

SAINT ALBERT THE GREAT ON THE BETTER DEVOTION

THAT ACTUAL AND SENSIBLE DEVOTION IS NOT TO BE SO MUCH
REGARDED AS A CLEAVING TO GOD WITH ONE'S WILL

DO NOT be anxious for actual [cf. practical] devotion, or sensible [cf. felt] sweetness, or tears, but let your only care be to remain united to God in your soul by good will. For God delights above all in a mind free of sense impressions; that is, free of the images and likenesses of created things.

It befits the monk to be remote from all creatures, so that his whole bare intent is upon God, dwelling upon Him and cleaving [cf. adhering] to Him. Deny yourself, therefore, so that you may nakedly follow Christ, your Lord and God, Who is in truth poor, obedient, and chaste, Who bore humiliation and suffering, in Whose life and death many were scandalized, as is apparent in the Gospels.

The soul which is detached from the body does not notice what is being done to the body which it has left behind—whether it is being burnt or hanged or reviled; nor is it afflicted by the insults which are heaped upon its body, but its whole attention is fixed upon the Now of eternity and on the One Thing which the Lord in the Gospel says is necessary. This should also be your attitude to your body, as though you were already parted from it. Think always upon the eternal life of your soul in God, carefully directing your thoughts upon that One Thing of which Christ said: 'But one thing is needful.'¹⁸ If you do this, you will find in yourself a wonderful increase in grace and swift progress in reaching bareness of mind and simplicity of heart.

Indeed, this One Thing is very near to you when you rid yourself of all sense impressions and of all other entanglements in created objects. You will soon experience the truth of this when you wait

upon God with a bare and intent mind, and cleave to Him: and thus you will remain unconquered, whatever may be done to you, like the holy martyrs, fathers and elect, and all the blessed. They despised all things, and only thought upon the safety of their souls and of eternity in God; thus armed within and united to God by good will, they spurned all earthly things as though their soul were already severed from their body.

Learn from them how marvellous is the power of a right will fixed on God. It is as though through the impression which a soul receives from God, and through its virtual and spiritual separation from the flesh, the soul looks on the outer man as from a far distance, as if not belonging there; and so it scorns all suffering that is brought to bear on itself or on the flesh as if it were being inflicted on some other creature, not a man. 'But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.'¹⁹

Never, therefore, foster in your heart, which lies open to God, thoughts or imaginations which you would blush to hear of or notice in other men; and this because your chief reverence should be for God. For it is right to fix your thoughts and meditations solely upon God: that the whole weight of your mind dwells upon Him as though there were nothing in the world but God, and that in this embrace you may enjoy the perfect beginning of future blessedness.

NOTES: ¹⁸ Saint Luke 10:42. ¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 6:17.

—Chapter 10 from *Of Cleaving to God (De adhaerendo Deo)*, attributed to Dominican Saint Albert the Great (between 1193 and 1207–80), Bishop and Doctor of the Church, translated from the fifteenth-century Latin manuscript by Elisabeth Stopp (1911–96), and published by A. R. Mowbray & Co., London, in 1954, pages 34–35. *Of Cleaving to God* first published by Blackfriars Publications, Oxford, in 1948.

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