

# The Joyous Sacrificial Will

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*“Self-sacrifice is the miracle out of which all the reported miracles grow.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Abstract

This article seeks to explore the theme of sacrifice in relation to joy and the First Aspect or Will. In an effort to better understand this life-affirming relationship and eliminate some of the distortions around the idea of sacrifice, this paper examines the concept of sacrifice as a universal animating principle. It touches upon the more elevated patterns of thought around the theme of sacrifice existing within the major religious traditions and concludes with some thoughts on why willing self-sacrifice can only lead to increase, enhancement and joy.

## Introduction

The Ageless Wisdom teachings inform us that the *joyous sacrificial will* must eventually replace the obsolete thoughtform of sacrifice as suffering and renunciation.<sup>1</sup> Although joy, sacrifice and will can be distinguished from one another, from a higher perspective they are related and might be seen as facets of one and the same energy. Inseparably bound together, they are an expression or manifestation of Soul or Spirit. These three qualities are part of a dynamic synthesis and do not exist in absence of each other. Rather, each builds upon each other as part of a continuum.

While the *joyous, sacrificial will* exists as a sustaining whole, all too often humanity has failed to grasp the connection between joy and self-sacrifice. Human understanding and reaction to self-sacrifice has been complex and varied. Misinterpretation and, at times, distortion by the major religious traditions have caused much sorrow and woe. New ideas of what it means to sacrifice are beginning to emerge, but in many quarters the old outworn thoughtform of sacrifice as suffering and self-abnegation still controls. Self-sacrifice and

spontaneous inner joy continue to be viewed as incompatible opposites that can never be fully reconciled.

In the western, secular world in particular, the notion of self-sacrifice has largely been rejected. Self-sacrifice is frequently seen as a character flaw or a self-defeating behavior and has been replaced by the idea of utilitarian individualism and self-interest. In family and social scientific theory the idea of self-sacrifice has been almost completely neglected.<sup>2</sup> In other areas, such as in the field of evolutionary biology, and to a lesser extent in the field of psychology,<sup>3</sup> the concept of altruism or self-sacrifice is a well understood topic. The theoretical ideas have been widely considered and confirmed, yet arguments persist as to whether pure self-sacrifice really exists, if it has evolutionary significance and beneficence, or whether self-sacrifice or altruism is an evolutionary instinct.

## Sacrifice as a Universal Archetype

Esoteric philosophy, as exemplified by Alice A. Bailey, offers a much more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of sacrifice. The teachings relate joy and will with self-sacrifice, and inform us that sacrifice is a universal animating principle and one of several universal laws that govern creation. The Law of Sacrifice and Death, along with the Fourth Ray of Harmony through Conflict (to which-

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this law is related), are the dominating factors in our solar system.<sup>4</sup> Together they hold the secret to progress and evolution. Under the Law of Sacrifice—the basic law of giving and group work—the human and subhuman reaction to sorrow and pain can never really be eliminated from our planet.<sup>5</sup> For it is only through sorrow, pain and destruction that the beauty of livingness, harmony and oneness can be realized on Earth. Although suffering seems to be more or less unavoidable on our planet, our individual reaction to sorrow and pain can be lessened once we achieve a measure of self-realization and come to understand the true nature of the will and sacrifice.

From the esoteric perspective, the notion of sacrifice—which the Ageless Wisdom describes as a “taking over through identification”—is irrevocably linked to Love; a love that desires to give of itself so that others might be saved.<sup>6</sup> One might say that all life is an expression of the love nature of the One About Whom Naught May Be Said. Such an inconceivable Love also characterizes the Solar Deity who sacrificed or gave His life to our solar system. It was as a result of “His impulse, His will, His desire, His incentive, His idea and purpose... that the process of manifestation began its cyclic evolutionary existence.”<sup>7</sup> Love is the impelling motive for creation and the underlying cause behind the death and destruction of form. In this system—a system ruled by the Second Ray and the will-to-unity—Love is the governing influence.

The theme of sacrificial love and the pulling away from the confines of limitation and form also has its roots in the Sirian principle or Law of Freedom. It is this principle that enabled Sanat Kumara—the Lord of our World—to become the “Great Sacrifice” for our planet.<sup>8</sup> His sacrificial act not only provides the life and governing impulse for existence on Earth, it embodies a path of service, selflessness and surrender that leads to release and reunion with the Creator. Neither can we forget that it was the sacrifice of the solar angels, those who took human bodies and “chose to die,” that brought the fourth or human kingdom into being.<sup>9</sup> Their sacrifice made it possible for consciousness to indwell and evolve within humanity. This same impulse also produced the great World Saviors, such as the Buddha, Shri Krishna, and the Christ who enacted the drama

of sacrificial love and salvation, along with the many “prodigies of self-sacrifice”<sup>10</sup> such as Joan of Arc, St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa and Oskar Schindler.<sup>11</sup>

Since all organized life is sacrificed via evolution for that which is higher,<sup>12</sup> and in order for others to thrive and evolve, the connection between the sacrificial impulse and the existence and progression of all Earth forms is difficult to ignore. Thus sacrifice is revealed as a universal archetype rooted in love and related to the Law of Freedom that all life must inevitably emulate.

### **The Language of Sacrifice in the Major Religions**

Not surprisingly, the Law of Sacrifice is “the first of the laws to be grasped by the human intelligence.”<sup>13</sup> While distortions about sacrifice have always been present, at times they have existed alongside a number of more enlightened presentations, some of which date back to the very dawn of civilization. For example, sacrifice is one of six main themes found in the Egyptian Pyramid Texts, the oldest known recorded texts, believed to be composed as early as 2494-2181 B.C.E.<sup>14</sup> The myth of Osiris not only constitutes one of the first cosmogonies or creation myths, it contains the earliest example of the ritual action of self-willed sacrifice—a process that results in the gradual death of the lower self and the journey of transformation and transcendence.

The prototypical pattern of sacrifice is also present in the Vedic texts dating to 1500-1000 B.C.E, as discussed in a recent *Esoteric Quarterly* article on *Purusha Sukta*.<sup>15</sup> In Vedic thought, all the energies and forces that adhere to divine law are believed to participate or share in the Purusha’s ritual act of sacrifice. This pattern is believed “to apply not only to the macrocosm and the microcosm, but to every creative act.”<sup>16</sup>

Sacrifice is inherent in the very name that Allah gave to his religion. Islam, an Arabic word replete with meaning, is interpreted by most scholars to embody the principle of submission or self-surrender to God’s Will. But one must not equate that idea with the notion of suicidal sacrifice, since historically Islamic mores placed a strict ban on suicide.<sup>17</sup> Only in the last twenty to thirty years has the idea of a “suicide

bomber” become prevalent. The idea of self-sacrifice—*shahid* or martyrdom—is part of Islamic belief, especially in Shi’ite piety, but the term in its true spiritual sense is applied to “one who has born witness with his or her own being to Divine Oneness.”<sup>18</sup> Today countless Muslims and Sufis continue to practice their faith guided by the ideal that “Oneness with Allah can only be realized by total surrender, dedication, service and above all self-sacrifice for the good of humankind.”<sup>19</sup>

Sacrifice also forms the very basis of Buddhism. One of the primary features of the Mahayana Buddhist School<sup>20</sup> is its emphasis on universal salvation and self-sacrifice. A Bodhisattva is the personification of self-sacrifice, one whose immense compassion compels him or her to work for others and deter his or her own salvation for the welfare and benefit of all sentient beings.<sup>21</sup> This concept also exists within Judaism, especially among Kabbalists who believe that God’s *self-sacrifice* created the universe. This benevolent sacrifice is described as a *tsimtsum* or contraction of God’s essence which allows for the creation of independent realities. However, this “quantum leap from the infinite to the finite”<sup>22</sup> necessitates a *Tikkun*—a healing or repair of the differentiation and chaos that ensues. Such a healing involves willing self-sacrifice and service in order to restore divine light and the essential Unity or Oneness of Life.

The theme of sacrifice lies at the heart of Christianity. In the early Christian milieu the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was thought to release humanity from the fear of death.<sup>23</sup> His death served as “prelude to resurrection” and spoke to the universal implications of resurrection for humanity as a whole.<sup>24</sup> The Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul emphasizes this point by making it clear that Christ’s death upon the Cross was not primarily concerned with each individual or with absolution of sins; rather, it was a great cosmic event,<sup>25</sup> signifying the surrender of the personal will to the transcendent source from which all life stems. Likewise, in the hymns from the Acts of St. John—among the earliest of the apocryphal Christian acts—Christ’s sacrifice was believed to be part of an initiatory process leading to union with God, his seem-

ing death a model or prototype. As late as the fourth century Christ was viewed as a *mystagogue* or initiator into the Sacred Mysteries; his disciples were the *mystai* who were to become the *symmyasti* or fellow-initiates of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

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These more enlightened attitudes eventually gave way (in Christianity and other major religious traditions) to negative and sometimes pernicious distortions surrounding the idea of sacrifice. Today, many people still view sacrifice as recognition of God’s

dominion, as a means of gaining salvation, and a necessary appeasement from the universal condition of sin. In some parts of the world, these attitudes seem to be stronger than ever. In other places, the notion of sacrifice has been replaced with self-interest. Despite the modern attitude that sacrifice is not a virtue or a good, there are several mainstream efforts underway to unveil and redefine sacrifice in order to lift it above the decidedly Sixth Ray focus on deprivation and destruction. For example, within the Catholic tradition a newer understanding has begun to emerge that views sacrifice not as a forced or necessary atonement, but as “a perfectly free, responsive, self-giving, self-communicating, en-Spirited love...”<sup>27</sup> This understanding was undoubtedly encouraged by the reforms of the second Vatican Council in its attempt to move away from the negative associations around sacrifice, Christ’s Passion, and the Cross. Clearly some have rejected the new attitudes of the Church as a liberal dilution of the faith, yet this new understanding that views sacrifice as “ethical living” and a “self-giving response to love,”<sup>28</sup> is a welcome reversal.

**The Sacrificial Will**

Various religious traditions speak to the idea of sacrificing our personal will to God’s Will. Unfortunately, this concept is frequently based on the thought that giving up our personal desires and wishes involves a loss of identity and a sacrifice based on and proven by faith. Sacrifice is believed to be a duty grounded in the recognition of God’s dominion over humankind and on a sense of undeniable

guilt for being born in such a state of sin that Christ had to die for our offenses.<sup>29</sup>

Esoteric philosophy also encourages us to subordinate and sacrifice our personal will to Divine Will, but this step is taken from a position of strength based on the existence of real love and the evocation of the sacrificial will and not on a life-denying or nihilistic attitude. Esoteric doctrine defines the sacrificial will as a “blending of the will to save, plus love shed abroad, and active intelligent aid based on truth.”<sup>30</sup>

This links the sacrificial will to the realization of the spiritual self—to our defining essence. Stemming from the central nucleus of power within—the power of the Soul, and later the Spirit—this threefold power allows us to fulfill our duty to the Hierarchical Plan, to liberate and advance the evolution of matter, and create unity, fusion and synthesis. Through its development and use, we are able to recognize and implement some measure of divine purpose and help close the door where evil dwells. The sacrificial will enables us to release ourselves, with full deliberation and force, into “a vortex of force in which we learn to handle the planetary correspondence of that which we ourselves have overcome.”<sup>31</sup>

The awakening and functioning of this saving force requires the elimination in us of all hindrances or impediments and the conscious sublimation and channeling of the separative impulses and energies of the personality into an entirely new creative activity<sup>32</sup>—an activity focused on group well-being, elevation and freedom. It involves a paradigm shift from self to others, a metamorphosis of self-will or desire into the will of the Soul. When our life attitude is steadfast and unflinchingly directed to furthering human evolution and life as a whole, when we can stand in spiritual being and consciously choose self-surrender with no expectation of loss, the sacrificial will arises and becomes active in us.

Thus do we assume responsibility as spiritual scientists, leaders and co-creators in the effort to expand, enhance and empower. Then our actions are authentic, effortless and spontaneous<sup>33</sup> with no real sense of self-denial or deprivation involved. Wielding the unified force of Light, Love and the Power of Death, we become a living sacrifice, a link between cause and effect and the one who, according to St. Paul, has nothing and yet possesses all.

## The Joyous Sacrificial Will

Two of the possessions or gifts that we receive and learn to embody are freedom and joy. As the sacrificial will begins to develop and manifest, we gain an ever-increasing measure of freedom from emotional reaction and the narrow limitations of the lower self, release from life’s burdens, from fear and egoistic conceit. We also acquire the freedom to investigate, to decide, to plan and execute our goals.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, we acquire the freedom of spiritual ascent. We open to higher channels of spiritual energy and enter a future of limitless creative growth and potential.

Joy is developed through a focus on the good, the beautiful and the true, on the benefit of what might be, and the vision of the countless possibilities for humanity.<sup>35</sup> While joy is a quality we must learn to cultivate, joy is ever present within the Soul.<sup>36</sup> Joy begins to pour into the vehicles when the Soul begins to dominate, when we are energized not by the note of sacrifice, but an altruistic attitude and the desire to see others flourish.

Various studies in the fields of medicine and psychology show evidence of the connection that exists between joy and willing sacrificial service. This connection, often termed the “helper’s high” describes a state of joy or euphoria followed by periods of calm and increased energy. The concept was first formalized in 1965 when it was observed that the act of helping another heals the helper more than the person being helped.<sup>37</sup> Recent studies corroborate this finding and show that the performance of altruistic responses is facilitated by positive feelings that are associated with prosocial behavior. Altruistic behavior creates a positive feedback loop that contributes to the contiguity of prosocial activities and the maintenance of well-being.<sup>38</sup> Similar findings are borne out in the field of evolutionary biology where research reveals that genetics favor self-sacrifice over self-interest because it promotes survival, well-being and general health.<sup>39</sup>

Various mystics, poets and philosophers have long commented upon the relationship between sacrifice and joy. Tulsidas, the great medieval Hindu philosopher and poet, penned the following lines: “This and this alone is true religion — to serve others. This is sin above all other sin — to harm others. In service to others

is happiness. In selfishness is misery and pain.”<sup>40</sup> Another Indian poet, playwright and essayist, Rabindranth Tagore, wrote about the link between joy and sacrificial service in the following way: “I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.”<sup>41</sup> In his essay “On Compensation,” Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “every act rewards its self” and “one of the most beautiful compensations of this life is that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.”<sup>42</sup>

These many thoughts link back to the Tibetan’s statement that will is an expression of the Law of Sacrifice and that the deepest joy is one of the results.<sup>43</sup> The travails of our Soul disappear and our hearts are filled with the divine recompense of joy when the sacrificial will is present. Joy also emerges from the intentional choice we make to meet world need and from the “realization that the entire planet will achieve.”<sup>44</sup> The connection we establish with our spiritual source is an immense source of peace and joy.

Though the will-to-sacrifice is based on pure choice, in reality this choice is an outgrowth or expression of the Law of our own being. Whether present instinctually or consciously, the urge to sacrifice is inherent in biological organisms all along the chain of being. As an innate, creative devotion to the greatest good,<sup>45</sup> its effects are unifying and uplifting and have a definite curative, uplifting and releasing effect. Willing self-sacrifice provides a sense of accomplishment that goes well beyond accomplishment for oneself.<sup>46</sup> The urge to sacrifice acts to dissipate negativity and glamor in us and in our surroundings by beckoning us to cultivate love where there is hate, light where there is darkness, hope where there is loss of faith.<sup>47</sup> This makes the sacrificial will a way of fulfillment and liberation for us and for others; a way of purpose, governed by reason—a spiritual activity aligned with the joyous note of this solar system. From this perspective, sacrifice cannot be regarded as suffering or giving up, rather, it signifies our joyful participation in Life, the Creator’s inexhaustible abundance and the great work to which we are all called.

## Conclusion

Rather than seeing sacrifice as a negation of life, as a diminishment or as necessary suffering, we can learn to recognize self-sacrifice as the consciousness of Spirit and as a powerful Life-affirming and fully intentional act arising from our appreciation of life, the pursuit of truth, our sense of purpose and abiding trust in the Universe.

Seen in this light, willing self-sacrifice does not conflict with self-realization or fulfillment. Instead, it is a spiritual elevation or enhancement—a means of supernal completion. Sacrifice connects us with our own inner strengths, with humanity and the Creator’s Power. Arising out of the fullness of our true nature and a clear sense of Plan and Purpose, the will-to-sacrifice represents a unique sharing from the deep well from which all life springs. As the purest form of spiritual interchange, selfless sacrifice releases a tremendous potency into the world. It is a joyful creative act and the “miracle out of which all other miracles grow.”

<sup>1</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. II* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1955), 309-310.

<sup>2</sup> Howard and Kathleen Bahr, *Families and Self-Sacrifice* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2001), 1231.

<sup>3</sup> See Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Harvard University Press, 1998.)

<sup>4</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology, Vol. II* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1942), 91-92.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

<sup>6</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1951), 1226.

<sup>7</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology, Vol. II* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1942), 89-90.

<sup>8</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and Initiations* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1960), 416-417.

<sup>9</sup> Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology, Vol. II*, 92.

<sup>10</sup> Sherri Fisher, *Why Not Me? Self-sacrifice As The 25<sup>th</sup> Strength*

[www.positivepsychologynews.com/news/sherri\\_/200907052951](http://www.positivepsychologynews.com/news/sherri_/200907052951) (accessed July 31, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, (accessed July 31, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Lucille Cedercrans, *Creative Thinking* (Whittier: Wisdom Impressions 2007), 494.

<sup>13</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology, Vol. II*, 88.

<sup>14</sup> “The Pyramid Texts,”

[www.egyptologyonline.com/pyramid\\_texts.htm](http://www.egyptologyonline.com/pyramid_texts.htm) (accessed June 21, 2009).

- <sup>15</sup> See the Spring and Summer 2009 issues of the *Esoteric Quarterly* for an article titled “*Pursusha Sukta*” by Zachary Landsdowne.
- <sup>16</sup> Usha Choudouri, “Vedic Ritual and its Symbolism,” [www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i\\_es/i\\_es\\_choud\\_ritual\\_frameset.htm](http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_choud_ritual_frameset.htm) (accessed May 25, 2009).
- <sup>17</sup> Navid Kermani, “Roots of Terror, Suicide, Martyrdom, and Self-Redemption in Islam,” [www.opendemocracy.net/articles/faith-europe\\_islam.article\\_88jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/articles/faith-europe_islam.article_88jsp) (accessed June 25, 2009).
- <sup>18</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam; Enduring Values for Humanity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2002), 268-270.
- <sup>19</sup> Mohammed Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1994), xiii.
- <sup>20</sup> Mahayana Buddhism differs from the orthodox Hinayana School in several ways. Two basic differences are that the Mahayana School sees the Buddha as the first cause and shifted the emphasis from personal to universal salvation.
- <sup>21</sup> Jayaram V, *The Essential Features of Mahayana Buddhism*, [www.hinduwebsite.com/buddhism/Mahayana.asp](http://www.hinduwebsite.com/buddhism/Mahayana.asp). (accessed May 19, 2009).
- <sup>22</sup> Nissan Dovid Dubov, *The Key to the Kabbalah*, (London: Dwelling Place Publishing, 2006), 67.
- <sup>23</sup> Eugene Webb, “Rene Girard and the Symbolism of Religious Sacrifice” (*Anthropoetics* 11, No 1, Spring/Summer 2005), 3.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>25</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *From Bethlehem to Calvary* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1973), 176.
- <sup>26</sup> Max Pulver, “Jesus’ Round Dance and Crucifixion.” *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 173-177.
- <sup>27</sup> Robert J. Daly, “Sacrifice Unveiled and Sacrifice Revisited: Trinitarian and Liturgical Perspectives,” [www.highbeam.com/doc/IGI-98541722.html](http://www.highbeam.com/doc/IGI-98541722.html) (accessed June 26, 2009).
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> John Shelby Spong, *The Sins of Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005), 172.
- <sup>30</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. I* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1944), xvi.
- <sup>31</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. II*, (New York: Lucis Trust, 1955), 398.
- <sup>32</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 572.
- <sup>33</sup> Marilyn Barker, “Manifestations of the Will,” [www.iloveulove.com/psychology/psychsynth/manifwill.htm](http://www.iloveulove.com/psychology/psychsynth/manifwill.htm) (accessed July 7, 2009).
- <sup>34</sup> Will Parfitt, *Psychosynthesis: The Elements and Beyond* (Rockport: PS Avalon, 1944), 55-56.
- <sup>35</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1957), 206.
- <sup>36</sup> Roberto Assagioli, [www.esotericstudies.net/articles/focus-on-joy-compil.pdf](http://www.esotericstudies.net/articles/focus-on-joy-compil.pdf).
- <sup>37</sup> Frank Riesman, “The “Helper Therapy Principle.”” *Social Work* 10 (2), 27-32.
- <sup>38</sup> Paul Gilbert, *Compassion, Conceptualizations, Research and Use in Psychotherapy* (East Sussex: Routledge, 2005), 152-153.
- <sup>39</sup> See, for instance, *The Global Brain: The Evolution of Mass Mind from the Big Bang to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by Howard Bloom. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).
- <sup>40</sup> [www.worldprayers.org](http://www.worldprayers.org) (accessed June 27, 2009).
- <sup>41</sup> [www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/15762](http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/15762) (accessed June 27, 2009).
- <sup>42</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Selected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 1906), 16.
- <sup>43</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology, Vol. II*, 437.
- <sup>44</sup> See *Focus On Joy*, [www.esotericstudies.net/articles/focus-on-joy-compil.pdf](http://www.esotericstudies.net/articles/focus-on-joy-compil.pdf) (accessed July 5, 2009).
- <sup>45</sup> Vigen Gurorian, *Awakening the Moral Imagination*, [www.mmisi.org/ir/32\\_01/guroian.pdf](http://www.mmisi.org/ir/32_01/guroian.pdf) (accessed August 30, 2009).
- <sup>46</sup> Sherri Fisher, “Why Not Me? Self-Sacrifice As the 25<sup>th</sup> Strength,” [www.positivepsychologynews.com/news/sherri./200907052951](http://www.positivepsychologynews.com/news/sherri./200907052951) (accessed July 30, 2009).
- <sup>47</sup> Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi.