

THE GOOD ROAD

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OUR SPIRITUAL DIMENSION AS HUMAN BEINGS

First Teaching

We human beings are not automata controlled solely by the chemical actions and reactions of our bodies. Besides our visible form, our cells and our tissues, we possess magnetism, emotions, ideas and, above all, our condition as spiritual beings.

We are made up of a physical body, a soul, and Spirit. Our mind—comprised of emotions and intellectual understanding—is only a vehicle for the Spirit. If we wish to obtain a genuine and lasting happiness, we need to validate this reality.

The force that sustains life is still an immense, unknown field. Science laboriously attempts to penetrate it with some results. Various schools of psychology and psychosomatic medicine—among many other disciplines—sum up the efforts of scientists in their attempts to understand the human being as a whole.

The more we realize that human beings continue to suffer in spite of advances in biology, new surgical techniques, developments in preventive and diagnostic medicine, and advances in our knowledge of mental processes and psychological treatments—the more urgently and deeply do we feel the need to give a spiritual dimension to our lives.

By our essential nature, we are spiritual entities destined to immortality. But since our spiritual being acts on the metaphysical as well as the physical plane, we have free will, which defines our lives. We can do good or evil; we can make an effort or stagnate. In other words, our lives are in our own hands. Free will is an intrinsic quality of our condition as spiritual beings. It is what characterizes our soul and it shows in our behavior and in our works.

A divine spark—the Spirit—has been deposited in our being like a dewdrop reflecting the sun. We were made to be an image of the divine; but our senses, which on the one hand allow us to unfold, on the other feed us conflicting messages which disturb and create disharmony in our souls.

Our means to unfold are willpower and the gift of Divine Grace.

By the rightful effort of will, we clarify, and purify our thoughts and feelings and make ourselves deserving of Divine Grace.

By the gift of Divine Grace, we come to recognize the Spirit and to know what is good in our own past experience, and we receive guidance from the souls who have already traversed the Good Road of spiritual unfolding.

INNER LIFE

Second Teaching

To be able to actualize our condition as spiritual beings, it is crucial for us to get to know ourselves deeply and intimately.

We carry the seeds of eternity within us. The less unrest, uncertainty and disorder there is in our environment, the better we will be able to harbor clearer thoughts and feelings and understand the immensity of our destiny.

If our objective is to have a great deal more than we have now, how much happiness do we think we will find when we have everything and can't take in anymore? Will the road to materialism really give us the freedom we yearn for?

Human beings nowadays have a low level of inner freedom: we are wrapped up in objectives which are not always supportive of our yearning for liberation and objectives which are governed by mental structures that alienate us from our sense of being. We are not yet ready to choose our destiny freely and responsibly. It is essential for us to gain some distance from the whirlwind of materialism and to learn how to harmonize our exterior activity with the inner recollection needed to cultivate our spiritual life. We need to begin the Good Road of spiritual unfolding.

Although we all have spiritual yearnings, it isn't easy to be faithful to our aspiration and behave in accordance with it. Speeches, practices and books become useless and tiresome unless we ourselves really live spiritual life, reflecting upon our lives and trying to live the teachings we receive.

We encounter ourselves in inner reflection. We come to think, to know by intuition, to love and seek God. Moreover, we discover that this God, so greatly sought after and so little known, so very alive and yet so abstract, is within our own soul. There we find the link that connects us with the divine.

These concepts, though very simple, are not always easy to understand. This is because we are educated for continuous exterior action and are taught to achieve practical and immediate results. But some of us are able to depart from that way of thinking and discover value in pausing to observe ourselves inwardly and seeking God there.

To discover the need to know ourselves is to have found the Good Road of spiritual life. It is to have discovered the secret of peace and happiness.

GOOD DISCERNMENT

Third Teaching

When we say that we need to dissociate from what is “worldly” in order to begin our road of unfolding, it might seem as though we were putting up a barrier between ourselves and the world. But there is really no such barrier. Dissociating ourselves from worldliness, changing our way of life and retreating to solitude are expressions which indicate a change in our mental attitude, a change in the way we approach life, a change in our point of view.

Dissociating from worldliness is the expression we use to refer to our effort to move from a selfish and personalistic state of consciousness to a state of participation and generosity. Any other interpretation would mean that we would be creating new barriers instead of overcoming the barriers of separativity and ignorance.

It is possible to be in a solitary spot without having inner peace, and to be in perfect contemplation in a noisy city. For example, we won't pay attention to the countless billboards that have been designed to awaken greed, lust or banality if we are not interested in them. Alternatively, we can be completely deprived of visual stimulus yet have our minds filled with very disturbing images. The secret to changing our attitude consists in thinking and directing our attention deliberately, aiming to expand our state of consciousness. In this way, we disassociate ourselves from worldliness (in other words, from a selfish and personalistic attitude), since our minds are centered on a spiritual objective.

Sometimes we classify our preferences for the practices of spiritual life as contemplative, devotional, speculative or operative. Behind this is an instructional purpose: so that we can learn both to value individual characteristics and to observe the effects of practices which promote a merely partial development. From this perspective, our objective is to unfold harmoniously: to balance feeling and analysis with upright, just and compassionate action. Until we reach this harmony, we tend to incline more towards one aspect of life than another.

We all need to develop both our own individual characteristics and the ability to get along with the groups we relate to. This is not an easy task. Sometimes our personal characteristics put us in conflict with the characteristics of others. Sometimes very domineering people tend to manipulate those who are weaker. We all need a certain degree of self-knowledge, nobility and generosity to be able to unfold both in groups and individually, as group members.

We each have our characteristic mold, and only in that mold can we unfold. Our spiritual work consists in knowing, polishing and transforming our mold, not in replacing it by another one.

If, for example, we have difficulty meditating or concentrating on a particular idea, we probably need to rest our mind, to empty it of the distractions that are disturbing it, centering our thoughts and attention on very simple ideas, on images which promote quietude. This mental repose is our meditation. If we aren't able to rest our mind that way, we can try occupying it with something concrete, positive, uplifting. These active, well-directed thoughts will then be our meditation.

Spiritual life makes daily life beautiful and brings peace and calm to those around us. It teaches us to value inner things, strengthens our good tendencies, and directs toward the Good Road the energies we usually waste in trivial objectives.

MENTAL WORK

Fourth Teaching

It is good to generate thoughts of love, so that our path may be luminous and so that we may sow goodness with our actions.

The secret of people's success or failure is in the type of thoughts behind their lives and work.

When we plan our future, when we start a task, when we set even the simplest objectives, it is good for us to generate thoughts of impartial love, of universal fellowship and of personal renouncement. This will cause our purpose to triumph and bear abundant fruit, no matter how limited our means and no matter how many obstacles we come up against along the way.

When we send out thoughts with selfish aims—even if they appear to be beneficial for us—we generate bitterness and suffering. But when we send out generous thoughts, we create all around us the conditions that are necessary to generate happiness. Thoughts direct energy and set the objective. The Work is the result. A well-aimed arrow will surely hit the chosen target. Once released, it doesn't stop and it doesn't change its course.

Our progress depends on the quality of our thoughts as much as on the result of our works. Our first step on our road of unfolding is not blaming ourselves for past errors or making an ostentatious change of lifestyle. Nor is it making a heroic leap to the opposite shore. *Our unfolding begins when we send out one thought of love after another, until we have created the habit of right thinking.* Waves of nobly directed thoughts gradually erase those which were selfishly emitted. This is the only effort which transforms. We could well define it as living in heaven.

If we engage in right thinking, we acquire a magnetic strength that enables us to overcome all obstacles and triumphantly achieve our objectives. The star of our destiny doesn't change, but how fast we reach it and how bright it is depend on how and what we think.

There is a burden of pain on the person who does unjust and selfish actions as well as on those at whom those actions are directed. We pay for wrongful actions with our blindness, isolation and suffering. However, thinking wrongfully is what's truly harmful, and that harm becomes even stronger if it is done behind an apparently inoffensive appearance. We also do much harm if we masquerade thoughts and desires for what is wrongful behind an innocent facade, while not daring to actually do wrong for fear of punishment, reproach or ostracism.

Selfish or unwholesome thoughts come from the desire to possess and they imprison us in a circle of petty and narrow ideas. Without realizing what we are doing, we choose to have a tiny part of what we desire, thereby forsaking all that we could achieve.

Thoughts born of unwholesome intentions tie us progressively to a destiny of darkness and ignorance, whereas generous and expansive thoughts, motivated by the good use of our free will and directed by right intention, are the basis of happiness and the unfolding of our best possibilities.

Only when we learn to make a habit of thinking well can we transcend the pair of opposites possessing-disattaching and have all that we need to fulfill our life and our works.

When we make a mental habit of good thoughts, our minds gain the power to carry out good works. This is the foundation of a real and stable happiness.

If we are thinking well, we are on the Good Road.

THE INTEGRAL HUMAN BEING

Fifth Teaching

We could say that this is the era of specialization. One consequence of this is that we tend to study all the aspects of the human being in depth but separately. Although we have made great achievements using this mode of investigation, this has occurred in detriment of trying to develop an integral way of seeing the human being. We don't thoroughly understand either our individual reality or our relationship with the human whole to which we belong. And we don't develop our spiritual possibilities as much as we could, either, since we are tied to the values of a heedless materialism which makes us lose sight of those possibilities. Moreover, we misuse a great deal of our energy and creativity by nourishing a state of anxiety which has a negative effect on us. This situation leads us to adopt a lifestyle that does not satisfy our need for meaning.

People's bodies and minds are animated by Spirit. We need to recognize and welcome this reality, accepting it not only intellectually but practically through our daily choices, decisions and actions.

We are sufficiently equipped to recognize how important it is to have a healthy body, an active mind and an egoent spirit. In other words, we already perceive our need to unfold harmoniously. What we have yet to do is to embody this ideal of physical and spiritual health in our daily reality, an ideal which can lead us to a harmonious relationship with the rest of humanity, with the Earth on which we live and with the Universe which is our shelter.

A balanced diet and appropriate physical exercise develop bones and muscles, while study and reflection cultivate the mind. We also need to acquire the capacity for sustained mental concentration, to liberate and channel the energy of our organism in a positive direction instead of wasting it thoughtlessly.

A morality based on participation and a healthy joie de vivre gives us the right to a constructive pleasure that generates energy instead of wasting it. It also gives us the right to use—unless it affects the needs of other human beings—the goods we need for our unfolding. If our destiny is to unite with the divine, which is the plenitude of happiness, we have the right and obligation to attain that happiness and spread it around us.

From time immemorial the great Teachers have taught us the secrets of true happiness:

- To cultivate self-control rather than trying to control others
- To give rather than ask for
- To work for the common good instead of working only for our own benefit
- To generate richness instead of accumulating profits

These attitudes lead us to egoence.

We need to acquire the habit of reflecting for ourselves rather than blindly adopting what has been thought and said by others. We are currently using only a fraction of the billions of neurons in our brains. Surely in the future new pathways will be formed in our cerebral cortex. Our memory will be clearer and we will, especially, have the ability to acquire the faculty of

intuition. This development will make us sure of ourselves and of our capacity for attainment, and it will allow us to reach the beatitude that comes with knowledge. But this future will become a reality only if we work on our unfolding diligently and with dedication. Thus we will learn to be the arbiters of our own destiny instead of placing the burden of our life onto the shoulders of others.

To be always waiting for others to make us happy, guarantee our wellbeing, take care of us without requiring any responsibility on our part, and resolve our conflicts without any need for us to change is a surefire way to insipidity, suffering and ignorance. If we transform ourselves into bread of life by generating good thoughts, creative ideas, efficient work, an open attitude and a sense of commitment, it means we are building our egoent individuality and collaborating in the creation of a better world. It means we are treading the Good Road.

LIBERATION AND CHANGE

Sixth Teaching

When we dream of liberation from our limitations and ties, we are generally trying to break loose from rituals, traditions, customs and society. Sometimes, however, we don't realize that without a creative content to replace the schemes we reject, just leaves us empty of values, principles and direction.

It is also not very evident that the yearning for change has various components. Some of our needs for change are an answer to exterior negative situations; others are an answer to certain of our own attitudes which lead us into impossible situations. It can often be seen that, in our mind, the concepts of liberation and change have very imprecise limits and are easily confused.

We rarely think concretely of liberation as a concept. Rather, when facing circumstances we consider unjust, conflictive, stressful or somehow disagreeable, we wish to escape, and we want a different reality.

It is evident—and most of us accept this—that in order to achieve the ability to live in freedom, we must consent to participate in a system which is just to everyone. Otherwise our own liberty will sooner or later be in jeopardy. For example, Nicholas II, the last Russian czar, abused the power vested in him by the governmental system of the time. Although he was obliged, after the revolution of 1905, to accept the existence of a representative assembly which was established to limit monarchic autocracy, he continued to act as if he were accountable only to God for his governmental decisions. The system itself was unjust and abusive, but the extreme to which the arbitrariness of this Czar carried it was one of the most decisive factors that forced him to abdicate in March, 1917. He and his family were executed on the night of July 16, 1918. Coming closer to home, we often want to implement changes by using the violence of unkind words, aggressive gestures, emotional withdrawal or many other methods that do, of course, produce changes. But the effectiveness of these changes is very questionable, and they're very costly for ourselves, our families and everyone around us.

Are violent changes, whether of words, attitudes or actions, necessary for our liberation? Is it justifiable to use violence in certain situations, always, or never?

To help us elucidate these questions, let's analyze the basic concepts they involve. What do we understand by change? freedom? liberation?

Changing means substituting or causing others to substitute something new for what they already have. Here there is no positive or negative connotation. Change is no guarantee of improvement. It's simply a substitution. Looking at change in our own life, the positive or negative connotation is not given by change in itself but by how we change and what substitutions we make.

Freedom refers to our natural *power* to act in one way or another, or not act at all. This power is necessarily accompanied by responsibility for our actions. This is logical. Were we not responsible for our own actions, we would not respect others. And since we are not an

abstraction and since we don't live in empty space, we would consequently end up mistreating them in one way or another. We live in relationship; what we do affects those around us.

Liberation refers to the *action* of making ourselves free. In other words, *the natural power of freedom becomes reality through a specific action: liberating ourselves.*

What is implied in the action of liberating ourselves?

The action of liberating ourselves consists in balancing the use of our power to be free with the exercise of responsibility implicit in acting and speaking in a way that is respectful of others' freedom. The action of freeing ourselves implies, as a consequence, leading a life governed by spiritual and ethical principles. It implies, above all, a life committed to the common good.

Where is the place for prerogatives, privileges, and the license to behave at whim? There is no place, since those attitudes don't promote the common good but instead are mainsprings of human tragedies. Irresponsibly exercising the power to be free leads us to injustice and violence.

In our particular situation as Sons and Daughters of Cafh, how can we liberate ourselves, how can we balance the exercise of our freedom with the responsibility implied by that exercise?

The answer is very short, but implementing it occupies our whole life: we create that balance by working on our spiritual unfolding.

From this point of view, why is spiritual unfolding necessary?

We need to unfold spiritually to be able to overcome our tendency to behave reactively and to jump from one extreme to another without serenely applying our discernment.

Sometimes we replace our cultural heritage with improvisations we make as we go along. We experiment with our own life without taking the necessary precautions to preserve our health and integrity. We exchange the limited knowledge of our society for the ignorance of our own inexperience and lack of vision of the whole.

At other times, mainly in our youth, we exchange repressive traditions for permissive practices that consume our physical and mental energy and make us slaves of our instincts, or even slaves of addiction. We replace the ancient customs we want to transcend for others that, although new, are not better.

In our yearning for change, independence and freedom, we want to begin a new life: we want to change. But if we aren't careful, we often merely exchange old rituals for other ones. Once there was a man who stopped wearing the cross his mother had given him, boasting that he was a free thinker and that the cross was a sign of superstition. Soon afterwards he was flaunting a gold amulet as protection against bad luck.

What good has humanity reaped from violence, unduly permissive customs and hedonism? Have these eliminated suffering, misery, war? What price have we paid for the progress we have achieved? *Will we be able to generate change without unleashing tragedies?*

We are merely exchanging one jail for another with our thoughtless attitudes and rash changes for the sake of change. We bounce from one extreme of opposites to the other: from submissiveness to traditional values and standards to the rebelliousness and chaos that come with changing without reflecting.

Personal and societal progress requires that we examine tradition, encourage new tendencies and foster initiatives. But we also need to learn to build on what we have already learned instead of destroying or denying it. It is not postures, words or violent or extreme actions that enable us to walk the path towards liberation. For that we need vision, creativity, knowledge and self-control. In other words, we need to cultivate our faculties, be familiar with the foundations that already exist, depart from the already known, and use what humanity has already accomplished as a springboard to new horizons.

In order to fulfill the possibility of liberating ourselves, of being agents of positive change for ourselves and for humanity, we need to exercise a methodical effort to expand our love and knowledge. In practice, we need to learn to master our bodies, to think logically and methodically, to use our creative imagination, and to ennoble our feelings.

What bind us are our limitations. Our exterior way of life simply reflects what we are, our current spiritual stage as individuals, as a group and as humankind as a whole. Consciously or unconsciously, we build our way of life, and our way of life reflects the degree to which we are dominated by our instincts and to what extent we are working to attain our inner liberation.

True freedom unlocks our inner life, making us more creative, opening new horizons for us, and making us more responsible and involved. Exteriorly, this freedom requires a life of discipline, order, and effort.

Mohandas Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Simone Weil, Rigoberta Menchú, Albert Schweitzer, Marie Curie, Victor Frankl and countless other innovators and agents of change in our times demonstrate with their lives that exterior and interior freedom, the transformation of society and ourselves, are built on what has already been achieved, on the legacy of society and on facing adversity with courage and daring. That is our launching pad.

When, through self-control, systematic knowledge and the daring of love, we secure what is best for all, we develop the vision, strength and courage to be agents of change. We don't need to destroy or force, to conquer or subjugate. We just need to be what we are: human beings with an infinite number of possibilities. To know this and to behave accordingly is truly liberation.

FREE WILL

Seventh Teaching

The Persian poet Omar Khayyam took the deterministic vision of the world and expressed it beautifully:

“And the first Morning of Creation wrote
What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.”

God projects the world, and it unfolds according to His or Her divine ideation. From this point of view, it would seem that everything is subject to an absolute destiny, that everything is predetermined—not only human actions, but even the Universe itself. However, local causes, maintaining the integrity of their origin, act freely within the conditions that prevail during their particular time and place in the Universe. A determinative cosmic idea unfolds according to free will within its magnetic field of action.

The same thing happens in our case. We are divinely determined: we are human, and our destiny is substantial union with God. Our present circumstances are the result of past feelings, thoughts and actions. Moreover, we are also subject to the determinism of the causes and effects that are defined by inheritance. Yet we have freedom of action within the magnetic field of humankind. Our characteristics enable us to think and feel independently: we are free. Our actions establish our future conditions for us. Although our final destiny is determined, the choice of how and when we will attain it is in our own hands.

If we recognize our final destiny and behave accordingly, we can live a life of peace and progress. If we deny that destiny, we can suffer countless miseries until we again find the Good Road.

Consciousness and will are what shape the various nuances of our future, eventually leading us—depending on how we apply our free will—to our final destiny. Consciousness is the reflection of our divine, eternal and immutable destiny. Will is the reflection of our freedom and possibility for unfolding.

It is not our destiny to abandon ourselves in the arms of fatalism. We can improve our life circumstances by using the means we have at hand today. To a certain extent we can change those circumstances by availing ourselves of the best possibilities which becoming offers to us. Thanks to our free will, we can make a constant effort to advance on the Good Road of spiritual unfolding. Does not a good captain continuously verify the course of the ship to insure it arrives at the chosen destination?

We possess the power to reflect and to reason, as well as to make decisions and choices. The exercise of these faculties is what constitutes our free will. The fact that we have free will means that we are individually, socially, morally and spiritually responsible for our actions. We are able to make use—and good use—of our free will to the extent that we cultivate our intelligence so that we can understand better, to the extent that we use our memory to remember the connections between cause and effect when examining our actions, to the extent that we

strengthen our will to increase our chances of choosing well, to the extent that we expand our contexts to be able to make choices for the common good, and to the extent that we cultivate our noblest feelings to learn to love more deeply. Otherwise, the freedom to positively influence our own present and future is practically null, and we live at the mercy of circumstances and impulses.

The bridge that narrows the gap between the determinism imposed by the law of cause and effect and our free will is our capacity to recognize the relationship between causes and effects. This provides a foundation for finding new positive and practical responses to the challenges presented by the circumstances which it is our lot to live.

Free will, as a possibility, is a gratuitous gift. We need a systematic effort to unfold spiritually if we want to make the most of this gratuitous gift.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Eighth Teaching

The word life is defined by the dictionary as “the principle or force by which animals and plants are maintained in the performance of their functions.”

Our life is our means to act, to unfold. The way we act largely defines the quality of our life, as well as its characteristics, influence in the environment and existential meaning. That’s why such expressions as “materialistic life,” “lost life”, “physical life,” “social life” even “spiritual life” have been coined over time.

Since we have chosen to live deliberately and to apply ourselves to our unfolding, it makes sense that we would want to adopt a way of life that is consistent with our ideal. We would like to describe our life as “spiritual,” but what would that mean? How can we live a spiritual life?

The Teaching of Cafh defines the concept this way: To live a spiritual life means experimenting with (trying out, investigating) and leading our lives according to (acting in accordance with certain legally and rationally established rules of order or method) known truths —methodically (systematically), continuously (uninterruptedly), theoretically (meditating, reflecting deeply), and mystically (from the viewpoint of our relationship with God).

We may note that the Teaching exhorts us to live the known truths. It doesn’t speak of discovering new truths or standing on supposed truths. It also urges us to establish very strict conditions by which to live those truths.

Let’s analyze the first condition: experimenting with and living the known truths. The first thing that becomes evident is a very obvious step: we need information. Which truths are already known? We can’t want to unfold and live better if we don’t even know what our culture and society as a whole have to offer and what they have verified as truths. How much credibility would we have, even with ourselves, if we wanted to work for a better world without even knowing or doing what is already within our reach to make a better world right away? How would we base our judgments of what’s good and not good, or what’s helpful and not helpful? If we speculate about supposed truths without knowing or living in accordance with the truths that are already evident, we run the risk of distorting our reasoning for lack of information and other elements of discernment. Even the goals we set wouldn’t be valid, since we couldn’t be sure that they weren’t just motivated by personal interest.

The first requirement to live a spiritual life, then, is to live in a manner informed by and consistent with truths which are already known. This requires a methodical, continuous, theory-based and mystical work.

It requires a methodical work because living in a manner informed by and consistent with known truths presupposes certain orderliness in the way we study, make decisions and assessments, and in the way we approach everyday life. If, for example, we mismanaged our finances and were therefore unable to meet our obligations, we couldn’t say that we live in

accordance with already known truths—not doing harm to our neighbor—because such behavior would necessarily cause others to suffer.

It requires a continuous work because living spiritually means being consistent with our vocation of unfolding at every moment. Truthful behavior cultivates healthy relationships and helps our attitude to be consistent in every situation, putting our personal convenience in second place. Besides, when we are always truthful, the people around us trust that they can believe what we say.

It requires a theory-based work since known truths rarely appear in black and white without gray areas. We need to reflect and meditate deeply to make sure that our interpretations do not distort those truths to benefit ourselves personally, to the detriment of the common good. For example, it is a known truth that all human beings deserve to live in freedom. But if we don't reflect in depth about the meaning of this statement, we might interpret it to mean that we have the right to listen to the radio at full blast even if it bothers our neighbors.

It requires a mystical work because for our reflections, understanding and actions to be spiritual, they have to be clearly circumscribed within our primary goal, which is to deepen our relationship with God.

There's a great distance between what we know and how we live. We know that we all have a common origin, but we still treat each other as strangers. We know ways to live healthily but we choose to obey old habits and desires of the moment, which induce sickness and premature death. We know what our income is, yet many of us live beyond our means. We have some knowledge of what our society's and our own future needs will be; we do little, however, to make sure that those needs can be satisfied when the time comes. It is certain that we are going to die, but we tend to live as if we were immortal. It is evident that reality includes much more than human beings, yet we ignore the life of the Earth and the Universe.

Living a spiritual life implies making an effort to reduce the gap between what we do and what we already know is good. It implies expanding and deepening our knowledge so as to improve what we do and broaden the horizon of our lives. This way of living is the aspiration of those of us who walk the Good Road.

THE ACT OF PRESENCE

Ninth Teaching

The elation of discovering our vocation and the energizing effect of coming into contact with the Good Road may give us the feeling that we are very strong and now know the solution to the evils afflicting humanity. Sometimes we may even want to go out preaching and reforming the world. Urged on by a desire for progress and a yearning to help humanity we may, in our pursuit of happiness for all, expect others to do what we think should be done. But the solutions we imagine are not always the ones needed to alleviate the ills of the world—imagining is very different from implementing. Besides, we can't provide for others what we ourselves don't yet have.

What can we give in the meantime, while we are working on ourselves to achieve the good that we have glimpsed?

Our commitment to our vocation can be our contribution. We can talk to our relatives, friends and coworkers about the ideal that inspires us. We can dedicate ourselves to putting the concepts and values we discover on the Good Road into practice in our own lives.

Getting close to souls means listening to them, loving them, assisting them in their needs. To tell them what they have to do would distance us from them, while sharing openly what we discover will draw us closer to them.

There is a big gap between saying what has to be done and doing it. We need to prepare ourselves both inwardly and outwardly if we are to bridge that gap.

Our first job, especially at the beginning, is to stabilize ourselves on the Good Road with our presence. This is no small task.

What does it mean to be present on the Good Road?

- To be in the here and now
- To be present with our mind and feelings
- To be available for whatever is necessary
- To be silent
- To be listening
- To be communicating
- To have our eyes wide open
- To look within
- To look to see the needs around us

These attitudes help us to develop the spiritual strength we need to orient our own lives as well as to help others. Above all, they give us the orientation we need to find the souls who are looking for the Good Road.

But what motivates us to keep practicing these attitudes?

The exercise of remembering that we live in the divine presence gradually reduces distractions and quiets our impulses. If during the day, we take a few seconds out of each hour to remember who we are and what our destiny is, to remember our fervent wish for good for

ourselves and everyone else, we will create a solid foundation for remaining in a state of presence. This apparently simple exercise keeps us alert and helps us to gain some distance from our mental and emotional movements. In this way, at every moment of the day and in all circumstances, we will radiate the divine presence in our heart to our surroundings, and we will transmit that beneficial force simply and spontaneously, without speeches or show. Our life is transformed because we establish a concrete and effective contact with the divine in the silence of our hearts.

By focusing our thoughts frequently on the divine during the day, we remember the practices we have learned and have the inner strength to apply them in our daily circumstances. We also develop the necessary serenity and clarity to carry out our activities more efficiently and attentively.

This state of presence is our mission. It is our contribution to the solution of social ills, since it not only motivates our own spiritual unfolding, but its effects expand in concrete and effective acts for the good of all souls.

“I am here,” we think, “in this school, in this office, in this home, where we are all committed to our work. I love these souls; I wish them all well and want them all to be happy. For this reason, I make an effort to express spiritual life in the way I behave and relate with them. At the same time, I transmit the divine presence I cultivate in my heart. I do the same jobs as those around me, and I also invite the divine presence to illumine us all.” This attitude of presence is a beneficent force. Imagine saying it in the middle of an argument. Isn’t it evident that we would be able to improve the environment, calming ourselves down and everyone else who is around us?

A state of presence guides our thinking, feeling and acting to everyone’s good. At home, when we are out, even while sleeping, we are in the presence of the divine as a permanent witness of our love and of our aspiration to the common good.

FAITH AND BELIEFS

Tenth Teaching

Is it possible to live without faith?

We can't have the entire body of universal knowledge at our disposal. Even if we did, it would be impossible to make full use of it. For this reason, we must accept out of faith what others know and communicate to us. On the other hand, faith is indispensable for healthy and productive human relationships. We need to trust one another. Otherwise, we would be unable to function as groups.

These aspects of what we will call "faith" are related to trust.

Another way in which we use the word faith is related to our religious beliefs.

Religions establish their beliefs, some asserting and urging people to believe what others deny. Religious beliefs acknowledge and proclaim supernatural facts that are unknown to the rational mind. They identify faith with the dogmas they preach. If we are believers, we think of faith as a virtue, trying to stay faithful by working hard not to doubt our beliefs. We class ourselves as non-believers if we are unable to believe in any particular religious doctrine; we even think that we don't have a spiritual vocation. To limit faith in such a way would be to deform it.

It is always good to believe in one particular interpretation of the supernatural and the unknown because this creates a predisposition to faith, but this is not what is essential about faith. In this respect, it is very important that we distinguish between faith as an attitude and the contents of belief systems.

To adhere to certain beliefs means to profess *a* faith. But to so limit *faith*—as an attitude of the soul—would deform it.

Having faith means possessing a mental and spiritual state that is so broad that it opens us to the unknown. To start on the Good Road, it is necessary to have this kind of faith, which predisposes us to accept as possible what we have not been able to verify by our own means. Without this faith, any attempt of a supernatural order would be impossible.

That's why we need to work effectively on our faith, to expand its horizons and deepen its meaning.

True faith is not faith in a creed, but faith that what seems impossible may be possible and that what seems true to us today could be something else. Faith soars up over reason to rest on intuition, which is a mental gift that opens our minds to a field of untold possibilities.

Faith enables us to confess our limitations and to accept and face the unknown. To have faith is to intuit the truth of what is beyond our understanding but which exists within us, manifesting itself without being known.

Plain and simple faith assures us from the start that we have the capacity to recognize the truth which, step by step, reveals the unknown to us.

In short, faith means being sure that the truth is potentially within ourselves.

LIVING HEALTHFULLY

Eleventh Teaching

A great deal of our suffering centers on bodily illnesses, mental conditions and emotional disorders. These are all energy consumers and are sources of tension, anguish and alarm. They diminish the quality of and even shorten our lives.

It is not yet possible to prevent all physical ailments, but to a great extent there is a lot we can do to avoid them. Living healthfully works miracles, even in cases of unavoidable genetic or chronic illnesses. Living healthfully means taking care of bodily health as well as mental and emotional health.

Frugality, a methodical and organized life, modest habits, upright behavior and a cheerful temperament are all sources of physical and mental well-being.

Nowadays we preoccupy ourselves with diets and practices to improve our health, many of which are unproven and obviously risky. At the same time, we may be neglecting recommended and proven practices which are simple but which, if we followed them, would add years and quality to our lives: practices such as not smoking and, whenever possible, avoiding smoking areas; eating lots of fruits and vegetables; reducing our consumption of saturated fats; getting enough sleep; meditating to reduce stress; improving our interpersonal relationships; avoiding promiscuity; cultivating stable and deep affective ties; drinking very little alcohol or avoiding it altogether; exercising and engaging in sports; keeping our brain active through study; devoting time to healthy recreation; avoiding all narcotics; using order and cleanliness to make a beautiful home, adding the details of care and attention which don't cost money: a table which has been lovingly set for dinner; a meal which has been carefully prepared and served; a smile on our lips, a kind word.

How can we organize our lives so as to integrate into our lifestyles what we know is good for us and for our families?

If we complain that we don't have enough time, we won't make the time to live moderately.

If we complain that we are under a lot of stress and that we can't add anything further to our hectic life, our hectic life will devour us.

If we complain that we can't concentrate, our confused minds will rule our lives, immersing us in confusion.

If, by contrast, we make it our purpose to live a healthy life and we organize our lives in a positive way, we stop complaining and get to work.

Let us learn the art of substituting unhealthy habits with habits that will be good for our physical, mental and emotional health.

Instead of arguing and giving orders, we can spend time in dialogue and conversation.

Instead of eating what harms us, we can prepare the healthy food that our body needs.

Instead of watching programs that degrade our intelligence and sense of morality, we can view programs that are educational or creative in a wholesome way; or we can study or read an interesting book.

Instead of giving in to a hectic way of doing things that has an alienating influence on our lives, we can organize our schedule so that we can successfully fulfill it.

Instead of complaining, we can elevate our thoughts to the divine in a spirit of gratitude and love.

Instead of giving in to anxiety, we can give ourselves trustfully to prayer.

All human beings can count on having twenty-four hours every day and seven days each week. That is the time we have to walk the Good Road or to walk the road of pain, confusion, deterioration and premature death. The choice is ours. Exterior conditions have an influence, but they are not the determining factor. We always have a broad margin of free will for organizing and employing our energy in a useful, responsible and expansive way.

With the proper attitude we can change our exterior conditions. A healthy life is not a privilege of the rich. We might be very wealthy yet adopt an unhealthy and disorganized lifestyle.

Healthy living results when we apply our energy to our spiritual unfolding, when we feel that we are indebted to life. Isn't it our obligation to repay our family and society with a healthy body and a healthy mind that will enable us to work and be a positive element in our environment, wherever it may be?

The Good Road gives us all the above-mentioned signposts, which orient us and guarantee us a better journey through this world. If we choose to respect them, they become a source of well-being, expansive joy and a productive life.

WAYS TO PRAY

Twelfth Teaching

How would we describe a typical day in our life? Usually the first things that come to mind are images involving work, our comings and goings, time spent with our family, or other concerns. The demands that the exterior world places on us are so great that they practically define our self-image. We see ourselves in action, making decisions and working. The picture of ourselves in recollection, meditating or praying seldom comes to us as an aspect of what we are. However, there is an ever-present need in us to stop and reflect, to elevate our minds to a higher level than the daily routine. Sometimes we have a burning desire for knowledge, for understanding. At other times we need to forget our daily worries, take a respite, and regain strength in stillness. Sometimes we need to forget our daily preoccupations, to find some peace, to give ourselves time. What is more, we need to pour out our hearts, to find consolation in telling a friend or someone we trust of the dreams, fantasies, yearnings and sorrows that fill our hearts.

No matter how busy we are, we need the pure and unselfish affection of friendship. If we don't have this, we feel a lack of meaning in our lives and a need to change, to do something to reverse this situation. We then seek to cultivate friendship, the mutual caring that is born in and becomes strengthened through respectful relationships, appreciation for one another, unselfish giving.

There is one friendship, among all the others that we may cultivate, which we don't always take care of or value but which is always there, inside, waiting for us. It is the friendship par excellence which gives us lasting repose, which makes us friends with ourselves. To become friends with God may seem very daring, but from time immemorial this possibility has been and will be within our reach through prayer.

If we have an image of ourselves as very active and busy persons, we may believe that praying is incompatible with our lifestyle or abilities, and that we'll never be able to do it right.

If it is hard for us to pray because we aren't in the habit of it, we feel discouraged, even coming to believe we are unworthy of the Good Road. Yet in most cases this is a mistaken perception. The difficulties that arise are not insurmountable obstacles that prevent us from unfolding spiritually. In fact, it is not that we have difficulty praying, it is that we have not yet discovered the way of praying that works best for us.

Although it is part of our nature to elevate our thoughts in prayer, we don't all do that in the same way. Exercises of meditation and prayer, as generally taught, are points of support from which to carry out our inner work. We must each delve within to find our own individual and spontaneous way of praying.

It is not good to force ourselves to pray in a way that feels difficult. If we have trouble concentrating, we can get used to thinking in concrete terms about the aspects of our lives that we want to deepen into. In other words, we can make the content of our life the subject of our prayer. It is good to do it often, as many times as we can during the day.

We can help ourselves to pray by creating images, saying elevating words, having positive thoughts about someone we love. It can also help to envision the good we wish for the world, for our family, for those who are alone. We can imagine the light that emanates from the divine and envelops the world and all beings. We can imagine the immensity of the sky or of snow-capped mountains as witnesses of the divine presence.

If we find it hard to keep our attention on that kind of imagery, we can imagine something more definite and concrete. We can create and offer feelings of love, compassion and generosity, thus uniting with all souls and with the divine through our good feelings. We can think of the divine as a real and loving being who is by our side, endowed with all the qualities we would wish for in the person we love the most. Or we may imagine the Messiah, the divine Teacher who comes to the earth to liberate all souls. We can think of his beauty, his capacity to love, his spiritual strength which cures all afflictions.

When we get used to thinking about the divine, a strong yearning is born within us to think about this friend whom we love and to share the reality of our life with him. We want to communicate with him, ask for his help, confide our secrets to him and, above all, hear his answer.

If we can't concentrate on this type of thought or image either, we should not get discouraged and believe we cannot pray. The thoughts that arise in our imagination, even the most varied and materialistic ones, take on the nature of prayer if we observe them, analyze them and give them their place and meaning within the context of our life as a whole.

Praying means thinking, imagining and feeling with our intention placed on the divine. Praying means organizing our inner faculties and elevating them above the habitual level. Praying means filling ourselves to the brim with the best that we are able to conceive of and to offer it as goodness to those around us. Prayer gives us the freedom to communicate with the divine in the way that is most positive for us.

And if we can't do this, either, we shouldn't think that we don't pray. An upright intention and fidelity to our vocation of unfolding are also prayer, and they keep us on the Good Road.

Whether it be through thoughts, imagination, feelings, or an upright intention and fidelity, our friendship with the divine is a real and concrete possibility that allows us to connect with what is most sublime and exalted in our lives. Let us not neglect to cultivate this friendship, which will always bring us together giving us peace and tranquility.

MENTAL OPENNESS

Thirteenth Teaching

What is our attitude toward knowledge and faith? What is our attitude toward the faith of other human groups profess?

If we are dogmatic, we get used to holding rigid, specific, indisputable ideas, and commonly boast of our knowledge as if it were absolute and infallible. We assert ourselves within the sphere of what we think we know, and systematically deny everything outside that sphere. When it comes to metaphysical concepts, we take the postulates of our creed on faith, and we call this truth. By doing so we deny, in advance, the postulates of all other creeds without bothering to consider the possibility of studying them with an open and objective attitude.

When the fact that we profess one faith makes us dogmatically deny the validity of another, when by asserting that we possess definitive and final knowledge we deny what we don't know, we are actually preaching ignorance and intolerance. Few things take us farther away from the Good Road than these unyielding and arrogant attitudes.

To unfold, to penetrate the secret of what we don't know, we need to adopt an attitude of mental openness.

An attitude of mental openness does not mean that we necessarily accept differing points of view as true, but that we are predisposed to acknowledge them as valid within their context.

Human knowledge is partial and imperfect. The way to deepen and expand it is by adding new discoveries, theories and ideas to our stock of knowledge which although they may also be partial and limited, they enrich our knowledge by correcting or increasing what we already know.

An attitude of mental openness also presupposes the acceptance that we will eventually be able to know what we do not yet know. By not denying the possibility of knowing what we don't yet know, we are potentially affirming this knowledge and attuning our mind to the possibilities which exist for grasping and knowing it.

By taking beliefs, theories and scientific experiments as parts of the great jigsaw puzzle of human knowledge, we don't absolutely negate or affirm anything.

This open attitude to what we don't know and what we think we know is directly reflected in our relationship with others. When we understand that every point of view reflects a way of perceiving and interpreting reality, and that—up until now—no one has yet been able to affirm that he or she knows the absolute truth, we overcome the conflicting positions between our beliefs and the ways we define problems and their solutions. We adopt a broader point of view which, since it is not based on dogmatically exclusive positions, helps us to achieve more harmonious and constructive relationships with those who think differently from us.

An attitude of mental openness is a state of expectancy, of a healthy desire to know what we don't know, without saying beforehand what that knowledge will or won't consist of.

An attitude of mental openness, cultivated by an upright intention and a love for knowledge, opens the gates of the potential knowledge of the Universe to us.

The momentary brightness of newly acquired knowledge lights our way along the Good Road, but an attitude of mental openness is what keeps the lamp constantly lit, allowing us to see the next step in our search for truth.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Fourteenth Teaching

We often think of active participation in the problems of humankind in terms of participation in political or ideological activities, or ventures that promise fast and spectacular results. We tend to think that the more a person is involved in activism, the more he or she is participating in social concerns.

Does this type of participation best befit the Sons and Daughters of Cafh? What is our role here? What part does our work of spiritual unfolding play in solving the things that are wrong with the world?

It is evident that an exterior activity aimed at relieving or solving humankind's problems is a form of participation. But it is also evident that not every exterior activity necessarily qualifies as a helpful response to human needs.

There are noble human beings who work for the good of humankind. They offer their collaboration to the Great Work tirelessly, never becoming disheartened. They help those who are needy, and they expose those who are powerful, vain and arrogant. They improve the quality of life in society, contributing scientific achievements and laying the groundwork for eras of progress.

Other noble human beings help society by participating in its sufferings through a life of prayer and of humble, selfless work. This renouncement, this inner sacrifice and silent participation, is a spiritual force that sustains humanity, enlightens it, and provides the impetus for its unfolding.

As Sons and Daughters of Cafh, we participate in social problems and sufferings by manifesting a spirit of companionship and fraternal union with all human beings, and by leading a frugal life which is dedicated to spiritual unfolding. *Our work par excellence is to fulfill within ourselves what we want to achieve for the world, so that we may then offer it as a legacy of good for humanity.*

Indifference, for example, is one of the greatest social evils, since it leads to countless miseries. Selfishness is based on indifference. By neither seeing nor being able to feel the suffering of others, we don't mind being self-centered and seeking only our own personal convenience. The same happens with other social ills. They're rooted in the way we are; they are the product of our state of consciousness. This is why we need to expand our state of consciousness if we are to work for the good of humanity. This is our work of active participation par excellence.

How can we participate directly and actively in daily life to solve the problems of the world?

We can do so by working actively to transmute indifference in ourselves, making the effort to develop understanding, compassion and a sense of commitment in our relationships—because we want to eradicate indifference from the world, and we know how easily hidden it is inside our own selves.

We can do so by working actively to transmute selfishness within ourselves, learning to occupy only one place in the world and not two—because we want to eradicate the selfishness in the world, and we don't deceive ourselves about the effort it takes to achieve it.

We can do so by using part of our time and our energy in training ourselves to make our work effective, efficient and tailored to social needs—because we want all human beings to have what they need.

We can do so by trying to get the necessary training to be able to give efficient help—because we want to participate in good works.

We can do so by making the commitment to abide by a code of behavior that is consistent with our aims—because we want to eradicate corruption and banalities.

We can do so by trying not to take refuge in privilege or running away from the difficulties most people must bear—because we want to take an active part in the process of social transformation, and we want to be at the front line and not safe in the rear guard of the struggle.

We can do so by practicing tolerance and compassion in our own surroundings, showing respect for those with whom we live—because we want a world of peace and harmony.

We can do so by living as simply as possible, including in our circle the poorest and most needy—at least in this way and to this extent—because we wish to unite with all souls.

We can do so by working to make our life into an example which will be a testimony of the Teaching—because we want our expansive point of view to have a positive influence, and to contribute solutions to the difficulties that burden us.

We can do so, above all, by trying to reserve our energy in living a responsible and orderly life, in order to have something to offer to souls—because we want to participate in all the ways that were mentioned above.

This active participation of the Sons and Daughters of Cafh with humanity gives fruits of good, which are concretized in good works.

EGOENCE

Fifteenth Teaching

It is our destiny as human beings to unite with the divine. However, our path to that destiny is marked by the struggle between predestination and free will, between intellectual possibilities and the free flow of intuition, between the limitations of biological and inheritance factors and the possibilities we yearn to fulfill. We oscillate between such pairs of opposites as power and lack of power, evolution and stagnation, being and not being.

When we concentrate our attention on selfish matters or on those that are only relatively important, we are wasting our energy, while our ideas and feelings become increasingly confused. Our world shrinks, and our destiny of union with the divine disappears from our consciousness.

When we want to be happy while remaining in these contradictory states, we become engrossed in selfish enjoyments that neither last, satisfy, nor accomplish anything real for ourselves or others—making it evident that we are not on the Good Road.

To overcome these contradictions, our only recourse is to acknowledge the way we are and to change the way we see the world and life. This is not an easy task. The formula is simple, but its execution takes a lifetime: to give less importance to the superficial and trivial aspects of our life, and to focus on fundamental problems so that they may gain importance. This is the way to develop egoence¹ By this simple formula, we discover that we identify our self with our external personality, which has been formed by the combination of habitual ways of thinking, feeling, expressing ourselves, and interpreting life—whether these habits have been acquired consciously, or unconsciously and automatically. We understand that our external personality is not the same as our individuality—on the contrary, it obliterates it.

Our individuality is based on our deepest yearning for union with the divine, on our aspirations to love and participate, on the unique and inimitable place we occupy in the expression of the divine plan on Earth.

This is how we learn to distinguish between what is fundamental and what is accessory, to differentiate relevant tasks from senseless bustle, and to discriminate between the objectives that are consistent with our purpose and those which contradict it. We resolve contradictions by using clarity of discernment, find solutions by using impartial judgment, and gain the strength to overcome difficulties by reserving and transmuting our energy and by the purity of our feelings.

To the extent that we become egoent, we genuinely face the problems that afflict all human beings. To the extent that we concentrate our attention on the fundamental aspects of life, we will be able to discover the causes of problems and collaborate in solving them by really participating, loving expansively and working selflessly.

¹ Egoence: “Egoence means perfect individuality identified with the cosmic consciousness.... Egoence has nothing to do with the development of a super-personality. On the contrary, to be egoent is to transform oneself into pure nothingness, in order to identify with the universal consciousness, with the Divine Mother.”

(Spiritual Life of Cafh, Seventh and Twelfth Teachings)

Our individuality emerges when we begin to know ourselves and ground ourselves firmly in our spiritual values. Our egoence emerges, too, as manifested in our expanding consciousness and participation with all souls. This inner happiness gives the seal of reality to our spiritual life, because it inspires and moves us to carry out noble and selfless actions.

As we come to recognize our real being and the expansion of our consciousness, we multiply our strength and open our perception to the Universe. We no longer perceive the greatness of eternity and the smallness of human beings as opposites. In our experience, those apparent extremes unite in a simple state of being.

The development of egoence has very practical and obvious aspects. Some of these include thinking independently of what is fashionable or of the pressure of what others will say; feeling deeply without fear of being vulnerable; placing the vocation of unfolding above all else without fear of losing the approval of those who think differently; speaking of spiritual things without fear of ridicule; and acting consistently with the ideas we profess, even if that proves difficult.

When our behavior becomes consistent with our vocation, the contradiction between predestination and free will disappears.

SPIRITUAL VOCATION

Sixteenth Teaching

According to tradition, there was once a simple, humble man whose only aim and wish in life was to hear the word of God, so he went to live in the desert as a hermit. There he spent his time in prayer and mortification, keeping up his efforts hour after hour, day after day, year after year for forty years, becoming old in the process. One night he began to weep in desolation. As he prayed, he said to God, “For so many years I have asked you to speak to me, for so many years I have not flagged in prayer or offering, and all I hear is the fathomless silence of the desert. You don’t exist; it has all been in vain.” In the midst of his sobbing there spoke a Voice, which said, “Who do you think has been nourishing your prayer for over forty years? Perseverance in your yearning and the strength of your vocation were my response, which you had always. I have always been beside you, listening to you. I have always loved you and I always will.”

Let us think a moment about our “desert experience.” Let us think about all our wishes, work, worries, joys, and our determination to get the better of life in spite of all difficulties. Let’s add to all this our self-confidence, our faith that the results of our efforts will be good; the joy and the hope that fill us at the birth of a child, our pride at getting our first job, the countless experiences that make up our life. Let’s add our defeats, too, our failures, all the times we were at the point of saying, “I can’t go on.” Perhaps, we identify with the hermit in the story.

All human beings have a vocation. We want to find the ultimate meaning of life, so we rely on something we can’t describe, define or grasp, but which is the substratum that gives force and meaning to everything else. This something— which is indefinable, unfathomable and at the same time so evident and so powerful—we call vocation. It leads us to make an effort until the end and does not let us give up. Because we can’t describe or define it, we assimilate it to our destiny of union with God, calling it a spiritual vocation.

Spiritual vocation appears differently in different people. Although it is not possible to define or comprehend, its presence is concrete and evident in people’s lives. It is not sentimentalism, ideology or activism. It is rooted in the very essence of life.

How does vocation express itself in us, who are Sons and Daughters of Cafh?

We all have dreams, and we all yearn to fulfill our destiny in accordance with our personal characteristics. The way we live our vocation is unique to each one of us. What we share is a conscious and tangible yearning to commit ourselves to our vocation. We want to nourish ourselves with it; we want it to be fully manifested in our lives. And, like the hermit of the desert, we want to persevere in our search for meaning until the end.

Cafh offers us the Good Road as a means to stand firm and not yield in our effort to unite with God, even in the desert of endless experience.

Spiritual vocation is the deep and innermost strength that gives us the vision of our destiny and the strength to not deviate from that aim.

Spiritual vocation is the innermost primordial certainty that is the substructure of what we are and what we yearn for, and which does not support itself on anyone or anything.

Spiritual vocation is the truth that endures through changes, doctrines, triumphs and failures, joys and sufferings.

Let us walk firmly along the Good Road without allowing ourselves to be carried away by superficial emotions or the fluctuations of circumstances. Let us always remember and nourish the enthusiasm we had when we first began to awaken spiritually. Let us dedicate ourselves to persevere in our yearning and determine to fulfill the ultimate meaning of our life.

We will not be deceived if we are sincere, simple and humble, and if we walk the Good Road slowly but firmly. Our vocation will guide us until God shelters us forever in his love and beatitude.