

Prologue

*My righteous one lives by faith.*¹ This is at the same time an apostolic as well as a prophetic saying. In fact, the apostle tells that which the prophet had foretold, that the righteous one lives by faith.² If it is so, or better, because it is so, we absolutely must meditate with fervor and continually re-examine the mysteries of our faith. In truth, *without faith it is impossible to please God.*³ In fact, where there is no faith, there can be no hope. *Whoever would approach God, in fact, must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*⁴ Otherwise, what sort of hope will be possible? But where there is no hope, there can be no love. For who can love something from which he hopes no good? Therefore, by faith we are lifted up to hope, and by hope we progress to love. After all, regardless of anything I possessed, *if I had no love, I gain nothing.*⁵ In fact, you learn what the fruit of love is from the mouth of Truth: *"If someone loves me he will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."*⁶ Thus, love leads to manifestation, manifestation leads to contemplation, and contemplation leads to knowledge. When Christ our life appears, then we will also appear with him in glory,⁷ and then *we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.*⁸ You can see, then, the starting and the ending point, the steps by which we climb up through hope and love from faith to knowledge of the divine,

1. Hab 2:4.

2. Richard refers to St. Paul's use of Hab 2:4 in Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11 (cf. Heb 10:38).

3. Heb 11:6.

4. Heb 11:6.

5. 1 Cor 13:3.

6. John 14:21.

7. Col 3:4.

8. 1 John 3:2.

and through knowledge of the divine to eternal life. As he [the Lord] says, “*This is eternal life, to know you, the true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*”⁹ Therefore, life certainly comes from faith, but life also comes from knowledge: the inner life comes from faith; the eternal life comes from knowledge. From faith comes that life by which, at the present time, we live towards the good; from knowledge comes that life by which, in the future, we will live in beatitude. Thus, faith is the origin and foundation of all good.

How zealous we should then be in our faith, since from it all good derives its foundation and in it all good finds its completion!¹⁰ But if faith is the origin of all good, knowledge is its consummation and perfection. Let us try, then, to reach perfection, and by all degrees of possible progress, let us hasten to move from faith to knowledge: let us make our best effort to understand that which we believe. Let us think of how the philosophers of this world have applied themselves to such a knowledge and consider the point to which they have progressed. We should be ashamed to be found inferior to them in this regard. “*That which can be known about God is plain to them,*”¹¹ as the apostle testifies, “*For though they knew God they did not glorify him as God.*”¹² Thus

9. John, 17:3.

10. The trouble in this sentence is the fact that both an *ad sensum* translation and a more literal and etymological translation are possible. *Firmamentum* can be understood in its more common meaning of sky/heaven—thus in this case, indicating the reaching of the highest summit—or as a derivative of *firmitas*, thus shifting the attention to the unshakeable source of the faith. Possibly, this is to be understood as a clever play on words in the Latin and that both meanings are intentionally included by the author. Yet, rendering the full spectrum of evocative meanings in translation is a hopeless task. Salet, helped by a vague ambiguity in the French he uses, favors the less common, etymological reading of the sentence, thus his rendering tends to highlight the role of faith as the supreme source of good. Spinelli harmonises the two halves of this phrase and in his Italian text he translates that “From faith every good derives its origin and receives its sustaining.” Although I understand the importance Richard assigns to faith—as *totius boni fundamentum* (the foundation of all good)—in full harmony with the most traditional Augustinian theology, I think it is important to emphasise also the goal of faith as a *terminus usque ad quem* (a target end to which it runs). In fact, later in this Prologue, Richard will encourage the reader to ascend by faith in contemplation to the heavenly places. In any case, the reader should realise that the original language of the sentence is much wealthier and thus mystically evocative, and no translation will ever be able to accomplish or replicate its strength.

11. Rom 1:19.

12. Rom 1:21.

they knew him. But how much more should we accomplish, who have received the tradition of the true faith from the cradle! In us the love of truth needs to bring forth greater results than that which the love of vanity was able to produce in them.¹³ It should rightly be that on these topics we—who faith directs, hope leads, and love urges—demonstrate ourselves to be more capable [than them]. Therefore, it ought to be too little for us to hold by faith good and right ideas about God; we should rather make an effort, as it has been said, to understand what we believe. Let us always strive, within the limits of what is right and possible, to comprehend by reason that which we hold by faith. Yet, why is it surprising if our mind ends up finding the profound mysteries of God as obscure as darkness, when almost at every moment it is fouled by the dust of earthly thoughts? *Shake yourself from the dust*¹⁴ virgin daughter of Zion. If we are children of Zion, let us set up that sublime ladder of contemplation, let us assume wings like eagles,¹⁵ by which we can take off from the earthly ground and ascend to the heavenly places. Let us taste the realities of heaven, and not those of earth. [Let us taste the realities of heaven] where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Let us follow Paul in that place where he has gone before us, when he flew to the profound secrets of the third heaven, where he heard such mysteries that no mortal is permitted to repeat.¹⁶ Let us ascend after our Head. Because if he has ascended to heaven, it is in order to stimulate and pull our desires after him. Christ has ascended and the Spirit of Christ has descended. It is for this reason that Christ sent us his Spirit, so that he could raise up our spirit after him. Christ ascended in the body; let us ascend in our spirit.¹⁷ His ascent was bodily; let ours be spiritual,

13. The original Latin is tighter and much more effective. Yet, both Salet (in French) and Spinelli (in Italian) find it necessary to translate the sentence favouring a wordier rendering of the phrase's meaning to clarify it at the expense of its rhetorical force. Although the persuasiveness of a true mystic is found also in the images he is able to construct with his words, the present English translation too can possibly benefit from a loss of intense rhetoric in favour of clarity, albeit verbose and loose.

14. Isa 52:2.

15. Isa 40:31.

16. 2 Cor 12:4.

17. The word *mens* has been rendered with the term "spirit." The modern English usage of the word "mind," which would be the most literal translation, conveys a set of meanings that are completely alien to Richard and his mystical understanding. Richard is not a rationalist. To him, "mind" indicates rather the spiritual side of a hu-

instead. Why, after all, has [Christ] presented the Spirit as doctor and leader of our ascension, if it was not because he wanted our ascension, for the present time, to be spiritual?¹⁸ In fact, at the ascension of our bodies, which for us is still to take place in the future, Christ himself will come in the body, in the same flesh that he assumed for us, according to the words: *He will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*¹⁹ Let us ascend in the spirit, then, let us ascend with our intellect to that place where at present we cannot ascend with our body.

Furthermore, it ought to be too little for us to ascend only to the mysteries of the *first* heaven in our intellectual contemplation. Let us ascend from the first heaven to the second, and from the second to the third. To those who ascend in their contemplation from the visible things to the invisible ones, and from the physical realities to the spiritual, the first thought that will occur will be that of immortality, then secondly of incorruptibility and thirdly of eternity. Such are the three areas: immortality, incorruptibility, eternity. The first one is that of the human spirit, the second that of the angelic spirit, the third that of the Spirit of God. In fact, the human spirit possesses immortality by right as a sort of inheritance, which no time or length of period can ever take away from him. In fact, the human spirit must forever either live in glory or face punishment. Thus, this spirit deserts itself, so to speak, and debases itself below its proper place every time it bends itself at present time towards the earthly and transitory things. To the spirit, then, ascending to the first heaven is nothing other than returning to itself and to orientate its thoughts and actions towards those things that belong to immortality and are worthy of itself. Incorruptibility, on the contrary, is far above the human spirit's condition: at the moment this [human

man person, which nonetheless does not exclude a person's rational abilities. See also: Spinelli, *Riccardo*, 78; and Salet, *Richard*, 55.

18. In his Italian translation, Spinelli confuses the accusatives *doctorem* and *duc-torem* as nominatives referring to Christ our Head, whom Richard mentioned few lines above. Actually, the accusatives should be understood as appositions referring to the word *Spiritum*. It is very important to acknowledge the leadership role that Richard recognises to the Holy Spirit in our mystical ascension to God and the heavenly places. We should always remember that Richard is primarily a *mystic*: his systematic theology stems out of his intense mystical life. In Richard's mind it is the Holy Spirit (and it could not be anyone else!), who leads us to the vision of God, after the likeness of Christ our Head. In this regard, the Latin text is unequivocal.

19. Acts 1:11.

spirit] cannot possess it. However, the human spirit is capable to obtain by merit of its virtues this condition that right now it does not possess. Therefore, to the spirit, ascending to the second heaven is equivalent to providing for itself by merits the glory of incorruptibility.²⁰ On the contrary, the angelic spirit already possesses this incorruptibility almost by a hereditary right; it acquired it by the merit of its own perseverance on these terms—that it should never be able to lose it thereafter. The third heaven, finally, belongs only to the divinity; in fact, it is written in this regard that only God inhabits eternity.²¹ All the other things that have had a beginning in time cannot possess eternity by the very fact that they have not always existed. Nonetheless, to be able to fly up to this heaven with the wings of contemplation and to be able to fix the eyes of the spirit²² to the radiant light is a singular gift and one superior to all others. Consequently, we can ascend to the first heaven even now, we can ascend to the second one by virtue, and we can ascend to the third by spiritual contemplation.

Now, it is to this utmost heaven that the Spirit of Christ elevates the spiritual men, to whom the privilege of a revealing grace gives light in a more sublime and perfect way than the others.²³ It is up towards this heaven, in fact, that we are brought by the Spirit who lifts us up, every time that the grace of contemplation allows us to reach the comprehension of the eternal. Again, simply believing true statements on eternal realities should appear to us as too little a thing, if it is not also given to us to strengthen these faith truths by the witness of reason.

Let us not consider the notion of things of eternity—which we receive only by faith—alone to be sufficient, if we do not also learn that

20. Another possible translation is: “Therefore, it [the human spirit] has to ascend to the second heaven, in order to provide for itself by merits the glory of incorruptibility.” Richard’s Latin highlights, in its force, how this process of ascension is not only commendable but also a necessary duty of the soul enkindled by grace.

21. Isa 57:15.

22. See note 17.

23. It would be equally correct to translate the sentence as: “Now, it is to this utmost heaven that the Spirit of Christ elevates the spiritual men, whom He enlightens by the privilege of a revealing grace in a more sublime and perfect way than the others.” In this interpretation, the agency of the Holy Spirit in the *ascensio nostra spiritualis* (our spiritual ascension), so dear to Richard’s mystical approach, would be emphasised even more strongly.

notion, which our intellect can offer, since we are not yet capable to receive knowledge from direct experience.

We have included all these considerations in this prologue to our work, so to render our spirits more attentive and more passionate towards this study. We believe that there is a great deal of merit in being full of zeal in this investigation, even if its result is not as perfect as we had intended it to be in our desire.

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