

## **The Attraction.**

### **We Must Serve God by Our Interior State of Grace, in Our Vocation.**

### **The Gentleness and Strength of the Attraction<sup>1</sup>**

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament  
Paris, Tuesday, October 11, 1859

My Sisters, last time we said that we must serve God according to our state, because the state of our soul, like that of our body, is the expression of God's will; and that the grace of our state was given to us in accord to that state. Consequently, it is the most perfect for us. These states come from God, and, since God loves us, he always gives us what is best for us – if another were better for us, then God would give it to us.

**We must sanctify ourselves according to our states**, regardless of whether these states are permanent or not, whether of body or soul; it suffices that God wills it. He never wants sin. You might say, my present state is such a small thing. I am suffering. It is because I have behaved in such and such a way. But rather, if God had not willed it [it would not be]. Our Lord says in the gospel **that not a hair on your head falls to the ground without your Father's willing it** (cf. Mt 10:29-30): he does not say permission, but will. Let it fall, I will it: nothing more. All the more so for these states of soul -; they are more important than a strand of hair which is the most useless thing in the world.

How consoling – rather – how lovely this is! I will be content with my present state. It would be silly to react in any other way. This is what the Good Lord wants. I must serve him by exercising the virtues according to my state. If I cannot walk, I will serve the Good Lord as best I can in that condition. When I know that I did something wrong, I examine the cause. God does not want sin, but he wants everything else: humility following pride, trust following boldness and discouragement – he wants all that. Let's move on to another topic.

**We must serve the Good Lord according to the attraction of grace**, because the attraction of grace is the will of God manifested in us. What is an attraction? How shall I say it? I don't know. This is how it is defined: An extraordinary movement of grace in us that draws us strongly and gently to God or to one of his mysteries; to something that comes from God, that really draws the soul very gently and powerfully.

The attraction is always an extraordinary grace with a special character. Any attraction that aims merely at the service of God in general is not an attraction; it is a movement of grace. A true attraction draws us to something that becomes a center for us, a characteristic of our holiness. The first rule is that God never gives an attraction contrary to one's vocation. For example, I know my vocation. If I have an attraction contrary to adoration, I must say: I know that adoration is the will of God; this attraction is a temptation from the devil disguised as an angel of light. Grace brings a feeling of peace, and there is none here; this is not then a grace. With this rule, we can easily discern the authenticity of an attraction.

St. Paul, living in the early centuries when there were gifts of prophecy and miracles, said: ***Strive for the gift of prophesy, because it is the greatest, and no one can have it if he does not confess Jesus Christ; where there is no faith, there are no gifts*** (Cf. 1 Cor 14:1,39). From this I say that every attraction that goes against the purpose of a vocation is not an attraction. God cannot contradict himself. What is secondary is subject to what is primary, namely, the goal of my life. If I act against my particular grace, I will not attain my goal. Many pious persons get lost when they don't make this distinction. They imagine

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<sup>1</sup> Number 184. *L'attrait. Il faut servir Dieu par son état intérieur de grâce, dans sa vocation. Douceur et force de l'attrait.*

external works to be the will of God, subordinating to them all interior work. What was considered an attraction ends up by absorbing the interior life, and they get lost while thinking they are in a perfect grace. As a result, it is not surprising that some influential persons of prayer and charity – excuse me for saying this – end up by getting married. Some young ladies behaved like angels and were thrown into good works. Their interior life weakened. They thought they were doing a lot of good, that they were acting for the love of God because they were attracting others, but one day, the balloon burst – that’s what happens.

Some directors sacrifice many souls they are guiding. They forget that a strong wind can put out a little fire and that a tree cannot bear fruits too soon. In general, the characteristic of an attraction is internal; when it is only external, as a principle, or as a priority, it is only zeal. It is within that an attraction to such and such a mystery is formed – the external way is merely its expansion [expression].

Sadly many men and women religious mistake a devotional attraction for their vocation. When, for instance, a Carmelite nun experiences great zeal for souls, imagining she can set fire to the whole world, she will lose her own vocation. Either she will be compelled to abandon works of charity and apostolic zeal to return to her convent, or if she has already left she will not be satisfied. Some religious left their convents to care for the sick, others to get involved in the work of teaching. In so doing, they abandoned their own vocation for a mere attraction. Almost all of them ended in failure, lost their vocation, and even caused scandal. This is because they did not remain faithful to their interior attraction. One may be filled with ardent zeal and love, as a red hot fire; it will not last. She needs medicine to cure her fever. I don’t believe in those forms of zeal that would embrace the entire universe. I prefer a soul that enjoys remaining at the feet of our Lord. If someone is both happy and proud, it may be nothing other than a head of steam. Once the steam has evaporated, nothing is left. This is but a mixture of devotion and frail human nature.

St. Theresa never left her convent to preach; she never left her vocation. St. Catherine of Siena remained loyal to her call. The Sisters of Charity are in their vocation, but a contemplative soul who joins them would get lost. Many lost their vocation in order to run around (in zeal). I saw many poor unhappy religious women seeking for something else!

However, could it not happen that God will give someone a more perfect attraction than the grace of her vocation? We must examine if the attraction is interior, if it calls for immolation, if it came from Jesus Christ. To test an attraction, you must live with it for some time and discern its characteristics. Oftentimes you will see that it is nothing more than the result of nature. You will see as you go deeper, whether the rest is only spurring you to go deeper. I can understand that St. Anthony of Padua, who was a religious priest, would enter the order of St. Francis for greater poverty and virtues – we can set aside what is less for what is greater.

The Church always allows someone to leave the active life to become contemplative. A Capuchin or a Dominican may join the Carthusians. The opposite is not allowed. If one is drawn to opposite ways of life, this is not an attraction. We must always suspect any movement that draws us outside. – But, there’s a fire. – Check if the hearth is well lit, well fed; only then I can trust the fire. You must resist all interior movements that are contrary to our goal. Such a test does not come from God, because God does not contradict himself. If he perfects your vocation, by making it easier and greater for you, that attraction has the right characteristics – you can follow it without fear.

**How does an attraction work? In two ways: at first it is gentle.** Our Lord attracts us by his goodness and sweetness. When our Lord called the apostles, it was with gentleness: he attracted them like a magnet drawing iron. His voice was so gentle when he called Mary in the garden of the Resurrection; there was so much goodness and appeal that he touched her heart, and she could only say: *Rabbouni! My Good*

***Master (Teacher)!*** (cf. Jn 20:16) She said nothing else, because her heart was so happy. The apostles gave up everything (cf. Mt 19:27): it was a great grace, it was the great gentleness of our Lord that had attracted them, his goodness. They were not inclined to do violence to themselves: they were crude and ignorant – they knew only their nets and boats, and they held on to them like treasures. As for us, we have experienced this same joy for our Eucharistic vocation. Nothing seemed difficult; we were gaining more than what we were leaving. God began by showering his manna. The devil cannot do this; he cannot give us this goodness and gentleness.

**Points for reflection:**

After summarizing a previous teaching, Father Eymard presents two principles of discernment on the authenticity of grace. He concludes by a positive sign of God's attraction. Explain these points in your own words.

