

The End of the Present World
and the
Mysteries of the Future Life

by Father Charles Arminjon

Translated by
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SOPHIA INSTITUTE PRESS®
Manchester, New Hampshire

The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Future Life was originally published in 1881 in French under the title *Fin du Monde Présent et Mystères de la Vie Future*. This edition contains minor editorial revisions.

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For the English translation of Sacred Scripture, we used the New American Bible, Saint Joseph Edition. In some instances, the Douay-Rheims edition more closely matched the Latin phrases interspersed throughout the original French text; these latter cases are footnoted accordingly.

Printed in the United States of America

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Cover design by Ted Schluenderfritz

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Sophia Institute Press®
Box 5284, Manchester, NH 03108
1-800-888-9344
www.sophiainstitute.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Arminjon, Charles, 1824-1885.

[Fin du monde présent et mystères de la vie future. English]

The end of the present world and the mysteries of the future life / by Charles Arminjon ; translated by Susan Conroy and Peter McEnemy.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-933184-38-8 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Eschatology.

I. Title.

BT821.3.A7613 2008

236 — dc22

2008037585

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Preface

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, “the Little Flower,” gave us the most impressive endorsement of this book, *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Future Life*:

Reading this was one of the greatest graces of my life. I read it at the window of my study, and the impression I received from it is too intimate and too sweet for me to express . . . All the great truths of religion, the mysteries of eternity, plunged my soul into a happiness not of this earth . . . I experienced already what God reserves for those who love Him (not with the eye of man, but with that of the heart), and seeing that the eternal rewards had no proportion to the light sacrifices of life, I wanted *to love, to love* Jesus with *passion*, to give Him a thousand proofs of love while I still could. I copied out several passages on perfect love, on the reception that the good God will give His elect at the moment when *He Himself* becomes their great and eternal reward, and I kept repeating unceasingly the words of love burning in my heart.”¹

In spite of the *enormous* influence this book had on the life and heart of the greatest saint of modern times, who *in turn* has inspired

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millions of lives throughout the world for more than a *century*, no one had ever translated it into English and published it in America. I personally felt called — *compelled* — to bring back to life again this book that inspired in Thérèse “an irresistible impulse toward God,” in the hope that it may have a similar influence on souls of our time.

The author, Father Charles Arminjon, was a highly esteemed preacher in France. His book consists of nine conferences that he preached at the Chambéry Cathedral and then published in 1881 under the title *Fin du Monde Présent et Mystères de la Vie Future*. He delivered these conferences with the express purpose of combating “the fatal error and great plague of our century,” which he described as “the absence of the sense of the supernatural, and the profound neglect of the great truths of the future life.”

St. Thérèse first read this book in May of 1887, when she was only fourteen years old. She told us that it immersed her in a happiness not of this world. It gave her a presentiment of what God reserves eternally for those who love Him. It taught her that our sacrifices in this life are almost as nothing compared with the rewards that await us in everlasting life.² It inspired her to love our Lord Jesus even more ardently — to love Him “with *passion*.” And it reminded her that life on earth passes by very quickly, and so we should love and serve Him now, while we still can.

Very shortly after reading this book, with her heart aflame with the desire to give everything to God, Thérèse requested and obtained her father’s permission to enter the cloistered Carmelite Monastery in Lisieux. According to Monsignor Andre Combes in *The Spirituality of Saint Thérèse*, Father Arminjon’s writings had nourished in Thérèse an “impatience for the joys of Heaven and a paramount esteem for a life wholly consecrated to Divine Love.” Thus, Father Arminjon deserves “not only a title to fame” for

preaching and publishing these conferences, “but also a right to the *gratitude* of all devoted followers of St. Thérèse, and so of the whole Church.”

And to that, I say, *Amen!*



On June 4 and 5 in the year 1887, St. Thérèse copied out the following extract from Father Arminjon’s seventh conference, on “Eternal Beatitude and the Supernatural Vision of God”:

As no mother ever loved her dearest son, so the Lord loves His predestinate. He is jealous of His dignity and could not permit Himself to be outdone by His creature on the score of fidelity and generosity. Oh! The Lord cannot forget that the saints, when they once lived on earth, paid homage to Him by the total donation of their repose, their happiness and their whole being; that they would have liked to have had an inexhaustible flow of blood in their veins, in order to shed it as a living and imperishable pledge of their faith; that they would have desired a thousand hearts in their breasts, so as to consume them in the unquenchable fires of their love; and to possess a thousand bodies, in order that they might deliver them to martyrdom, like victims unceasingly renewed. And the grateful God cries out: *Now, my turn!* The saints have given me the gift of themselves: can I respond other than by giving myself, without restriction and without measure? If I place in their hands the scepter of creation, if I surround them with the torrents of my light, that is a great deal; it is going beyond their highest hopes and aspirations, but it is not the utmost endeavor of my Heart. I owe them more than Paradise, more than the

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treasures of my knowledge; I owe them my life, my nature, my eternal and infinite substance. If I bring my servants and friends into my house, if I console them and make them thrill with joy by enfolding them in the embrace of my charity, this satisfies their thirst and their desires superabundantly, and is more than the perfect repose of their hearts requires; but it is not enough for the gratification of my divine Heart, for the repletion and perfect satisfaction of my Love. I must be the soul of their souls, I must penetrate and imbue them with my divinity, as fire penetrates iron; by showing myself to their spirits, undisguised, unveiled, without the intervention of the senses, I must unite myself to them *in an eternal face-to-face*, so that my glory illuminates them, exudes and radiates through all the pores of their being, so that, “knowing me as I know them, they may become Gods themselves.”

St. Thérèse repeatedly referred to the phrases she had read from Father Arminjon’s pen “as a guarantee to us that, at a certain time, she really did make it the guiding theme of her interior life, the foundation of her hope and the stimulus for all her sacrifices.”

As soon as I had read St. Thérèse’s enthusiastic endorsement of this book, I sought to find a copy of it. I searched for *years*. I even wrote a letter to the cloistered Carmelite nuns in Lisieux, France — at the very same convent where St. Thérèse lived for the last nine years of her life. The Sisters sent a handwritten letter back to me, in French, saying that they were unable to send me Father Arminjon’s book because it was no longer published. At first, I was discouraged by their reply, but something inside me would not let me abandon my search. If this book had such an enormous influence on the life of St. Thérèse, and if reading this was truly “one of

the greatest graces” of her life, as she herself said it was, then there must be value in it, and it should not be dismissed so easily.

Finally, after approximately seven years of searching, I discovered *one single copy* of this book, written in its original French language and owned by a Carmelite priest, Father Donald Kinney. As I held this book in my hands, I felt as if I were holding a “lost treasure!” My heart has been on fire to share this treasure with others. Since 1987, I have dreamed of making this book available for English-speaking readers here in America. You are now holding my dream in your hands!



It is very profitable for us to keep in mind what is traditionally referred to as “the four last things”: death, judgment, heaven and hell — and Father Arminjon’s conferences are a powerful aid in bringing these four last things to mind in a very unforgettable way! This book encourages us to live in this world with our hearts set on *the life to come* — with our “eye on the prize,” so to speak. It inspires us to prepare our souls for God, to strive more earnestly to attain everlasting life with Christ, and to help save souls who will love Him eternally. It encourages us to avoid the pitfall of being overly preoccupied with the many distractions, anxieties, pleasures, and pursuits of this fleeting life on earth. “Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity, except to love God and to serve Him alone.”³

Let me share with you another passage that clearly meant a great deal to the Little Flower. She copied it out by hand, dated it May 30, 1887, and kept in her *Manuel du Chrétien* at the Carmelite Monastery. It is a beautiful quotation from St. John Chrysostom about the effects of Divine Love when it takes hold of a soul, and it was taken from Father Arminjon’s fifth conference, on purgatory:

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The man who is inflamed with the fire of divine love is as indifferent to glory and ignominy as if he were alone and unseen on this earth. He spurns all temptations. He is no more troubled by pincers, gridirons, or racks than if these sufferings were endured in a body other than his own. What is full of sweetness for the world has no attraction for him, no taste; he is no more liable to be captivated by some evil attachment than is gold, seven times tested, liable to be tarnished by rust. Such are, even on this earth, the effects of divine love when it firmly takes hold of a soul.

Just before little Thérèse was called home to God in 1897, she wrote, “I feel that my mission is about to begin — my mission to make God loved as I love Him.” I pray that St. Thérèse and Father Arminjon will intercede for us earnestly, that by opening our minds and hearts to the mysteries of the future life, we may be inspired to love and serve God more generously in this life — with a love as pure and ardent as that of the saints. And may we be so blessed as to hear Him say to us in heaven, “*Now, my turn!*”

Susan Conroy
Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel
July 16, 2008



Notes

- ¹ Translated from *Histoire d'une Âme* (*Story of a Soul*), the autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.
- ² Cf. Rom. 8:18.
- ³ Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*; Eccles. 1:2.

I

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

A. Faith

The first thing a Christian needs is faith, without which no man is a faithful Christian. Faith confers four benefits:

1. Faith unites the soul to God, because by faith the Christian soul is in a sense wedded to God: “I will espouse thee to myself in faith.”¹ For this reason, when we are baptized, we begin by confessing our Faith when we are asked, “Do you believe in God?” For Baptism is the first of the sacraments of faith. Hence our Lord said, “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved”² since without faith, Baptism is of no avail.

Consequently, we must realize that without faith no man is acceptable to God: “Without faith it is impossible to please God.”³ For this reason (commenting on Rom. 14:23: “All that is not of faith is sin”), St. Augustine says, “Without the recognition of the eternal and unchangeable truth, all virtue is but a sham even in the best of men.”

¹ Osee 2:20 (RSV = Hos. 2:20).

² Mark 16:16.

³ Heb. 11:6.



Anger

*Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger,
for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.*

James 1:19-20

Do you have a fierce temper? If so, you're in good company: some of the saints were known for this personality defect — a characteristic that, with God's help, they overcame. The Gospels tell us that Jesus nicknamed the brothers Sts. James and John the “sons of thunder”⁵ — perhaps because of their impetuous nature, as when they wanted Him to call down fire from Heaven to destroy an inhospitable town.⁶ Other saints known for expressing anger include St. Basil the Great, whose hot-blooded temperament made it difficult for him to exercise tact in his dealings with others; St. Cyril of Alexandria, whose early years as a bishop were marked by quarreling, intolerance, and even violence; and the brilliant Church scholar and bishop St. Augustine, who was very unappreciative of opposition. A more contemporary example is the nineteenth-century French religious brother St. Benildus, who once remarked of his difficulties as a teacher, “I imagine that the

⁵ Mark 3:17.

⁶ Luke 9:51-56.

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angels themselves, if they came down as schoolmasters, would find it hard to control their anger.” The saint admitted that it was only with the Virgin Mary’s help that he managed to keep from murdering some of his most ill-behaved students (which proves two things: saints have tempers, and they’re allowed to exaggerate, as the rest of us do).

When it comes to a reputation for anger, few would argue that St. Jerome deserves anything other than first place. This great Scripture scholar had a brilliant but prickly personality and was famous for his arguments with other Church figures, including St. Augustine, conducted through letters that were often vitriolic or sarcastic. St. Pammachius, a former Roman senator, corresponded with Jerome, and tried to get him to tone down his language, without notable success; the Roman widow St. Marcella also corresponded with Jerome, sometimes challenging his ideas and once scolding him for his trigger-quick temper. It should be noted on Jerome’s behalf, however, that in addition to being gentle with the poor and downtrodden, he was well aware of his weaknesses and performed great acts of penance (such as living in a cave) because of them.

Some saints who are known to us for their gentle nature — notably the great bishop St. Francis de Sales and the holy French priest St. Vincent de Paul — had to work very hard to overcome their tendency toward anger and contentiousness. St. Vincent said that, without the grace of God, he would have been “hard and repulsive, rough and cross,” and St. Francis once claimed that it took him more than twenty years to learn to control his temper.

St. Remigius, when asked how he maintained an even temper, responded, “I often consider that my guardian angel is always by my side.”

In the fourteenth century, Bl. John Colombini was a rather greedy merchant, particularly known for his bad temper. He flew into a rage one day because dinner wasn’t ready when he arrived

home. Hoping to shame him into better behavior, his wife handed him a book about the saints. John threw the book onto the floor, but then — ashamed of his temper — he picked it up and began to read. He became so engrossed in reading about the saints that he forgot his dinner; indeed, he was completely converted by the experience. He subsequently gave away most of his wealth, turned his home into a hospital, and personally cared for a suffering leper. When his wife urged him to be prudent in his charities, John — who was no longer easily offended by rebukes — gently reminded her that she was the one who had hoped for his conversion (to which she is supposed to have responded, “I prayed for rain, but this is a flood”).

Learning to control our temper takes time and patience — and some of the saints were willing to make extreme efforts in this regard. For instance, when a storm interfered with his harvest, St. Nathalan angrily complained against God. Immediately repenting, he vowed to gain control of his anger and took a radical step to remind himself of this vow: he bound his right hand to his leg with an iron lock and threw the key into a river, promising that it would never be unlocked until he made a penitential pilgrimage to Rome. Years later Nathalan arrived in Rome; he purchased a fish from a boy there, and inside the fish’s stomach was a key — which, of course, opened the lock.

Although the Lord probably doesn’t expect such unusual efforts from us, He does want us to control our anger, and He gives us opportunities to do this — especially in daily life: bearing patiently with others’ annoying habits, correcting others’ mistakes with kindness and courtesy, refraining from blaring the horn when someone cuts us off in traffic, refusing to yield to the temptation to judge others’ motives rashly.

When we have to speak to someone with whom we’re angry, we should first pray for the Lord’s guidance and help. It’s often more effective to speak in terms of asking favors, rather than

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making demands or giving orders (for example, “May I ask a favor? Will you please pick up your clothes, rather than tossing them on the floor? Thank you; that will really help me”). Asking the Holy Spirit to give us the right words can help defuse a potentially explosive situation.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux advises us, “When you are angry with someone, the way to find peace is to pray for that person and ask God to reward him or her for making you suffer.” We don’t usually think of it this way, but those people who anger us are doing us an unintentional favor by allowing us to grow in patience, so we should try to be gentle with them.

Similarly, says St. Alphonsus Liguori, “When it happens that we commit some fault, we must also be gentle with ourselves. Getting at ourselves after doing something wrong is not humility but a subtle form of pride. . . . To be angry at ourselves after the commission of a fault is a greater fault than the one just committed, and it will lead to many others.”

Thus, God wants us to control our tempers — even when we ourselves are their target. His healing mercy and peace are offered to everyone, but we’ll miss out on them if we allow our anger to get in the way.

For Further Reflection

“Anger is a desire to revenge. ‘To desire vengeance in order to do evil to someone who should be punished is illicit,’ but it is praiseworthy to impose restitution ‘to correct vices and maintain justice.’ If anger reaches the point of a deliberate desire to kill or seriously wound a neighbor, it is gravely against charity; it is a mortal sin.” — *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2302 (*Thus, depending on the circumstances and our motivation for it, anger can be righteous and justified, or gravely sinful. We must take care to control sinful anger and strive to keep even righteous anger from becoming morally offensive.*)

“Dismiss all anger, and look into yourself a little. Remember that he of whom you are speaking is your brother, and, as he is in the way of salvation, God can make him a saint, in spite of his present weakness.” — *St. Thomas of Villanova*

“The lion can be tamed and made obedient, but your own wrath renders you wilder than any lion.” — *St. John Chrysostom*

Something You Might Try

◆ St. Francis de Sales advises that, to avoid the sin of anger, you must quickly ask God to give peace to your heart when you're angered and then turn your thoughts to something else. Don't discuss the matter at hand, or make decisions, or correct another person while you're angry. When a person angers you, St. Francis advises, consider the person's good qualities, rather than the words or actions you find objectionable.

◆ If you wish to control your temper, become aware of the circumstances in which you're most likely to be angry: in certain settings (such as rush-hour traffic), with certain people (perhaps a particular neighbor or acquaintance), or at certain times of the day (maybe just before the end of the workday, when you're scrambling to clear your desk). Once you've learned from experience what things can anger you, prepare for these moments with a short, silent prayer — for instance, “Lord, help me avoid losing my temper,” or “Dear Jesus, let me stay calm.”

◆ It's also helpful to recall, when you're in a peaceful mood, a recent situation when you lost your temper. Ask yourself, “Was my anger justified? How will I respond to this situation in the future?” You can even “practice” responding properly by pretending this situation is repeating itself; by letting yourself feel angry when you're alone, you can rehearse possible responses and evaluate which ones might help you.

Further Reading

Scripture: Proverbs 19:11; Matthew 5:22; 1 Corinthians 13:5;
Ephesians 4:26-31.

Classics: St. Francis de Sales, *An Introduction to the Devout Life*;
St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*.

Contemporary Works: Rudolf Allers, *Self-Improvement*.



*Father of saints and sinners,
there are times when I become very angry and upset,
times when I disappoint You and myself by losing my temper.
I am sorry; I ask for Your forgiveness and Your assistance.
Help me to follow the example of St. Francis de Sales
in persevering in my struggle against anger.
I wish, like Your Son, to be angry only
when I see injustice and hatred;
I wish, like Your saints, to be forgiving when
I see repentance and contrition.
Give me humility, compassion, and right judgment,
so that everything I do and everything I experience
will add to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.*



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