

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

Abandonment to Divine Providence

By Jean-Pierre de Caussade, SJ

[From the book *Abandonment to Divine Providence*]

1 - The life of God in the soul

There is a time when the soul lives in God, and a time when God lives in the soul. What is appropriate to one state is inconsistent with the other. When God lives in the soul it ought to abandon itself entirely to His providence. When the soul lives in God it is obliged to procure

for itself carefully and very regularly, every means it can devise by which to arrive at the divine union. The whole procedure is marked out; the readings, the examinations, the resolutions. The guide is always at hand and everything is by rule, even the hours for conversation. When God lives in the soul it has nothing left of self, but only that which the spirit which actuates it imparts to it at each moment.

Nothing is provided for the future, no road is marked out, but it is like

a child which can be led wherever one pleases, and has only feeling to distinguish what is presented to it. No more books with marked passages for such a soul; often enough it is even deprived of a regular director, for God allows it no other support than that which He gives it Himself. Its dwelling is in darkness, forgetfulness, abandonment, death and nothingness. It feels keenly its wants and miseries without knowing from whence or when will come its relief. With eyes fixed on Heaven it waits peacefully and without anxiety for someone to come to its assistance. God, who finds no purer disposition in His spouse than this entire self-renunciation for the sake of living the life of grace according to the divine operation, provides her with necessary books, thoughts, insight into her own soul, advice and counsel, and the examples of the wise. Everything that others discover with great difficulty this soul finds in abandonment, and what they guard with care in order to be able to find it again, this soul receives at the

moment there is occasion for it, and afterwards relinquishes so as to admit nothing but exactly what God desires it to have in order to live by Him alone. The former soul undertakes an infinity of good works for the glory of God, the latter is often cast aside in a corner of the world like a bit of broken crockery, apparently of no use to anyone. There, this soul, forsaken by creatures but in the enjoyment of God by a very real, true, and active love (active although infused in repose), does not attempt anything by its own impulse; it only knows that it has to abandon itself and to remain in the hands of God to be used by Him as He pleases. Often it is ignorant of its use, but God knows well. The world thinks it is useless, and appearances give colour to this judgment, but nevertheless it is very certain that in mysterious ways and by unknown channels, it spreads abroad an infinite amount of grace on persons who often have no idea of it, and of whom it never thinks. In souls abandoned to God everything

Author: Jean-Pierre de Caussade, SJ

Fr. Jean-Pierre de Caussade, SJ (1675–1751) was a French Jesuit priest and author, most well-known for this famous treatise, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, and also his letters to the Visitation nuns, where he served as confessor and spiritual director. He also served as the rector of two colleges, and as spiritual director for a Jesuit house. He was deeply influenced by the writings of both Saint Francis de Sales and Saint John of the Cross.

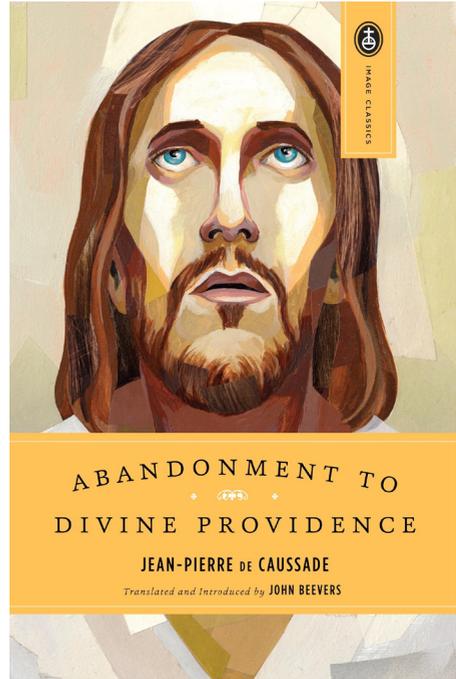
is efficacious, everything is a sermon and apostolic.

God imparts to their silence, to their repose, to their detachment, to their words, gestures, etc., a certain virtue which, unknown to them, works in the hearts of those around them; and, as they are guided by the occasional actions of others who are made use of by grace to instruct them without their knowledge, in the same way, they, in their turn, are made use of for the support and guidance of others without any direct acquaintance with them, or understanding to that effect.

God it is who works in them, by unexpected and often unknown impulses; so that these souls are like to Jesus, from whom proceeded a secret virtue for the healing of others. There is this difference between Him and them, that often they do not perceive the outflow of this virtue and even contribute nothing by co-operation: it is like a hidden balm, the perfume of which is exhaled without being recognised, and which knows not its own virtue.

2 - The most perfect way

When the soul is moved by the divine influence, it forsakes all works, practices, methods, means, books, ideas, and spiritual persons in order to be guided by God alone by abandoning itself to that moving



power which becomes the sole source of its perfection. It remains in His hands like all the saints, understanding that the divine action alone can guide it in the right path, and that if it were to seek other means it would inevitably go astray in that unknown country which God compels it to traverse. It is, therefore, the action of God which guides and conducts souls by ways which it alone understands. It is, with these souls, like the changes of the wind. The direction is only known in the present moment, and the effects follow their causes by the will of God, which is only explained by these effects because it acts in these souls and makes them act either by hidden undoubted instincts, or by

the duties of their state. This is all the spirituality they know; these are their visions and revelations, this is the whole of their wisdom and counsel insomuch that nothing is ever wanting to them. Faith makes them certain that what they do is well, whether they read, speak, or write; and if they take counsel it is only to be able to distinguish more clearly the divine action. All this is laid down for them and they receive it like the rest, beholding beneath these things the divine motive power and not fastening on the things presented, but using or leaving them, always leaning by faith on the infallible, unruffled, immutable and ever efficacious action of God at each moment. This they perceive and enjoy in all things, the least as well as the greatest, for it is entirely at their service at every moment. Thus they make use of things not because they have any confidence in them, or for their own sake, but in submission to the divine ordinance, and to that interior operation which, even under contrary appearances, they discover with equal facility and certitude.

When the soul is moved by the divine influence, it forsakes all works, practices, methods, means, books, ideas, and spiritual persons in order to be guided by God alone by abandoning itself to that moving power which becomes the sole source of its perfection.

Their life, therefore, is spent, not in investigations or desires, weariness or sighs, but in a settled assurance of being in the most perfect way.

Every state of body or soul, and whatever happens interiorly or exteriorly as revealed at each moment to these souls is, to them, the fulness of the divine action, and the fulness of their joy. Created things are, to them, nothing but misery and dearth; the only true and just measure is in the working of the divine action. Thus, if it take away thoughts,

words, books, food, persons, health, even life itself, it is exactly the same as if it did the contrary. The soul loves the divine action and finds it equally sanctifying under whatever shape it presents itself. It does not reason about the way it acts; it suffices for its approval that whatever comes is from this source.

3 - Abandonment, a pledge of predestination

The state of abandonment is a certain mixture of faith, hope, and charity in

one single act, which unites the soul to God and to His action. United, these three virtues together form but one in a single act, the raising of the heart to God, and abandonment to His action. But how can this divine mingling, this spiritual oneness be explained? How can a name be found to convey an idea of its nature, and to make the unity of this trinity intelligible? It can be explained thus. It is only by means of these three virtues that the possession and enjoyment of God and of His will can be attained. This adorable object is seen, is loved, and all things are hoped for from it. Either virtue can with equal justice be called pure love, pure hope, or pure faith, and if the state of which we are speaking is more frequently designated by the last name, it is not that the other theological virtues are excluded, but rather that they may be understood to subsist and to be practised in this state in obscurity.

There can be nothing more secure than this state in the things that are of God; nothing more disinterested than

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the character of the heart. On the side of God is the absolute certitude of faith, and on that of the heart is the same certitude tempered with fear and hope. O most desirable unity of the trinity of these holy virtues! Believe then, hope and love, but by a simple feeling which the Holy Spirit who is given you by God will produce in your

soul. It is there that the unction of the name of God is diffused by the Holy Spirit in the centre of the heart. This is the word, this is the mystical revelation, and a pledge of predestination with all its happy results. *“How good is God to Israel, to those who are upright in heart.”* (Psalm 72:1) This impress of the Holy Spirit in souls inflamed with His love, is called pure love on account of the torrent of delight overflowing every faculty, accompanied

by a fulness of confidence and light; but in souls that are plunged in bitterness it is called pure faith because the darkness and obscurity of night are without alleviation. Pure love sees, feels, and believes. Pure faith believes without either seeing or feeling.

In this is shown the difference between these two states, but this difference is only apparent, not real. The appearances are dissimilar, but in reality as the state of pure faith is not lacking in charity, neither is the state of pure love lacking in faith nor in abandonment; the terms being applied according to which virtue prevails.

The different gradations of these virtues under the touch of the Holy Spirit form the variety of all supernatural and lofty states. And since God can rearrange them in an endless variety there is not a single soul that does not receive this priceless impress in a character suitable to it. The difference is nothing, there are the same faith, hope, and charity in all. Abandonment is a general means of receiving special virtues in every variety of different impresses. Souls cannot all lay claim to the same sort, nor to a similar state but all can be united to God, all can be abandoned to His action, all can receive the impress that is best suited to them, all in fact can live under the reign of God and enjoy a share in His justice with all its advantages. In this kingdom every soul can aspire to a crown, and whether a crown of love, or a crown of faith, it is always a crown, always the kingdom of God. There is this difference, it is true - the one is in light, the other in darkness; but again what does this

signify if the soul belongs to God and obeys His will? We do not seek to know the name of this state, its characteristics, nor excellence, but we seek God alone and His action. The manner of it ought to be a matter of indifference to the soul. Let us therefore no longer preach to souls about either the state of pure love, or of perfect faith, the way of delights, or of the Cross, for these cannot be imparted to all in the same degree nor in the same manner; but let us preach abandonment in general to the divine action, to all simple souls who fear God, and let us make them all understand that by these means they will attain to that particular state chosen and destined for them by the divine action from all eternity. Let us not dishearten, nor rebuff, nor drive away anyone from that most eminent perfection to which Jesus calls everyone, exacting from them submission to the will of His heavenly Father and thus making them members of His mystical body. He is their head only in so far as their will is in accordance with His. Let us continually repeat to all souls that the invitation of this sweet and loving Saviour does not exact anything very difficult from them, nor very extraordinary. He does not ask for talent and ingenuity, all He desires is that they have a good will and desire to be united to

Him so that He could guide, direct and befriend them in proportion as they are so united.

4 - Abandonment, a source of joy

There is nothing more generous than the way in which a soul having faith, accepts the most deadly perils and troubles, beholding in them something divine of the spiritual life. When it is a question of swallowing poison, of filling a breach, of slaving for the plague-stricken; in all this they find a plenitude of divine life, not given to them drop by drop, but in floods which inundate and engulf the soul in an instant. If an army were animated by the same ideals it would be invincible. This is because the instinct of faith is an elevation and enlargement of the heart above and beyond all that is presented to the senses.

The life of faith, and the instinct of faith are one and the same. It is an enjoyment of the goods of God, and a confidence founded on the expectation of His protection, making everything pleasant and received with a good grace. It is indifference to, and at the same time

a preparation for every place, state, or person. Faith is never unhappy even when the senses are most desolate. This lively faith is always in God, always in His action above contrary appearances by which the senses are darkened. The senses, in terror, suddenly cry to the soul, "Unhappy one! You have now no resource, you are lost," and instantly faith with a stronger voice answers: "Keep firm, go on, and fear nothing."

5 - The great merit of pure faith

Whatever we find extraordinary in the lives of the saints, such as revelations, visions and interior locutions, is but a glimpse of that excellence of their state which is contained and hidden

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in the exercise of faith; because faith possesses all this by knowing how to see and hear God in that which happens from moment to moment. When these favours are manifested visibly it does not mean that by faith they have not been already possessed, but in order to make the excellence of faith

visible for the purpose of attracting souls to the practice of it; just as the glory of Thabor, and the miracles of Jesus Christ were not from any

increase of His intrinsic excellence, but from the light which from time to time escaped from the dark cloud of His humanity to make it an object of veneration and love to others.

That which is wonderful in the saints is the constancy of their faith under every circumstance; without this there would be no sanctity. In the loving faith which makes them rejoice in God for everything, their sanctity has no need of any extraordinary manifestation; this could only prove useful to others who might require the testimony of such signs; but the soul in this state, happy in its obscurity, does in no way rely on these brilliant manifestations; it allows them to show outwardly for the profit of others, but keeps for itself what all have in common, the will of God, and His good pleasure.

Its faith is proved in hiding, and not in manifesting itself, and those who require more proof have less faith.

Those who live by faith receive proofs, not as such, but as favours from the hand of God, and in this sense things that are extraordinary are not in contradiction to the state of pure faith. But there are many saints whom God sets up for the salvation of souls, and from whose faces He causes rays of glory to stream for the enlightenment of the most blind. Of such were the Prophets and the Apostles and all those saints chosen by God to be set in the candlestick of the Church. There will ever be such, as there ever have been.

There is also an infinity of others who, having been created to shine in the heavens give no light in this world, but live and die in profound obscurity.



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