and delights? In a town, would you wish all the inhabitants to be without distinction, or all of them to be magistrates endowed with authority? And in the world, shall all be subjects, or all be entrusted with power; or, if no one is appointed to command, and no one is subject, what will the world be but a place of anarchy and confusion?

Hence this inequality of states and conditions, so far from being contrary to providence, is the certain effect of it; and because there is a providence, there must be an inequality of states and conditions. It belonged to God's wisdom, which comprehends all things, to unite men among themselves by the ties of subordination and dependency, to the end that, by the fortunate comforting the unhappy, and by the rich assisting the poor and wretched, the rich and fortunate and the poor should unite their voices in proclaiming the praises of that providence which governs all.

But I hear you say: Suppose this unequal distribution of the goods of the world is necessary among men, should not, then, the just be privileged in preference to the wicked; Why not confide the exercise of power and the possession of the riches to the good, who would make a proper use of them, instead of bestowing them on the wicked who abuse and dishonor their trust?



I answer: If you consider the wisdom of God, you will be forced to acknowledge here again the wise dispositions of God's providence. Why does God refuse earthly goods to some of the just? It is with a view that they may not cease to be just. In abundance, they would grow haughty and be perverted. God also refuses earthly goods to the just, in order to exercise their virtue and embellish their crown. Job rendered God more honor on a dunghill than the kings of the earth on their thrones. On the other hand, why does God bestow earthly goods on some sinners? To show the vanity and nothingness of these goods, and to attract His very enemies by temporal rewards. He also grants these goods to them, in order that they may expiate their sins by using them for good purposes, or that He may thus repay them for the good they do in this life. He rewards their natural virtues with natural recompenses. Thus he formerly bestowed the empire of the world on the Romans, in return for the natural virtues which they practiced.

However, the conduct of God's providence in this point is not always uniform. God does not always refuse earthly goods to the just, lest some should be tempted to imagine that these temporal blessings are not the work of his hand, if he were never to bestow them on his faithful servants. And God does not always grant them to sinners, lest some should be induced to fancy that, in order to become rich, it suffices to be wicked. God's providence disposes otherwise. By a wise moderation which he observes in the distribution of goods, he tries to keep both the good and the bad within proper bounds, and to restrain their desires, under the veil of the impenetrable secrets of his divine providence. Again, do not think that, because Almighty God sometimes allows the wicked a fatal liberty to prosper, he forgives, or even views leniently their impiety. "The prosperity of the fools," says Solomon, "shall destroy them." He does not say, "destroys them," but "shall destroy" them. Why so? Because the prosperity of the wicked does not always produce immediately disastrous effects. Sometimes the reverse comes after a long delay. Wait patiently. You will see the end of what seems to begin so well. "Almighty God," says Job, "takes pleasure in defeating the machinations of the impious. He brings their counsellors to a foolish end," not to a bad beginning. No; all seems prosperous at first. It is the end which is disastrous. He lets them raise aloft their mighty tower of Babel. But afterwards, in the confusion of their pride, they disperse and are gone. For want of this reflection, many men wonder at the prosperity of the wicked. Even the prophets themselves address God sometimes with tender reproaches. They appear almost to accuse him. We are apt to look too much at the beginning of things, and not, like holy David, at the end. Who would have thought that the honors which Aman had received from King Assuerus, and his advancement to the position of the favorite courtier of his sovereign, were destined to conduct him to a shameful death on the gibbet? It is certain, however, that Aman was brought to this pass by his rise to power. God had decreed that the opprobrium of the scaffold should be the end of Aman's ambitious and prosperous career. To what a shameful end did not God bring certain Greek, Roman, German and French emperors, after a prosperous career of a few years! Who would be willing to enjoy their "prosperity," if, with it, he had to accept the reverse? Is there any one stupid enough to envy their short-lived "good-luck"? "The prosperity of fools will destroy them." It is hardly worthwhile to add more proofs. It is a daily experience that "man shall not be strengthened by wickedness;" and that "the unjust shall be caught in their own snares," because "they who sow iniquity shall reap destruction."

But, permit me, you will say, to speak of my own personal misfortunes, and on the conduct of God's providence relating to particular circumstances in which I find myself placed. I have, it seems to me, omitted nothing to make providence favorable and propitious to me, and yet it appears to withdraw itself from me. I made choice of a state of life, and I have been unfortunate in it; I engaged in different

kinds of business, after recommending the success of them in my prayers to Almighty God, and they miscarry. Not one of my enterprises has been successful. If I engage in any affair, it is attended with ill-success. Everything turns against me. My friends abandon me, my enemies persecute me, even God himself seems to forsake me. Were I not afraid of blaspheming, I would say, Where is providence?

Alas! do you know what the designs of providence are in your regard? Await the time of God's decrees, and, when that time comes, you will see all unraveled before you. The veil will be withdrawn, and providence will justify itself. It is true, if you were to live forever upon earth, and had nothing to hope for beyond it, you would have reason to be distressed and afflicted; but when you reflect that God has not placed you in this world forever; that the earth is only a place of pilgrimage and banishment for you, a dwelling for a while, and a time of trial, after which a new order of things will be disclosed to your eyes, and reward or punishment, according to your deserts, will be administered, can you, from this point of view, call God's providence in question, as if your labors were to be fruitless, as if your tears were never to cease flowing, as if your virtues and trials were to be without reward? And should you not, on the contrary, say to yourself: "If there is a providence, things must be so; the traveler must go through the toils of his journey before he can relish the delights of his own home; gold must be cleansed in the fire, to come forth pure and resplendent; the grain must rot in the earth to bring forth a hundred-fold in return ; finally, to reap in gladness, we must sow in tears"?

Remember the case of the rich miser in his grand palace, at one time seated before a table covered with exquisite meats, at another time softly reclining on a downy bed, or sauntering through pleasant gardens, followed by crowds of lords. Next, let them turn their gaze on the wretched beggar lying upon the steps of the palace, with nothing but rags to hide his nakedness; covered with sores; with no linen to dress his wounds, but forced to allow the very dogs to lick them; without a morsel of bread, and without hope of getting a mouthful from the rich miser. Now, judge of the fate of both, and determine which of the two you would rather be, the rich man or the beggar. You will at once say, the rich man, because he is happy; not the poor man, who is wretched. Know, then, that you have judged quite wrongly; for this rich man is that unfortunate glutton, whose pleasures and magnificence were so many snares which entrapped him into everlasting ruin. The beggar is that unfortunate Lazarus, whose miseries were like so many golden keys to open to him the gates of heaven. God gave earthly enjoyments to the rich man partly, to reward him for the occasional good works performed by him, and, partly, to punish him by giving him up to the desires of his heart, and not chastising him as he chastised Lazarus, His true servant. This is evident from the answer which Abraham made to the rich glutton then in hell : "Remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." (Luke xvi, 25.)

After all, you must know that, in spite of all your endeavors and all your searches, there will always remain impenetrable mysteries in God's providence. If you extend your view beyond certain prescribed limits, always asking in all things the "why" and the "how," then you have reason to fear that the dreadful sentence will be pronounced against you: "He that is a searcher of Majesty shall be overwhelmed by glory." (Prov. xxv, 27.)

In his youth, St. Ephrem (who died as deacon 378) was troubled with doubts concerning divine providence; but God, in his mercy, completely cured him. One day he was sent on an errand and had to pass through a wood. On his way, he saw the cow of a poor neighbor lying under a shed. Little Ephrem drove off the cow and chased her through the woods, till she was overcome with fatigue. During the

night the cow was attacked and devoured by wild beasts. Little Ephrem thought no more of his mischievous sport; but God did not forget it so easily. About a month afterwards, Ephrem was again sent on an errand. This time he was obliged to stay over-night with a shepherd. During the night the shepherd indulged a little too freely in strong drink, and, while he slept, a pack of wolves came and killed and scattered the sheep. Next day, Ephrem was arrested by the owner of the sheep, and accused of being in league with a band of robbers, who, it was said, had killed the sheep. Young Ephrem loudly protested his innocence; but it was all of no avail, he was declared guilty, and was cast into a gloomy dungeon. A few days after, two other criminals were confined in the same prison. Now, one night, whilst Ephrem slept, he had a remarkable vision. An angel, in the shape of a beautiful youth, appeared to him, and asked him why he was detained there. "Oh!" said Ephrem weeping, "for no reason at all. I am perfectly innocent." The beautiful youth smiled, and said: "It is true you are innocent of the charge brought against you: but do you not remember how, some time ago, you chased a poor man's cow, so that it died of exhaustion? Remember, God is patient, but he is just. Your companions in prison are also innocent of the crimes laid to their charge, but ask them if they are not guilty of other crimes." Next morning, Ephrem told his two fellow-prisoners of his vision, and asked them whether they had not committed some other crimes. One of them said: "I am innocent of the murder laid to my charge, but, some time ago, I became guilty in another way. One day, as I was crossing a bridge, I saw two men quarrelling violently. At last one of them threw the other into the river. The drowning man cried piteously for help; I could have assisted him, but I neglected to do so, and so at last the poor man was drowned. I see that God is now punishing me for this sin." The other prisoner said: "I am entirely innocent of the crime of adultery of which I am accused, but, two years ago, I became guilty of another very grievous sin. I knew two brothers, whose parents, when dying, had divided the property between them and their only sister. Now, these cruel brothers wished to disinherit their sister. They therefore accused her falsely of crimes. They gave me fifty pieces of silver, on condition that I would also swear against her. Though I knew that she was innocent, I perjured myself, and swore that she was guilty. God is now punishing me for this detestable crime." Next day, these two prisoners were put to the torture: they continued to protest their innocence, and were finally set at liberty. Ephrem witnessed these tortures, and now he had to remain for forty days more, all alone, in prison. At the end of this time, three more culprits were brought into prison. During the night the beautiful youth appeared again to Ephrem, and asked him whether he knew these prisoners. "How should I know them?" answered Ephrem sadly. "Well," said the angel, "one of them is that wicked man who threw his enemy from the bridge into the river; and the others are the two unnatural brothers who calumniated and disinherited their own sister." Next morning, Ephrem told his vision to his fellow-prisoners, and they acknowledged, with sighs and tears, that it was all true. After remaining thirty days in prison, these criminals confessed their guilt, and were put to death. Ephrem now remained, all alone, in prison, for twenty-five days longer. At last the beautiful youth appeared to him for the third time, and said: "Do you believe now that there is no such thing in the world as chance or accident? Do you believe now that God governs everything?" "O yes," said Ephrem weeping, "I believe! I believe that God is just and wonderful in all his ways." Ephrem then promised that, if he were freed from prison, he would quit the world, and consecrate his whole life to the service of God. The angel promised him his liberty. Five days after, the old shepherd appeared before the judge, and testified to Ephrem's innocence. Ephrem was set free, but he had learned a valuable lesson: he never afterwards doubted of God's providence. During the remainder of his life he served God faithfully, and became a great saint in a short time, by accustoming

himself to take all things, both prosperous and adverse, as coming from the hands of God for his greater good.

### **How, then, should we regard the sufferings of this life?**

*We should regard them as so many blessings of Almighty God.*

Almighty God created us to be his own in time and in eternity. But, in consequence of the fall of our first parents, we feel inclined to leave him, the source of all happiness, and to attach ourselves to this world, the abyss of all miseries spiritual and temporal. But God, as the best of all fathers, makes use of different means to counteract that evil inclination of ours which draws us more and more away from him, the ocean of all goods. As fowlers use different kinds of bait for different kinds of game, so God bends and applies himself to the several dispositions of men, both for their benefit, and to maintain the sweetness of his fatherly providence over all. He draws some souls to himself by love. But the number of these souls is very small. In fact, among the women whose conversion is related in the Gospel, St. Magdalen is the only one who followed our Savior through love. God draws the greater part of souls to himself by the troubles of this life. The woman of Chanaan went to our Lord, that she might obtain relief in her temporal distress. St. Paul the Hermit and Arsenius withdrew into the desert, to escape persecution. St. Paul the Simple became a hermit on account of the unfaithfulness of his wife. Blessed Gonsalvus resolved to become a Dominican, because, while riding gaily and swiftly through the streets, he was thrown from his horse into a mud-puddle, and was laughed at by all those who were eye-witnesses. While yet in the mud-puddle, he said to himself: "Is it thus, treacherous world, that you treat me? You now deride me, but I also will laugh at you." This said, he abandoned the world and embraced the religious life.

Nicholas Bobadilla, a poor student of Paris, often went to see St. Ignatius Loyola, for the sake of relief in his temporal wants; but he soon felt drawn by a holy love to St. Ignatius, and became one of his first and most zealous companions.

The venerable Bernard of Corlione, in trying to escape the hands of human justice, fell into those of divine mercy, by going to join the Capuchins.

Thomas Pounc, an Englishman, fell most awkwardly, while dancing at a ball of the Queen of England. "Get up, you fool!" said the queen to him. The young man, feeling highly offended, resolved to avenge himself on the world, by quitting it. He entered the Society of Jesus, where he led a holy life; and after having suffered in a dungeon for twenty years, during the time of religious persecution in England, he finished his life, by sacrificing it, at last, for the sake of the faith.

"I have heard on good authority," relates St. Francis de Sales, "that a gentleman of our age, distinguished in mind and person, and of good family, seeing some Capuchin Fathers pass by, said to the other noblemen who were with him: I have a fancy to find out how these barefooted men live, and to go amongst them, not meaning to remain there always, but only for three weeks, or a month, so as to observe better what they do, and then mock and laugh at it afterwards with you." So he went, and was received by the fathers. But Divine Providence, who made use of these means to withdraw him from the world, converted his wicked purpose into a good one; and he, who thought to take in others, was taken in himself: for, no sooner had he lived a few days with those good religious, than he was entirely changed. He persevered faithfully in his vocation, and became a great servant of God.

St. Ludwina hurt herself very seriously at the age of sixteen. She became bedridden for thirty-five years. Her disease at last grew so violent, that her flesh began to corrupt and to be filled with worms. The putrefaction extended even internally. As she was poor, she had not even sufficient clothes to keep herself warm; so that the tears which she frequently shed, froze on her cheeks. She could move only a little her head and one of her arms. The pains which she suffered for thirty-five years are beyond description. It was five years before she understood that God had sent her those afflictions as a means to draw her soul to Himself, and unite it to His holy will in a most intimate manner in time and for all eternity. No sooner was she convinced of this, than she began to weep most bitterly over her want of submission to the dispositions of Almighty God. She ever afterwards was most grateful for all the pains which God made her endure, looking upon them all as so many blessings and gifts of her heavenly Father. She thus became one of the most admirable saints in the Church of God.

Thus many souls enter into themselves through disgust or weariness, or on account of disappointments or misfortunes. God makes use of such disappointments and troubles to detach them from the love of creatures, to preserve them from the delusion of false appearances, and to force them to enter into themselves; to purify their hearts; to cause goodness to take root in their souls; to give them a distaste for a worldly life. Do you think such souls would have sought consolation only in God, if the world had loved them? Do you think they would have known the sweetness of God, if the world had not maltreated and banished them from its society? It is God who permits such harsh treatment and contumelies to befall them. He causes thorns to spring up in all their pleasures, in order to prevent them from reposing thereon. They would never have belonged to God, had the world desired them; and they would have been adverse to God, had the world not been adverse to them. It is thus that the Lord breaks the fetters by which the world held them in bondage. Yes, God had, as it were, to deprive them of their sight, as he did Tobias, to enlighten them; he had to prostrate them on the ground, like Saul, to lift them up; he had to cast them, if we may say so, into the grave, like Lazarus, to restore them to the life of grace. They had, as it were, exhausted the treasures of his goodness. Holy inspirations, moving considerations, wholesome advices, edifying examples, remorse of conscience, had all been employed through the tenderness of his mercy, and all rendered fruitless through the obduracy of their hearts. No other means are left in the treasury of grace than afflictions. How many have only shed tears for their sins after they had wept for their misfortunes! How many never ceased being criminal till they began to be unhappy! In truth, who would not have been moved to pity at the spectacle of King Manasses stripped of his treasures, and of his kingdom, and of his liberty, enslaved to the King of the Assyrians, and weeping and lamenting in a shameful bondage? And yet his great misfortunes were the greatest blessings which God could send upon the wicked king; for, a prey to great miseries, this king entered into himself, detested his crimes, did severe penance for them, and secured his salvation. (4 Kings v, 1.) Let us imitate the saints in their love for the cross, and always say with St. Paul: "If we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified with him; for I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." (Rom. viii, 17, 18.)