



○ *The Theology of  
the Spiritual Life*

**BY JOSEPH de GUIBERT, s.j.**

translated by Paul Barrett, o .f .m .c a p.

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## *Translator's Foreword*

THE author, Fr. Joseph de Guibert S.J., was Professor of Ascetical and Mystical Theology at the Gregorian University, Rome, and this book is based on notes which he issued periodically to his students. He did not intend it to be his final word on the subject, for, as he says in his Preface, he meant to deal only with the more important points of doctrine and with those which he thought needed fuller treatment than is usually accorded them. He proposed writing a more complete treatise, but he died in 1942 before he could carry out his resolve. Nevertheless, the present work is a monument to his memory and a standing proof of how great a loss his death was. Theological accuracy, unrelenting logic, virile devotion and practical common sense here blend to make a book that cannot fail to hold, to teach and to inspire.

This translation is intended for all those who may not have had access to the original. It is not meant to be a complete technical substitute for the original: that is an ideal which is very difficult to attain, especially where the subject is theology and the language is Latin. But neither is it a mere abridgement; it contains the complete text. However, the author gives a multitude of references to books and periodicals, the vast majority of which are not readily available to the average reader. I have omitted most of these references, retaining only those which, to my knowledge, can be found in English, translated or original. I did this in the interests of economy and readability and with the awareness that the professional student of spiritual theology (to whom alone these references are likely to be of interest) will not be satisfied with a translation when the original is open to him. For the same reasons I have omitted the lengthy Syllabus of spiritual authors which Fr. de Guibert appended to his book and which, though a very valuable contribution to spiritual theology, is of interest only to the student. I have also omitted the author's short preface, giving the substance of it at the beginning of this foreword. These omissions and a few minor changes have been made with the permission of the Rector and the Director of Publications of the Gregorian University. Here and



there throughout the text I have inserted notes explaining terms and references which might not be clear to the non-theologian.

I should like to express my gratitude to all who assisted me in preparing this translation: to Very Rev. Fr. Hilary, O.F.M. Cap., for reading the final draft and for making many valuable suggestions and emendations; to Rev. Fr. Cornelius, O.F.M. Cap., of Burlingame, California, for his comparative reading of the text and translation; to Very Rev. Fr. James, O.F.M. Cap., Professor of Philosophy at University College, Cork, Ireland, for his assistance on some points of interpretation and translation; to Rev. Fr. Peter, O.F.M. Cap., lecturer at the same University, for his help in translating some quotations from the Greek; to Very Rev. Fr. Stephen, O.F.M. Cap., Custos Provincial; and to my fellow members of the staff of St. Francis High School, Pasadena, California, for their assistance and encouragement.

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Finally I wish to acknowledge Messrs. Sheed & Ward's permission to use quotations from E. Allison Peers' translation of the *Com-*

*plete Works* of St. Teresa of Avila, and the permission given me by the Newman Bookshop, Westminster, Md., to use quotations from Professor Peers' translation of the *Complete Works* of St. John of the Cross.

May God grant that the author, Fr. de Guibert, is now enjoying the reward of his work and that we, too, may put into practice what we read here and so come to rejoice, at the end, in the company of the Saints.

THE TRANSLATOR.



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## *Part One*

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY



## CHAPTER ONE

### Definition of Ascetical and Mystical Theology

The usual way to define Ascetical and Mystical Theology is to say that it is the part of theology which deals with the perfection of the Christian life and relative problems. However, before we narrow down this definition, we must consider some terms which we shall use rather frequently in the course of this work, and we must also investigate the background of the words "ascetical" and "mystical."

#### I. *Some Preliminary Terms*

The *supernatural life*, as distinct from the natural, is composed of (1) acts by which man freely tends towards his supernatural end, the intuitive vision of God, to which he has been destined; (2) the grace and habits given to man to enable him to attain this end.

The *spiritual life*, as opposed to the mere life of the senses, is often taken to denote the activity of man as a spiritual being, that is, activity involving the use of the intellect and will. But strictly speaking, the spiritual life means man's activity in regard to the supernatural goods of the soul, goods to be completed and fully possessed in the future life. Thus the spiritual life should be regarded as being in contrast to the life which is centred in the things of this world (cf. the contrast between spirit and flesh in the New Testament, especially in St. Paul).<sup>\*</sup> More strictly still, "spiritual life" means man's supernatural activity, insofar as it is exercised not merely in its lowest form (i.e., just sufficiently to attain eternal life) but fully and intensely. Hence the use of the terms "spirituality," a "spiritual man," etc., to give the idea of higher Christian life.

The *interior life* means almost the same thing. However, as opposed to the exterior life, it means the spiritual life insofar as its internal principles are man's. It means the spiritual life as made up of internal acts, the external acts getting their value from the internal dispositions of the agent.

*Spiritual perfection* (the nature of which we shall later discuss more fully) means in a general way a certain fullness of the spiritual life which lacks nothing for its complete development in this world



or in the next. *Sanctity* in the original sense of the word means the freedom of the soul from sin, and its union with, or consecration to God. Therefore "sanctity" refers to the gift of habitual grace residing in the soul, while "perfection" denotes the soul's way of acting.

*Prayer* is an elevation of the mind to God. Therefore it is an act by which a person is made more holy and united to God, his final end. Prayer is *vocal* if thoughts and affections are expressed in words, especially in words cast in a formula already existing. It is *mental* prayer if it consists wholly in internal acts or in words which come spontaneously and unrehearsed. It is called *discursive* mental prayer when it is composed of many acts of the intellect and will; it is *contemplative* when it is made up, not of reasoning, but of a kind of simple gaze at a truth already possessed, and of an abiding love in which the will rests. This contemplative prayer is called *acquired* when a person attains it by his own efforts, anticipated and helped by grace. It is called *infused* when it is the result, not of preceding efforts, but solely of the special grace of God.

## II. History of the Terms "Ascetical" and "Mystical"

- 2 In order to understand better the modern controversy about the meaning of the words "ascetical" and "mystical" we must first briefly trace the history of these two words.

1. The Greeks used the terms "mystic" and "mystic things" in reference to secret religious rites, e.g. the mysteries (religious rites) of Ceres at the Attic city of Eleusis, etc. Hence the double element in the meaning of the word "mystic"; it signified something religious that was at the same time hidden and secret.<sup>3</sup> It seems that the word "*mistikôn*" (not found in the New Testament) was adopted by the Christians just as it was found in use by the pagans, as having an exclusively religious significance, while "*musterion*" was also used in its non-religious sense to mean something secret.

Among the Christians, the adjective "mystic" was applied to a more profound and more perfect knowledge of the truths of the faith, a knowledge which was not to be shared with all indiscriminately.

Hence in Pseudo-Dionysius the name "mystical theology" is given to a more intimate, hidden and holy knowledge of God Himself arising from union with Him, superior to the knowledge which is obtainable by reason alone or the ordinary teaching of the Faith: formerly the word "gnosis" was used in almost the same sense. Thus to the concept of something religious and secret, was added another element, that of an intuitive and experimental knowledge.

The term "mystical theology," along with the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, passed into the Latin tongue and was used very frequently by the medieval theologians. In their works it came, in the course of time, to mean that part of theology which dealt with the mysterious knowledge of God derived from prayer and contemplation. And from this use comes the distinction between *practical* mystical theology (the knowledge of God as such) and *speculative* mystical theology (the scientific investigation into this knowledge); cf. John Gerson, who writes at length on both.

Thus the term "mystical theology" came to indicate broadly the whole theological study of the spiritual life considered as a preparation for union with God in contemplation (so it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and so it is now). This broad use of the word "mystical" in spiritual theology must be carefully distinguished from the theological use in which the words "mystical body" are employed to indicate the recondite union that exists between Christ, the Head, and the faithful, His members. It must be distinguished from the liturgical use (meaning symbolism, worship), and from the exegetic use (meaning the "typical" interpretation of Holy Scripture).

- 1 2. "Ascetical" comes from the Greek "*dskein*"—"to adorn, to prepare by labor," and later "to make someone adept by exercises," and then "to learn any skill by exercise, especially athletic skill." From the root word the following were derived: *ascetes*, *ascesis*, *nsceticus*; and these were applied to the exercise of any art, and primarily to the athletic arts. The word came then to be used for the exercise of philosophic study, or of virtue: it frequently occurs in this sense in the Greek philosophers.

Amongst the Christians, St. Paul uses the word itself only once, in Acts 24.16; but he often makes a comparison between the exercises of the Christian life and athletic exercises,<sup>4</sup> e.g. 1 Cor. 9.24-27; Phil. 3.13-14; 2 Tim. 4.28. Even in the early ages of the Church the name "ascetics" (*ascetes*) was given to those who fought against the flesh, and who bound themselves to this fight by the public profession of perfect chastity. Hence "asceticism," "ascetic" came to be applied to the exercises of monastic life. Cf. *Ascetica* of St. Basil.

The word was not used in Latin in ancient times (unless as a transcript of the Greek), nor does it seem to have been used in the language of the Middle Ages. It is only later that it passed from the Greek to the Latin and the vernacular tongues. Later still it was linked with the word "theology" to form "ascetical theology" on an analogy with the much older term "mystical theology." Then

in the eighteenth century, when the word "mystic" was restricted to extraordinary and infused graces, the scope of each term was more precisely defined and a clearer distinction was drawn between them, e.g. in the two "Directories" of Scaramelli,<sup>5</sup> or in the two volumes of Fr. Meynard on the interior life.

### III. *The Distinction between Ascetical-mystical Theology and Other Branches of Theology*

4 Before we define our terms, we must first distinguish between: Ascetical-mystical Theology and the other branches of theology. Until the end of the Middle Ages, theology (i.e., the knowledge of God and divine things derived from revelation) was generally treated as a whole (e.g., the *Summa* of St. Thomas), although some theologians had already set about recording the conclusions they reached in a particular field of theology (e.g., rules of life, as did G. Peraldus and St. Antonine). However, from the seventeenth century on, theology was divided into various parts to facilitate study and exposition, the division appearing first in books, and then in lectures. For example, the Carmelites dealt separately with mystical theology which, being practical, was easily distinguished from speculative dogmatic theology. We must, though, inquire further as to how mystical theology is distinguished from moral and pastoral theology.,

5 1. Authors do not all draw the same distinction between Ascetical-mystical Theology and *Moral Theology*. Some<sup>6</sup> hold that Moral Theology deals with the Commandments and virtues insofar as they are obligatory, whilst Ascetical-mystical deals with Counsels and with the perfection of the Christian life beyond that which is of precept. Therefore Moral Theology differs from Ascetical-mystical Theology insofar as the latter "is not content to deal with the sins to be avoided, but goes beyond them to consider man's moral life as perfectible by the counsels to such a degree that he attains, through exalted virtue, the union of the created will with the Divine Will" (Schram).

Others hold that Moral Theology embraces all that has been divinely revealed as necessary for a good and holy life. So it embraces not only that which is good, but also that which is better, not only the Commandments, but also the Counsels. And Ascetical-mystical Theology seeks to know how, by what paths and degrees, by what means and aids, a man, acting according to revealed principles, can arrive at that perfection of the Christian life in which he fulfills, as fully as possible here on earth, the counsels and com-

mandments learned in Moral Theology. Therefore, although Ascetical-mystical Theology inquires scientifically and theologically into the nature of perfection and thus better establishes its later conclusions, nevertheless it becomes, in the end, almost an art by which dexterity is acquired in the practical application of its conclusions and in the choosing of a means to the end desired. Thus it can be called a directive, as well as a doctrinal science.

The first opinion seems preferable, because it is better suited to the way in which problems are actually posed and distinguished from each other. It allows the same subject to be examined under different aspects, each aspect in its proper place, so that there is no repetition. For example, when dealing with patience or fortitude, Moral Theology can deduce what is of precept in the virtue, thus clearing the ground for Ascetical-mystical Theology to discuss what is of counsel only. The note of moral good, which Moral Theology considers in human acts, is present in both commanded and supererogatory acts. But Ascetical-mystical Theology rather considers human acts, not according to their greater or lesser conformity with revealed rules of conduct, but according to their ability to attain a greater, supernatural *perfection* or fullness of Christian life. Wherefore, the whole treatment of the nature and various acts of the moral and theological virtues should apparently be handed over to Moral Theology (as is done in *Ilallae* of St. Thomas). For, in ascetical theology, only certain questions are to be considered in order to see what bearing they have on the study of perfection, to see why we should concentrate more on this or that virtue, in this or that degree of the spiritual life, to see how in practice, and by what ways and means, we can attain a more perfect possession of these virtues.

- 0 2. *Pastoral Theology* teaches the clergy how they should exercise, according to the revealed principles, the care of the souls committed to them. Hence, it too comes near to being an art, and has much in common with Ascetical-mystical Theology insofar as one of the main duties of the pastor is to lead fervent souls to perfection. They differ, however, because perfection is the essential object of Ascetical-mystical Theology, not merely the partial object, but its unique, distinguishing object. And it deals with this object not only to procure the spiritual good of others, but also, and primarily, to assist the investigator in his own search for perfection. Whereas Pastoral Theology is concerned with the personal perfection of the pastor only insofar as it may better further his pastoral ministry.

But since a great part of Pastoral Theology relates to the means of converting men and leading them from infidelity to Christianity

or from sin to grace, we may ask whether Ascetical-mystical Theology should also deal with conversion. O. Marchetti and Heerinckx say that it should, and some authors<sup>7</sup> treat of the conversion of sinners as a kind of preface to Ascetical-mystical Theology. However, more often than not, treatises on Ascetical-mystical Theology have nothing about conversion, and many even exclude it, as does Tanqueray,<sup>8</sup> because striving for perfection presupposes at least the habitual possession of the life of grace, the fullness of which is being sought in ascetical theology. However, we should distinguish and say, with Hertling, that the province of ascetical theology begins where Christian perfection first appears in some way as the mark at which man should aim (or that ascetical theology begins at least where such a mark can be at all fittingly suggested). Thus ascetical theology can concern itself with healing the soul of a priest or religious made hideous by mortal sin, even by habitual mortal sin, because such a soul is already faced towards perfection by virtue of its profession and obligations. Or ascetical theology can deal with conversion from a tepid life to the pursuit of perfection. But the conversion of a sinner, a stranger to all religious living, or of an infidel, would seem rather to belong to religious psychology if there is question of describing the manner, the motives and effects of such a conversion. If we want to find means to procure a conversion of this sort, then Pastoral Theology is the science to invoke; if we want to convert infidel nations, then Missiology is our guide. Sometimes, it is true, the consideration of an attainable moral perfection can help very much to bring about the conversion of those who wish to throw off the shackles of sin and error. But ordinarily the notion of saving men's souls implies mainly, if not exclusively, the conversion of sinners and infidels to substantial grace and faith. This is so since a great part of a pastor's duty consists both in seeking out those who do not concern themselves with God or the true Faith, and in trying to save those who hate God and the Faith.

Another part of Pastoral Theology is more closely bound in with ascetical theology, namely catechetics, especially since a true concept of catechetics includes the spiritual formation of youth. Therefore Fr. Haynucfve, for example, deals with the formation of youth before treating of the Purgative Way.

In this work, however, we are concerned with the study of the more perfect Christian life. This is the usual procedure adopted by authors, and it is the one which allows a clearer and more orderly discussion of the matters involved. Nevertheless, when dealing with the question of beginners in the spiritual life we shall treat briefly of conversion and of the spiritual formation of youth.

#### IV. *The Distinction between Ascetical Theology and Mystical Theology; the Term "Spiritual Theology"*

Authors, even the modern ones, are much less agreed in distinguishing Ascetical Theology from Mystical, since as we have seen, these words have had various meanings. The historic usages of the words have their several sponsors, and each usage would seem worthy of adoption, if only on the score of enthusiastic support.

Some include in Ascetical Theology "all the theory and practice of the spiritual life up to, but exclusive of, infused contemplation," and place in Mystical Theology all that pertains to infused contemplation from the beginning of the prayer of quiet to the union completed in the spiritual marriage.<sup>9</sup>

According to others, Ascetical Theology treats of the three ways, purgative, illuminative, and unitive, insofar as a man can make progress in them by the ordinary assistance of grace; while Mystical Theology treats of the extraordinary gifts and acts which constitute or accompany infused contemplation.<sup>10</sup>

Others place under Mystical Theology whatever pertains to the unitive way, while under Ascetical they treat of the purgative and illuminative ways.

Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.,<sup>11</sup> distinguishes between them according as the agents predominantly exercise the virtues in the normal way (Ascetical Theology) or according as they predominantly use the gifts in a supra-normal way (Mystical Theology). Saudreau<sup>12</sup> and Arinterro hold almost the same opinion.

There are also some who deal with the whole spiritual life under either heading. This is what Schorrer did in his *Theologia Ascetica*, and, more recently, Fr. Aurelian of the Blessed Sacrament in his *Cursus Asceticus*. Murawski, also, holds that Ascetical embraces the whole science of Christian perfection, and therefore includes whatever pertains to the method of directing souls who have the graces of infused contemplation and whatever pertains to the relationship between these graces and perfection. And Joseph of the Holy Ghost, O.C.D., and La Reguera deal in their books on Mystical Theology with practically all questions relating to the spiritual life: some more recent authors do the same, e.g. Fr. Louismet, O.S.B.

« The various ways of distinguishing Ascetical from Mystical Theology may be classified, for all practical purposes, under three heads according as the distinction between them is interpreted widely, strictly, or most strictly.

*Widely:* insofar as Ascetical and Mystical denote two points of

view in the study of perfection, viz., activity or passivity. Ascetical looks on perfection as procurable by one's own acts and efforts by reforming one's life and living according to the Commandments, the counsels and the example of Christ and the Saints. Mystical regards perfection as a gift of God formed in us by the action of divine grace, and especially as it is formed by that operation under which the soul is passive to a great degree, so that at length the union of the soul with God through and in Christ may be consummated. Thus any spiritual life is at once ascetical and mystical.

*Strictly:* we may term mystical the interior life of those souls who are habitually led by the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, who are made so sensitive and so docile to these inspirations that their whole interior life is lived under this leading by grace. On the other hand, we can find an ascetical state in which personal effort and the methodical performance of spiritual exercises are more evident, whilst the continual inflow of grace into the soul is less apparent and less perceived experimentally.

*Most strictly:* in the strictest sense of the term, "mystical" means a certain mode of mental prayer and union with God which is produced in some souls by the special action of grace. This action of God makes the prayer simple and passive, and includes an experimental "taste" of God or an immediate sense of His purifying action resulting in an infused contemplation properly so called, as the term is ordinarily understood and as it is described by St. Teresa in her Fifth to Seventh Mansions. The souls who do not enjoy these mystical gifts will be said to follow the ascetical way. It can happen that a soul may have these mystical touches briefly and occasionally without being in the way of contemplation as best defined by Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., whose definition is practically the same as the most strict interpretation given above.

Since each of these three distinctions between ascetical and mystical is used by many authors, it is not possible to find any one division which is acceptable by common consent. This gives rise to the custom of dealing, in one and the same treatise, with all the questions that concern both, no matter how the distinction between them is understood. More and more every day the term "Spiritual Theology" is coming into use,<sup>13</sup> since it has the advantage of including under one heading both ascetical and mystical, and of not supposing that a precise and clear-cut distinction exists between them. This term explains that the science of the spiritual life is a part of theology, that ascetical and mystical cannot be separated, and finally, that both have a common purpose, the spiritual perfection

of man. So it seems that we should follow this usage here. Thus we can deal with matters which some treat as ascetical, while others treat them as mystical, without our inquiring whether any one subject belongs to ascetical or to mystical theology.

We cannot argue against this terminology (as does Zimmerman) from the way some ecclesiastical documents<sup>14</sup> speak of ascetical and mystical separately, for it is certain that these words are employed in the documents according to the usage accepted by many; and it is also certain that ecclesiastical authority does not wish thus to solve indirectly the controversy among Catholic authors.

- 9 *Spiritual Theology* can therefore be defined as the science which deduces from revealed principles *what* constitutes the perfection of the spiritual life and *how* man can advance towards and obtain it. This science can be called ascetical insofar as it points out the exercises by which man can, with the help of grace, tend actively and by his own efforts, towards this perfection. It can be called mystical in the broader sense of the word, since it shows forth the graces, gifts, and ways by which God draws man to Himself, unites man to Him and so leads him to perfection. It can be called mystical in the stricter sense of the word because it deals with the wonderful graces which constitute or are connected with infused contemplation properly so called.

Some may object to our term by saying that it is too individualistic and egocentric because it springs from preoccupation with our perfection and not with the glory of God through Christ and the Church. We answer that the best thing any Christian can do for God's glory and the best possible way for him to co-operate in the work of the Church is first to secure his own spiritual perfection. Without perfection the rest is of little or no value; with true perfection everything else follows, since the whole life of a truly perfect soul, precisely because it is perfect, will be motivated throughout by the love of God and the neighbor.

- 10 We have spoken about the use of the words "ascetical" and "mystical" among Catholic authors and theologians. Among non-Catholic and secular writers these words are often used in senses other than those we have mentioned. "Ascesis" in the stricter sense is used for mortification (especially bodily mortification) and abstinence; this is the usage ordinarily employed by Protestant authors. "Mystical," on the contrary, is understood in a wide, or very wide, sense to signify any experimental knowledge of suprasensible things or related matters, so that it includes spiritualistic experiences, occultism and theosophical teachings. It may be even extended to embrace doctrines or conclusions which are accepted on the strength



of "intuition" and which are held to be sacred and above all discussion; hence comes "social or political mysticism." Or "mystical" is applied to the philosophy which supposes a certain unity between man and all that is outside of him. Finally "mystical" is used to describe all the phenomena which can be reduced to or paralleled with religious ecstasy.

### V. *The Divisions of Spiritual Theology*

- 11 Various authors propose different divisions and different sequences of the subject matter of Spiritual Theology. Some divide the various points to be discussed according as they belong to ascetical or mystical theology.<sup>15</sup> This division presupposes a set principle of distinction, whereas there are some questions, like that of spiritual direction, which belong both to ascetical theology and to mystical theology.

Some place contemplation as the center of the whole matter and treat of the preparation, the exercise, and the consummation of contemplation. This treatment, which is most suitable to those who live a strictly contemplative life, cannot very well include the whole province of Spiritual Theology.

Many divide their treatises according to the Three Ways: purgative, illuminative, and unitive; or according to the three degrees: beginners, the proficient, and the perfect. Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange,<sup>16</sup> O.P., has this general division, but he also has a preliminary section dealing with the nature and causes of perfection, and he adds a fifth part on the "*gratiae gratis datae*" (visions, revelations, etc.). Fr. Chrysogonus of the Blessed Sacrament, O.C.D. (*Ascet. et Myst. Summa*, 1936), after explaining his principles, treats in both sections (i.e., in Ascetical and Mystical) of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways. But this seems an awkward division, because there is quite an amount of Spiritual Theology which more or less belongs to all these degrees and ways, and which must be treated when dealing with each one of the three ways.

All this leads quite a few authors<sup>17</sup> to believe that they would do better to treat first of the more general questions of the nature and causes of perfection, then to treat of the general means and methods for acquiring perfection, and after that to treat, in special spiritual theology, of whatever pertains to each degree and state in which Christians may find themselves while striving after perfection.

- 12 This division (which is proposed in a slightly different way by others) seems preferable for use here; we shall adopt the following sequence:

## A. On the Nature of Spiritual Perfection, and on the Factors Which Assist or Impede Its Development

1. *The perfection of the Christian life* is estimated according to the degree of charity possessed, effective and affective charity; charity towards God and one's neighbor—the Virtues and Counsels—Union with God, with Christ the Man; imitation of Christ and the Saints: desire of Perfection. (Part Two.)

### 2. *Factors:*

a. *Natural*: character and physical temperament—natural forces acting on them (heredity, acquired habits, diseases, psychological treatment) ; scruples.

b. *Supernatural and preternatural*: God, good and bad angels. Habitual grace, infused virtues, gifts of the Holy Ghost; actual graces. Temptations. Discernment of spirits, their impulses. (Part Three.) Visions and revelations; diabolical possession and obsession.

c. *The co-operation, of man with God*: methods employed in the spiritual life (activity and passivity) ; spiritual direction; spiritual friendship. (Part Four.)

## B. Means and Exercises by Which Man Progresses towards Perfection

1. *Means which sanctify "ex opere operato"*: the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Communion; Penance and the other Sacraments. Sacramental graces.

2. *Exercises by which the zeal for perfection is aroused, nourished, and directed:*

a. Spiritual reading, exhortations; study of spiritual doctrine.

b. *The Spiritual Exercises*; annual retreat; periodic times for recollection.

3. *Exercises for reforming and perfecting one's way of life:*

a. Examination of conscience (particular and general) ; methodic rooting out of vices and acquiring virtues (trials).

b. Zeal for perfection in ordinary actions and in the duties of one's state in life (rule of life).

c. Mortification of the senses and passions; interior and exterior mortification; positive penances.

4. *Exercises which unite one to God:*

a. Prayer in general (necessity, difficulties, helps).

b. Vocal prayer; liturgical, private.

c. Mental prayer: in general; in particular (meditation, affective prayer, acquired contemplation). (Part Five.)

d. Ejaculatory prayers and aspirations; exercise of the presence of God; zeal for conformity with the Divine Will; purity of intention.

e. Devotions; in general, and in particular.

### **C. The Degrees Through Which God Usually Leads Man to Perfection**

1. *The degrees of the spiritual life in general*; do they exist and in what sense? What are they? (various divisions); their interrelation; their relation with the active and contemplative life. (Part Six.)

2. *Beginners*: the first formation in the spiritual life; passive and active purification of the soul. What exercises, virtues, difficulties are proper to this state?— (fear of God, compunction, meditation on sin and the four last things, zeal for reparation).

3. *Proficients*: progress in virtue and in the interior life. Virtues which are of special importance in the spiritual life—self-denial, humility, poverty of spirit, obedience, chastity, patience; religion, piety; faith, hope, charity (mercy, thirst for souls).

4. *The perfect*: consummated union with God, full surrender of self to His service.

a. *Active union*: affective and effective (pure love and perfect resignation; spiritual joy and interior peace).

b. *Passive union*: infused contemplation; the nature, degrees, and distribution of strictly mystical graces, direction of souls which possess them (Part Seven); extraordinary events which can accompany contemplation (ecstasy).

### **D. The Various States in Life in Which Man Can Tend towards and Exercise Perfection**

1. *States of life in general*: divide vocation and selection of one's state.

2. *Zeal for perfection* and obligation of tending towards it in (a) priestly life, (b) religious life, (c) lay state.

Thus we do not dwell on points about grace, merit and virtues that were presumably treated in dogmatic and moral theology. Instead we pass on to explain only whatever is necessary as a foundation for the proper discussion of our subject, and so we deal only once with any matter that is pertinent to our study of Spiritual Theology.

## REFERENCES

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2. F. Prat, *The Theology of St. Paul*, II, pp. 609®. and 401ff.
3. F. Prat, *op. cit.*, II, p. 383.
4. Note that St. Paul also uses the word “*gumndzein*” to signify spiritual striving; e.g., in 1 Tim. 4.7-8; Heb. 5.14, 12.11.
5. *Directorium Asceticum* and *Directorium Mysticum*.
6. E.g. A. Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life*.
7. E.g. A. Soudreau, *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, I, Ch. 1, n. 1-30.
8. *Op. cit.*, n. 636.
9. E.g. Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, n. 10-11.
10. E.g. A. Meynard, *Traité de la Vie Intérieure, Ascétique et Mystique* (2 vols., Paris, 1884; new ed. by G. Gérest, 1923-1925) , I, p. viii; À. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, I, Ch. 1, n. 15.
11. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 28.
12. *Op. cit.*, II, n. 411.
13. E.g. J. Hedley, *Lex Levitarum*.
14. E.g. Code of Canon Law, canon 1385, 2®.
15. E.g. A. Devine, *A Manual of Ascetical Theology*; and *A Manual of Mystical Theology*.
16. *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*.
17. Both older and modern; e.g. A. Le Gaudier, *De Natura et Statibus Perfectionis* (1643), and Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, n. 255-261 (1923).

## CHAPTER TWO

### **The Method and Sources of Spiritual Theology<sup>1</sup>**

#### A. Method

- 13 The science of spiritual things is at once a part of *theology*, a *science* studying certain facts (which were, and still are, partly observable), and the *art* of tending towards perfection. Hence the method to be used in it will have to be not only strictly theological, positive, and deductive, but also inductive, resting upon observation and experience.

It is only by revelation that we know for certain the existence, nature, and causes of this supernatural life, the perfection of which we desire to attain. Therefore before all else we must make our own the revealed truths and their corollaries which form the principles of spiritual theology (and which make it subsidiary to dogmatic and moral theology). From these principles, spiritual theology will deduce further conclusions about its own proper object, namely, spiritual perfection. And since the infallible teaching power of the Church in explaining revealed dogma extends also to these further conclusions, then a close study of the documents of Catholic tradition will yield many statements of spiritual doctrine which will support and complete the deductions we have made in our study of dogmatic theology.

Using all this as a base we shall be able to interpret correctly and use confidently whatever facts we may cull from our own or others' experience. This consideration of experience will teach us how, actually, holy or truly fervent people living in our day, and before it, arrived at perfection—what means they used in practice, through what degrees and trials God led them. From this we shall be able to conclude how efficacious in reality is such and such a method or means of sanctification, what are its disadvantages, and what are the dangers to be avoided in its use, etc.

- 14 But this does not mean to say that in our construction of a spiritual theology we can be content with experience alone or with

conclusions deduced from principles without reference to experience.

Experience alone, combined with good judgment and an average knowledge of revealed doctrine, is sufficient to formulate a few practical rules that can be useful enough in the direction of souls, just as popular nostrums may sometimes prove curative. But like all other empirical conclusions these rules of thumb will not have the support of a full, precise and well-founded knowledge. Hence directors who depend on such rules will always be liable to error, especially when they meet new cases, which they will strive mightily to reduce to forms familiar to them. They will be the slaves of all kinds of prejudices arising from their education, from their reading done haphazardly and without any critical judgment, from their own character and the circumstances of their own spiritual life. They will be content with confused and ill-defined theological concepts and doctrine. Metaphors and similes will, for them, take the place of solid reasons founded on revelation, and they will be easily attracted by novelty and led along by vain curiosity. And they will be open to deception, as is evident from the multitude of new devotions and forms of piety that the Church has had to condemn in every age.

Γ» Nor can deduction *a priori* alone suffice, because:

1. There are many conclusions relating to the spiritual life that can be deduced from the principles only by a long, complex, and difficult chain of reasoning, conclusions founded on revealed truths that have not yet been defined in a simple formula by the teaching Church. And since the principles of these conclusions must be drawn from the ordinary testimony of tradition, they are not always easily distinguishable from the private opinions of the tradition of various schools. Thus it may often happen that such conclusions (many, for example, about the Gifts of the Holy Ghost) cannot reach full and perfect certitude, cannot be more than very probable assertions, or prudent rules, or opinions based on supreme suitability. Therefore even the least cautious investigator will carefully compare such conclusions with those derived from experience and will thus vindicate their validity or throw into relief their weaker points.

2. Moreover, from experience alone can be learned the way to apply general theological conclusions to particular cases, due consideration being given to all differing circumstances. Only experience can teach how to regulate, according to the needs of each soul and according to the various movements of grace in each, those elements that can be altogether unduly stressed in the spiritual life, as love and fear, mortification and joy, etc.

3. Spiritual theology cannot consist in theory alone. Like all other arts it must have as its essential aim to teach how one can actually attain the end for which it supplies the principles. The art of *doing* is all the more necessary here, since in the affairs of the spiritual life there is often less difficulty in knowing what to do than in knowing how to go about doing it. In practice, however, the only way to learn how we can help the work of grace in souls is by experience.

## B. Sources

- 16 The sources of spiritual theology will therefore be of two kinds, dogmatic and theological sources, and experimental sources. However, it is not a rare thing to find among these sources, documents that supply at once theological and experimental data. For example, St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* is a document of Catholic tradition in which a bishop and a Doctor of the Church passes on to us and explains revealed truths about the spiritual life, thus making it a theological document; and at the same time he makes known to us his conclusions gleaned from a long experience as a spiritual man and director, thus making his book a document based on experience. Therefore in such a book we must as far as possible distinguish between that which is theological and that which is experimental.

### I. Theological Sources

- 17 Among strictly theological sources, a distinction must be drawn between those elements which are common to all parts of theology and those which more properly belong to spiritual theology.

1. As regards the *common theological sources* (Sacred Scripture, documents of the teaching Church, writings of the Fathers and theologians) we shall here add little to the general principles of usage found in fundamental theology.

a. The *inspired books* provide:

(1) The *speculative teaching* on God and man which is the foundation of the whole spiritual life: in the Old Testament (Psalms, Prophets, Sapiential Books) on God the Creator, His power, justice, mercy, providence; in the New Testament on the Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption, our incorporation in Christ, the supernatural life and its end, the Beatific Vision (especially in St. Paul and St. John).

(2) *Precepts and counsels*: in the Old Testament (Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, Tobias), but especially in the New Testament, which

sets before us the fullness of the precept of charity and of the other precepts and counsels (Christ's Sermon on the Mount, His parables in the Synoptics; His discourse after the Last Supper, St. Paul's Epistles, as regards their teaching on morals; the Catholic Epistles).

(3) *Examples* of prayer and action: in the Old Testament, the Patriarchs, Moses, the Prophets, Tobias, Judith, the Maccabees (reverence towards God, love for the Divine Sanctity, fortitude against God's enemies) ; but in the New Testament particularly, the example of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, the Apostles; in the Lord's Prayer especially, and in practically every other part of Sacred Scripture we are taught how to pray—in the Psalms, Canticles, prayers of the Prophets, St. Paul's doxologies and those found in the Apocalypse.

We should take account of the progress of the spiritual life from the Mosaic Law to the Evangelical Law, following the words of Christ Himself recorded in Matt. 5.21,27' "You have heard that it was said to them of old . . . But I say to you . . . We should do so because in the instances and prayers found in the Old Testament there are various things which, though good, do not reach the perfection of the Gospel and which are redolent of the harshness of the Israelites: hence they should not be incorporated into our spiritual life without being mitigated: for example, applying the rigor of justice to sinners, cursing the enemies of God. An added reason for our procedure is that such Old Testament passages seem to have had too much influence on some spiritual writers.

III b. *Ecclesiastical Documents*. Of the ecclesiastical documents to be dealt with here some are doctrinal while others are disciplinary or practical:

(1) *Doctrinal documents* relating to spiritual theology do not provide much that is positive; the directions they give are mainly negative, namely, condemnation of errors in the spiritual life.

(2) *Practical documents* are found in *ecclesiastical laws* relating to the various states of life which either presuppose perfection or endeavor to attain it, as the clerical and religious states. Thus, for example, in the Code of Canon Law there are canons on mental prayer (c. 125, 595), on spiritual exercises (c. 126, 595, 1367), on manifestation of conscience (c. 530), on common life for clerics and religious (c. 134, 594), etc.: and there are also exhortations such as Pius X's *Haerunt Animo* (Aug. 4th, 1908), addressed to the Catholic clergy.<sup>2</sup> Thus is set forth the mind of the Church on the means suitable for acquiring perfection and on the dangers to be avoided in its pursuit.

The attainment of perfection is the primary and essential aim of



any religious order. Hence in *approving religious orders* the Church authentically declares that the form of life proposed in any approved rule is an apt means of acquiring perfection. But by this approval the Church does not mean to say that such a rule is the only means to attain perfection or the most suitable means or that it is more suitable than any other.

- 19 (3) In the *canonization of a Saint* the Church proclaims only one thing with the fullness of her infallible authority, namely, that this Servant of God is a Saint and merits the cult which the Church demands be paid to him by all the faithful. From this it necessarily follows that the canonized Servant of God is already in Heaven. By simple beatification the cult of a Servant of God is merely allowed to some of the faithful. By commanding or allowing the cult of a Servant of God, the Church, by her ordinary teaching power, proposes him as a supreme example of the Christian life. This is apparent both from the way in which causes of Beatification and Canonization are prosecuted (especially from the examination into the heroicity of virtue which is necessary according to the present discipline), and from the way in which decrees of Beatification and Bulls of Canonization are prepared. Heroicity of virtue as ordinarily understood is not required for the beatification or canonization of martyrs, since by their very martyrdom they display heroic fortitude and charity by undergoing death for Christ. So the Church endorses the general complexus of the life of the Servant of God: she may even endorse some particular mode of action which is prominent in the conduct of the holy person's life. But hereby she does not endorse the value of single acts, and much less does she propose such acts for imitation or approve them as a general norm for the spiritual life.

Nor can it be rightly concluded from the fact of canonization that the Servant of God led a life more perfect than that of another person who has not been canonized; nor that this or that religious order or form of Christian life is more perfect than others because more canonized persons lived according to its rules. Canonization does presuppose a holy life, but it depends on so many other conditions that it can easily happen that a person who is much more holy and more perfect than a particular canonized Saint may never be raised to the honors of the altar. Hence, from the fact that any one form of life was that of many Saints and Blessed, one can rightly conclude that such a way of life is by its very nature positively suited to lead to sanctity, but one may not further conclude that such a way of life is, *in comparison*, more suited to sanctity than another mode of life.

Spiritual theology, if it bears in mind the limitations just men-

tioned, can find an abundant source of traditional doctrine in the authentic documents of canonization and beatification, e.g., Benedict XIV, *De Beatificatione Servorum Dei* (1734-1738).

∴() c. *The Writings of the Fathers and Theologians.* Here we shall add nothing to the general rules for the use of the writings of the Fathers and theologians except to say that one must carefully distinguish between writings which propose a doctrine or exhortation for all, and those which are addressed to one person or one group with an eye to their particular, needs. In this latter case the content of the document is not a formulation of spiritual doctrine but rather a concrete application of it providing rules of conduct for the individual or the group. This is especially true of spiritual letters.

I 2. The following are properly speaking the *sources of spiritual theology*:

a. *The writings of the Saints and spiritual men* help us to discern what the Church believes and teaches (as do, for example, the writings of theologians), and they also provide us with the fruit of the writer's experience in the affairs of the interior life. These writings, besides the value they derive from their authors' faithful submission to the Church and Catholic instinct, have often a special authority. This authority may derive from various sources: it may be due to the fact that the authors belong to the teaching Church or were declared Doctors of the Universal Church (e.g., St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Alphonsus Liguori), or because the Popes gave them special approval (e.g., the writings of St. Teresa of Avila, St. Francis de Sales, St. John of the Cross, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius), or because by long use they have acquired universal favor with the faithful, who see in them the genuine spiritual doctrine of the Church (e.g., St. Bernard's works, before he was declared a Doctor; *The Imitation of Christ*).

'2 The Solemn Canonization, or even Beatification nowadays, presupposes an examination of the authentic writings of the Servant of God prior to the introduction of his Cause. It follows from this that there is nothing erroneous in these writings that militates against the holiness of the author or prevents him from being proposed to the faithful as an example of sanctity. But it does not follow that errors are excluded, even errors in spiritual matters, provided that such errors did not arise from imprudence, inconstancy, or culpable pertinacity of opinion. The Church does not necessarily say that every revelation received by the Servant of God is true or objectively reported. His canonization means only that he did not act imprudently in the matter. Benedict XIV,<sup>8</sup> and after him Poulain,<sup>4</sup> was able to compile a list of errors found in the revelations of canonized saints. As a case in point we may cite the Decree on the

heroic virtues of Blessed (now St. [Tr.]) Gemma Galgani, November 29th, 1931, in which it is declared that "This decree does not pass judgment (it has never been the custom to do so) on the preternatural charismata of the Servant of God." Nevertheless, because of the authors' sanctity, of which canonization is a proof, these writings of the saints have a special, though not a theological, authority. This is so because the saints, when speaking of perfection, treat of a subject well known to them from their own experience; and also because their writings are the products of souls full of the Holy Ghost and supremely docile to His guidance.

- 23     b. *The lives of the saints* (saints by canonization, or "saints" by reputation) are documents of Catholic tradition insofar as they record the sayings and doings of the saints and thus portray for us the attitude of these holy persons to the affairs of the spiritual life: they are also experimental documents insofar as they tell us how actually these Servants of God attained perfection. We should therefore estimate the doctrinal value of these lives: first, according to their fidelity to history in narrating deeds or handing down doctrine or sayings; second, according to the correctness of the narrator's opinions on the spiritual life; because, since there are very few lives of saints written purely historically and according to the laws of the strictest criticism, it follows that the opinions of the narrator almost always influence to a greater or lesser extent his selection and presentation of the facts. Hence in the same biography we find both the viewpoint of the saint and the viewpoint of the narrator; so that sometimes the doctrinal impact of the biography may come mainly from the narrator's own personality, ideas and interpretation. In view of this, special weight should be given to the lives of saints written by other saints, such as the Life of Antony by Athanasius, that of St. Francis by St. Bonaventure, of St. Paul of the Cross by Blessed (now St. [Tr.]) Vincent Strambi. On the other hand, we should accept with caution the treatment of doctrine in the Life of St. Francis by Paul Sabatier, who, though a very learned historian, is a non-Catholic.

- 24     c. The various documents just cited may be ascribed to different *schools of spirituality*, more or less distinct from each other. The following points about these schools may be appropriately noted here:

(1) *Origin of the schools.* By reading and comparing the spiritual writings of several authors like Ven. Libermann, Gay, Guéranger, Lacordaire, and Olivaint, who were contemporaries of each other, we can readily see that such schools of spirituality exist even within the ambit of the purest Catholic tradition. A comparison brings out not only the difference between such men but also

the relationship of each one to the authors and the spiritually minded of his own and other generations. Moreover, members of the same school are often united by external bonds, e.g. by common life in the same religious community, by being taught by the same spiritual master, by association in the same period or place, by certain peculiar circumstances, e.g. reaction against the same error or vice, etc. All this gives rise to agreement in using a certain method, in preferring a certain mode of internal or apostolic life, in placing greater emphasis on a certain mystery of faith, a certain devotion or motive for action, in choosing a certain principle as the centre of the spiritual life. It is true that all the essential elements of this spiritual life are found in any truly Catholic school, since they are taken from the Gospel itself; but the balancing of the elements, their blending and the relative importance given to each (so that the result is a unified body of doctrine and rules of life) are not the same in all schools.

¶ This diversity among schools must be carefully considered and properly understood: (1) lest we think of it as a real opposition between them; (2) lest we consider that a school rejects or thinks less of any element merely because it develops it less fully than does another school; (3) lest the quite legitimate penchant and liking on which we base our own selection of a school become a narrow, rigid exclusiveness which in practice regards the other schools as less Catholic, less well-founded, less productive of sanctity; (4) lest we, on the contrary, fall into a dangerous eclecticism by wishing to select arbitrarily elements from several schools and reduce them by force to a unity: for each school is a complete and harmonious body of doctrine, the parts of which lose much of their value if separated from the whole. It can even happen that elements which are very suitable to one school become harmful if they are transferred bodily and unchanged to another school.

M This diversity of spiritual schools cannot very well arise from their diversity in speculative theology, for it often happened that in religious orders the spiritual school had its own special character before the school of speculative theology was founded, e.g. the Franciscan, the Dominican, the Jesuit schools. And often there is a difference of opinions in speculative matters even in the same school and even regarding questions which would seem to have the greatest influence on spiritual doctrine. The source of the diversity should apparently be sought: (1) in the variety of vocations in the Church (the contemplative life, the apostolic life in one form or another); (2) in the variety of the ways by which God leads individual souls, a variety contributing greatly to the beauty of the Church; (3) in the difference between the founders of the individual schools, each

one of whom discovered that, for himself and his immediate disciples, a certain "formula of the spiritual life" was efficacious for promoting sanctity; and this wise blending of the various elements, the "formula" for a particular mode of life, became characteristic of each school. The aim of all schools is ever the same—the full dominion of charity over the whole life of man, and through it the most perfect tending towards the final end, namely the greater increase of grace in souls and hence the greater eternal glory of God. But there are different ways of utilizing and regulating the various means towards this end, and it is from these different "*modi operandi*" that the diversity of schools really arises.

27 (2) *Our attitude towards the various schools* will depend on whether we are then thinking of our own perfection or are exercising the office of spiritual director. When we are working out our own personal perfection we shall find that there is a great advantage in following the directions of one particular school. Our choice of school will often be determined for us by our vocation and state in life. Membership in a certain religious community, early spiritual formation, the promptings of grace, a special personal spiritual need which a certain school satisfies—all these can determine our choice. However, it can sometimes happen that a person formed in one spiritual school may, in the course of years, change to another school which he sees is better adapted to lead him to perfection. Such a change can be made prudently where the soul is not bound by special bonds to a particular school. But it is always harmful for anyone to be perpetually sampling and mixing the various forms of spiritual life out of curiosity or inconstancy, without persevering long in any. However, this should not be interpreted so strictly that, for example, one would be allowed to read only the writers of one's own school to the rigid exclusion of all others. Surely there is no one who will not benefit greatly by reading St. Bernard, St. Teresa or St. Vincent de Paul. But, on the whole, each person should be faithful to one school, since it is the foundation of his spiritual life, while taking from the authors of the other schools whatever can be adopted by and assimilated into his own school. Thus it is easy to see why freedom to read certain spiritual books is usually restricted (and wisely so) in the case of novices and those who are beginners in the spiritual life, and who are not yet deeply imbued with the principles of the school they follow. They are not able to assimilate properly and profitably the rich variety of spiritual diet, and books that are very good in themselves could become the source of a harmful confusion.

28 In exercising the office of spiritual guide we cannot but be influenced by the special character of our own school. Nevertheless

we must direct our charges according to their individual vocations, the graces they receive, and the spiritual formation they have already undergone. When we have to deal with a soul formed in one particular school and profiting by this formation, there is no reason why we should be in haste to make a change in his way of tending to perfection, a change which will perhaps make him more like ourselves but which possibly will not be without harm. Our zeal for change will be even more ill-advised if the person's school has been determined for him by his special vocation or by an obvious inspiration of grace. Hence it is necessary for a director of souls to have sufficient knowledge of the principal schools to enable him to guide each soul according to the teaching of its own school. Therefore he should not restrict his study of spiritual theology to a few books, at least not when it is likely that he will have to direct many souls of different spiritual types and degrees.

In practice we must accept this diversity of souls as a fact: in this matter it would be useless and harmful to try to reduce everything to a unity. We must approve all that the Church approves, because her explicit or implicit endorsement of a school means that it is a safe way to sanctity. This, however, does not mean that each school may not have its own dangers as well as its own merits. Hence it is useful to know exactly what these good and bad points are, provided that we do not use our knowledge to conclude that any one of these schools is once and for all superior to the rest. Such a conclusion would neither be very prudent nor very humble.

## II. *Experimental Sources*

*H* Spiritual theology draws from experience conclusions of different kinds and of varying import and value.

1. *Treatises on experimental psychology* contain the conclusions of general psychological observation and experience, and by studying them we can know more precisely the laws which govern the production of the acts of intellect and will (which essentially constitute the spiritual life), and the helps or hindrances which the spiritual life finds in imagination and sense life, and even in the various forms of organic activity. With this precise experimental knowledge we can better see the true nature of certain phenomena of the interior life, and the true origin of certain difficulties which occur in it. Thus we can find out various ways of influencing the faculties of the soul, and various methods of psychological education and curative treatment.

We should pay special attention to psychopathology, so that we may know enough to suspect psychopathological causes for some

of the states of soul which we meet in direction: and also so that we may gauge the possibility of obtaining a cure by suitable psychological or physiological treatment. However, we should by no means attempt to obtain such a cure ourselves. These psychological diseases are intimately connected with organic defects and cannot be cured independently of the diagnosis and cure of these defects. Therefore, since we are not doctors, there are elements in such cases which are beyond our reach, and which must be dealt with if there is to be any prudent hope of a cure. Hence when we suspect that there are psychopathological elements in a case which may yield to treatment we should send the person to a skilled and prudent doctor.}

It should also be noted that many of the “discoveries” of modern psychology are already known to students of Catholic spiritual writings. For example, some of the psychological observations made by Cassian and St. Francis de Sales are extraordinarily acute, and none the less so for being couched in simple language. Nevertheless, here as elsewhere, guided and methodical observation, assisted in many cases by experimentation, can discover facts and the laws which govern them, with a rigor and precision that will always be lacking to spontaneous and casual observation, even though it be very sharp observation. Hence spiritual theology can very profitably convert to its own use many of the findings of experimental psychology.

Finally, it should be noted that these psychological studies help us greatly to avoid attributing to preternatural causes (God or the devil), many things which today are known to arise from natural sources and which formerly were somewhat too readily credited to preternatural agencies. This holds good both for demoniacal molestation and for the action of God or the good angels, for visions or internal locutions, for internal trials or for consolation and a general feeling of well-being (euphoria). Cf. in Part Three, the discernment of spirits.

- 30     2. *Religious psychology* can be understood broadly to mean the study of the more general religious phenomena insofar as they are common to various religions (states of interior consolation or desolation, of devotion or aridity; mental and vocal prayer, asceticism; groups devoted to the pursuit of the perfect life). As such it can be very useful in the study of apologetics and allied sciences. However, it does not seem to provide much that can be directly used in spiritual theology, at least insofar as spiritual theology is viewed here, namely, as a practical theology for acquiring perfection. What Fr. Maréchal® says of the various forms of mysticism is true also of any part of the spiritual life, namely, that in any

mysticism there are three factors: the *doctrinal* element (a concept of the absolute and the relations of man with it); *psychological* facts (consolation); and the *interpretation* of these facts with the aid of doctrine, and the consequences deduced therefrom. Since the doctrinal element in the Catholic faith is very different from that in other religions (Judaism excepted), and since at the same time it is much more developed, it follows that very few of the findings of *general* religious psychology will contribute anything to the practice of the Christian life. Nevertheless, some of these findings can aid in the understanding of certain adductions of Catholic tradition or of certain phenomena, e.g. of contemplation.

3. On the other hand, however, the *psychological study of religious acts* in the Christian religion, and especially in the Catholic Church, will be the principal source from which spiritual theology will draw the experimental part of its teaching. Outside the true Church, and much more so outside the Christian faith, we can only guess at the supernatural value of the religious acts under consideration. Within the Church we have a firm foundation on which to base our conclusions. Of course there will always be some doubt about single cases, but it will certainly be possible to reach a sound conclusion from a number of cases, or even from some individual cases that have the authentic approval of the Church (the canonized saints). Hence we can observe some instances at least, where souls certainly arrived at true spiritual perfection, and so we can more fully realize the value and practical efficacy of the doctrine we hold. There is, distinct from the dogmatic tradition, though not always easily distinguishable from it in the doctrine of spiritual teachers, a true experimental tradition gathered and handed down through many generations from the beginning of the Church. The documents of this tradition, although they may not be authoritative and preserved from error by the gift of infallibility, are nevertheless one of the principal sources of spiritual theology. And though for the most part they report observations in practical rather than scientific form, yet by patient and methodic study we can glean from them clear, precise facts, and so formulate a complete and systematic body of doctrine.

4. To these experimental data, bequeathed to us by the ages, we should add those *facts which we personally have learned from our own experience* of the interior life. No course of study, no amount of experience at second hand, can adequately take the place of this personal participation in the spiritual life. It is only by means of such personal contact that we can understand the data found in the accounts which others leave us of their experiences, and it is clearly evident from the gross errors made by unbelievers when



they try to interpret the writings of the mystics and ascetics, errors which are found even in the psychological studies made by eminent persons. On the other hand, he who knows the Catholic interior life from his own experience of it will rather easily, and with a minimum of error, understand the writings of the saints, even those which describe states different from his own. For the Catholic is accustomed to the saints' mode of expression and he knows at least the locale of the journeys they describe, although he may not yet have travelled that way himself. Of course, this personal experience is not all-sufficient, as we have shown in paragraph 17 above.

33 To the director's personal experience of the spiritual life can be added that which he gains in exercising his office, though this latter experience will be less immediate, since there are many things about the state of the souls he directs which he can know only from their own account.

No matter how precious is the knowledge derived from experience, it is not an end in itself but only a means, and a secondary means at that, to procure the good of souls. Therefore we must be on our guard against stressing the value of this knowledge to the detriment of souls. We can harm souls by indiscreet questioning about their state or the graces they have received, questioning that does not help us to direct them better and which may be prompted, rather, by our curiosity to know the details of an unusual case. We can do even more harm by asking unnecessarily for written descriptions of their state, or by regarding souls as subjects for experimentation. In all this, moreover, there is not lacking a certain irreverence for the grace of God working in souls.

Hence we can see what should be our attitude towards the systematic inquiries (*enquêtes*) that Poulain<sup>7</sup> suggests as a means for filling out our knowledge of mystical phenomena. A good example of such inquiries may be found in a recent book:<sup>3</sup> it consists of nine questions set to seventy-six young people ranging from ten to twenty-one years of age. One cannot deny that such investigations can be useful for the better understanding of how, in fact, young people pray, and that the results may enable us to give them advice that is less theoretic and less arbitrary than would otherwise be possible. Nevertheless, we should use cautiously the conclusions that seem to follow from the replies received, because it can easily happen that the subjects will more or less unconsciously color the truth in their answers. Moreover, these questionings cannot be multiplied without harming the spiritual life of the subjects. Therefore, on the whole, it seems preferable to collect observations of concrete cases where this can be done without abusing confidences;

*ci.*, for example, Prof. R. Allers' and Fr. Bruno a Jesu Maria's research on aridity.0

## REFERENCES

1. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, Ch. 1, Art. 1; *cf.* Ch. 2; Poulain, *op. cit.*, Ch. 30; Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, n. 32-33.
2. Translator's note: *cf.* Pope Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae*, Sept. 1950; Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*, Dec. 1935.
3. *De Beatification? Servorum Dei el Beatorum Canonization?* (1734-1738), III, Ch. 53, n. 15ff.
4. *Op. cit.*, Ch. 21. n. 4ff.
5. Cf. J. Lindworsky, *The Psychology of Asceticism*.
6. J. Maréchal, *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics*, p. 288.
7. *Op. cit.*, Ch. 30, n. 7-12.
8. A. Bolley, *Gebetsstimmung und Gebet* (Dusseldorf, 1930).
9. *Études Carmélitaines*, October 1937.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Some Observations on the Study of Spiritual Theology

#### A. The Present State of Studies in Spiritual Theology

34 Three things should be particularly noted about the present state of studies in Spiritual Theology:

1. The *favor that such studies have found* not only with Catholics but also with heretics and unbelievers. This sympathetic interest explains the appearance of so many books, commentaries, publications of all kinds, periodicals, etc., dealing with spiritual matters, particularly those of a mystical character. Some enthusiasts, however, are drawn by motives which are not very praiseworthy—curiosity about extraordinary occurrences, hunger for new and unusual sensations, and a kind of intellectual snobbery. But, on the other hand, many modern students of spiritual theology have very commendable reasons for their enthusiasm—their reaction against materialism and the worship of science, their desire for a more interior life, for a spiritual renewal after the calamities of war and its effects, an intimate persuasion of the necessity and value of the interior life.

2. The *sharp controversies* on many points between even Catholic theologians. These controversies are often long-drawn-out because there is no general agreement on the formulation of problems, nor on the precise use of the commonest terms, nor on the interpretation of evidence, etc. There is much less disagreement in dogmatic and moral theology because there the vocabulary is set, and there exists a commonly accepted order and mode of procedure.

3. The *relative lack of documents* and other aids to the pursuit of these studies. Much has been written on the subject, it is true, but it is more suited for edification or direct persuasion than for scientific study. It is true that for some years past many works have appeared which lend themselves to systematic study; yet there are still few truly scientific documents of a technical nature.

## B. A Few Precautions

Because of these circumstances and because of the very nature of spiritual theology, there are certain things which must especially be guarded against in this branch of theology if we are to avoid running into grave difficulties.

1. Since our subject is at once a theological *science* and an *art*, we must distinguish accurately between the points that pertain to each (i.e., conclusions, proofs, the evidence of tradition). We must take into account not only that which is common to every good-living soul but also variety in character, in circumstances, in the impulses and ways of divine grace, in vocation. Nor should we forget the importance in any art of estimating the scope, the ratio, the greater or lesser importance to be allotted to each exercise, to each inner urging, to each thought. For in spiritual theology more errors are likely to arise from laying too much or too little stress on particular points than from downright denials or blunt affirmations.

A6 2. Many advantages follow from the *intimate connection* that exists between spiritual theology and the spiritual life, our most personal and precious possession. Such advantages are: the joy afforded by this study, the ease with which one can give oneself up to it, the great assistance one derives from the knowledge gained because of the connaturality of the object known (of which St. Thomas often speaks), which allows of many things being understood more easily and more thoroughly than would otherwise be possible. But here, too, there are special dangers which must be sedulously guarded against. Mere emotions and sensible affections must not be confused with theological principles, lest we come to regard as valid arguments metaphors, similes, and pious figments of the imagination that move us emotionally. We must not hold as generally applicable things which are good and true only in a particular case. We must not desire to impose on others our spiritual way of life as being the only true and secure one. We must not become obtuse in refusing to understand interior needs, states, and forms of life different from our own.

'17 3. Masters of the spiritual life usually regard it predominantly under one of three aspects—the speculative, the affective, or the practical. Their viewpoint is determined according as they are interested in expounding dogmatic foundations and general principles, or in fostering the love of God and the other good dispositions of soul, or in deducing practical conclusions and in assuring their execution. This variety of outlook and aim is good, provided

*preference* does not become *exclusiveness*. For a spirituality that is entirely speculative, or almost so, will nourish the illusion that man always acts logically according to what he sees and believes: and from this will arise the dangerous policy of entertaining the highest spiritual concepts while one still has great defects. And if spirituality is too exclusively affective it will lack solidity and stability, and emotions productive of nothing will take the place of good works. If practicality is stressed unduly, it will become pure empiricism, and the whole spiritual life will be taken up with minutiae, whilst vigor, strength, and magnanimity will be lacking. Again, caution will have to be exercised in balancing human activity and passivity towards grace in the spiritual life. Some will set forth more prominently the role of activity, while others will stress passivity under grace. If activity is stressed too much, there will be a tumult in the soul; it will not be able to hearken to God, and it will lack true progress and real union with Him. But if passivity is emphasized overmuch, there will be danger of idleness and illusion. Therefore each person, while following his own legitimate penchant for one or the other form of life, should beware lest he allow that penchant to grow beyond its due confines.

- 38 4. Spiritual doctrine should be founded primarily on Catholic tradition—but on Catholic tradition drawn up in its fullness after entirety. Our *doctrine*, therefore, must be a *complete* one, gathering together all the elements found in tradition. For example, we should not be so taken up with the idea of spiritual joy as to omit the traditional teaching on compunction, or vice versa. We must receive tradition in its entirety and not arbitrarily reject the teaching found in any age because of its alleged obscurity. The spiritual life of the Church has not shone forth with equal splendor in every age, and hence not all periods of the Church's history are of equal import in the study of the spiritual life. But every age in which the testimony of Catholic tradition, properly so called, is clearly present is of equal authority, because that authority is ever based on the same foundation, namely, the guidance of the Holy Ghost infallibly assisting the Church. Wherefore in examining tradition we must first look to its unity, continuity and universality, leaving for the moment the differences of schools and periods to be treated in the second stage of our inquiry. For if we concentrate too much on these differences, we shall see disagreements in doctrine, where in reality there is only a difference in speech or conception, or we shall come to the conclusion that essential unity cannot be achieved unless we rigorously exclude the disturbing diversity which in reality adds so much to the beauty of the body of the Church.

### C. The Necessity of This Study

W As regards the necessity of studying spiritual theology, we refer the reader to Heerinckx's *Introductio in Theologiam Spiritualem* (Rome, 1931), n. 448-466, where he will find a summary of the views of various authors on the utility and necessity of this study for the director of souls. For the way to teach this science, consult the same work, n. 468-521.

Here it will suffice to point out the reasons why at least lectures dealing *ex professo* with spiritual theology should be given to those who will have to direct souls. These lectures should be given as an addition to spiritual reading, conferences, advice received in direction and all the other similar ways in which no small amount of spiritual doctrine may be acquired. These latter exercises and aids are destined mainly for producing the personal sanctification of the clerics and religious who use them, and only secondarily and obliquely for imparting a general knowledge of the science of the spiritual life. Hence much is omitted that is not very necessary for one's own sanctity but which is essential for the direction of others. Again, spiritual doctrine is expounded, and rightly so, according to the spirit of one's particular school, and so the general introduction to the various schools, so necessary for a director, is missing. The very method of teaching spirituality will be more exhortatory than scientific, and therefore it cannot take that technical form which is so productive of exact and well-ordered concepts. Finally, exhortations and spiritual conferences do not particularly lend themselves to the full teaching of spiritual doctrine, since they do not readily admit of scientific synthesis, rigorous demonstration and clear-cut conclusions.

The manner of giving these special lectures will differ according to circumstances. But since spiritual theology presupposes and completes dogmatic and moral theology, the lectures will be more in place if given after the principal dogmatic and moral tracts on God and the Incarnation, the elevation, redemption, and justification of man. Thus, questions dealing exclusively with spiritual theology can be discussed without the necessity of preliminary explanations of matters which will be more fully treated later in other branches of theology. And although there is nothing against teaching spiritual theology as a complement to moral theology or pastoral theology, yet, in practice, it can scarcely be dealt with adequately except in a special course, as Benedict XV noted: "Because this subject is not treated in the ordinary course of dogmatic and moral theology, it usually happens that the young cleric, while being instructed in the other branches of theology, is taught little about the true

principles of the spiritual life of which a sound and vivid knowledge is indispensable for his own perfection and for the success of the sacred ministry to which he is called by God" (*Epist. ad P. O. Marchetti*, Nov. 10, 1919, A. A. S., 1920, 30).

This is confirmed by the *Ordinatio* from the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and University Studies, in which it is laid down for Theological Faculties that the principles of Ascetical Theology be taught in a special course.

## *Part Two*

### THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL PERFECTION





## CHAPTER ONE

### **H<sub>q</sub> w State the Problem of the Nature of Perfection?**

- 10 It follows from what we have said in Part One, paragraphs 4-9, that the whole of spiritual theology is concerned with acquiring a certain perfection of the Christian life over and above that which is strictly required for salvation. Therefore we must first inquire into the nature of this perfection in order to formulate a standard according to which we can judge it.

#### **A. The Term and Concept “Perfection”**

Everyone accepts the general concept of perfection proposed in Aristotle's classic definition: “One gives the name ‘perfect’ . . . to that which cannot be surpassed in excellence and goodness in its own kind: just as a physician or a flute-player is perfect when he lacks nothing as regards the form of his proper excellence” (*Metaphysics*, IV, 16, 1021 b).<sup>1</sup> That is to say, a thing is perfect when nothing can be added to it, and when it lacks nothing in its own order. Or, in the words of A. Lalande, a thing is perfect when one cannot conceive of further progress in the order under consideration. Any part of being can be perfect under three aspects—in its being, in its mode of acting (its power), and in obtaining its end.

- 11 From the beginning, Christians have explicitly used the words “perfection” and “perfect” in a moral and religious sense. Our Lord Himself used the word “perfect” twice: once at the end of His dissertation on the new law of the Gospel by which the Old Law attained its fullness and consummation (Matt. 5.48) : “Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.” It is true that in the parallel passage in Luke 6.36 the word “merciful” appears; but the word “perfect” as used by Christ should be retained, since Luke, as was sometimes his custom, accommodates the word to his context. Again, in Matt. 19.21, Our Lord said to the rich young man, “If thou wilt be *perfect*. . . .” In the parallel passages in Mark 10.21 and Luke 18.22 we find, “Yet one thing is wanting to thee. . . . the sense,

therefore, is quite the same, according to the definition of Aristotle we have just quoted.

The word often appears in St. Paul, both in the general sense of the fullness of the Christian life, as in Phil. 3.15 (*téleios*) or Col. 3.14 (*teleifites*) and also as explicitly or implicitly in contrast with the word *népios*, to indicate the fullness as opposed to the beginning of the Christian life (as in ordinary use "*téleios*" means "man" as distinguished from "boy").<sup>2</sup> In the Epistle to the Hebrews he uses various words—*teleiôn*, *teleiosis*, *teleiôtés*—in the sense of a consummation in consecration and sanctification, according to the Old Testament usage in the Septuagint (Exod. 29.1; Levit. 16.32).<sup>3</sup>

The word also occurs frequently enough in the Apostolic Fathers and thence in the other Christian writers. In the fourth century Gregory of Nyssa composed a short work on Christian perfection entitled "On Perfection and the Kind of Man the Christian Should Be."

- 42 This Christian use of "*téleios*" is not derived from the usage in the pagan mysteries of the word "*tetelesménoi*" (from "*teléo*," "*teleté*," "to initiate" and "initiation"), nor from the philosophical use of the same word in moral matters. Our word comes rather from the Old Testament, in which it is employed as a synonym for the Hebrew "*thâmîm*" and "*scilem*" in the sense of moral plenitude.<sup>4</sup> However, in the spirit of the whole Old Testament, "perfection" should be understood here rather in the legal, negative and exterior sense, though it came more and more to mean (especially in the Prophets) the interior aspect of perfection which is so stressed in the Gospels.<sup>5</sup>

## B. How Does the Question of Christian Perfection Arise?

- 43 The question of Christian perfection, its nature and its attainment, arises naturally from the revealed doctrine of man's last end and supernatural life, and especially from the doctrine of merit and the consequent possibility of obtaining the goal, namely, the Divine glory and the Beatific Vision, in varying degrees according to the varying store of merits which each person has acquired during life. For if adults were saved without any personal merit, as are baptized infants, then the whole question would be one of acquiring or not acquiring salvation, and not of attaining perfection. Therefore it will be profitable here to recapitulate shortly what dogmatic theology has to say about the supernatural life and its development in man, so that we may keep before us the Church's teaching and so more easily see how the question of the nature of spiritual perfection should be posed.

- 44 God freely created from nothing the whole world and all things spiritual and material contained in it, to manifest His perfection by the goodness He gave to creatures; in other words, He created the world for His own *glory*.<sup>5</sup>

Man, at the same time as he was created, was destined by the free beneficence of God to procure His glory by the intuitive vision of the Divine Essence by which he could become eternally happy.

In order that he might become capable of this vision he was elevated to the status of a son of God by adoption and to an accidental participation in «the Divine life (sanctifying or habitual grace), and by virtue of this permanent quality infused into the soul (created grace), God was made present in man in an altogether special manner. This indwelling of the Three Persons is properly regarded as being the work of the Holy Ghost (Uncreated Grace or Gift), at least by appropriation.

But since Adam, the first man and head of the human race, by his sin lost these gifts for himself and his posterity, all men are now born deprived of this grace, and by that very fact are incapable of arriving at the end set them by God in the present order of things, and are become “a mass of damnation.”

But the Divine Word, the Second Person of the Most Holy and Most Blessed Trinity, Jesus Christ, made man of the Blessed Virgin Mary, offered Himself in sacrifice on the Cross, atfd by dying in obedience repaired the disobedience of Adam. Thus He became the Second Adam, and merited for His brethren, for all men born of Adam's race, the forgiveness of original and of repented personal sin; and He restored to them sanctifying grace, Divine Sonship, and the capacity for and right to the inheritance of the intuitive vision of God.

Each man is now made a participator in this redemption insofar as he is buried with Christ in Baptism (at least by desire when actual baptism is not possible) ; and each partakes of His death and resurrection and becomes a member of the Body of the Church of which Christ is the Head. From Christ each receives the life of sanctifying grace, the dignity and rights of adopted sons of God.

- c. Therefore, the ultimate end, the supernatural intuitive vision of God, can be gained after this life by all who die in habitual grace, in proportion to the grace each possesses. This habitual grace can be increased in man both by a fruitful application of the merits of Christ gained in the reception of the Sacraments, which act *ex opere operato*, and by the merit gained *ex opere operantis* by the good works which he does during his lifetime in the state of grace and assisted by the various aids he asks of Christ. For, in order that man can do these good works more easily and connaturally, despite

internal and external impediments, sanctifying grace is accompanied not only by the passing help of actual graces but also by permanent gifts, namely, the theological and moral virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost,

But the time in which man can so merit and progress in grace is strictly limited to the present life, which is given especially as a period and means of probation. By acting with the support of grace, an adult can tend towards the end and beatitude proposed to him, and by his good works he can obtain this beatitude in an ever-increasing degree.

- 46 Therefore, absolutely speaking, the ultimate purpose of all man's existence, the purpose to which all his actions should in some way be referred, is that he may come after this life to possess and love God in the highest possible degree in the Beatific Vision, wherein he gives God the highest external glory.

Relatively speaking, the ultimate purpose of this life, obtainable by all the good actions of life, is that man may persevere and grow in habitual grace and in the praise and service of God and so become capable of possessing Him after death in the highest possible degree.

Each adult must attain this end for himself by his own acts, nor may he subordinate this end to any other. For all men must tend to the common end, the glory of God in the Beatific Vision. They must strive for this goal, not separately and individualistically but as brothers born of the same human race, under the same head and redeemer, Christ, and, after justification, incorporated into Him and made one Mystical Body with Him. Each man by his striving must help his brothers to reach this common end in as high a degree as possible in the order of charity and according to the state of life destined for each by Providence.

There can never be a real opposition between these two ways of procuring the glory of God, between one's own sanctification and the sanctification of others, because the greater spiritual good of the neighbor can never require the loss or even the diminution of one's own spiritual good. One may be required to relinquish some spiritual aid not absolutely necessary for one's sanctification; but if such an aid is given up from a motive of charity it can be, and in reality will be, made up for by God, who is All-powerful. (Cf. *infra*, para. 68.)

### C. How Stale the Problem of the Nature of Perfection?

- 47 We can now see in what sense we must treat of the perfection of the spiritual life to be striven for and obtained during this life.

Only God is simple and absolutely perfect, to whom simply and

absolutely nothing is wanting, and to whom nothing can in any sense be added.

But created beings can enjoy an absolute perfection in a certain sense. They are perfect when they have everything required for their nature and the fullness thereof, when they have everything that is fitting for them in the state in which the Creator places them, and when they so attain the end set out for them that there can be no more progress possible for them in attaining this end. Therefore, in the supernatural order man will enjoy this absolute perfection after the resurrection of the body, when he possesses the intuitive vision of God in Heaven. This will be the perfection of having attained the heavenly home, the end of man, where he will have everything proper to his elevated nature. Of course, the Blessed in Heaven will lack that higher degree of glory which they could have merited by living a more holy life than they actually did live. Nevertheless, in a real and absolute sense they have achieved their perfection insofar as that higher degree of eternal glory is now simply impossible for them and in no way suited to the state in which they departed from life in the world. Hence though they *lack* that degree, yet they are not deprived of it, and so the perfection of their happiness is not impaired.

If we consider man's perfection in its essence, we can see that he is already truly, and in a certain sense absolutely, perfect even in this world if he is in the state of grace, because he has everything needed to constitute and fulfill his supernaturally elevated nature. He is perfect in the sense that if he dies he lacks nothing, absolutely speaking, for attaining his ultimate end, the glorification of God in the Beatific Vision.

But if perfection is considered under the aspect of the effecting and obtaining of this ultimate end, then the perfection of man, while he is still living in this world, can never be absolute and can never exclude all further progress. For, while he remains on earth, man can always progress in obtaining sanctifying grace in a greater degree. Even the Blessed Virgin herself acquired new merits all through her life and made progress in sanctity: this is now the common opinion of theologians, although some formerly taught the contrary; cf. the condemned propositions of Peter de Bonageta. Only in Christ could there be no progress in sanctity, because of the hypostatic Union.

4« When, therefore, we speak of tending towards perfection, of striving for perfection in this life, it should be understood in a relative sense only, that is, insofar as a person may be deemed more perfect if he lacks less of the qualities of perfection and if he has that which enables him to obtain the ultimate end in a still higher ' /

degree. Therefore when we speak, as we do later on in this book, of the state of the perfect as distinct from the state of beginners and proficients, we give the qualification "perfect" to those who have arrived at a certain stability and fullness of the supernatural life in which sanctifying grace is possessed in a high degree and in which the greater obstacles to perseverance and progress in grace have been overcome. But such perfect people are by no means excluded from greater progress in the spiritual life, though they are already relatively perfect.

It is thus apparent that the question of the nature of perfection in this life cannot be one of defining the degree of spiritual progress in which one can be simply called perfect, but rather of deciding according to what norm the life of a person already in the state of grace can be called more or less perfect, and deciding what element of the spiritual life makes most for perfection.

- 49 The perfection of our life on earth will always be only a relative perfection, inasmuch as our life here is not the full possession of God but rather the way and the means to acquire the Beatific Vision. For we shall fully procure the extrinsic glory of God, which is our last end, only by the intuitive vision of His Essence, as we have said; and all our other actions are means to obtaining, and obtaining in a greater degree, this vision. Of course, we already glorify God in the world by our praise, love, and service; and we are bound to give Him this glory because it is required by the Natural Law, and more so by the supernatural positive law. But all the praise that can be given to God in this life, even by the greatest contemplatives, is very imperfect compared with the praise and glory given Him by the Blessed in Heaven who see Him face to face. The praise and service rendered in this life excel in one respect, that is, insofar as they merit an increase of sanctifying grace and, consequently, are a means of obtaining a higher degree of the glory to be paid to God throughout eternity in the Beatific Vision. Therefore the perfection of this present life should be estimated primarily and essentially according to its suitability as a means to obtaining the Beatific Vision, and not as something that is to be treasured wholly or even mainly for its own value.

In consequence it can sometimes happen that God wills the omission of certain acts which would here and now contribute greatly to His glory but whose omission will contribute even more to His glory in eternity. Hence, for example, the better to practise charity for God's ultimately greater glory, a person could profitably give up studies from which he could *now* derive a greater insight into the mysteries of faith and so be able *now* to praise the Divine Persons more highly. Thus there is no opposition between God's immediate

glory and the glory to be given Him in the Beatific Vision. We shall explain this further when we deal later with the nature of perfection. In the meantime, however, our point is sufficiently clear if God's immediate glory is understood not in the strict sense of "clear knowledge with praise" but rather in the wide sense as the greatest glory we can give Him in this life by loving Him and serving Him above all else, so that in the end we shall be able to glorify Him more in the proper sense in Heaven by knowledge, praise, and love.

## REFERENCES

1. Translator's note: cf. Ross' translation.
2. Prat, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 41-42, p. 343.
3. *Idem*, I, p. 395.
4. Dent. 18.13; 1 Kings 8.61, 11.4. Cf. "*teleiôtes*," Judith 9.16; Prov. 11.3. Wisd. 9.6 has "*téleios*."
5. Cf. the article by Platt in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, IX, 728, "Perfection." Translator's note: this is not a Catholic publication.
6. On the concept of glory as "clear knowledge with praise," cf. St. Thomas, Iallae, q. 2, a. 3; Hallae, q. 103, a. 1, ad 3.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Perfection and Charity

#### A. Charity the Principal Norm for Judging Perfection

Thesis I. *Charity is the principal norm, for judging the perfection of the Christian life.*<sup>1</sup>

- 50 1. Our thesis does not mean that perfection consists in charity alone, but that charity is the principal and essential element of perfection in such a way that, as St. Thomas says, "He who is perfect in charity is perfect in the spiritual life"<sup>2</sup>; and he who is perfect in any other virtue is perfect only to a certain degree. Hence the measure of man's charity is the measure of his perfection. Here we assert this in a general way; later we must inquire into the exact meaning of charity as we have used it in our thesis.

Our thesis, in this general form, seems to be almost of faith (*proxima fidei*) on account of the undoubted consensus of tradition and of the dear teaching of Scripture itself, namely, that charity holds the first place in the spiritual life and that it cannot increase in a soul without the perfection of that soul increasing at the same time. Whether or not this definition of perfection based-on charity is the most suitable is another question on which all are not agreed, since some define perfection differently, although all concede the primacy of charity.

- 51 2. We state our thesis against

a. The errors regarding Christian perfection which, from the very beginning, have tried to worm their way into the doctrine of the Church are here listed:

*The Gnostics*, following the pagan schools of philosophy, considered that the perfect life consisted in knowledge and contemplation (*theoria*), and, taking their cue from the religious mysteries of the pagans which purported to perfect their followers by revelation of secrets, they distinguished the perfect (*pneumatici*) from the ordinary Christians (*psychici*), and the pagans (*hylici*), by reason of their deeper religious knowledge or fuller understanding of revealed truth. Traces of this concept of perfection are to be found even in such men as Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

*The Montanists* sought perfection in the gifts of prophecy and ecstasy.

*The Messalians* taught that perfection could be gained by continual prayer, by which the soul would become incapable of suffering and of sinning and would become sensibly united to God.

*The Brethren of the Free Spirit* and the *Beghards* in like manner held that the soul could reach such a degree of perfection that it would become incapable of sin and of further progress, and that it could here partake of the intuitive vision of God and even of the Divine Nature, in such a way that all its acts would be acts of God Himself.

*Foullechat* and others simply identified perfection with voluntary and complete poverty.

*The Spanish Illuminati*—and after them, in modern times, the Quietists—held, for all practical purposes, that perfection consisted in the higher gifts of contemplation and in absolute passivity.

*The Modernists*: these also wished to make the more perfect spiritual life consist in a “deeper,” esoteric understanding of the teachings of Catholic tradition, and so they were, to some extent, a throwback to the intellectual aristocracy of Gnosticism.

b. We assert our thesis also against the popular misconceptions of the nature of perfection (of which St. Francis de Sales speaks in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Ch. 2), such as making perfection consist in penances, long prayers, ecstasies, revelations and other extraordinary gifts; or in sensible or interior spiritual consolations; or in great alms or works of zeal and mercy.

c. Finally, our thesis is stated against any idea of merely natural and earthly human perfection as found in positivism and moral autonomy: and against the false concept of Catholic perfection and sanctity (introversion, abnormal forms of sexuality, etc.) which many non-Catholic psychologists have fabricated for themselves.

### 3. *Proof of Thesis.*

a. The Bull *Ad Conditoem* of John XXII, a document of the teaching Church, asserts “(For, since) the perfection of the Christian life principally and essentially consists in charity . . . which in some sort unites or joins man to his end. . . .”

b. From *Sacred Scripture*:

In Matt. 22.39 and Mark 12.31 Christ, replying to the arguments of the Scribes about the commandments of the Law, pointed out the primacy of charity by saying that the twofold command of charity is the first command, and that there is no greater command, and that on it depends the whole Law and the Prophets. Cf. John 17.21, where the spreading of charity is the witness to the whole world of Christ's mission and of the whole supernatural order.

Even more expressly still, St. Paul teaches that charity in every way holds first place in the spiritual life: that it is the more excellent way (1 Cor. 12-31), the end of the promise (1 Tim. 1.5), the bond of perfection (Col. 3.14), the summary in which is comprised all the law, and the fullness of the law (Rom. 13.8-10); just as all things are restored in Christ (Eph. 1.10), and all fullness dwells in Him (Col. 1.19), the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2.9). Faith itself gets its efficacy and value from charity (Gal. 5.6), as do all the other virtues, which are nothing without it (1 Cor. 13.1-13).<sup>3</sup> Similarly in 1 John 4.7-21; 3.23: "God is charity: and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him."

53 c. From the beginning the *Fathers* set forth this primacy of charity, as can be seen from the following few quotations:

St. Clement of Rome: "Who can adequately speak of the bond of the love of God... ? All the elect of God are perfect in«charity: without charity nothing is pleasing to God. . . ."

St. Ignatius: "Charity, to which nothing is to be preferred."

St. Irenaeus: "The eminent gift of charity which is more precious than knowledge (*gnosis*), more glorious than prophecy, more worthy of note than all the other charisms. Wherefore the Church in every place, because of that love which she has for God, in every age sends a multitude of martyrs to the Father, whilst all others (that is, the sects of Gnostics) not only do not have this to show but even say that such martyrdom is not necessary." (Written against the Gnostics' concept of Christian perfection.)

St. Gregory of Nyssa: In the Canticles God "shows the most perfect and blessed way of salvation, that which is accomplished through charity. For, with some, salvation is achieved through fear; others act uprightly and virtuously, not possessing goodness out of charity, but in expectation of reward. But he who runs eagerly towards perfection drives out fear . . . despises rewards . . . and loves with all his heart and mind and strength, not any of these things which are made by God, but God Himself, who is the fount of all good."

St. Augustine says, "Charity begun is justice begun: charity advanced is justice advanced." And again, "He is better in whom charity is greater. When we ask whether a person is a good man, we do not seek to know what he believes or hopes, but what he loves. For he who loves rightly, without doubt believes and hopes rightly."

And he answers the famous inquiry' as to what is the good life, by saying: "If God is man's highest good . . . then, since to seek one's highest good is to live rightly, it follows immediately that living rightly means nothing else than loving God with all one's heart, with all one's soul, with all one's mind."

Cassian:<sup>4</sup> "We shall not be able to reach that true perfection unless ... we love Him by striving to attain to nothing save His love alone."

St. Gregory the Great: "Though the Lord's commands are to be found everywhere in His Divine words, why is it that He says of love, as of a special command, 'This is My commandment,' unless because all commands are of love alone and all are but one command because whatever is enjoined is founded on charity alone?" (And the whole homily likewise.)

Julianus Pomerius writes at length in praise of charity and concludes: "Thus they who love God perfectly can be perfect in this life."

↳4 d. The foundations of the Scholastic doctrine were laid by *St. Bernard*, who distinguished four degrees of perfection according to the degree of love: first, man loves himself for his own sake and therefore wrongfully; second, after conversion he loves God for his (man's) own sake, and not for Himself alone; third, man loves God for Himself; fourth, he loves himself solely for God's sake: but this last degree is that of the Blessed in Heaven, and St. Bernard does not know if it is ever perfectly attained by anyone in this life—"Let those who have experienced this make such a statement; but as for myself, I must confess, it seems impossible." Cf. St. Thomas, Hallae, q. 184, a. 1 and *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*, Chs. 1-6: cf. also Suarez and Passerini.

e. The theological argument is that which *St. Thomas* gives: "Absolutely speaking, that thing is perfect which attains the end which is fitting to it according to its purpose. ... So, in the spiritual life man can absolutely be called perfect if judged by that in which the spiritual life principally consists, and he can be called relatively perfect if judged by anything that is only an adjunct of the spiritual life. But the spiritual life consists principally in charity, and if one does not possess charity he is considered a spiritual nonentity. Therefore, absolutely speaking, he who is perfect in charity is perfect in the Christian life" (*De Perf. Vit. Spir.*, Ch. 1).

"A thing is called perfect insofar as it attains its proper end, its ultimate perfection. But it is charity which unites us to God, who is the ultimate end of the human soul. . . . Therefore charity is the principal norm for judging the perfection of the Christian life" (Hallae, q. 184, a. 1). For the Christian life on earth is nothing other than the road to life eternal in which God will be seen intuitively. Therefore earthly life will be more perfect, the more efficaciously it brings man to eternal life. And the higher the degree of charity a man possesses, the more efficaciously will his life guide him to God, because charity is not only the condition but also the

measure of the merit of the acts by which man tends towards his final end, and the degree of union by charity with God in this life will be the degree of possession of Him in Heaven.

This is confirmed negatively by the fact that the other virtues are either conditions (faith, hope) or instruments of charity?

These general reasons will be strengthened by other arguments which we shall adduce in proving our next thesis.

## B. Perfection Increases according as Charity Is Infused

**Thesis II.** *Christian perfection increases according as a higher degree of the habit of charity is infused into the soul with the effect that all the human acts of the soul are elicited, or commanded and informed, by charity in a more universal, actual and intense manner.*

- 55 1. *Statement of the problem.* Though theologians are agreed that perfection is to be judged essentially on the basis of charity, yet they dispute whether the norm should be actual or habitual charity. There is good reason for the dispute because (a) anyone—for example, a religious—can, after many years of fervor, fall into tepidity without losing the life of grace by mortal sin. Thus, though such a person would have infused charity in a high degree (since grace and the other habits once infused are not diminished), yet his life could not be considered very perfect, (b) On the contrary, a person recently converted from a life of sin could live much more perfectly than the tepid religious, although he has infused charity in a lesser degree and has acquired less merit thus far. Or such a person could make a very heroic act of charity and yet be weighed down by many defects, since he would still be a novice in the spiritual life.

Hence, though all hold that both the habit and the act of charity are required for the perfection of the Christian life, some, like Suarez, hold that perfection is to be judged formally according to the *habit* of charity found in the soul which allows it to exercise its acts without hindrance. But others like Passerini, Marchetti, and Garrigou-Lagrange<sup>8</sup> hold that perfection is to be judged according to the impulse or the activity of charity.

We must first state the problem precisely, since the point at issue is so often obscured because many make it an occasion for controversies about the *states* of perfection. They want to know the nature of Christian perfection so that they can define the state of perfection (thus did St. Thomas and afterwards Suarez and Passerini). Hence they consider perfection more as a certain state which one can strive for or obtain in this life. But although there is a state of the spiritual life which is called the state of the perfect (as we shall see later), yet the question of the nature of perfection

is better stated in the form proposed by St. Thomas, namely, "What standard must we use in estimating the degree of perfection of the Christian life?"

However, this is a double question, because we can inquire about the degree of perfection already acquired, that is, the *state* in which the soul now is, to which the degree of glory in Heaven corresponds. Or we can seek to know how perfect are a person's actions and mode of life. To clear away this ambiguity many authors use the word "sanctity" for the first (present *state*'), and the word "perfection" for the second (perfection of action), as we have already noted in paragraph 1.

- 56 Having made this distinction, there can be no further question about perfection considered as a state, or sanctity; for all theologians, whether they make a real or only a notional distinction between the habit of grace and the habit of charity, agree that both habits increase simultaneously in the soul. Hence the degree of one's habitual perfection will depend on the degree of one's habitual charity, because the ultimate end, the Vision of God, will be more or less fully possessed in proportion as charity is greater or less.

The question of the perfection of life understood in the second sense ("perfection of action") remains to be solved; that is to say, we must find out on what basis we are to judge whether a person is living a more or less perfect life, for the perfection of one's mode of living depends, in part at least, on the degree in which one possesses the infused habits of grace and charity.

Some hold that perfection is to be judged on the activity of charity, others on the influence and dominion of charity over one's whole life. It seems better, however, to say that there are many factors, all of which must be taken into account together, if one is to demonstrate plainly how perfection of life is to be judged according to charity. This is the thesis which we propose to explain and prove.

In our proof it will be better if we prescind from the disputed question of the way in which the infused habits of grace and the virtues grow, since the points which we shall bring forward are true no matter which side we take in that controversy.

- 57 2. *Explanation and proof of thesis.* Since the essential purpose of our earthly life is "to be the way to the ultimate end, the Vision of God," our mode of living will be more perfect according as it leads to the fuller attainment of the end. There are various ways in which charity can effect this fuller attainment by means of acts done in this life.

a. If, other things being equal, those acts are done by a person who has the habits of grace and charity in a greater degree; because

a greater degree of habitual grace makes man and his works more worthy and more pleasing to God, with the result that such works are more meritorious. This is the common opinion of theologians, with only a few disagreeing. St. Thomas says: "The greater the charity and grace which inform an act, the more meritorious that act is."

b. Whether the *virtual* influence of charity is required to make an act meritorious, or whether the *habitual* influence suffices, it is certain that the more actual the influence of charity, then the greater the merit, since the motive of charity is more perfect and more meritorious than all others. Likewise, no matter whether the increase of grace merited by acts elicited or commanded by less intense charity is conferred immediately or afterwards only, all theologians hold that the merit is greater, and the increase of grace is greater, the more intensely the meritorious act is elicited or commanded by charity.

Hence one's life is more perfect in proportion as one's acts are elicited or commanded by more actual and more intense charity.

58 c. Finally, one's perfection grows according as more acts are informed by the motive of intense charity, and according as the dominion of charity over one's life becomes more universal. But it can never happen that all the acts of any ordinary person will be elicited or commanded by charity, because it is certain from the definition of Trent<sup>7</sup> that no one, without a special privilege which seems to have been conferred on the Blessed Virgin alone, can avoid all venial sin. Therefore at least some of man's acts will not be informed by charity. However, the more acts done from charity, and the more intensely and directly these acts are elicited, then the more perfect will be one's life.

d. Acts elicited by other virtues (faith, hope, humility) can be subjected more fully to the dominion and informing of charity in two ways: first, the more perfectly the acts of these virtues are done in their own order; secondly, the more these acts are conformed to the Divine Will expressed in these virtues as commands or counsels. And the less perfectly such acts are done according to the requirements of any particular virtue, so much the less perfectly will they be submitted to the rule of charity. (Cf. *infra*, paragraphs 77sq., where we speak of the function of the virtues in perfection.)

59 Our thesis is strengthened if we consider the present life as a kind of initial glorification of God by us, glorification which will be given fully and essentially in the next life. For we glorify God more by our actions on earth, the more worthy and the more pleasing we are to Him by reason of a higher degree of habitual grace,

and also the more actually, fully, intensely, and universally our acts are directed to Him as our Last End and Highest Good.

Again our thesis is confirmed by the general principle that habits are given to produce acts, and that therefore their perfection is in these acts. Thus in Heaven man's highest perfection is not in possessing the *lumen gloriæ* as a habit but rather in the *act* of the Beatific Vision. So also all the supernatural habits are given to man during this life so that he can *act* and tend to his last end by his actions. Therefore the perfection of one's tending towards the Final End is to be judged primarily from the acts which constitute this tending, and from the habits only insofar as they further one's quest by making one's acts more efficacious for obtaining the end and attaining to higher glory.

#### *Additional Notes*

- 60 In what sense can a person yet alive be called more perfect than any particular soul in Heaven?

The acts of love of a soul in Heaven, considered in themselves, will always be more perfect than the acts of a person still on earth insofar as they proceed from a clear vision of God and not from faith alone, which is always obscure even in the highest states of infused contemplation. Moreover, the acts of the Blessed are constant, unchangeable, and can never cease; they cannot become more difficult by reason of the miseries of this life, nor can they be hindered, as earthly acts are now and then, by venial sins from which no one on earth is free.

But the acts of a person in this world are meritorious, and through them he can make progress, a thing which is impossible for the Blessed. And these acts can proceed from a habit of charity and sanctifying grace possessed in a greater degree by some one living person than by a particular member of the Heavenly Court. Hence, afterwards, when this person dies and comes into possession of the Beatific Vision he will become one of the Blessed and will glorify God more than that soul now in Heaven.

Thus it can happen that of two people who die now, the one whose life is *now* less perfect as regards his mode of action can obtain a greater degree of glory than the other. This will be the case if he lived very fervently for a long time and later fell back, but without losing his acquired merit through sin. For theologians agree that the amount of habitual grace once acquired is not lessened by many venial sins nor by tepidity, although these do give rise to a greater danger of sinning mortally and of losing grace. Moreover, we should not leave out of consideration the increase of



grace conferred *ex opere operato* by the frequent reception of the Sacraments.

However, we should note that it is extremely imprudent to make any assertion of fact in any particular case, because we know nothing of the proportion between the increase of grace given *ex opere operato* in the Sacraments and the increase gained *ex opere operantis* by any fervent act of charity. Nor do we know in what degree the better dispositions of the recipient influence the *ex opere operato* efficacy of the Sacraments. It is therefore sufficient to note that a once fervent but now tepid soul can have merited a higher degree of glory than a recently converted fervent soul.

### C. Perfection Judged according to Affective and Effective Charity

**Thesis 111.** *The perfection of the spiritual life is to be judged according to both affective and effective charity. However, although perfection depends primarily on affective charity (internal dispositions), we can more safely estimate a person's degree of perfection by considering his effective charity (his external acts)*

61

1. *Statement of problem.* It is usual to distinguish between affective and effective charity: "We show our love for God mainly in two ways, one affective, the other effective. By the first we love God and love what He loves; by the second we serve God and do what He commands. The first unites us to the Goodness of God; the second makes us act according to His Will. By the first we are filled with peace, complacency, benevolence, urgings, desires, sighs and spiritual longings, so that our soul is plunged into God and mingled with Him; the second gives us a firm resolve, a steadfast mind and unwavering obedience, so that we accomplish the commands of the Divine Will, we submit to, accept, approve and embrace whatever comes from His Will of Good Pleasure. The first makes God pleasing to us; the second makes us please God" (St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, VI, I).

In view of this distinction it is often said: "Although love of affection seems in itself more perfect, yet there is no doubt that the other love (practical, active) is to be preferred to it in this life" (Le Gaudier). This is true provided it is understood correctly. Our aim here is to reach that correct understanding.

In regard to the exercise of charity we must distinguish between

a. Internal movements or urgings which, without deliberation or the use of free-will, arise spontaneously in us whenever we think of the Goodness, the bounty of God. Before we freely assent to these

stirrings, whatever be their cause, they are not yet acts of charity; they prepare for and help the exercise of charity, but they do not constitute it.

b. Acts freely elicited, freely admitted urgings to please and love God, joy at God's glory, the will or desire to increase that glory, the resolve to do good to others for God's sake, etc.

c. Internal acts of the other virtues dictated by charity; for example, humility, patience.

d. The external actions by which man manifests his inner dispositions, not by words alone, but particularly by acting according to the urgings which spring directly from charity itself or are commanded by charity—doing good to his neighbor, adoring God by external acts, e.g. the liturgy, patiently bearing with trials and reproaches, faithfully fulfilling the duties of his state, etc.

It will be seen that affective charity consists of the acts enumerated in (b) and (c), while effective charity consists of those under (d).

62     2. *Explanation and proof of thesis.*

a. From what has been said about the Christian life being more perfect in proportion as charity elicits or commands the free acts of man in a more universal, actual, and intense manner, it follows that this perfection depends primarily on the exercise of affective charity. For if that disposition of charity does not inform the soul in some way, even the external acts which are perfectly performed in their own order will be of no supernatural value: and if this disposition is slothfully evoked or influences only weakly the external acts, then these acts will be of little value. But when the disposition is aroused energetically and has strong influence, then the external acts will be of great value. And if in such acts there are any imperfections arising from a source independent of the will (invincible ignorance or some physical or moral impossibility), the supernatural value of the acts will not in any way be lessened.

Therefore, in itself perfection depends primarily on the voluntary affective charity that dominates one's life, and it depends on external acts only insofar as they are a necessary condition for true charity, or are so closely connected with charity that true charity could not endure unless such external acts were performed. For it is certain that if external acts are done without regard for God's Will, or the demands of charity, then they are not informed or commanded by charity. Again, if the acts are not fully conformed to the demands of charity, they will not be fully subject to its dominion: nevertheless even such partially informed acts will nourish charity and increase it.

Hence perfection is to be ordinarily judged on the basis of both

external and internal acts of charity: but, primarily and in itself, perfection is to be judged on the degree of affective charity.

63 b. It is not easy for us to judge our own perfection or that of others on the basis of the perfection of affective charity since the true measure of this perfection is the free determining of the will itself, which can easily be confused with a mere velleity, or with the Divine impulses which are given by God to help the free acts of the will but which are of themselves not free and meritorious acts. Such confusion can occur all the more easily because there are difficulties in exercising internal affective charity, difficulties which arise, not from the act itself, since God is All-lovable, but from the fact that in order to elicit true and sincere and intense acts of charity, the soul must first overcome the contrary love for sensible and worldly things which pour in upon it and confine it; and even then it must act according to affective charity in the face of external obstacles and difficulties.

It follows, then, that if we are to estimate confidently the perfection of internal and essential charity, we must consider not so much the urgings of charity or their expression in words but rather the conditions and effects of charity in external action (effective charity). In other words, we must judge perfection both by the lessening of the opposition placed by contrary loves, and by the soul's external mode of action.

It is important that the faithful learn to judge their own spiritual life by this standard. As it is, many judge their progress or regress by what they feel. They do not distinguish free acts of will from perceptible inclinations which often do not depend directly on the will; and much less do they distinguish free acts from those spontaneous acts of the will when confronted with the good or bad proposed to it, of which we spoke above in paragraph 61,a, and which are not free and meritorious acts of will. (

c. Christ has taught us that a tree is to be judged by its fruits, and that not those who cry, "Lord! Lord!" will enter Heaven but those who do the will of the Father (Matt. 7.15-27; Luke 6.43-49). He emphasized this teaching by many parables, e.g. the two sons (Matt. 21.28-32). And He taught clearly what the Prophets had so often told the Chosen People—that external works have no value unless they are done from a good internal motive.

d. The Church uses these norms in the processes of beatification when she has to decide on the heroic perfection of any Servant of God. She pays much more attention to the beatificand's mode of action, to his effective exercise of charity, than to his descriptions, written or otherwise, of his internal dispositions.

*Corollaries*

64 1. It follows from what we have said that, for the most part, men cannot estimate exactly the perfection of any soul. It can happen, for example, that a person suffers so greatly from "nerves" that he is not fully master of himself in many external acts, and therefore his mode of action will be deemed very imperfect if judged on appearances only. Nevertheless, such a person may act with real, intense internal charity and may be much more perfect than another who can conduct his external life with ease and regularity.

The Church can properly and prudently form a positive judgment of internal perfection from the external manner of action of the Servants of God, since their external conduct is such that it necessarily supposes internal perfection. But in many cases one cannot form the negative judgment that internal perfection is lacking where external perfection is not apparent. We do not know whether the external faults of action arise from a lack of intense charity or from some other cause altogether independent of free-will. The Saints often used this consideration as ground for greater humility: they saw that there is almost always danger of error in concluding from externals that internal perfection is lacking: hence they thought it ever possible that those who seemed on the surface to have little love for God might perhaps in reality love Him much more than they themselves.

65 2. It also follows from what we have said that one cannot immediately condemn as useless those general impulses of the love of God (e.g., in mental prayer) which are not immediately followed by some practical conclusion or resolve. If they are true movements of love, that is, not merely emotional but elicited by an act of free-will, then they are meritorious in themselves and can greatly contribute to the increase of the dominion of charity over one's whole life. However, these impulses of love are to be suspected if they have no effect on one's mode of life—if, for example, one is not made more humble, more faithful to one's obligations, or at least if one does not make greater efforts to become humble and faithful. St. Teresa gave this rule for judging mental prayer to Fr. Jerome Grecian in her letter dated October 23, 1576.<sup>10</sup>

66 3. Since infused contemplation is nothing other than the highest exercise of affective charity, we may well ask whether perfection is to be judged according to the degree of this infused contemplation, namely, whether the life of one who enjoys the Prayer of Transforming Union is not by that very fact more perfect than the life of one who has only the Prayer of Quiet. Leaving aside for the moment

the question whether or not infused contemplation is necessary as a means to attain the highest degree of perfection (we treat of that elsewhere), here we seek to know only whether perfection and infused contemplation can be identified one with the other, or whether they are at least so interconnected that there is an exact parallel between the degrees of each, as is the case between the degrees of sanctifying grace and habitual charity.

It appears that the more common opinion is the negative one, held even by those who teach that great spiritual perfection cannot, or in practice does not, exist unless infused contemplation is present too. The affirmative opinion should logically be held by those who teach that infused contemplation follows necessarily when the gifts of the Holy Ghost grow with sanctifying grace in such a way that the soul eventually arrives at a certain stage where infused contemplation is the connatural effect of the Gifts. The basis of the negative opinion is this: infused contemplation consists in enlightenment of the intellect and movements of the will passively infused by God into the soul and, since the will is passive, these movements and enlightenments are not meritorious in themselves but only on account of the free acts of intense charity which follow from them. Thus it can happen, because of this freedom of the will, that a more intense act of charity, and hence greater perfection, will not always follow the gift of higher contemplation. If one admits with Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., that there can be a certain "contemplative way" in which God, by His special Providence, gives these gifts to some souls so that infused contemplation becomes almost their ordinary way of prayer, then it seems possible to admit a loose coincidence of the degrees of contemplation with the degrees of perfection, insofar as, granted this special disposition of Providence, such souls continue to receive ever greater gifts if they faithfully respond to those already infused; and thus, as perfection grows, so does the degree of contemplation. Cf. *infra*, Part Seven on infused contemplation.

#### D. Perfection Judged according to Charity towards God and Neighbor

*Thesis IV. Perfection is to be judged according to the twofold act of charity, first towards God, and second, towards the neighbor.*<sup>11</sup>

- 67 1. *Explanation.* This thesis needs but a short explanation. Since charity is a single virtue by which we love both God for Himself and our neighbor and even ourselves for God's sake,<sup>12</sup> and since there is but one formal object which specifies all the acts of charity, namely, the infinite goodness of God, it follows that all the acts of

this virtue fall under the same degrees of perfection. And since the same formal motive moves me to love God and the neighbor for God's sake, it must follow that, when the influence of this motive grows in me because of increased charity, then will grow the intensity of all the acts to which the motive moves me. This truth is inculcated by St. John in his whole First Epistle, where he shows the intimate connection between, and inseparability of, both acts of charity. For true charity towards the neighbor cannot exist unless it comes from the supernatural motive of the love of God. Such true charity is to be sedulously distinguished from any natural leaning towards well-doing arising from purely human compassion; and it should be distinguished also from any form of love or friendship towards other men, springing from any other motive, even a supernatural one.

Moreover, since God wishes men to tend towards the final end not separately but socially, that is, helping their neighbor at the same time (whence comes the whole economy of salvation in the body of the Church under Christ the Head), it follows that the neighbor "is joined to us by a certain social law of life in the obtaining of, or the participation in, beatitude" (St. Thomas),<sup>18</sup> Therefore the perfection of tending towards the ultimate end, that is, the perfection of charity, cannot be present without a similar degree of the perfection of union through charity with the neighbor in this tending towards the end.

Nevertheless, due order must be preserved even in this perfection of charity. Man must love God more than himself, he must prefer his own spiritual good to that of his neighbor, but must love his neighbor more than he loves his own body. The reason for all this is that "God is loved as the Principle of good, upon whom is founded the love of charity, but man loves himself with the love of charity because he is a partaker in the perfect good: the neighbor is loved because of his association in this good. Association with others is a cause for loving them because in such an association or union all are faced towards God. But since unity is greater than union, the fact that man partakes in the Divine Goodness is a greater reason for loving him than the fact that he is associated with us in this participation" (II-IIae, q. 26, a. 4). And, since the body will partake of beatitude only by a kind of overflow from the soul, "the association between one's soul and that of one's neighbor in sharing the happiness of Heaven is closer than the association between one's soul and one's own body" (*ibid.*, a. 5).

bH 2. *Conclusion.* From this follows the supremely important conclusion that there can never be any opposition between the desire for perfect love of God and perfect love of neighbor or of oneself.

As regards the affective side of charity, there is no reason why it should not embrace both God and others for God's sake in due order.<sup>14</sup>

As regards the effects of charity, or the works of charity, it is certain that the external acts by which love of God is immediately exercised are, in themselves, higher than any other acts. But God, by the economy of salvation He has founded, often asks us to prefer acts whose immediate object is the good of the neighbor, to those acts of which He Himself is the immediate object. Thus the very perfection of our love for God may move us to prefer acts benefiting the neighbor. Therefore effective charity will be the more perfect, the more conformed it is in particular cases to the supreme law of the Will of Divine Good Pleasure which decrees that charity be exercised by such and such a man in such and such a way. Granted the relativity of perfection in this life, an act which is more worthy in itself will not always be of greater merit for us and give greater glory to God. But an act will always gain greater merit and give greater glory if, according to the decree of Divine Providence, it is more efficacious for obtaining the Final End for us and our brethren. (Cf. what we shall say below in Chapter Eight about the desire for one's own perfection and about the contemplative and active life in Part Six.)

## 69 Additional Notes

*Other definitions of spiritual perfection.* There are many definitions of spiritual perfection more or less different from that which we, following St. Thomas, have just evolved. Some say that perfection consists in union with God, in conformity with the Divine Will, in imitation of God or likeness to Him. However, these other definitions can mostly be reduced to ours, since they only throw into relief one or other of the effects of charity, as we shall soon show. Here we shall subject only two of these definitions to a brief examination.

1. That which O. Zimmerman and many others propose and which takes its rise from the words of St. James (1.4) : "perfect . . . failing in nothing," which they compare with the philosophic definition: "A thing is perfect if it lacks nothing." This definition says that the perfect man is he who does all good. More precisely, perfection "consists *negatively* in avoiding all fully deliberate sin and, when possible, also semi-deliberate sin; and *positively* in fulfilling, as far as possible, all precepts and counsels." This definition actually and materially agrees with ours because the more perfect the dominion of charity over one's life, the more will one avoid even semi-deliberate sins and the more will one strive for all the goodness possible. But it does not point out so well as our definition the

nature of perfection in this life, which is the perfection of a *way*, altogether relative to obtaining the definitive perfection of the future life, and which is at the same time a tending, a movement towards a destination, and therefore never properly speaking a *state* at which it is possible to arrive here on earth. Moreover, their definition considers the perfection of man too much as existing in himself and it does not demonstrate so well that man's perfection is to be regarded in relation to God, his final end. Whereas, on the contrary, by defining perfection in terms of charity, one immediately shows that man's perfection, like that of any creature, can only be in terms of relationship with God, the Ultimate End, and in possession of that Ultimate End.

2. More recently, Fr. Chrysogonus of the Blessed Sacrament, O.C.D., places the perfection of the spiritual life in a person's reaching the degree of charity destined for him by God, a degree which is not the same for all souls. Hereby he implies perfection of the infused virtues, and excludes all voluntary imperfection. This definition is acceptable in the abstract but does not seem applicable to the concrete circumstances of life as it is. For it is certain that not one of the greatest saints, except the Blessed Virgin, arrived at exactly the degree of charity corresponding to the graces given him by God. And it is also certain that there is no one who, even towards the end of his life, avoided all or at least the smallest venial sins, nor *a fortiori* all more or less voluntary imperfections. Thus this definition considers perfection not as relative and dynamic, but as absolute and static, as a goal at which no one in fact arrives during life. Wherefore it seems preferable for us to inquire with St. Thomas into a relative perfection or to look for a standard according to which the life of any Christian can be called *more* perfect.

## REFERENCES

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- 2- *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*, Ch. 1; cf. *S.T.*, IIallae, q. 184, a. 1, ad. 2.
3. Cf. Prat, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 332ff.
4. *Conferences*, XI, 6-8.
5. Cf. *S.T.*, IIallae, q. 184, a. 1, ad. 2, and pars. 71 ff. below.



6. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 135.
7. VI, Can. 23; cf. cap. 11.
8. St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, III, 7.
9. *Idem, ibidem*, V, especially 1 and 6; cf. also VII and VIII.
10. Translator's note: cf. English translation of "Letters" by E. Allison Peers.
11. *S.T.*, IIallae, q. 25, a. 1; q. 27, a. 8; *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*, Ch. 2.
12. *S.T.*, IIallae, q. 23, a. 5; q. 25, a. 12, and q. 26, a. 1-4, on the order of charity.
13. *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*, Ch. 2.
14. Cf. *S.T.*, IIallae, q. 26, a. Iff.

## CHAPTER THREE

### How Are the Other Virtues and the Evangelical Counsels Related to Perfection?

70 We have seen that perfection is to be judged principally, but *not wholly*, on the basis of charity. For, although all the acts which constitute the Christian life can be commanded in some way by charity, nevertheless many of them are not elicited by it but are acts of the other virtues. Thus the Christian life can be more perfect by reason of acts which advance perfection not only through the influence of charity but also through the virtues by which these acts are elicited. For example, an act of faith possesses its own perfection not only because it may be commanded by great charity but also because it is more perfect in its own order as faith. In fact, when the Church wishes to judge of the sanctity of any Servant of God whose beatification is being petitioned, she inquires not about charity alone but about all the other virtues as well, to see if they were exercised in a heroic degree. Therefore those virtues are integral parts of Christian perfection. We must accordingly inquire as to how the other virtues are related to charity in constituting perfection.

We must also inquire about the Evangelical Counsels, in the practice of which perfection itself is sometimes placed, in order to judge their relation to charity.

We do not need to touch here on the Gifts of the Holy Ghost because, according to the most probable opinion (shared by St. Thomas), these Gifts are not the principles of acts distinct from acts of the virtues, but only aids to the performance of these latter acts in a loftier and better way. It will therefore be more fitting if we leave the treatment of the Gifts to Part Three, where we shall speak of those things which assist us in the pursuit of perfection.

#### A. Faith and Hope Grow with Charity

*Thesis I. The other two theological virtues, faith and hope, are so connected with charity as its immediate preparation that the dominion of charity over man's life cannot become more perfect without the exercise of faith and hope becoming more perfect too.*

- 71 1- *Explanation of thesis.* The only reason why the virtues of faith and hope are infused into man on earth is to make possible his tending to his ultimate end, which tending is activated by charity. For by faith the supernatural end and the way thereto are proposed to the mind, with all the other truths revealed in order that a man may the better tend towards his goal. But theologians are not agreed on the nature and functions of hope, and therefore all do not explain in the same way its connection with charity. Some hold that God's Goodness to man is absolutely or at least partly the formal object of hope, and they therefore maintain that the act of the love of concupiscence can be identified with the act of hope. They say that hope is connected with charity insofar as an imperfect love of God (love inspired by His bounty) prepares the soul for perfect love of God (love of God for His own sake).

Others hold that the formal object of hope is, in full or at least in part, the helping power of God, and that the essential act of hope is the lifting up of the soul (*erectio animae*) in face of the difficulties which obstruct the pursuit of the final end, God. Thus they teach that hope is necessarily presupposed by charity because, since faith proposes to us the object that is to be loved, namely God, the *Summum Bonum*, our Ultimate End, the soul cannot pass on to the act of charity itself unless assisted by God to love Him above all things. For when the object to be loved, namely the Infinite Goodness, is offered to the soul by faith, the soul sees at once that it cannot by itself become united with It nor possess It by the love of friendship. Therefore the soul cannot love the Infinite Goodness above all things with a true efficacious desire, but only with a mere inefficacious wish, unless it is given the all-powerful help of the Divine Mercy which it hopes for. St. Thomas says, "Just as a person cannot be a friend of another if he does not believe that he can have, or if he despairs of ever having a certain companionship or familiar intercourse with the other, so a person cannot have friendship with God, i.e. charity, unless he has faith by which he believes in the possibility of the companionship and intercourse of man with God, and unless he hopes that he can attain this companionship" (*Q. Disp. de Spe*, a. 1; *de Virtut.*, a. 13; and *lallae*, q. 65, a. 5).

This second concept of the virtue of hope seems altogether preferable both on account of other reasons adduced by its champions and because it explains much better the close connection which all recognize as existing between hope and charity.

Faith, based on revelation, supplies the deficiency of our intellect which of itself is incapable of knowing supernatural goods, of knowing God as our supernatural end; and hope, founded on the all-powerful assistance of God, supplies the deficiency of our will,

which, by itself, is incapable of tending efficaciously towards this end. Thus becomes possible the act of charity itself by which man adheres to God, his *Summum Bonum*, his Ultimate End. Moreover, by accepting this concept of the role of hope in the spiritual life we can easily understand why hope is necessary in any and every degree of perfection, a fact not so easily explained if hope is conceived as a kind of imperfect love of God which prepares for perfect love.

i'i 2. *Proof of thesis.* Hence it is clear that a more perfect dominion of charity over one's whole life necessarily presupposes a greater perfection of faith and hope in eliciting one's acts. This does not necessarily imply an increase in theological knowledge, though the science of theology, if properly cultivated, can greatly assist charity. Rather the increase is in the spirit of faith, the supernatural spirit, which is a kind of totality of belief by which one believes the truths of faith more firmly than all the other truths, in practice giving revealed truths precedence over all others. Thus if a man possesses this totality of belief, he is guided by the light of faith in all things, in his whole life, down to the last consequences which flow from the principles of faith. At the same time his assent of faith is made more firm, he penetrates more deeply into the truths to which he adheres, and his faith affects his whole soul and life more really and more fully.

Again, the greater the dominion of charity is, then the greater will be the increase of hope, of trust in the help of God. For as charity grows, so do all its demands on man's whole life, since greater charity ever seeks to do greater, higher, and more arduous things. And since humility and the knowledge of one's misery also increase at the same time, thereby making one confide less in one's own strength, one's trust in Divine help must also of necessity become greater.

Likewise, when charity grows, the perfection of faith and hope grows, not only because the habits of these virtues grow, and not only because they are informed by greater charity, but also because the acts of faith and hope are elicited more perfectly; for a truth is better known when it is more loved and more cherished. At this point that connaturality with the object known, of which St. Thomas so often speaks, is very evident—the more one loves God, the better one understands the things that are of God.<sup>2</sup> And it is immediately apparent that increase of hope, of trust in the help of a friend, stems from charity.

Therefore, faith and hope, like charity, can always increase whilst we are living, because their formal object, like that of charity, is God Himself. But in the case of a moral virtue, like justice or temperance, a mode of action can exist in which the virtue could not be

more perfect insofar as such a mode of action would be the golden mean between the two extremes of excess and defect. Yet in the case of faith and hope man can always penetrate deeper into the Infinite Truth and appreciate always more the omnipotent assistance of God, and so he can cleave ever closer to the formal objects of these virtues; and these formal objects, since they are infinite, can never be cherished as they ought.

## B. Moral Virtues Remove Impediments to Charity

**Thesis II.** *The exercise of the moral virtues pertains to the integrity of Christian perfection because these virtues remove impediments which would make the exercise of charity itself either absolutely impossible or at least more difficult. Moreover, the moral virtues make possible the submission to charity of all human acts not elicited by the theological virtues, and they allow of such acts being directed by charity to the ultimate end. In fact one's acts, and one's whole life, can be better informed by charity, and tend more effectively towards the end, the more perfectly they are accomplished according to the norms of the moral virtues.*<sup>3</sup>

- 73 1. *Explanation of thesis.* The acts of the theological virtues, which by reason of their formal object (God Himself) immediately orientate man to his ultimate end, do not comprise the whole of human life. Life is also made up of many other good acts which can be, and ought to be, so informed by charity and so directed by it to the ultimate end, that each one of them merits some increase of sanctifying grace. Such good acts, considered in themselves and by reason of their formal object, are elicited by the moral virtues, e.g. acts of humility, temperance, justice.

Theologians commonly teach that, besides the acquired natural habits of moral virtue, the just man also possesses infused supernatural habits of these virtues by means of which his acts of moral virtue are elicited supernaturally according to the dictates of reason illumined by faith. Therefore each of these acts will be more perfect according as it is elicited in fuller conformity with the requirements of the individual virtues; for example, an act of adoration which is an act of the virtue of religion pertaining to justice, contributes to the more perfect fulfillment of the requirements of the virtue of justice.

Hence arises the problem: how does special perfection in exercising the individual moral virtues stand in relation to the general perfection of the whole Christian life which we said was to be judged essentially according to charity and its dominion?

No one denies that the exercise of the moral virtues is necessary

in some way for Christian perfection. That they are necessary is immediately apparent either from the practice of the Church in inquiring into the lives of the Servants of God for their beatification or merely from the Christian instinct which never regards a person as perfect unless he possesses a high degree of humility or temperance. But we must further investigate the reason for this necessity of the moral virtues.

- 74 There are two schools of thought on this matter. Some hold, with Vâsquez and Suarez, that the acts of the moral virtues, at least the infused moral virtues, are in themselves meritorious *de condigno* of an increase of grace and glory independently of their being ruled or directed by charity. Hence these theologians teach that these acts *per se* and immediately pertain to the integrity of Christian perfection because by their very nature they contribute to the increase of eternal glory. Nevertheless they say that such acts contribute to grace and glory only secondarily, because they by no means deny the primacy of charity in the Christian life and they concede that the acts of the moral virtues become more meritorious when commanded by charity.

But some hold to the teaching of St. Thomas, of the old scholastics in general and of many recent authors, who say that the acts of the moral virtues are meritorious only insofar as they are commanded by charity or at least directed by it in some way to the ultimate end, since charity is the only virtue which tends formally towards God, the Ultimate End. Thus they rather hold the view expressed in our thesis, which we have set down as the more probable opinion. We must be aware, though, that this controversy is something of a battle of words, since even the advocates of the first opinion above presuppose that the *habitual* direction of acts by charity is always necessary.

- Γ. 2. *Proof of thesis.* Man tends meritoriously towards the Ultimate End, the Beatific Vision, not by any single act, as was the case with the angels, but, because his nature is at once spiritual and corporeal, by a whole series of acts done one after the other during his life while he is still a "wayfarer." And because of the various necessities of this life, because of his social way of tending towards the end according to the ruling of supernatural Providence, and because of the help or hindrance offered by the many circumstances of this life to this very tending towards the end, all man's acts (coming as they do one after the other in this life), cannot be simply acts of formal tending towards the end (i.e., acts of charity). Instead, they will have to be of many very different kinds and will be directed according to the norms of the various moral virtues and also, granted the present order of things, of the supernatural moral virtues.

Therefore these acts will have the character of means by which formal tending towards the ultimate end is made possible: for we know from revelation<sup>4</sup> that all these acts, if done as they ought to be, merit eternal life and an increase of everlasting glory. But, most probably, merit and increase of glory are gained only insofar as these acts are directed by charity to the ultimate end: they are certainly more meritorious the more strictly and fully they are thus informed by charity.

Charity can direct acts to the final end only if they are pleasing to God: but venial sin is not pleasing to God because, although it does not break off the tending towards the end as does mortal sin, nevertheless it cannot be referred to the end because of its non-conformity with the laws of the moral life. Therefore, unless an act is so done according to the moral virtues that it is morally good, it cannot be directed by charity to the final end. Moreover, though a soul does not commit mortal sin, which would be absolutely contrary to charity, yet if it acts with little or no conformity to the moral virtues, its acts of charity and of the other theological virtues will be elicited remissly and with difficulty, and its venial sins will increase. And because of these venial sins it will become less docile to the impulses of grace, it will be attracted less by the spiritual and supernatural realities and will be drawn more by the things of this world than by these supernatural realities.

Finally, it is certain that the more perfectly the soul is disposed to practise humility or justice, so much the more perfectly can its whole course of action be directed by charity. For the obstacles to the dominion of charity do not come from charity itself but from those impediments, found even in the holiest souls, which arise from even the slightest disorder in their acts or from a less perfect conformity to even the smallest demands of the virtues.

76 From what we have said it follows that, if we consider single acts, then any one act can be more perfect than any other if both are viewed, for example, under the aspect of patience, although the second act is motivated by more intense love. But if we regard the whole complexus of life and all the moral virtues, then a greater perfection in these moral virtues must argue also a greater perfection in charity, because such over-all moral perfection can come only from intense charity and cannot be obtained except by removing the obstacles to great progress in charity. This is the basis for the Church's method in the processes of canonization. (Cf. the treatment of effective charity, *supra*, n. 63.)

77 We can now see why masters of the spiritual life attribute so much importance to some of the moral virtues, for example, humility, which at first glance do not seem as if they should be given

such prominence when there is question of the intrinsic perfection of acts. These virtues are of such moment because they remove the greater obstacles to the perfect dominion of charity.

Hence also we see why the effort to progress in the moral virtues is not necessarily the same in all, some striving more intensely after one virtue, others after another, while the theological virtues will always have the same import for all. This is so because the theological virtues deal directly with the end which is to be sought as ardently as possible by all, whilst the moral virtues are only means to this end, and do not all have the same importance and are not equally necessary or useful in the various circumstances of the spiritual life.

### C. Relation of Observance of the Counsels to Perfection

*Thesis III. Observing the Counsels can be taken to mean, in general, the doing of good works which are not of precept in themselves under pain of venial sin. In this sense the Counsels are essential to higher perfection because a man cannot have this higher perfection unless he is accustomed to performing many of these good works. Or observing the Counsels can be taken to mean simply the keeping of what are commonly called the Evangelical Counsels. In this sense the Counsels are not, in themselves and absolutely speaking necessary to perfection, although they contribute greatly to it inasmuch as they remove many impediments which usually render more difficult the dominion of charity over one's whole life.*<sup>5</sup>

- /K 1. *Statement of the problem.* It is often said that greater perfection consists in avoiding not only all mortal sins and even, as far as possible, venial sins, but also in observing the Counsels. Hence perfection would seem to consist principally in observing the counsels as well as the Commandments. St. Bonaventure in a way taught this when he held that perfection is "The conformity of man on earth to Christ by that habit of virtue by which he turns from evil, does good and bears with trials in a spirit of supererogation." Nevertheless, many theologians teach that perfection calls more for the observance of the Commandments than of the Counsels.

This contrast of commandment and counsel seems to be present even in St. Thomas, since in his opusculum *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis* (cap. 5-6, 13-14) he distinguishes between one degree of charity which "comes under the necessity of precept" and is "necessary for salvation," and another, higher degree which "exceeds ordinary perfection and comes under the counsels." But in the *Summa Theologica* (IIaIIae, q. 184, a. 3) he teaches that "perfection consists essentially in the commandments . . . secondarily and



instrumentally, perfection consists in the counsels," and this because "the love of God and of our neighbor is not commanded according to a measure, so that what is in excess of the measure be a matter of counsel."\*\*

79 A counsel can be understood in two ways (and in fact is so understood by St. Thomas, for example) :

A counsel is simply on the same plane as a commandment, that is to say, it is a morally good act, but one which does more than is commanded under pain of even venial sin. For example, we are commanded to forgive our enemy his offence and not to deny him the ordinary marks of politeness: but we can go further and show him special and more than ordinary attention (Matt. 5.39ff.) which if omitted would not be a venial sin. Again, in the case of humility, we are forbidden to desire or defend our good name inordinately; but here again we can go further and embrace humiliations which we could lawfully avoid—for example, by keeping silent when a word from us would show that we are innocent. In the same way, we can receive Communion more frequently than is commanded.

A counsel is, as it were, a means or special practice without which, it is true, we can ascend to any (even the highest) degree of perfection but which nevertheless is a great help to perfection since it removes the obstacles which, though they do not make perfection impossible, yet render it rather more difficult of attainment. This is the case with voluntary poverty, perfect chastity, and spontaneous obedience, as witness the great saints who lived in the married state, or who possessed great wealth, or who did not have to exercise obedience; for example, saintly kings or popes.

We should observe here that the same counsel can often be viewed under two aspects; for example, perfect chastity is at once the exercise of the virtue of temperance beyond that which is commanded, and a means by which the perfection of charity is more easily attained.

80 2. *Proof of thesis.* We must now demonstrate briefly how the counsels, understood in the two senses given above, are related to perfection: and from hence we shall be able to solve the problem as to whether there are also counsels properly so called in the matter of charity. We shall prescind in our demonstration from the vexed question whether or not there are "positive imperfections," namely, whether a person can, without venial sin, select that which appears less perfect here and now, omitting an act which would be possible and more perfect in the given circumstances. For, though all admit that there counsels and acts which are not in themselves com-

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manded, yet some deny that a more perfect act can be omitted without venial sin. These say that, though we are not obliged to select the more perfect act because of its nature and circumstances, nevertheless our very selection of a less perfect act would not be referable to the ultimate end.<sup>6</sup>

As for us, we think that the more probable opinion by far is the one which holds that the selection of a less perfect good act is both good in itself and meritorious, although it is less good and meritorious than the selection of the corresponding more perfect act. However, everything that we shall say here will hold good for both opinions.

HI a. *Counsels understood in the wide sense.* Intense charity cannot be present in man and cannot inform and direct his whole life unless he does many things which are in no way obligatory, and this because such works of supererogation are either the means or condition of this intense charity or else its effects and fruits.

Nor will man be able to avoid all mortal sins unless he does more than he is bound to, and this because of the corruption of human nature, the passions to be conquered, the temptations to be overcome, the necessity of imploring God's help. And much less will he be able to avoid many venial sins and exercise the virtues in that degree which is required for the full dominion of charity over his life unless he does very many things which are purely of counsel. For example, he will never possess humility unless he accepts many humiliations which he could easily avoid, nor will he possess real temperance unless he performs many mortifications which are not of obligation.

On the other hand, intense charity will move a man to do, from a motive of love of God and neighbor, much that he is not bound to do.

The reason for this is suggested by St. Thomas—the observance of those things which are commanded by the individual virtues makes our actions simply referable to the ultimate end by charity, namely, it takes away impediments which are opposed to the dominion of charity over the working of our souls. But where it is question of a counsel only, both the counselled action and the less perfect act are good, and are in themselves referable to the ultimate end, but the one is more easily referred than the other. The counsels, therefore, take away the impediments which, though not opposed to the dominion of charity, yet make it more difficult. But the dominion of charity cannot, morally speaking, be fully and intensely exercised if one does not possess that facility which comes from the observance of the counsels. God can overcome this difficulty by imparting more powerful graces, but He does not ordinarily do so, especially for

those who through tepidity neglect the practice of the counsels. However, He will so assist those who are prevented by grave obligations from doing as many works of supererogation as they would wish. But even such as these can do more than is commanded in the matter of intention and application while performing their duties, and thus they can do many works of counsel under another guise.

82 Since these acts of the moral virtues done from counsel are only *means* to a greater exercise of charity or are the fruits of greater charity, it follows that such acts done from counsel are in no way more perfect *in themselves* and more meritorious than acts done from precept; rather, greater perfection will exist where the acts are done from greater charity. For example, the act by which one prefers death under torture to denying the faith is *commanded* under pain of mortal sin: nevertheless it will be much more perfect than some small mortification done under counsel: for, excepting the case of some very holy soul doing such a small mortification from a motive of the most intense charity, the sacrifice of the martyr will always proceed from greater charity.

83 Nor will one's life be more perfect simply because one does many acts of counsel, especially if it is a question of the easier acts. Rather he who faithfully and constantly fulfills the more difficult obligations shows great charity by that very fact, whereas a multitude of supererogatory acts can exist side by side with weak charity and even with the neglect of many obligations.

Nevertheless where many difficult, and especially, diverse works of counsel (e.g., prolonged prayer, and works of zeal) are united with fidelity in fulfilling both the ordinary obligations and those of one's state, then one cannot but conclude that the soul is ruled by intense charity and therefore possesses great perfection.

This is the reason why the Church attributes so much importance to the works of counsel when preparing for the beatification of the Servants of God.

84 b. *The Counsels understood in a particular way*—the “*Evangelical Counsels*.” The name “Evangelical Counsels” is commonly given to the three counsels of perfect poverty, perfect continence or chastity, and spontaneous obedience, or the abnegation of one's own will and independence. St. Thomas (in *lallae*, q. 108, a. 4) reduces the other counsels to these three principal ones.

But the observance of these counsels is not in itself necessary for the highest perfection, as is evident from the fact that persons who observed only some, or maybe even none, of these counsels are proposed by the Church as models of the highest perfection, as for

example many kings, like St. Louis, who was both married and wealthy.

But because the Evangelical Counsels remove the greatest impediments to the full dominion of charity over man's life, namely, the love of riches, the pleasures of the flesh, honors and independence, it follows that the observance of these opposing counsels of poverty, perfect continence, and voluntary obedience makes striving after perfection easier, safer, and more efficacious.<sup>7</sup>

This is confirmed by the practice of the Church which imposes on all priests of the Latin Rite the observance of the counsel of perfect chastity and which in the Code of Canon Law, Canon 487, decrees that the religious state "in which the faithful undertake to observe, over and above the common precepts, the Evangelical Counsels by the vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty, is to be held in honor by all."<sup>8</sup>

- 85      c. *The Counsels and charity.* Here we shall investigate the special question: "Are there acts elicited by the virtue of charity itself which are not of precept but of counsel only?"

At first glance it seems that one cannot deny the existence of such acts: for there are many acts of internal and external charity which one may omit without sin—for example, an act of internal charity renewed each hour or even more frequently, or the care of a sick stranger undertaken voluntarily for love of Christ. St. Thomas teaches this explicitly in one place (*De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*. c. 5-6, 13-14): nevertheless, he later teaches no less explicitly (in *IIaIIae*, q. 184, a. 3) that there are no acts of charity which fall under counsel.

But there is no contradiction here: for there are acts of charity which are matter of counsel only in the sense that they can in themselves be omitted without fault, even venial fault; but these acts of charity are not of counsel in the same sense as the acts of poverty or humility, since these latter are concerned with removing the impediments which make the perfect exercise of charity more difficult and so are concerned with means to the end and not with the end itself. But *any* act of charity is concerned, on the contrary, with the End Itself, God: wherefore it is often said that all acts of charity are obligatory, not as regards their exercise, but rather under the aspect of an end to which one must tend. Thus St. Thomas answers his own question as to whether a religious is obliged to fulfill all the Evangelical Counsels by saying: "He is not so bound that he must fulfill all the things that follow from the perfection of charity; but he is bound to intend to fulfill them and he acts against this obligation if he contemns them. Wherefore he does not sin if he

passes them over, but he does sin if he contemns them. Likewise he is not bound to all the exercises by which one arrives at perfection but only to those which are specifically enjoined on him by the Rule he follows" (Hallae, q. 186, a. 2). Thus, in the example St. Thomas often uses, a doctor does not sin by not applying extraordinary curative measures in a case because he is not bound to do so, but he would sin if he resolved not to heal as well as he could but only to restore a certain measure of health.

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Hence we see in what sense there are not works of counsel in the matter of charity. The precepts of the other virtues such as prudence and temperance oblige according to a certain fixed standard, namely, insofar as they lead to the attainment of the ultimate end, since they are directly concerned, not with the end, but only with the means to the end. But the precept of charity deals with the End Itself, God, whom we are bound to love with all our hearts. For example, one can conceive of a degree of temperance which is perfect because it so perfectly holds the mean between excessive penance and sensuality that one cannot think of a temperance which would be more perfect: but there is no degree of charity attainable by a mere man which will not always be imperfect and thus always capable of growth. But since that which is imperfect in its own order naturally desires to be perfected, it follows that the observance of the precept of charity, always imperfect, is in itself ever directed towards increase and more perfect observance. Wherefore a person does not sin by omitting acts which are here and now more perfect, but he would sin by excluding them absolutely, or by putting aside all thought of progress in charity; as St. Thomas says, "He would sin by contemning."

Therefore man is bound under pain of sin to fulfill all the obligations of his state of life and thus to grow in charity, and he is bound not to exclude the tending to ever greater perfection that is innate in charity. If he did otherwise he would be "conterjptuous of doing better and set against spiritual progress" (Hallae, q. 186, a. 2).

The same must be said of Faith and Hope: for we can always cleave closer to God's revealed word and can always have more confidence in His all-powerful help. Hence one can make many acts of faith and hope which could be omitted without sinning. Nevertheless, as we have already said, it can never happen that great charity will exist where faith is weak, whereas on the contrary it is quite certain that though St. Louis the King, for example, did not observe the counsel of perfect chastity, yet he possessed greater charity than many who did observe that counsel.

## REFERENCES

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2. Cf. *S.T.*, Hallae, q. 2, a. 3, ad. 2; q. 1, a. 4, ad. 3; I, q. 1, a. 6, ad. 3.
3. *S.T.*, lallae, q. 65, a. 2-3.
4. Council of Trent, VI, c. 10; 16 and Can. 26; 32.
5. *S.T.*, Hallae, q. 184, a. 3; *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*, Chs. 6ff. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, I, Ch. 13.
6. Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 427ff.: also *The Love of God and the Cross of Christ*, I, p. 318.
7. Cf. 5. *T.*, Hallae, q. 186, a. 7 and a. 2-5.
8. Cf. S. Woywod, *Practical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Perfection and Union with God, with Christ

It is often said, and with truth, that the more man is united to God, to Christ, then the greater is the perfection of his Christian life. We must ascertain in what sense this concept of perfection is true.

#### A. Union with God

##### I. *Man Can Be United with God in Several Ways*

87 1. The highest degree of union is that of the *Hypostatic Union*, in which the humanity of Christ was assumed into the unity of a person by the Word, both natures remaining distinct from each other.

2. Below the Hypostatic Union, which is unique in its perfection, there is the consummate *union of the Blessed with God in Heaven* by which they participate in the intuitive knowledge of the Divine Essence, which by its very nature is proper to God alone but which is made possible for creatures because "The Divine Essence, by applying itself in an ineffable way to the created mind," supplies the created intellectual *species*. By the beatific vision man is united to God in the highest degree that is possible after the substantial hypostatic union. In fact, at least in the present order of things, this union of the blessed, the brothers of Christ, the Firstborn, stems from that very union by which His humanity is united hypostatically to the Word. And by this union with God, the *Summum Bonum*, man accomplishes the end for which he was created, the glory of God, and in attaining this end he attains beatitude.

3. But even on earth, the just man, incorporated with Christ, is truly made a partaker of the divine nature, he becomes like unto God, an adopted son of God, *habitually* united to Him by the infused habit of *sanctifying grace*, by which he becomes capable of acting supernaturally. Because of this gift, the Most Holy Trinity dwells in him, and is present in him not only by Its all-pervading presence but also by a new manner of indwelling. And this union truly begins that perfect union which will be fully realized in Heaven.

88 4. Consequent upon this habitual union with God, full *actual union* is made possible for man by means of acts of the intellect and will, of charity and of faith which worketh by charity, insofar as man actually thinks of God and loves Him. Just as in Heaven union is perfected and the end obtained by the act of vision and love, so on earth the union of man as a wayfarer is perfected essentially, not by a habit but by these acts of intellect and will, because by them precisely the end of life's journey as such is attained, namely, man merits glory and increase of glory by meriting an increase of sanctifying grace.

This union with God through the supernatural acts of faith and charity can ever become greater, the more frequently and the more intensely these acts are performed.

This actual union is never achieved without the influence of God's grace with which the human will co-operates freely, and therefore the union is achieved actively and passively. But sometimes the acts of faith and charity become passive to a great degree, as in infused contemplation where God works in the soul through enlightenment and inspirations. In this case faith and charity become more intense and of a higher order. But it must be noted that, although these enlightenments and inspirations seem to be specifically different from those that are given in the ordinary way, nevertheless the union itself of the soul with God through the essential acts of faith and charity becomes more intense *only* if man faithfully responds to these great graces, for this union is not of a different species from the union of other just men, since it is essentially comprised, not of the light and impulse passively received, but of the more intense acts of faith and love by which man freely co-operates with these graces.

## II. *Perfection and Union with God*

89 We can now see clearly the relationship between perfection and this degree of union with God. Passing over the Hypostatic Union, which belongs to Christ alone, and the union of the Blessed, which is possessed in Heaven and cannot be increased, we can note the following points about the perfection to be found in this life:

1. Habitual union with God through sanctifying grace is the same thing as *sanctity*; and the degree of beatitude to be obtained, and the degree of glory to be given to God by man in Heaven, correspond to the degree of sanctity possessed by the soul.

2. The union with God through acts of the will is the same as the exercise of *charity*, according to which perfection of life is to be



measured. Therefore in this sense greater perfection is, absolutely speaking, to be found in greater union with God.

3. When one speaks simply of "union with God" one often means union through acts of the intellect, namely, *thinking of God* and divine things, ever more intensely, intimately, frequently, habitually. But in this sense one cannot say that the greater union, the greater the perfection: do not the demons always think of God? Such union, however, is of great assistance to man on earth in his search for perfection: for (1) it does away with dissipation of mind, which is a great impediment to charity: (2) it assists charity directly by better proposing God, the very object of charity, to the mind and by filling the soul with supernatural thoughts, affections and judgments. Therefore an increase of this union brings with it an increase of perfection, although this union does not constitute perfection.

90 4. The union which results from the graces of *infused contemplation* does not in itself-and directly make man more perfect: it does so only as far as it assists him in the best way possible to elicit very intense acts of charity. The special grace in infused contemplation is an infused light on divine things and infused movements of grace by which the soul is vehemently attracted to God. But merit, and hence perfection in the proper sense, is to be found only in the free act of faith by which man accepts these lights and in the free act of will by which he freely embraces and loves God, -who is drawing him.

Ordinarily, therefore, the graces of infused contemplation bring with them an increase of charity and perfection, because the human will usually co-operates faithfully with them. In fact, it seems that God does not generally continue to grant these graces to one who does not use them faithfully. Nevertheless, fidelity in co-operating with these graces can be very unequal even in fervent souls, and therefore greater perfection does not always follow greater graces of this kind. And if in any case these graces were such that, because of the abundance of light and the vehemence of urging, the soul were no longer free to resist, then there would be no meritorious act, and the resultant love, which would be no longer free, would not render the soul more perfect, just as the love of the Blessed in Heaven is no longer meritorious, since it is no longer free, by reason of the Beatific Vision, and so it does not make them more perfect. Does God sometimes grant such graces? We cannot deny offhand that He does, because, though these acts themselves are not free and therefore are not in themselves meritorious, yet they may be, after the cessation of these great graces, the source of many acts of intensest love, freely elicited because of the memory of these graces.

### III. *Union between the Holy Ghost and the Souls of the Just*

- 91 Of set purpose we say nothing here about the special union which, according to some theologians, exists between the Holy Ghost and the souls of the just. This union, if it exists, is never separate from the union resulting from the gift of created sanctifying grace: this latter union through grace is increased in the same way and from the same causes as sanctifying grace. Fr. Galtier holds that the special union first mentioned is not proper to, but only appropriated to, the Holy Ghost. Waffelaert says that it is a kind of union of person to person, and he reiterates the doctrine formerly proposed by Petau, by Scheeben,<sup>1</sup> and by others; but it is not proposed in the same way by all. Others hold firmly that our sanctification is effected by the common action of the Three Persons but, since our sanctifying grace is the participation in the grace of Christ, who is the Son, it is therefore *filial* grace in us, too, and consequently from it arise relations peculiar to each of the Persons of the Trinity.

#### B. Union with Christ as Man

##### I. *Christ as the Centre of All Spiritual Perfection*

- 92 What we have just said about union with God is equally true of each of the Three Persons of the Trinity, since their external operations (*operationes ad extra*) are held in common. Here we shall treat, not of union with Christ as God, but with Christ as Man. We must, however, recall the contents of the various tracts of dogmatic theology on this union.

Faith teaches (1 Tim. 2.5) that Christ is the one Mediator between God and man, and that therefore He is the one true Way to life, the Head of the body of which all the just are the members, living in Him as the branches live in the vine: therefore without Him we can do nothing, and in Him all things are summed Up and consummated.<sup>2</sup>

Hence Christ in His Sacred Humanity is the center of all spiritual perfection inasmuch as all spiritual life has Him as its

1. *Meritorious* cause: all graces are given to man by reason of His merits, by reason of His sacrifice on the Cross.

2. *Exemplary* cause: it is true that the first exemplary cause of adopted sonship is the natural Sonship of the Word: but the immediate exemplary cause of our sonship, its direct exemplar, is the Humanity of Christ, taken up into the unity of a Person by the

Word, the Son of God by nature. Hence the exemplar of our whole spiritual life is this Most Sacred Humanity and its operations.

3. *Final* cause: our spiritual life is faced towards the ultimate end, Divine Glory, but in such a way that "through Him, and with Him, and in Him (there may) be all honor and glory (to God)" (Canon of the Mass). Hence, just as life is communicated to us through Christ, so in Heaven we shall give glory to God through Him, completing His Mystical Body, from which one hymn of praise will rise to God from all the members through Christ, the Head.

4. The *efficient instrumental* cause (at least morally so): for the Humanity of Christ causes grace in us not only meritoriously but also by an efficient causality that is at least moral or intentional. Christ's Humanity does this through the Sacraments, which produce grace because they are the actions of Christ.

Is the Humanity of Christ the *instrumental physical* cause of any grace outside the sacraments? Theologians are not agreed but more probably the answer is in the negative.

## II. *Two Ways in Which the Just Man Is United to Christ the Man*

### 93 1. By an habitual, permanent union:

a. Through *sanctifying grace*, which is a participation in created grace which Christ the Man received in its fullness as *gratia capitis*. The just are united to God by this grace, are made His adopted sons, consorts of His Nature and have Him dwelling in them. Therefore they are united by this grace to Christ the Man, who received the gifts of grace in an eminent degree and who communicates them to His brethren; He, the Son of God by nature by reason of the Hypostatic Union, communicates grace to His brethren, the adopted sons of God, who receive their sonship from incorporation in Him through this grace. Therefore the basic union of the Christian with Christ is not merely moral but can truly be called mystical. For there is no immediate permanent physical union between the just man and the Humanity of Christ: the statements made by some theologians about the physical presence of Christ's Humanity in the just man, or about its remaining after the Eucharistic species are corrupted, are not founded on any solid argument and are rejected by the common consensus of theologians.

But through habitual grace the just man partakes in a likeness, to the Divine Nature, he partakes in the deformity which is found in Christ's own Humanity and which arises from that same grace, the grace belonging to the Head of the Mystical Body. Therefore, because of this sharing in the Divine Nature through the grace

which is communicated both to us and to Christ's Humanity, there arises between us and this Most Sacred Humanity a union that is more intimate than a mere moral union. Nevertheless, we should beware lest we rely too much on the metaphors found in Sacred Scripture ("branches," "members"), lest we use our imagination rather than our intellect and so think that the same physical entity of grace passes from Christ to us just as the sap flows through the whole tree or the blood through all parts of the body. Grace is an *accident* physically inherent in the soul of Christ just as in our soul, but it is a *purely spiritual* accident.

b. The Christian is united to Christ and is conformed to Him in a special way by the *sacramental character* by which, in Baptism, he is incorporated into Christ and is made capable of receiving His action through the other sacraments; by which, in Confirmation, he is made a partaker of the unction of the Holy Ghost in Christ; by which, in Orders, he is united to Christ so that he may accomplish His work, and by which he is made partaker of His Priesthood and power.<sup>3</sup>

c. In the Eucharist the physical union with Christ's Humanity ceases with the corruption of the species: but, because of the *sacramental grace*, there remains a special union with Christ. No matter how one conceives of sacramental grace, it is certain that it constitutes some permanent title to special actual graces in accord with the special purpose of the sacrament. But since the Eucharist, as is plain from its very matter, is essentially a sacrament of union with Christ, it follows that it gives man a sacramental grace which in some way unites him more closely to Christ. (Cf. John 6.56-57.)

2. Man is united to Christ actually:

a. In the *actual reception* of the sacraments wherein he receives the action of Christ in a special way and makes use of the graces He merited for us. This holds good for all the sacraments, but especially for the Eucharist, in which there is also a transitory physical union.

b. By acts of the *intellect*: by thinking of Him, of His mysteries and the works of His life on earth and now in Heaven; by conforming the intellect to the truths He taught (by increasing faith, and by more and more conforming all judgments to it—i.e., in the spirit of faith, the supernatural spirit).

c. By acts of the *will*: by love of Christ not only as God, our ultimate end, but also as Man, the Head of the human race, our elder Brother, through whom we are united to God; by conforming our will to the human will of Christ, our Exemplar. We treat directly of this special union in the following chapter on the Imitation of Christ.

d. Finally, the *priest* is united to Christ in a unique way in doing the work for which Christ has made him an associate in His ministry, namely, by offering Christ's Sacrifice, by conferring the Sacraments in Christ's Person, by teaching, directing, and helping souls by virtue of the mission received from Christ, by virtue of his priestly state.

94      III. *In What Sense, Therefore, Is Perfection of Life  
To Be Judged According to the Standard of  
Union with Christ the Man?*

1. As regards *habitual* union:

Since in the present supernatural order there can be no union with God through habitual grace except through and in Christ, and except inasmuch as man is incorporated into Christ, it follows that our sanctity will be the greater according as our incorporation in or union with Christ the Man becomes fuller.

2. As regards union through our *acts*:

From the doctrine that Christ is the sole Mediator, the only Way to God, it also follows that, according as our whole life becomes more informed by charity and is therefore more perfect, the more will our salutary acts be performed under the influence of Christ as *efficacious, meritorious, final* and *exemplary* cause.

Christ as *efficient* and *meritorious* cause; that is, the more our soul is subjected to the influence of Christ the Redeemer and Sanctifier by the use of the sacraments, by the union of our actions with the Sacrifice of the Cross and the Mass, by the use of the means of sanctification which Christ instituted (e.g., the Church, by living in and with it, living according to its directives, its intentions, etc.).

Christ as *final* cause; insofar as we intend to reach the end, the glory of God, which is to be obtained through Christ, by directing all our acts to God through Him, namely, by uniting our acts with His acts, intentions and merits and thus making our acts more pleasing to God, more meritorious and more productive of glory.

Christ as *exemplary* cause; namely, by the likeness and conformity of our life to that of Christ: cf. the following chapter.

IV. *The Humanity of Christ Never an Obstacle to  
Greater Union with God*

95      Therefore union with Christ's Humanity is not union with the ultimate end but rather union with the one means and the only Way that leads to the Father, outside of which way no one can come to Him or be united closely to Him. Whence it follows that there can

be no state or grade of perfection in which the Humanity of Christ could in any way become an impediment to greater union with God.

1. We say this because many Quietists of various kinds made the mistake of concluding that the thought of Christ's Humanity would be an impediment to contemplative and interior souls because It was a sensible thing by which they would be withdrawn from the more sublime way of contemplation in which they were intent only on the Infinite Essence of God. The Beghards of the fourteenth century, the Spanish Illuminati of the sixteenth and-seventeenth centuries, the Neapolitan Quietists, Molinos and Petrucci—all made this mistake.

2. As against this error one must believe with the Church (the whole doctrine is clearly set forth in Cardinal Casanata's document against Quietism) that:

a. It can happen that "in the act of (infused) contemplation" the mind is so drawn to contemplate God's very Essence or the mystery of the Trinity that *then* one cannot think of Christ's Humanity, just as the mind can be so fixed by God on any object of infused contemplation that, while the contemplation lasts, it cannot think of anything else, or can only do so with the greatest difficulty and with loss of spiritual progress.

b. But, where the soul is not thus passively led by God, there is no reason in the world why it should exclude "voluntarily and of set purpose," thoughts of Christ's Humanity, though it may not think of It in the same way as it did before in discursive prayer. St. Teresa explains this at length in her *Interior Castle* (VI, Ch. 7, n. 5-15). In every state Christ's Humanity remains for us the one way to God.

a This doctrine of the Church is authentically taught in the condemnation of the Beghards (Council of Vienne); cf. the condemnation by Innocent XI referred to above, and the letter of Pius X on St. Teresa (7th March, 1914) in which he approves her teaching against the Quietists wherein she denies that there is any benefit to be derived from excluding the thought of Christ's Most Sacred Humanity. (Cf. *Interior Castle*, *loc. cit.*, and her *Life*, Ch. 22.) This is confirmed by the practice of the Church of directing her whole liturgy, the common public prayer of all her children, to God through Christ's Humanity.

d. The essential theological reason is this: it is true that God Himself is a more worthy object for our contemplation than Christ's Humanity; it is true that grace usually moves souls in varying ways to rest in one mystery of faith more than in another, so that it can happen that a soul may give more time to thoughts of God Himself than to Christ's Humanity, or vice versa. Because of the essential

part that Christ's Humanity plays in the whole economy of salvation and sanctification, a soul may never lawfully exclude all thought of It even from private prayer, however, nor can this thought of Christ's Humanity ever become an impediment to more perfect union with God.

### V. Are There Differences of Kind in This Union?

- 96 Finally we must inquire whether, in this union of the just with Christ the Man, one can distinguish differences not only of degree but of kind as well. One is led to ask this question because of the manner of speech employed by many spiritual authors—e.g., Fr. de Jaegher, S.J.4—who seem to distinguish the life of *intimate union* with Christ from the life of *identification* with Him, as two altogether different states of soul. In the first, they say, our acts are offered to God through Christ and are united to His acts: but in the second the acts are no longer ours, rather Christ performs our acts in us: “I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2.20).

It is true that a just man's acts are in a sense the acts of Christ Himself, since the just man is a living member of Christ and is thus truly identified with Him. But this identification is the result of sanctifying grace, and hence it is attained in the very beginning of justification. This grace can certainly grow from there on, and so a greater identification with Christ can be attained. Moreover, the consciousness of this identification can become more vivid, more intimate, more profound, even habitual in the soul. God can make this consciousness immediate and *experimental* by means of the special graces of infused contemplation. The soul can “put on Christ” to a greater degree, namely, by becoming more conformed to Him in its manner of thought, willing, acting, judging alike with Him in all things: thus it can be identified more with Him in the moral order. But even after all this has been effected there is no new union or identification distinct from that already possessed by grace.

When authors say that Christ's actions become ours, that He acts in us, that all our own activity ceases, so that Christ does all things in us—these and similar expressions must be understood according to what we have just said about the greater degree, the greater consciousness, and the more fruitful effects of this identification with Christ, an identification that has been substantially present from the beginning of the spiritual life. That is to say, these expressions must not be held to imply a new, specifically distinct relationship between the soul and Christ, nor any kind of *absolute* passivity.

In regard to the sense of the text we quoted from St. Paul (Gal. 2.20) it should be noted from the context that he is dealing with

the justification by which he is dead to the Law with Christ and that he means that he lives now with a new life, the life in Christ through faith. Therefore one can by no means conclude from this text that there is an identification with Christ in any way distinct from that which is found in justification itself. This text can be applied to a higher degree of spiritual life only in the sense that the qualities attributed to any just man are realized *more fully* in this higher degree?

## REFERENCES

1. *The Mysteries of Christianity*.
2. Translator's note: this was written before Pius XII's encyclical *Corpus Christi Mysticum*. There the Pope teaches that the members of the Mystical Body are not all the *just* (e.g. not heretics in grace) but only those who are baptized and not excluded by heresy, schism, or excommunication.
3. *S.T.*, III, q. 63, a. 3 and 6.
4. *One with Jesus*.
5. Cf. Prat, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 169ff.; II, pp. 233ff.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Perfection and the Imitation of God, of Christ

97 Christ Himself said: "Be ye . . . perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5.48), and from this text some authors derived the definition "Perfection is the imitation of God Himself, or of the Holy Trinity." But from the Middle Ages on especially, conformity with Christ as Man has been often given as the essential formula of Christian perfection. We shall inquire as to how these ideas should be understood.

#### A. Imitation of God

##### I. *Scripture and Tradition*

98 Besides the words of Christ just quoted (Matt. 5.48), another text of Sacred Scripture exhorts us to be "imitators of God" (Eph. 5.1). The Alexandrians inculcated especially this imitation of God: according to Clement of Alexandria the true gnostic (perfect one) is he who "imitates God as far as possible"; likewise Origen: man receives in creation the dignity of being in the *image* of God, but he must achieve *likeness* to God by fulfilling his tasks "in imitation of God." Gregory of Nyssa says: "The end of a life lived in virtue (perfection) is the being made like to the Divine." Other later theologians at first defined perfection in terms of likeness to God: more recently some have defined perfection in terms of imitation of the Trinity.

##### II. *How We Can Imitate God*

99 Since God is the First Exemplary Cause of all being, it is obvious that all man's perfection is an ever greater participation in, and being made more like unto, the infinite perfection of God.

We can only wonder at but can in no way imitate the *physical* perfections of God, such as His omnipotence or His Eternity, because though it is true that our limited power is a kind of analogical

participation in the Divine Omnipotence, yet it is nevertheless not an imitation in any sense of the word.

We can more fittingly imitate many of God's *moral* perfections, such as mercy, justice, sanctity. This is precisely the imitation referred to in the words of St. Paul we have just quoted.

However, here again there can be no strict imitation of God's moral perfections as there can be of the examples left by Christ, because these perfections can be applied only analogically both to God and man. For example, the charity of God or His love for men is only analogically like the charity of man for God or his neighbor. This is so because in all God's perfections there is present that aseity (dependence on no other for existence) and that infinity by which He is His own End, and on account of which we are created for Him. Therefore we can imitate Him only in a broad sense.

Hence, although it is true that the more perfect man is, the more like to God is he, we cannot draw from this fact a real norm of Christian perfection. We shall always be forced to qualify and say that we must imitate God's mercy, for example, *so far as we are able*, remembering always the *infinite* difference that exists between the Creator and Lord of all, and His creatures and servants.

Therefore in this sphere of exemplarity Christ is again the one Mediator and sole Way, and by imitating Him we shall imitate God to the best of our ability, and through Him we shall come to know much more clearly these very perfections of God which we are to imitate,

## B. Imitation of Christ

### I. *Scripture and Tradition*

H»0 Christ Himself proposed to us His own mode of action as an example to be imitated, especially in John 13.15: "I have given you an example that as I do to you, so you also do." Compare the parallel passage in Luke 22.27. The passage in Matt. 11.29 is not fully apposite here because its sense is that we should become Christ's disciples *because* He is meek. Following Christ's teaching, St. John (1 John 3.16) and St. Peter (1 Peter 2.20-22) proposed the same doctrine. St. Paul, however, uses the formula "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11.1); "Be imitators of me" (Phil. 3.17), namely, "be my companions in imitation." Cf. 1 Thess. 1.6. But he also proposes directly the imitation of Christ, as for example in Phil. 2.9 and Hebr. 12.1-4.2

St. Ignatius of Antioch stresses this imitation of Christ in a special way. And the Alexandrians, who especially propose the imitation

of God, add that we are made like unto God if we imitate the Word Incarnate.

St. Augustine says that he who follows Christ perfectly is perfect and that he who imitates Christ follows Him perfectly. An apocryphal work attributed to St. Basil teaches that Christ took a human nature in order to become our Exemplar, and therefore every act of His is a norm of virtue.

This doctrine that Christ is to be imitated was developed more and more in the Middle Ages, especially by St. Bernard, by St. Francis of Assisi and his disciples (conformity with Christ), e.g. St. Bonaventure: Perfection is "the conformity of man on earth to Christ by that habit of virtue by which evil is rejected, good is effected and trials are borne—all by way of supererogation"; thus also Ludolph the Carthusian and Thomas à Kempis in his *Imitation of Christ*.

More recently St. Ignatius Loyola gives a very prominent place to this imitation of Christ in his *Spiritual Exercises* (from the second week on, the grace to be especially sought is knowledge, love and imitation of Christ the Lord). More briefly but no less explicitly St. John of the Cross in his *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (I. 13.3) first advises that one should have an "habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything that he does, conforming himself to His life; upon which life he must meditate so that he may know how to imitate it, and to behave in all things as Christ would behave."<sup>3</sup>

We should note the words of St. Vincent de Paul who, on every occasion, asked himself, "What would Christ do in these circumstances?"<sup>4</sup> St. Francis de Sales likewise taught: "By frequently looking at Christ in meditation you will learn His way of acting and you will conform your acts to the example set by Him. . . . By observing His words, acts and affections we shall learn with the help of grace to act and will as He Himself did" (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, II, 1). Finally, Leo XIII, in condemning Americanism, says, "Christ is the Teacher and Exemplar of all sanctity: it is necessary that all conform themselves to His manner of acting" (Letter to Cardinal Gibbons).

## II. Errors

- 101 To this zeal for imitating Christ, or, as they call it, this "imitationism," Protestant theologians oppose *union* with Christ as more in accord with the doctrine of St. Paul. There have been Catholics also who considered that imitation of Christ's earthly life is very suitable in the first degrees of the spiritual life but that it should be abandoned when the soul applies itself wholly to higher and

less sensible things: thus the Quietists and those against whom Pius X praised St. Teresa's doctrine on zeal for the imitation of Christ.

### III. *External and Internal Imitation*

102 We must distinguish between *external* and *internal* imitation, the more important and the truly essential being internal imitation by which our internal acts of intellect and will are conformed to that which Christ thought and willed as Man. It is apparent that a mere conformity of our external acts to Christ's outward mode of action is of no value if it does not arise from internal conformity, since the supernatural value of our acts comes solely from, and is measured solely by, the internal acts of our free-will.

Nevertheless, external imitation of Christ's acts is necessary if there is to be internal imitation. For if our internal imitation is true and sincere it must happen that our external acts will be also conformed to Christ's external acts in some way. We say "in some way" because it can happen that the external mode of action will not always correspond adequately to internal dispositions because of still unruly passions or unreformed habits persisting in body or soul. Moreover, external conformity greatly assists internal because of the reaction of the external man, of his external manner of acting, on the state of his soul—"Attitudes create states of soul." Finally, there are many external acts which must be done, and done in conformity to Christ's example, because otherwise they would be dissimilar to His actions and by that very fact would hinder internal conformity.

### IV. *A Christian Is More Perfect, the More He Imitates Christ*

101 It is certain that the life of any Christian is more perfect, the more it imitates the examples given us by Christ in His earthly life.

Christ was made man and lived many years on earth in order to be a true Exemplar of life to all men. He did not come solely to redeem us by His death, but also to bring us the light of His doctrine and examples. And since in His life the highest perfection of action is exemplified, and since it is not possible to conceive of His acting in a better way than He did, we thus have in Him an example of a perfect human life. Therefore, the nearer one approaches His example by imitation, the more perfect one is; and it is not possible to conceive a mode of action more perfect than that which is to be obtained by imitating Christ.

Christ is the Head to which the members should be conformed;

for although the head and the members have different functions, yet both live by the same life and partake of the same nature. Therefore there should be a kind of harmony and conformity of one with the other. In fact, the more the life of the members is made like the life of the Head, and the more nearly they are united to Him in action, so much the more perfectly will they fulfill their functions.

Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life not only by His grace and His doctrine but also by His example, as can be seen from Acts 1.1, and the praise given by Him to the one who "shall do and teach." Therefore the more one takes Him as the Exemplary Cause of life, the greater will be one's progress along the true way that leads to life.

### V. *External Imitation Not Always More Perfect*

104 But we must note, nevertheless, that it is not always more perfect to imitate Christ externally in particular cases. He did many things which were supremely perfect in the circumstances but which can by no means be taken as a general norm of greater perfection. Thus many things which He did out of consideration for human weakness, as, for example, possessing money, drinking wine, will not be always the more perfect thing for us to do.

Moreover, there are many internal acts of which Christ, because of His dignity and sanctity, could not leave us an example, e.g. contrition for our sins, humility by which we believe others better than and superior to us. (Cf. the invocation of "the penitent Heart of Jesus" condemned by the Holy Office.)

### VI. *Imitation Should Not Be Material and Literal*

10tt Therefore our imitation of Christ is not to be *material and literal* (as was sometimes the case in the Middle Ages). Rather we should imitate Christ by first considering His actions and then forming practical judgments about the value of things and the way to act in particular circumstances. We should imitate Him by acting according to these practical judgments in our own lives, and by cultivating the very same virtues as Christ did (like kindness, patience, humility, fortitude), remembering always, however, the differences in exercising these virtues that must exist because of the Hypostatic Union, His supreme sanctity and the role of Head—all exclusively proper to Christ.

It is clear that imitation of Christ cannot come from a mere superficial reading of the Gospels, but only from long meditation on them performed under the guidance of grace and the internal

operation of the Holy Ghost bringing to our minds those things which Christ did and taught. This is the reason for the importance of meditation on or contemplation of the mysteries and doctrine of the Gospels. It is true that the manner of making this meditation will vary with the various states of life or degrees of spiritual progress, but it must never be omitted altogether in order that the mind may be applied to "higher" things. Cf. the condemnations spoken of in paragraph 101 above.

*Additional Notes*

106 1. Imitation of Christ and conformity to the states of Christ.

St. Francis of Assisi (and after him the Franciscan school) proposes as an aim the imitation of Christ and conformity to Him: "To follow in the teaching and the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Let us hold therefore to the words, the life, and the teaching and the Holy Gospel (of Christ)" (*First Rule*, Ch. 1) ; "To observe the holy Gospel of Christ" (*Second Rule*, Ch. 1)? Likewise St. Ignatius urges us to follow the example of Christ as proposed to us in the Gospel. But on the other hand, Bérulle, Condren, Olier, St. John Eudes, and others of the so-called "French School" propose rather "conformity to the states of the Incarnate Word." Are these two points of view opposed? Wherein lies their real diversity?

There is no real opposition here, since all teach, each after his own fashion, that man must be conformed to Christ the Exemplar, Mediator, and Head; they all teach that conformity consists essentially in the internal dispositions of the soul, just as they all likewise hold that conformity must be manifested by external acts.

But it is true that Bérulle and his disciples pay less attention to the passing actions of Christ's earthly life as recorded in the Gospels than to the permanent interior dispositions from which these external acts proceeded as effects and manifestations, and which they call "His states." For, while His actions have passed, the dispositions that produced them will always remain in Christ. Therefore we can align ourselves with them, make them our own or, rather, co-operate with grace impressing these dispositions on our soul or imparting to us a greater participation in these dispositions of Christ.<sup>6</sup> In the "elevations" wherein they meditate on the states of Christ, the French School are more concerned with the deductions of speculative theology and with the dogmatic tract on the Word Incarnate than with the concrete accounts of the Gospel. The Franciscan School, and, following it, the Ignatian School, pay much more attention to the facts of the Gospel itself, to the very words of Christ as recorded in the text of Sacred Scripture. They meditate

on these words and acts, and contemplate them deeply and with affection in order that they may conform their lives as faithfully as possible to these examples of the human life of Christ. Illustrations of this point of view are to be found in the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (attributed to St. Bonaventure) and in the meditations of St. Ignatius on the mysteries of Christ in the *Exercises*.

But the difference between the two schools must not be overstressed. Even those who concentrate on the imitation of Christ's actions insist that such imitation must be primarily internal, and that it cannot be attained by our own efforts alone but only with the help of grace working in us. In like manner those who consider the states of Christ from a speculative point of view mainly, do not by any means wish to turn the soul away from meditation on the Gospel text; rather their "elevations of the soul" always have the Gospel as a starting point.

We should rather say that it is a question here of inclinations found in souls (varying penchants often account for the growth of the various schools of spirituality). One of the two schools is to a great extent speculative and passive, the other is practical and active. The two schools arise from the two ways in which we can know Christ's internal dispositions or states; that is, from theological deduction or from His words and deeds as related in the Gospels, the latter way being less abstract, more concrete and direct, and hence more suited to many minds. Each way is good in itself, provided that it avoids the dangers peculiar to it, and provided also, and especially, that its defenders take care not to brand the other way as idle and ineffective or as suitable only for beginners in the spiritual life, and as being incapable of leading to highest sanctity.

107 2. In somewhat similar fashion a distinction has been made between the sanctification of souls through the moral imitation of Christ and the contemplation of Christ in His mysteries. The latter way is said to have played a large part in the spiritual life of the first centuries of the Church. The former way, moral imitation of Christ, is said to have arrogated to itself in later times the primacy in the Christian life, thus minimizing the social character of that life and making it too individualistic. It is said that from this arose that *rnoralism* which in practice stresses solicitude for upright action and zeal for acquiring virtues more than the great realities or mysteries of supernatural sanctity, such as sanctifying grace, Divine adoption, man's being made like unto God, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

It is certain that the perfection of the Christian life is altogether different from the *rnoralism* of the ancient philosophers because everything in it is turned to God, relies on His help, and is directed

solely to increasing union with Him through sanctifying grace. It cannot be denied that Christian writers sometimes stressed classifications of the virtues to too great an extent in their teaching. And it is true that the motives for cultivating the virtues suggested by these ancient writers could have obscured the primacy of grace and the spiritual end, which, however, were by no means lost sight of. But on the other hand, one cannot deny that Christ Himself taught everywhere in His Gospel the precepts and counsels of the moral life, or that St. Paul, His faithful interpreter in the preaching of the "mystery," gave an important place to moral exhortations and never omitted them in his epistles. Nor should we forget that St. Thomas in II-IIae, q. 47, ad 162 treats at length of the moral virtues and borrows much from the ancient philosophers about the definitions and divisions of these virtues.

It would, therefore, be just as dangerous not to pay sufficient attention to acquiring perfection of the moral life, to our sanctification *ex opere operantis*, as to neglect to acquire the perfection which is to be obtained *ex opere operato* through the *mysteries* of the Mass and the Sacraments. For it is an essential characteristic of the whole Christian life that it unites these two, and we cannot admit that one of these aspects was ever so obscured in the Church that the spiritual teaching of any period strayed from the true path and lost its full efficacy for leading men to God. We can only go so far as to say that at various times, because of varying impulses of the Holy Ghost on the souls of the saints and of the whole Christian people, one or the other of these aspects was thrown into relief and was embraced more eagerly by the faithful. I do not see on what grounds primacy can be given to either of these methods of sanctification, that *ex opere operato* or that *ex opere operantis*, because there is no dispute as to the primacy of grace in man's sanctification. For whatever man does to attain moral perfection of life, or to increase sanctity *ex opere operantis*, he does only with the help of prevenient, essentially supernatural, grace; nor can we admit that the supernatural life of man on earth has a moral activity which evolves outside this supernatural life, by a kind of purely natural goodness.<sup>7</sup>

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1. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, I, 1; II, II; III, 13, 18-19, 56. C. Mannion, *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*.



2. Prat, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 34311.
3. Translator's note: *The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by E. Allison Peers, I, p. 60.
4. St. Vincent de Paul, *Oeuvres*, ed. Costes, XI, p. 53, pp. 347-348.
5. Cf. *The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi*, translated by Paschal Robinson.
6. P. Pourrat, *La Spiritualité Chrétienne*, III, Ch. 13, par. ii; cf. the English translation by W. H. Mitchell and S. P. Jacques, entitled *Christian Spirituality*.
7. Cf. Karl Adam, *Christ Our Brother*, Ch. 3.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Christian Perfection and the Carrying of the Cross

#### A. The Traditional Viewpoint

10K The ancient Christian writers commonly held that the highest perfection of the Christian life was to be found in martyrdom: thus Clement of Alexandria. Hence martyrdom was called "perfection," because "he who dies for the faith does a work of perfect charity."

Again, in the Middle Ages, St. Bonaventure says that "in general, the perfect is an act that is difficult and excellent"; and that "in general, an act is called imperfect when it is easy and when human frailty is inclined to do it." He goes on to say that evangelical perfection includes three things—"turning away from evil, pursuing the good, and patiently bearing with adversity"; and he concludes that "to desire death for Christ's sake, to expose oneself to death for His sake and to rejoice in one's death throes is an act of perfect charity."

Likewise *The Imitation of Christ* (I, 25) concludes the first book with these words: "The greater violence thou offerest to thyself, the greater progress thou wilt make." And St. Ignatius finishes the second week of his *Exercises* (n. 189) with the advice: "Let each one remember that he will make progress in all spiritual things only insofar as he rids himself of self-love, self-will and self-interest."

Similarly St. John Eudes<sup>1</sup> teaches that "martyrdom is the perfection and crown of Christian sanctity and Christian life." And Christ Himself taught "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15.13). Therefore must not the Christian life be esteemed more perfect, the more numerous and the more difficult are the things suffered for God? And is not death suffered out of love for God the very peak of perfection? It was so in Christ's life; His greatest act of love was His death on the Cross; and He taught quite plainly, "If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross" (Matt. 16.24).

We must distinguish carefully, however, between two problems: Are acts of the virtues more perfect, the more difficult they are? And: Since Christ redeemed us by the Cross, will one's life be more

perfect according as a greater part of it is given over to carrying the cross?2

## B. Is an Act More Perfect, the More Difficult It Is?

- 109 The problem as to whether an act is more perfect, the more difficult it is, has been discussed ever since the Middle Ages, when it was brought to the fore by the text of Aristotle: "Both art and virtue are always concerned with that which is more difficult." This text is explained by St. Thomas<sup>3</sup> and by St. Bonaventure. They distinguish between (1) the difficulty which arises from the arduous and exalted character of a task, which increases merit; (2) the difficulty that arises from the weakness or lack of virtue found in the agent, which lessens merit and perfection; and (3) the difficulty which arises from external circumstances, which can *per accidens* increase merit but which is more likely to be "the road to ruin and which therefore should be avoided." This third distinction is to be understood in the sense that it is ordinarily more difficult for a given person in given circumstances to act in a more than usually excellent and noble fashion. But it is altogether possible that, because of good habits, or the greater assistance of grace, one person may be able to do a more perfect act more easily than another person can do a less perfect act, the perfection and the merit of the more perfect act remaining undiminished by the facility with which it was done. This is so because the merit of an act comes both from the intrinsic goodness of the act in relation to the ultimate end, and from the intensity of the charity which informs the act.

But it can often happen that the very difficulty of the act will stir one to greater effort and greater motivating charity, and thus the same act can produce greater perfection and greater merit. Again, the very overcoming of the initial difficulty will often be a sign of the greater charity from which the act proceeds and hence also a sign of its greater merit.

But it by no means follows from all this that an act is *of itself* more perfect because it is more difficult.

## C. Does Not Perfection Consist in Carrying the Cross?

- 110 But since, as we have just seen, our exemplar is Christ, Whose whole life was a cross and a martyrdom (cf. *Imitation of Christ*, II, 12), an altogether different problem presents itself, namely, whether the life of a Christian must be deemed more perfect, the more it is conformed to that of the Crucified, and the more it is like that life which Christ freely embraced. Is not perfection to be

placed in the carrying of the Cross after Christ because He, in the actual supernatural order, chose to redeem and sanctify us by His Cross and sufferings?

From the example of Christ and the way chosen by God to effect our salvation and sanctification it is abundantly clear that no Christian life can, be perfect if the cross and pain borne for love of Christ are banished from it. It is also clear that, generally speaking, one ascends to greater perfection only by undergoing the greater trials that purify the soul more and unite it more closely to the sufferings of Christ.

However, we cannot bluntly assert that the life of a Christian is more perfect simply because he bears more adversity and more hardship for Christ's sake. Lesser sorrows borne with greater charity can make a person's life relatively more perfect. Therefore we must not consider anyone's life less perfect merely because his trials and sorrows seem relatively light. Nevertheless we may doubt that a soul possesses real sanctity if it seems to have in it no part, or almost none, of the Cross of Christ. And on the other hand we conclude that a soul must possess real sanctity if it bears many really difficult tilings with patience and joy, especially if faithful fulfillment of the duties of state accompanies this patience. Only the dominion of intense charity could effect such a state of soul, such conformity to Christ crucified, the Exemplar of all sanctity.

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1. St. John Eudes, *The Reign of Christ*, translated by R. M. Harding.
2. Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Love of God and the Cross of Christ*, especially 11, parts 1 and 2.
3. Cf. *S.T.*, IIallae, q. 27, a. 8, ad. 3.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Perfection and Conformity to the Will of God

111 Full conformity to God's Will is often proposed as the most direct way to perfection of the spiritual life, that is to say, one's life is more perfect, the more it is lived according to God's Will.<sup>1</sup>

We must therefore ascertain in what sense it is true to say that a person's life is more perfect, the more it is conformed to the Divine Will.<sup>2</sup>

#### A. The Will of Good Pleasure and the Signified Will

112 Since the time of Peter the Lombard the Divine Will has been viewed under two aspects, the *Will of Good Pleasure* and the *Signified Will*. St. Thomas expounds this distinction in I, q. 19, a. 11-12 thus: "The will, properly so called, is termed the will of good pleasure; and metaphorically speaking, it is called the signified will, since a sign of the will is called simply the will."

Five signs of the Divine Will are usually enumerated, in accordance with the teaching of Peter the Lombard: prohibition, command, counsel, operation, and permission.

By His Will of Good Pleasure God wills absolutely that those things be done which actually are done, and nothing can be done that would be contrary to this absolute will of God the Omnipotent. Sin is *permitted* by this Will insofar as God positively wills the present order of Providence which is intended positively on account of the good contained in it. At the same time God permits moral evil in this present order on account of the good which will come from it.

By His Signified Will God wills absolutely those things which are indications to us of what He desires and which show that an act is pleasing to Him, or is either permitted by Him or willed absolutely. Thus in Sacred Scripture He inspires the commandment against lying. He wills absolutely by His Signified Will the prohibition against lying and its revelation to man, and therefore this prohibition and revelation must be fulfilled. By His prohibition

God *signifies* that He obliges men morally not to lie, but it does not thereby follow that He wills absolutely that no lie shall ever be told. On the contrary, the very fact that lies are told is an indication of that other kind of Divine Will, namely, the will to *permit* men to lie through their own fault. Therefore whatever is the object of God's *operation* and *permission* is willed both by the Signified Will and the Will of Good Pleasure. On the other hand, whatever is the object of a *command*\* a *counsel*, or a *prohibition* is willed by the Signified Will but not necessarily by the Will of Good Pleasure also. Of. St. Thomas, I, q. 19, a. 12.

More recent authors like St. Francis de Sales<sup>3</sup> (and following him, Tissot and Tanqueray,<sup>4</sup> for example), restrict the Signified Will to the Will of God showing us what we ought to do (precepts, counsels), and they teach that the Will of Good Pleasure is God's Absolute Will as manifested by events which are either *positively intended* by Providence or only *permitted* by it. Therefore according to these authors the Divine *operation* and *permission* pertain to the Will of Good Pleasure, whilst *precept*, *counsel*, and *prohibition* constitute the Signified Will.

## B. Active and Passive Conformity

H3 Therefore the conformity of our will with the Divine Will can be understood in an *active* or a *passive* sense.

Passive conformity is accepting those things which God absolutely wills to be, namely, those things willed by His Will of Good Pleasure. Active conformity is zeal for acting in all things according to what God commands, counsels, or indicates to us in any way as being what He desires us to do.

Passive conformity is a necessary condition for a perfect life inasmuch as he who does not so submit to the decrees of Divine Providence cannot love God perfectly and truly. And this conformity will be greater, more filial and full of love, the more perfect is the soul's charity. But not vice versa; it will not always be true that charity will be greater in a soul, the more it submits itself to the decrees of Providence. For it can happen that a soul because of its passive disposition can easily enough suffer and accept all things out of true love of God: but if it neglects to *do* the things that God certainly wills it to do, its passive conformity to God's will does not automatically render its love perfect.

Active conformity, on the other hand, can be regarded as a true *measure* of spiritual perfection because it necessarily presupposes passive conformity, since God, by the very fact of His absolutely willing something, desires us to accept that thing as His Will.

Moreover, because of the very purpose for which we are created, it is certain that our actions are more pleasing to God, the more they are directed towards Him as their ultimate end. Therefore if we take pains to do the things which are revealed, in one way or another, as being more pleasing to God, we are following a line of action which enables us to fulfill better our ultimate purpose in life, and thus to lead more perfect lives. Finally, perfection is to be judged, as we have said, on the basis of the fuller dominion of charity over our lives: and we shall live more fully according to charity the more we choose, in all circumstances, that which is pleasing to God, whom we love with a supreme love.

### C. God's Positive Will and His Permissive Will

- 114 When it is a question of passive conformity with the Will of Good Pleasure we must distinguish between conformity to God's *positive* will and His *permissive* will.

Whatever God wills *positively* we too must will positively with Him, even before the event; for example, we must will our death to occur at the time decreed by God. God wills nothing positively that is not morally good in itself.

Therefore *physical* evils (death, sickness, earthquakes) are willed *positively* by God, since there is nothing morally evil in them and they are used by Providence for man's higher good, namely, his moral and supernatural good. Therefore in such things we can conform our will simply, even before the event, to God's will, which positively decrees them.

But where God only permits something, like sin, or man's resistance to the inspirations of grace, or even someone's damnation, there is always some created free-will to be found among the events leading up to the fact, a will that is out of harmony to a greater or lesser degree with the order intended by God. If this unruly will is not mine but another's, then I can simply adhere with my will to the Will of God permitting this disorder. For example, I can be conformed to the Will of God permitting the obstinacy of a sinner.

But when it is a question of my own sins or infidelity to grace I cannot, before the event, consent to the Divine Will's permitting the sin which I shall commit in the future. This is so because God's permissive will necessarily foresees that my future act will be contrary to His law. But I am still free to consent to or reject my future bad act. Therefore if I consent *now* to His permitting me to sin in the future, I am consenting beforehand to my future sin, I am positively willing sin. Hence I may consent to God's permitting the future sin of another because in that case the sinful will is other

than, and independent of, my will. But I may not consent to His permitting another's sin if the other's will depends on me and if I therefore can prevent his sin. As a consequence, if I am to consent beforehand to God's will permitting sin, a third will must intervene, a will that is *independent of mine*.

But after the event, when I have committed sin, I can then consent to the will of God which permitted my sin, precisely because the sin no longer depends on my present will and because I cannot change the fact that I have sinned.

Therefore I can reject with loathing my past act of will by which I sinned, and I can at the same time consent to the Divine will which permitted my sin, because my sin, like the sin of another, is no longer within my power of choice, it no longer depends on me.

Hence we can see why I may not consent to what I imagine is a Divine decision to permit my damnation: for this permitted damnation would necessarily presuppose mortal sin and final impenitence on my part. Therefore, to assent to this permissive divine "decree" would be the same as to assent to my future sin. The fact that God wills something by His permissive will does not mean that He wants me also to will or permit that same thing. Rather, He expressly commands me by the precept of hope never to assent to my hypothetical damnation. Therefore the Church condemned those who taught more or less explicitly that it is lawful, at least sometimes in the final trials of the mystical life, to be willing to sacrifice one's own supernatural welfare and one's own beatitude. Thus Innocent XII condemned Fénelon's propositions 6-12. Cf., as against these errors, the *Articles of Issy*,<sup>5</sup> or the formula of resignation used by St. Francis de Sales in his temptation against hope, so often described.<sup>6</sup>

#### D. God Does Not Will Absolutely that All Christians Be Equally Holy

- 115 A difficulty can arise from the fact that God certainly does not will absolutely that all Christians be equally holy, as is apparent from the actual inequality of sanctity and perfection that exists among men. Moreover, it does not seem that He desires all to reach equal perfection, since He does not give to everyone those very special helps of grace without which great sanctity cannot exist. Will it not, therefore, be most perfect for each one to tend only to that degree of perfection which God's Providence has decreed for him and which It has pointed out to him by the very graces It gave and continues to give each person? This seems to be the conviction of spiritual teachers when they exhort us not to seek perfection in a greater degree or more quickly than God indicates to us by His



graces: the soul and its spiritual director ought to *follow* grace and not wish to outrun it.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, absolutely speaking, it can happen that a soul, out of greater conformity with God's will, may remain in a lower degree of perfection.

The first and simplest answer to this difficulty is as follows: since a soul can do nothing towards perfection by itself, it follows that a degree of perfection higher than that for which God gives grace is simply impossible for it. Therefore, by conforming itself to this Divine will, it can renounce a higher degree that is *conceivable* but not really *possible* for it. Hence, by conformity to the Divine Will, the soul never renounces a higher degree of perfection possible to it.

116 But on examining the matter more closely we can add to our first answer. True conformity consists in willing what God wills or desires me to will, and, by inviting all to the highest perfection ("Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. . . ." Matt. 5.48), Christ points out that God wishes all to have the desire for highest perfection. Therefore we shall be conformed to the Divine Will if we exclude no degree of perfection from our desires and if we tend to all perfection, to the highest charity. But when, *post factum*, it is evident that a certain degree of perfection has not been willed for us by the Absolute Will of Good Pleasure, then our conformity will consist in accepting with love this free decree of God, whether it is a positive decree to give us just so much grace and no more to precede and assist our endeavors, or whether it is a permissive decree to allow our will not to give greater co-operation to the graces received.

Finally, we must note that God not rarely inspires souls with sincere desires (e.g., for the religious or priestly state, for martyrdom) and yet at the same time decrees by His Absolute-Will or Will of Good Pleasure (by a positive or permissive decree) that these desires shall never be brought to fruition. But such souls, in cherishing these desires, are fully conformed to the Divine Will, because God, although He does not will the work itself, yet wills *the desire for the work* as good and meritorious *in itself* and very useful for the progress of the soul which is assisted by this desire to lead a more fervent interior life.

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1. Benedict of Canfield, *The Rule of Perfection* (1610). A. Rodriguez, *The Practice of Christian Perfection*, translated by J. Rickaby, I, Ch. 8. J. Tissot, *The Interior Life*, translated by W. H. Mitchell.
2. St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, VIII and IX. St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Conformity to the Will of God*. J. P. de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. V. Ixhodey, *Holy Abandonment*. Tanqueray, *op. cit.*, n. 478-498. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Providence*.
3. St. Francis de Sales, *op. cit.*, VIII, Ch. 3, and IX, Ch. 1; cf. *Spiritual Conferences*, Ch. 15.
4. Tissot, *op. cit.*, Part II, Ch. 1. Tanqueray, *op. cit.*, n. 479.
5. Translator's note: *The Articles of Issy* (1695) were the findings of a commission set up to examine Madame Guyon's works. The commission was composed of Bossuet, de Noailles, and Tronson. Their findings (thirty-four articles in all) briefly set forth the Catholic teaching on spirituality and the interior life and condemned Madame Guyon's theories. The articles were signed by the commission and by Fénelon and the Bishop of Chartres.
6. *Oeuvres*, XXII, eel. Annecy, 1928, p. 19.
7. Thus St. Francis de Sales in F. Vincent's *S. François de Sales, Directeur* (1923), Ch. 8, pp. 44111.; or the Ven. F. Libermann in Tanqueray, *op. cit.*, n. 548.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Desire for Perfection

117 Lastly, we must solve the problem of the *desire for perfection*, since very many spiritual teachers insist strongly on the necessity of fostering a fervent desire for one's own perfection. On the other hand, however, quite as many authors persistently point out that there is a danger of the desire for one's perfection being too self-interested, egoistic and anthropocentric, and that, consequently, there is danger that such a desire may impair the purity of one's love for God and the true perfection of the supernatural life. Therefore we must ascertain how to reconcile an ardent desire for perfection with pure love for God and full conformity to His Will.

#### A. We May Not Be Indifferent to Our Own Perfection

118 We have just proved in paragraph 114 that we may not lawfully be indifferent to our eternal salvation.

The problem of indifference to our own perfection is similar to that of indifference to our salvation. My life can be less perfect than it should be without my necessarily having offended God, at least grievously. But this indifference is not good from another point of view because my greater perfection in this life has, as a necessary consequence, the greater glory which it could give to God in eternity, and it can never be good that I should be indifferent as to whether God gets more or less glory. Nor can I say: "I do not know how to procure this greater glory of God, whether it is to be obtained by my greater perfection or by some other means." It can never happen that less sanctity, less *true* perfection on my part, can be a necessary condition for God's being glorified more in some other way. It is true that the greater glory of God can often require me to omit the use of some *means* that is very good in itself for acquiring perfection, but never that I should cease from the pursuit of perfection. And it would seem to be against the goodness and wisdom of God if, having omitted the use of such a means, I should not be assisted by other graces to attain finally, though perhaps with more difficulty, to the degree

of perfection I should have had if I had actually used the means I sacrificed for His sake.

On the other hand, indifference to riches or poverty, to honors or contempt, to health or sickness, is good precisely because each of these can be, in certain circumstances, the means of promoting the greater glory of God.

119 This seems to be the reason why some of Fénelon's propositions were condemned: they were too general, that is to say, they taught that our desire for greater perfection or virtue could not be free of all imperfection unless we were motivated solely by the wish to conform ourselves to God's will for us to have such perfection.

Our doctrine is the same as that of St. Thomas, who holds that a person does not sin by omitting works of charity to which he is not bound by his state in life or by circumstances, but that he would sin if he contemned further progress or resolved against it. The saintly Doctor states the principle: "In the matter of the end itself there cannot be any question of just so much and no more; that is possible only as regards the means to the end" (IIallae, q. 184, a. 3). Therefore, since greater spiritual perfection and consequently greater sanctity is, absolutely speaking, the goal of our earthly life, it follows that "there cannot be any question of just so much and no more" in striving for this perfection. In other words, it will never be better if we tend less efficaciously to our end, and therefore it will never be better if we are indifferent to acquiring greater perfection; that would be to be indifferent to obtaining the fuller achievement of the end set out for us by God Himself.

## B. Pure Love of God and the Desire for Perfection

120 We can now see how the desire for perfection is to be reconciled with pure love.

I can desire the Beatific Vision of God either precisely as being *my beatitude* or the state in which I shall be fully happy, or as being a union with God, my highest good, or inasmuch as the Beatific Vision contributes to the glorification of God Himself. It is certain that the first kind of desire is legitimate, but it does not seem to be an act that is *theological in itself*, since its formal motive is the natural desire of a rational being to attain his own proper end. The third is undoubtedly an act of charity, of pure love of benevolence towards God. Authors are not agreed about the second, whether it is part of hope or of charity (of which it would be a secondary act like the act by which I love my neighbor for God's sake).

The same holds good for perfection: I can desire it *either* as Be-

ing precisely *my* perfection by which I become morally more perfect in the supernatural order in accordance with my elevated nature, *or* inasmuch as by this greater perfection I am more closely united to God, the Ultimate End, in this life, and more fully and definitively in the future world; *or* finally, inasmuch as my greater perfection glorifies God more or inasmuch as He wlls me to desire it for His glory.

It is obvious that this last way of desiring one's own perfection does not differ in motive from the act of pure love of benevolence towards God, and that therefore it is an act of the highest charity and cannot in any way lessen the perfection of charity. The only question that remains to be asked is whether or not it is better not to think of oneself, so that the mind may be fixed solely on God. We shall answer that question in due course.

121 It is certain that the act by which I seek union with God, although it may be an act of the virtue of charity, is less perfect than an act of love of pure benevolence. Therefore, speaking in the abstract, any human life in which all voluntary acts are elicited or at least commanded by the love of pure benevolence, is certainly more perfect than a life in which many acts are elicited or commanded by concupiscible love of God alone or, *a fortiori*, by the desire for one's own perfection as such.

That is true in the *abstract*. But we know that in the concrete it is impossible, in the present condition of life, for a man to avoid *all venial sins*. Therefore, much more will it be impossible for him without a very special privilege to elicit all his human acts from the most perfect possible motive, namely, from love of pure benevolence for God.

However, in Heaven when we receive the light of the Beatific Vision and when we are freed from all the infirmities of this life, we shall be able to love God both with the highest love of pure benevolence and also as being infinitely good to us and others, and we shall be able to rejoice in our own happiness and that of others. Then the powers of mind and will in the Blessed w'll be such that they can will all these things at once, each in its place, by actually willing and referring them to the ultimate end of all things, the glory of God desired because of purest love of God.

But while we are on earth this cannot be so. We are compelled to give our minds to these objects more or less successively, one after the other. Nor will a motive that is more perfect in itself be always more efficacious to move our wills, since it often happens that we grasp only imperfectly such a more perfect motive. And since a motive is efficacious only insofar as it is grasped by the intellect, it follows that it is impossible for a living person to perform

only perfect acts of pure benevolence and no others; and from this follows also the condemnation of the doctrine of "a state of pure love" (Fénelon's proposition no. I).

It is true that the more a person progresses in sanctity, the greater will become the dominion of charity over his whole life and the more will he approach the state of the Blessed, since more and more of his acts will be informed by an ever purer and more perfect charity. But, as we have just said, a person cannot avoid all venial sins. Therefore, even though he reaches the highest sanctity, he will never be able to exercise only the act of pure benevolence, and much less will he be able constantly to unite this highest of acts with the others subordinate to it, namely, the act of desiring union with God and the possession of his own ultimate end.

Thus it comes about that in the present life, even in the case of the most perfect souls, there must be a succession of acts, some very perfect, some less so, and some which are even venially sinful because of human frailty, and which are not in any way referable to the ultimate end.

But the desire for one's own perfection is good, although less perfect than pure love of benevolence for God, and such a desire is useful, even necessary, in order that the soul may tend efficaciously towards perfect charity. Therefore it should be cultivated, although it will not always be motivated explicitly by pure charity.

The necessity or usefulness of the desire for perfection must be judged from concrete circumstances, and the state of the soul, according to practical considerations.

### C. The Practical Importance of Cultivating the Desire for Perfection

122 We must therefore consider the *practical importance of cultivating the desire for perfection*, or, in other words, the practical motives for fostering such a desire as they are developed at length by approved authors.

In the beginning of the spiritual life especially, and even afterwards (cf. St. Teresa, *Life*, Ch. 15, n. 12), motives which are more perfect in themselves, such as the pure love of benevolence for God, do not always have greater power to move the soul. Hence the necessity of having recourse to other motives which do not exclude the love of benevolence but rather help it greatly—as, for example, the desire for one's own perfection and union with God.

This is confirmed by the practice of the Church in her liturgy. Very frequently she expresses such desires for sanctity and the things of eternity in her prayers; for example, in the Litany of the

Saints she asks "That Thou mayest Taise up our souls to Heavenly desires"; or, "Give us an increase of faith, hope and charity" (13th Sunday after Pentecost); "Grant to us. . . by Thy grace. . . that we may be duly intent on doing good works" (16th Sunday after Pentecost), etc. And who would dare say that the life of a Christian is less perfect because he follows the mind of the Church as expressed in her Liturgy?

Experience shows that God stirs up vehement desires for perfection in those whom He wishes to prepare for and lead to higher things. In actual practice, these desires are necessary if chosen souls are to overcome readily the difficulties they experience on their way to greater perfection.

Psychology, too, teaches that strong desires are a real interior power which greatly helps the operation of grace in the soul; whereas, on the contrary, if a person resigns himself unduly or prematurely to lack of progress in God's service, he will impede the necessary co-operation of the soul with the work of grace.

#### D. Dangers to Be Avoided

123 There are several *dangers* to be avoided in fostering the desire for perfection.

1. In the first place, the danger of self-love, egoism, vain delight in one's own perfection.

2. Too much introspection, accompanied by exaggerated and uneasy solicitude: loss of interior peace, of true resignation and conformity to God's wishes.

3. Timidity arising from a *negative* manner of desiring perfection; one's whole attention is given to avoiding sins and imperfections and less care is taken to cultivate the essential virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

4. A kind of *naturalism*, because more attention is paid to the moral virtues than to the theological, or because one relies on human activity rather than on the grace of God, hoped for and petitioned.

#### E. Safeguards against these Dangers

124 The principal safeguards against these dangers are:

1. In fostering the desire for perfection, to make use of supernatural motives, wholly supernatural motives; that is to say, one should bear in mind and meditate on *all* the truths of the spiritual life, and the whole economy of our sanctification.

2. One should distinguish carefully between the wholly laud-

able desire for spiritual *perfection* and the ordinarily vain wish to know *one's progress in this perfection*. It is true that many saints advise, for example, that in making the particular examen on some defect to be corrected or some virtue to be acquired, we should pay attention to and note faults that have crept in, or actions that we have done. Thus we can know, by comparing one day with another, whether or not we have progressed in the particular matter. This is good and useful so long as it is done from a spiritual motive and without anxiety, because we can thus recognize progress in any particular point, especially where it is a question of correcting external faults.

But it is altogether another matter when there is question of recognizing the progress of the soul in perfection itself *taken as a whole*, and especially when perfection is considered in its essential element, namely, charity. For we see that very holy souls, although they recognize fully the graces given them by God, think very little of themselves and are not conscious of having made great progress in perfection, but rather chide themselves for being remiss. And the more such souls advance, the more does God by His grace show them higher peaks of sanctity still to be scaled. This keeps them humble; in fact, the more they progress, the more humble they become.

Therefore, to desire to know the degree of one's sanctity and perfection would be to go against the wisdom of God's Providence and, at the same time, would leave the soul open to all kinds of preoccupation. Hence we should not only foster an ardent desire for ever greater progress in sanctification, but also a full resignation to the Divine Will as regards our ignorance of the outcome of our endeavors, at least in the matter of perfection taken as a whole.

- 125 Perhaps some will object by quoting that solemn dictum of the spiritual life, "He who does not advance, falls back." Consult, for example, Rodriguez<sup>2</sup> commenting on this saying which he derives, as do many others, from the *Epistula ad Demetriadem*, being under the impression that St. Augustine was the author of that Epistle, whilst in reality (as is now well known) Pelagius was the author. But it was also the maxim of many other writers, e.g. Cassian,<sup>3</sup> and St. Bernard, who says: "In the present order. . . nothing remains in the same state; not to advance is without doubt to fall back"; from which one might conclude: "Unless I see that I am progressing, I must fear that I may be falling back and so I cannot have any peace."

In reality the proper meaning of the maxim is that found in St. Gregory the Great: "Unless one strives for the heights, one falls



to the depths," and in St. Bernard: "If to be zealous for perfection is to be perfect, then obviously if one does not wish to make progress, one falls back"—that is to say, one who does not make any effort to progress will certainly fall back. But it does not follow that a person cannot in practice come to a halt in the spiritual life, at least as regards the perfection of that life. He will always acquire some merit by good works done in the state of grace and by the worthy reception of the sacraments. Nevertheless, his life may not become more perfect, because periods of fervor (e.g., after the annual retreat) may be succeeded by periods of negligence, so that the progress in perfection made in the first period may be lost in the second. Hence he may remain in more or less the same degree of perfection for many years. This seems to be the case with many souls who are not really tepid but who are caught in the net of mediocrity because they lack precisely the true, continuous and efficacious desire for greater perfection.

## REFERENCES

1. St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, XII, Chs. 2, 3. Rodriguez, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Tract 1 on the desire for perfection; cf. Tract 8, on conformity to the Divine Will. Tanqueray, *»p. cit.*, n. 409-431.
2. *Op. cit.*, Bk. I, Tract 1, Ch. 6.
3. *Conferences*, VI, Ch. 14.

## ***Part Three***

THE INSPIRATIONS AND GIFTS OF THE HOLY  
GHOST AND THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

126 It is Catholic doctrine that the beginnings of faith and justification in man are the product of the prevenient grace of God. The Church also teaches that no one can persevere in justice without the help of grace, supporting his intellect and will and healing him of the scars left by sin. Thirdly, it is certain that the beginning of all progress in Christian perfection comes from God's stirring the soul, and that there can be no increase in perfection unless God enlightens and strengthens the soul. The Divine impulses and enlightenments are usually called "the inspirations of the Holy Ghost," insofar as they are appropriated (as is all the work of our sanctification) to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity.

This is the basis for the unanimous teaching of spiritual authors that fidelity in following the inspirations of the Holy Ghost is the first and essential condition for any progress in perfection, and that real perfection and sanctity cannot exist without habitual docility to the leading of the Holy Ghost, who directs the soul by these inspirations. Therefore, as we have remarked in paragraph 8 above, any degree of the spiritual life can be called mystical in a wide sense.

Since there is a close connection between the inspirations and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, and since we experience many internal impulses which come not only from God and His angels but also from natural causes and from the devil, we must here inquire into (1) the inspirations themselves; (2) the Gifts and their function in the spiritual life; and (3) the "discernment of spirits," as it is commonly called.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **The Inspirations and Leading of the Holy Ghost**

#### A. The Inspirations of the Holy Ghost

- 27 The inspirations, or the impulses, enlightenments, and stirrings of the Holy Ghost are nothing other than actual graces, inasmuch as they strengthen our spiritual forces or heal our spiritual wounds. For theologians hold that the function of actual grace is twofold—first, to elevate man's acts to the supernatural order so that they may become *salutary* and *meritorious*; second, to heal the wounds left by sin, to strengthen the weakness of the human will and enlighten the ignorance of the human mind, to the end that man may succeed in resisting temptations and concupiscence, do supernaturally good acts, and persevere in justice.

All do not explain alike the relationship between these two functions of actual grace; nor do they agree as to how the transient aids to the spiritual life (actual graces) stand in relation to the permanent aids (sanctifying grace and the habits of the infused virtues).

But all agree that there are passing aids, or actual graces, by which man's power to do good is increased. These aids, as has been said, are called "inspirations of the Holy Ghost" because of the general appropriation to the Holy Ghost of the whole work of our sanctification. (Cf. St. Francis de Sales' definition in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, II, 18.)

- 128 Inspirations should be distinguished, first of all, from revelations, internal locutions, and other extraordinary phenomena by which man receives knowledge from God or the angels. In such extraordinary cases the knowledge of something is imparted through a formal locution, that is, through another's communication of his own ideas. This communication may be perceptible (to the internal senses only, or to the external senses), or it may be purely intellectual. By its very nature, a revelation gives new knowledge to the soul, though it may happen that the things so revealed are already known to the soul from another source, but that is only *per accidens*.

But in the case of the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, with which we are dealing here, grace does not, of itself, introduce into the mind any new thought or idea. Rather it improves and makes more vivid and profound the soul's knowledge of things already known and retained in memory or culled from good books, for example. Or grace may make the will more vehemently attracted by the things already known.

This Divine operation must necessarily precede the free determination of the will, since the precise object of the operation is to allow the determination of free-will to be duly and better performed. So if all *freely* elicited acts of will are to be called *deliberate* acts, then the inspirations of the Holy Ghost must consist of *indeliberate* acts of will which precede and prepare for the *deliberate* acts, which alone are free and meritorious. But some authors say that acts of will are deliberate only when they are elicited by a previous formal deliberation of reason, and that they are indeliberate when the will immediately adheres by a kind of direct instinct to the good proposed to it without formal deliberation. On this theory even indeliberate movements of will can be meritorious, and the inspirations of the Holy Ghost will be precisely this instinct which He arouses by His action and which the soul follows.

The Divine aid can consist in *enlightenment of the mind or stirring of the will*. Under the Divine influence the intellect may perceive supernatural truth better than it would without the Divine help. Or the will, under God's Hand, may be more attracted to the good presented to it by the intellect than it would be if it were influenced only by knowledge of the good. Or it may happen that the influence of grace is brought to bear on both intellect and will at the same time. Some have taught that a grace that works on the will alone is logically inconceivable. But we by no means hold that the will is moved without the intellect's having previous knowledge of the good towards which the will is moved. That would truly be impossible and against the very nature of the will. We do say, however, that the will is moved towards the good more vehemently by grace than it would be by the actual degree of knowledge of the good then possessed by the intellect.

Much less is it impossible for grace to act directly on the intellect alone, thus helping the will only indirectly, that is, by increasing the light of intellect so that the good intended is more fully grasped. But it seems more true to say that God ordinarily influences by His grace both faculties at the same time.

129 Be all that as it may, it is of greater importance for us to realize here that the soul, while receiving enlightenment and impulses, may be conscious to a certain extent that it is being en-

lightened or moved by God; or, on the contrary, it may have absolutely no consciousness of God's working in it, and the acts elicited under the influence of grace may appear to it quite like the acts elicited by the sole powers of nature.

As an example, suppose that three youths hear a sermon on priestly vocation. All three are good-living and listen attentively. The effect on the first is to give him the highest esteem for the priestly life and a great respect and reverence for priests, but it does not touch him personally, nor does he reflect to see if he himself is called to the priesthood. The second, however, sees that all that the preacher says is quite true, and concludes: "The priestly life is a beautiful one and most pleasing to God. Now, I wish to do whatever is most pleasing to God, there is no obstacle in my way, and my spiritual director believes that I am suitable for the priesthood. Therefore I should please God if I offered myself to the Bishop as a candidate for the clergy." And reasoning thus he does go to the Bishop. The third youth is deeply moved by the preacher's words. He is attracted to the priestly life and the service of God, but he fears the sacrifices and the difficulties of that life and service. Conflicting emotions surge through him, but the problem proposed can no longer be side-tracked, and in the end the urgings to become a priest have the victory. It seems that the first youth did not have the grace of a vocation. Christ said, "All men take not this word but they to whom it is given" (Matt. 19.11). To the second it was given to "take this word," and herein lay the grace which illumined his mind, but of which he was in no way aware; he was, of course, conscious that he reasoned and reached a solution in keeping with the teaching of the Faith. The third was conscious of receiving light, of being moved and attracted by a special action which, after speaking with his director, he came gradually to recognize as divine. He therefore acted in accord with the attraction and enlightenment.

It is true that, theoretically speaking, the intervention of an additional influence exercised by grace could be discernible. For instance, a psychologist can be perfectly familiar with all the factors that produce the psychological states of a particular soul, and he may know the external circumstances which influence that soul at a particular moment. Therefore, in theory at least, he should be able to discern the additional force which moves the soul, i.e. the attraction of God's goodness, because it is something new, something more than should result from the merely psychological causes. This new element should, of course, be ascribed to the special influence exercised by grace on the soul.

But this is in theory only, because it is altogether beyond the

power of the human mind even to know, much less to measure exactly, all the causes which influence a particular soul. Therefore, for the most part, the special action of God on our soul escapes our consciousness altogether. However, because of the manner of this action, we shall sometimes be more or less conscious of a special Divine influence, and we may even be able to conclude with greater or less probability or even with certitude that the action received is Divine.

- 130 We cannot say, however, that the greater and more powerful is the strengthening influence of grace, then the more conscious we are of it. We can find souls who are in complete aridity or even in the depths of desolation and who still strive heroically to fulfill all that they believe to be the will of God. They feel no Divine action on their souls; rather it seems to them that God has deserted them. But is it not evident that their fidelity could not last unless God's grace strengthened them? Therefore variations in perceptibility should be attributed not to the greater power of the Divine action but rather to the way that Divine action is brought to bear on the soul. Sometimes, in accord with the counsels of His Wise Providence, **God** hides His action more, and sometimes He reveals it more, changing the ordinary course of the soul's psychological life more perceptibly. But He always hides His action in some degree, as Leo XIII observes when speaking of these inspirations in his Encyclical on the Holy Ghost. He says that among the functions of the indwelling Spirit "are those secret admonitions and attractions which are repeatedly aroused in the soul by the urging of the Holy Ghost. . . . And, since these interior beckonings and inspirations are done quite secretly, they are sometimes compared in Sacred Scripture to the stirring of a gentle wind. The Angelic Doctor (III, q. 8, a. 1, ad 3) aptly compares them to the movements of the heart whose whole power is hidden deep in the living organism."

- 131 Not only do *all the just* receive such "admonitions and attractions" but also *sinner*s and even unbelievers, for without them, says Leo XIII (*Joe. cit.j*, "there can be no beginning on the way of life, no progress towards, and no arrival at, eternal salvation." For sinners and unbelievers are moved by these interior urgings to the beginnings of faith and to penance, and the just man always receives sufficient strength to resist any temptation.

Therefore the inspirations of the Holy Ghost will always play a most important part in all grades of the spiritual life. For the more a soul progresses, the more frequent and more powerful must the inspirations become because of the ever-growing disproportion between increasingly perfect works and human powers, until finally the soul is habitually led by the Holy Ghost.

## B. Docility to the Inspirations of the Holy Ghost

### I. *The Necessity of This Docility*

132 Masters of the spiritual life have always taught that perfect following of the inspirations of the Holy Ghost is of the utmost importance. This is so because in pursuing perfection, as in every work of salvation, the initiative comes from God and not from man, and therefore the work of our sanctification must have its beginning from these inspirations. This is all the more true since man's own thoughts in this matter are always *timid*, and since only God can inspire us with truly magnanimous resolves; cf. the prayer of "Solomon" for obtaining Wisdom (Wisd. 9.13-18). Finally, we are always safe in following what God suggests to us, because then we are acting according to His will and we are assured that He will give us all the graces necessary to perform the work He inspires.

### II. *What Perfect Docility Means*

133 We can now see wherein lies perfect docility to inspiration.

When inspirations are given to us in the form of enlightenment or urging, and when we are more or less *conscious* of them as such, we must judge, according to the rules for the discernment of spirits which we shall presently give, whether or not they are Divine (immediately so, or only indirectly through some created cause): and if they appear to be Divine, we should follow them faithfully. But we must be careful, as St. Ignatius says (*Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits," II, 8, n. 336), to distinguish sedulously "the actual time of the inspiration from the period following, in which the soul remains fervent and still feels the after-effects of the foregoing consolation. We must do so because in this second period the soul often makes various resolves and proposals which are based on its previous habits and which are the result of its own ideas and judgments. . . ." But when inspirations are given and we are in no way conscious of being influenced, then our docility will consist *first* in being very careful to do all things in conformity to the light of faith; *second*, in treasuring the good thoughts which arise in our minds; *third*, in taking care to be habitually recollected, lest we should neglect these thoughts or even pay no attention whatever to them; and *fourth*, in sedulously using, for the better service of God, all those helps which enlighten or move us from without, such as good example, exhortations, holy reading, or any other external stimuli that can be the vehicles of interior grace. Therefore docility is nothing less than perfect *fidelity* in following all the indications



of the Divine Will, no matter what they are, or in other words, docility is the active conformity to God's Will of which we spoke in paragraph 113 above.

### III. *Peace and Conformity to God's Will*

- 134 If docility is to attain its greatest efficacy it must always be accompanied by real interior *peace* and humble *conformity* to the Divine Will. If a person practises fidelity to inspiration with anxious solicitude, and with very frequent or even practically continuous introspection, it is an indication either that self-love (more or less conscious) is mixed with his motives, or that he has a nervous and restless temperament and strives indiscreetly and too hastily for the desired goal of perfect fidelity. The remedy for such an attitude is to strive always for fidelity in the work in hand, at every moment when we have to act. And if the soul sees that it has not been perfectly faithful, it should not be worried or think about its lack of fidelity except to make a very brief act of contrition to God for the minor defection. Spiritual teachers insist that we should "Live always in the present moment" and "Do what -we are doing."

Another condition for docility is great *trust* in God's assistance and the magnanimity consequent upon that trust.

It usually happens that the more faithfully a person follows the inspirations he receives, the more does he experience new inspirations which ask increasingly more of him. As a result of fidelity, too, the soul becomes more sensitive and alive to urgings and inspirations which formerly it would not have noticed; and God usually responds to fidelity by giving more and higher graces, and by advancing the soul to higher things. But it usually happens, too, that the soul experiences temptations to fear and timidity when it feels the growing action of grace. It asks, "Where does this way lead? How shall I be able to bear up under these increasing demands? How can I fulfill them?" If at this point the soul relies on itself and not on God alone, or if false discretion urges it to remain mediocre, it loses courage and cannot go forward on the road of fidelity. This seems to be one of the principal reasons why only a few reap the full fruits of docility.

## C. The Habitual Leading of the Holy Ghost

### I. *Errors*

- 135 The Church has had to condemn many errors regarding the habitual leading of the Holy Ghost in perfect souls.

The pseudo-mystics of the Middle Ages (e.g., the Brethren of the

Free Spirit) held that the leading of the Holy Ghost could be opposed to the external precepts of ecclesiastical authority.

The Spanish Illuminati (*Alumbrados*) taught even more expressly that the "Holy Ghost rules those who live (according to this mode of life). Only His urgings and internal inspirations are to be heeded as to what should be done or omitted."

The Quietists of the seventeenth century held as a general principle that man should wait for a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost before attempting to do any internal or external act because, otherwise, the act would come from man, from his self-love. Against these the *Articles of Issy* proposed the true doctrine: "It is not lawful for a Christian to wait for God to inspire virtuous actions in a special way and by a special inspiration. Rather, to stir himself to act he needs only that faith by which one recognizes the Commandments and the examples of the Saints as the Signified Will of God, indicated or openly declared, presupposing always the help of grace, inciting and forestalling."

Much less, therefore, is the habitual leading of the Holy Ghost to be thought of as a kind of conscious influence that directs, by enlightenment and impulses recognized as such, all the free determinations of the soul and that supplies a ready answer to every practical problem that arises in the course of the day.

## II. *The Church's Teaching*

- 136 The *Articles of Issy* declare: "We leave it to God to decide whether or not there is, or ever has been, somewhere on earth a very small number of elect souls whom He so forestalled at every moment and whom He so moved to do all the essential acts of the Christian life and other good works that nothing further had to be prescribed for encouraging them to do these works." Of course, by these words the authors of the *Articles* did not wish to exclude the possibility of extraordinary cases where the leading of the Holy Ghost would be present so continuously and manifestly that it would make up for all external direction and assistance. But they go on to say that it would be very dangerous, when directing holy souls, to suppose that such is the case with them. Even those saints who were apparently thus favored never thought, because of their great humility, of omitting the other means of knowing God's Will, such as seeking advice, heeding admonitions, and spiritual direction.

## III. *Divine Guidance in the Lives of the Saints*

- 137 The Divine guidance as exemplified in the lives of holy persons consists essentially (1) in that their souls are endowed with an

exquisite sensitiveness to even the smallest suggestions and inspirations of the Holy Ghost, however imparted; they are so gifted because of their supreme fidelity, their profound recollection of mind, their deep-rooted instinct for spiritual things, their spirit of faith, and finally, because of their increased "connaturality" with spiritual things of which we spoke in paragraph 72 above; (2) in that they can with great skill distinguish these inspirations from purely natural suggestions or those proposed by the devil under the appearance of good; they can do so because of a sure instinct that stems from their supernatural prudence, and from long and fervent practice in the spiritual life; (3) in that they follow the Divine inspirations very faithfully in their daily lives. All of this comes, properly and *per se*, from the abundance of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost found in such souls. (Cf. par. MOSq., *infra*.)

All the rest, such as distinct lights by which practical doubts are solved or propensities given to guide action, can be almost totally lacking even in the holiest souls without the essentials of Divine leading being absent. For the most part, however, such lights and propensities will not be wanting, but they will by no means be equally frequent, clear, and vehement in all souls or at all times.

#### IV. *St. Ignatius' Teaching*

138 Here we can profitably examine St. Ignatius' teaching in the *Spiritual Exercises* on the two ways of having recourse to the leading of the Holy Ghost.

1. When we have arrived at a decision in the choice of a vocation or in any other matter of great moment, by any of the means he proposes, the Saint recommends that we should have recourse to God to seek *confirmation* of our choice. He by no means wishes to exclude the possibility of God's confirming our choice by a special light or consolation in such a way that we have moral certitude of *positive* confirmation, in accordance with the rules for the discernment of spirits. But neither does he presuppose that it will always be so, nor that we should always expect such a confirmation. For often, and perhaps for the most part, we shall have only *negative* confirmation. If after using all the means at our disposal for finding out the Divine Will in our regard, we continue to beseech God earnestly not to permit us to be deceived in our choice, then we can be confident that, unless He actually wishes us to act on our resolution, He will turn us from our chosen mode of action by some of the innumerable instruments of His Providence, e.g. by some reading or advice which makes the difficulties of our chosen way more apparent, or by begetting a new thought in

our minds or even by raising up some external impediment. Therefore, after earnest prayer we can safely follow our elected course and regard it as God's Will until the contrary becomes apparent.

139 2. The Saint often advises a kind of interior *experimentation* as a means to knowing God's Will. For example, to those who wish to know how much they ought to fast (3rd Week, "Rules for Temperance," rule 4, n. 213) or in what way they should do penance (1st Week, add. 10, n. 89) he recommends experimenting by first trying greater abstinence or penance for some days and then lessening the fast and the penance, "because by thus assisting and disposing oneself, one will *often* experience thoughts, consolations and divine inspirations which will show the degree of penance that suits one." There is an example of such experiments for knowing God's Will in St. Ignatius' own *Spiritual Diary*. This experiment was conducted while he was enjoying the highest graces of infused contemplation, a fact worthy of note. And no less remarkable is his slowness, even then, in arriving at a decision.

Similar advice is found in the works of other Saints. But we cannot take the Saints' advice to mean that this "interrogation" of God and His answer (in the form of subsequent feeling of consolation or desolation) can take the place of the rules of prudence or the arguments of reason enlightened by faith. Much less, do the Saints hold that the "experimental" method can contradict these rules and arguments. This "experimental" method of knowing God's Will is proposed only as a complement to the rules of supernatural prudence. For it often happens that we cannot see clearly what is most in conformity with these rules or the other known signs of the Divine Will. And in that case we shall find the method proposed of great utility in ascertaining God's wishes. Nor can we always expect, even then, that the Will of God will become apparent. As St. Ignatius says, this will *often* be the case but not always. And when, for example, a form of penance is shown from another source to be imprudent, it would really be tempting God if we tried to find out by experiment whether He wishes us to undertake it. Finally, it is clear that indications derived from such experiments must be interpreted cautiously and under the guidance of a prudent director.

## REFERENCES

1. L. Lallemant, *The Spiritual Doctrine*, 4th Principle, Chs. 1,2, and 6. St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, II, Chs. 9-12, 21; *Introduction to the Devout Life*, II, Ch. 18. F. W. Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, Chs. 22, 23; *Spiritual Conferences*, Ch. 12.
2. Rodriguez, *op. cit.*, Part I, Tract 1, Chs. 4-6.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Gifts of the Holy Ghost

140 “The just man, that is, he who lives the life of divine grace and who acts through suitable virtues as through faculties, obviously needs those sevenfold Gifts which are fittingly called the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. For by their help the soul is prepared and strengthened to obey His communications and urgings more easily and promptly. Therefore, these Gifts are so efficacious that they lead the soul to the heights of sanctity, and they are so exalted that they remain with the soul, although in a more perfect manner, even when it comes to the Heavenly Court.” Thus does Leo XIII expound the doctrine of the Gifts in his Encyclical on the Holy Ghost, and thus does he show clearly how closely is this doctrine connected with the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. When we have briefly recalled to mind the theology of the Gifts we shall, easily see how they are related to the inspirations and leading of the Holy Ghost, and from thence what their function is in promoting the perfection of the spiritual life.]

#### A. What are the Gifts of the Holy Ghost?

III The primary basis for the whole doctrine of the Gifts is the prophecy of Isaias (11.2-3), where he says of the future Messiah: “And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness. And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.” In the Septuagint text the two words “*phôbos*” (“fear”) and “*eûsébeia*” (“godliness” in the English version: Tr.) mean the same as the one Hebrew word “*yîr’âh*,” which is repeated twice here and which in other places also has the same meaning. Hence in the original text, only six and not seven Gifts are enumerated (and perhaps the last words of that text are not genuine). But the Fathers follow the Septuagint and the Vulgate texts which give seven Gifts. (Origen, however, adds three others from 2 Tim. 1.7, namely, “(the spirit) of power, of love and of sobriety,” and so he names ten gifts.)

From the very beginning of the Church the Fathers, when ex-

plaining this text and applying it to the descent of the Holy Ghost on Christ, have held that the Gifts of the Holy Ghost passed from Christ to the whole Church. They evolved the concept of a spiritual gift received from God, and they appropriated in a special manner to the Holy Ghost the pouring out of these spiritual gifts on the faithful.

The Greek Fathers speak much of the Spirit who "rests" on Christ and the faithful. But they seem to pay little attention to the seven-fold number and do not distinguish closely the gifts of which Isaiah spoke (11.2) from the other gifts and charismata.

In the Latin Fathers there is a definite grouping of the Gifts. St. Augustine especially places the Gifts in juxtaposition to the Ten Commandments and the eight Beatitudes. And St. Gregory the Great connects the seven Gifts with faith, hope and charity.

142 There is no dispute among the theologians of the Middle Ages or more recent authors about the *existence* of the Gifts. But there is much controversy as to their nature, and as to the specific difference between them and the infused virtues. Cf. St. Thomas on this controversy, I-IIae, q. 68, a. 7.

Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor says that the Gifts prepare for the virtues and are the first movements and aspirations of the soul. Vâsquez, also, teaches that the Gifts are impulses and not habits; likewise Brancatus de Laurea.

But theologians more commonly hold, with St. Thomas (I-IIae, q. 68, a. 3) and Scottis that the Gifts are certain permanent habits or habitual dispositions. Scotus, however, following Peter the Lombard, teaches that the Gifts are not really distinct from the infused virtues. Pesch, in modern times, holds that this opinion is the more probable one insofar as the Gifts are only inadequately distinguished from the infused virtues, to which they add "mobility under the higher impulses of the Holy Ghost." But theologians commonly follow St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, and Suárez in holding that it is at least more probable that the Gifts are comprised of habits which are *really distinct* from the habits of the infused theological and moral virtues. However, all who hold this latter opinion do not teach that there are seven infused habits really distinct from each other. Suarez, for example, holds that the number seven may merely indicate a certain plenitude of perfection.

However, all, especially the less recent authors, do not derive the distinction between the habits of the Gifts and the virtues from the same source. Some say that the distinction comes from the fact that the Gifts strengthen the soul in the face of the principal temptations or make it conformed to Christ. Others say that the Gifts are distinct from the virtues because they make the soul more ready to perform

acts after a more exalted fashion, that is, to perform heroic acts. Others say the distinction exists because the Gifts dispose the soul to act in accord with a higher standard, namely, according to the instinct of the Holy Ghost and not only, as do the virtues, according to the standard of reason enlightened by faith.

- 143 St. Thomas reduced all these concepts to a synthesis (which Leo XIII followed in his Encyclical referred to in par. 140, *supra*). He teaches that the essential function of the Gifts, insofar as they are habits, is to make man "prompt in his obedience to the Holy Ghost," that is to say, to make Kim more easily moved by the impulses or inspirations of the Holy Ghost.

It seems, therefore, that the Gifts, taken as such, are to be viewed not as *operative habits*, like the virtues which are the immediate principles of supernatural actions, but as *receptive habits* or *disposing habits* by which the soul is disposed to receive more easily the stirrings of the Holy Ghost. Thus, with the help of the Gifts, a soul that receives these stirrings can better co-operate with them by eliciting free acts of the infused virtues. It is true that we sometimes hear of "the operations of the Gifts," "the acts of the Gifts," but in that case by "Gifts" is understood both the receptive habit itself and the inspiration received by it, combined with the eliciting habit of the virtues perfected by that same inspiration.

Therefore, apparently, there cannot be acts done by the Gifts which can be rigidly distinguished from acts done by the virtues. But there can be acts done by the virtues alone, as distinct from other more perfect acts of the same virtues, acts which are done more perfectly because the soul, with the help of the Gifts, is able to receive with greater docility the impulses or inspirations of the Holy Ghost, moving and directing it to do these more perfect acts. The same act can therefore be done with the simultaneous help of, for example, the virtue of fortitude and the Gift of fortitude (as against the teaching of some theologians who follow Suárez). It is hard to see, however, how one can say that the Gifts help in the production of all the supernaturally good acts of the just man. For it is quite possible for the just man to do the less difficult acts of virtue without receiving beforehand an increase of strength in the form of impulses and inspirations of the Holy Ghost, for the reception of which he is disposed by the Gifts.

This way of viewing the Gifts seems to be more in agreement with St. Thomas' teaching, especially where he shows how the Gifts help man to exercise the theological virtues, by uniting, for example, the Gift of Wisdom with charity, whereby, however, charity is not made something more than charity but rather is exercised more perfectly because of the assistance rendered by the Gift. From this



we can understand in what sense the Gifts assist the soul to perform "higher acts," i.e. to elicit acts in a loftier manner, namely, inasmuch as the acts are performed in a more exalted manner when both the Gifts and the virtues lend their aid than when only the virtues are there to help.

Thus, in full accord with the Encyclical of Leo XIII, primacy of importance should be given to that which is essential in the doctrine of the Gifts, namely, that there is in the just man an habitual disposition of docility to the impulses of the Holy Ghost. Relatively speaking, in second place only comes the problem whether this docility is the result of habits which are really distinct from the virtues and each other, and what number of habits there are, or whether, on the contrary, docility follows from the infused habit of charity itself or also from the habit of sanctifying grace.

The number seven apparently refers essentially to the principal forms or kinds of impulse of the Holy Ghost that are readily received because of habitual docility.

144 St. Thomas in *Ilallae* speaks at length on how the individual Gifts are to be viewed and on the relationship of the Gifts to each of the infused theological and moral virtues. He relates the Gifts of Knowledge and Understanding to faith (q. 8-9), Fear to hope (q. 19), Wisdom to charity (q. 45), Counsel to prudence (q. 52), Piety to justice (q. 121.), and Fortitude to the virtue of fortitude (q. 139). Hence, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange in his *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (pp. 296-299) does not follow St. Thomas' explicit doctrine, because he relates the Gift of Knowledge to hope, and the Gift of Fear to temperance, whereas the Saint teaches (*Ilallae*, q. 141, a. 1, ad 3) that the Gift of Fear corresponds principally to the virtue of hope and secondarily only to the virtue of temperance.

This explanation of the function of each of the Gifts was later developed greatly by, for example, John of St. Thomas, Lallemand and Meynard, and it has value apart from the question of the real distinction of the Gifts from each other. It clarifies, especially, the ways in which the Holy Ghost usually leads souls, and indicates the principal kinds of impulse and enlightenment which He imparts to them in order that they may exercise more perfectly the individual virtues with which the individual Gifts are connected.

## B. How are the Gifts Related to the Pursuit of Spiritual Perfection?

145 According to the common opinion of theologians, the Gifts of the Holy Ghost are infused into all the just at the same time as the

habits of sanctifying grace and charity. St. Thomas says (Iallae, q. 68, a. 5), "The Gifts of the Holy Ghost are connected with each other in charity in such a way that he who has charity has all the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, none of which can be possessed without charity." (Cf. *ibid.*, a. 3.) Recently, Fr. Umberg defended the opinion that "the Gifts, at least ordinarily speaking, are conferred in Confirmation" as being the more probable opinion, and more in conformity with the teaching of the Fathers. But the arguments he adduces do not seem to prove more than that a special increase of the Gifts is conferred by Confirmation. Therefore, in practice, the common opinion that the Gifts are infused into all the just can be held as certain. Leo XIII (*loc. cit.*, *supra*, par. 140) states this opinion at least implicitly.

146 Since one cannot suppose that the Gifts remain idle in the soul possessing them, it follows that they play some part in the spiritual life of every just man. And, truly, no one can persevere in the spiritual life, as we have already pointed out, much less make progress therein, unless he be assisted by many impulses and inspirations of the Holy Ghost, to which he is more readily made docile precisely by the Gifts.

Authors are not agreed as to whether the seven Gifts perform their several functions equally in every just soul. For if we admit seven infused habits really distinct from each other, we cannot very well hold that some of them remain idle, as it were. If, on the contrary, we take the number seven to mean only the seven principal kinds of inspiration which the just man is habitually disposed to receive (whether precisely by grace and charity, or by one or other of the habits really distinct from them), then we can more easily see how God distributes His inspirations to various souls in various ways according to their needs and vocation. And it seems that here precisely arises the obvious diversity of ways through which the Holy Ghost leads individual souls, not so much by moving some more than others, but rather by granting inspirations corresponding to the different Gifts each enjoys, some possessing mainly the Gifts that foster the contemplative life while others have a preponderance of the Gifts which foster the active and apostolic life.

147 As we have remarked in paragraphs 130-131 above, the number and intensity of the inspirations of the Holy Ghost are not equal in all souls, and, consequently, the part played by the Gifts in their spiritual life will not be equal either. But we cannot concede that the Gifts always play a lesser part in a soul in which they are less apparent and manifest to us. Sometimes the intensest graces and consequent increase in spiritual power are altogether hidden from even the consciousness of him who receives them, as happens in

those great interior trials and desolations by which God is accustomed to purify His saints. Therefore the part played by the Gifts will be known to us only indirectly, namely, by effects that necessarily presuppose great assistance rendered by God to the soul.

The almost uninterrupted leading of the Holy Ghost of which we have already spoken is nothing other than the habitual influence of the Gifts on the soul's whole life, disposing it to receive the unceasing inspirations of the Holy Ghost, whether they be hidden or manifest. It is therefore not quite correct to say that there are two ages in the spiritual life, the age of the virtues and the age of the Gifts. And, though it is true that the Gifts play a much greater part in the interior life of the perfect than in the life of beginners, yet they have a role in the spiritual life of beginners too. Nor does it ever come to pass that the Gifts are substituted for the virtues; rather, the operation of the virtues is increasingly perfected by the Gifts.

148 Since the thirteenth century, if not earlier, theologians have commonly held that the Gifts of Wisdom and Understanding play a special part in infused contemplation. Does it follow therefore that all mental prayer performed with the help of the Gifts is infused contemplation? In a few words, contemplation can be described as a simple intuition of God and Divine things, accompanied by love and delight; and, as we explain more fully elsewhere, it can be either partly infused and partly acquired or, on the contrary, wholly infused. It is partly infused and partly acquired when it is granted to the soul as the effect of the soul's previous efforts aided by the special assistance of God. It is wholly infused when God grants it entirely by means of a special Divine enlightenment and impulse with which the soul co-operates only negatively by removing obstacles.

Let us consider first the relationship of Wisdom and Understanding to infused contemplation, taking infused contemplation to mean only that prayer described, for example, by St. Teresa in her *Interior Castle* (Mansions V and sqq.), and accepted as such by all. If we thus limit the term "infused contemplation," it seems obvious that the Gifts of Wisdom and Understanding can readily influence many acts which do not pertain to infused contemplation. For, if we follow the doctrine stated above and hold that the Gifts are receptive habits, then there is nothing to prevent the Gifts of Wisdom and Understanding from disposing man to receive very different kinds of Divine impulses. Therefore the Gift of Wisdom, for example, can make man docile, not only to those very special impulses by which strictly and wholly infused contemplation is produced in him, but also to those more ordinary impulses which, for

example, produce in him the spiritual consolations which all fervent souls enjoy more or less frequently. This seems to be the mind of St. Thomas in *IIallae*, q. 45, a. 5: cf. *Iallae*, q. 68, a. 5, ad 1, and *IIallae*, q. 8, a. 4.

We come now to the case of contemplation that is not wholly infused but which is the result both of previous effort (in meditation or affective prayer) and of some special Divine impulse that helps the soul to pass from discursive to contemplative prayer. Here it must be admitted that all contemplation (and one may add, every type of prayer) that is accomplished with the aid of the Gifts of Wisdom and Understanding is at least *partly* infused. For contemplation does not come as a result of man's efforts alone: he also needs the special Divine impulses, and therefore no contemplation is ever *wholly* acquired. For the rest we can say that, in any life that is at all fervent, the impulses and inspirations of the Holy Ghost (which supply enlightenment and power, and which are received through the assistance of the Gifts) are so numerous that there can scarcely be a sincere prayer that is not partly infused in the sense we speak of here.

140 The same must be said of the relationship between the Gifts and the mystical life. We can limit the term "mystical life" to mean only that spiritual life in which wholly infused contemplative prayer is enjoyed. But we cannot say that the Gifts play a part only in the mystical life in this sense of the term. For if we thus limit the application of the term "mystical," we cannot likewise limit the operation of the Gifts in general, or even of Wisdom and Understanding in particular, since they all can play a large part in lives that are not mystical in this restricted sense. However, we can also take "mystical life" in a less strict, though no less proper sense, as meaning every life in which the leading of the Holy Ghost has become almost habitual. Then, in this case, it is obvious that one's life will be more mystical, the greater the part played in it by the Gifts of the Holy Ghost in general. We say "the Gifts in general" because, from what we have said, it is clearly possible that the Holy Ghost may lead a particular soul by giving it a preponderance of inspirations corresponding to a particular Gift. And in practice He seems to give these specialized inspirations in accordance with the peculiar external or internal vocation of each soul.<sup>2</sup>

## REFERENCES

1. S.T., Iaiiae q. 68; IIallae, q. 8, 19. 45, 52, 121, 139. Lallemand, *op. cit.*, 4th Principle, chs. 3, 4. Meynard, *op. cit.*, I, n. 215-271; II, n. 31-50. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 271-336.
2. Cf. Jacques Maritain, *De la Vie d'Oraison*, pp. 7411.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Discernment of Spirits

150 After giving a brief note on the history of the doctrine of the discernment of spirits we shall examine the meaning of the word "spirit." Then we shall try to determine to what extent rules for their discernment can be formulated. Next, we shall discuss the value of these rules, and finally, we shall draw up a list of rules in accordance with the traditional doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

#### A. Historical Notes

151 In the Old Testament the influence exercised on man by the good spirit of God is contrasted with the influence of the evil spirit, e.g. in the story of Saul (1 Kings 10.9; 16.14-23). And in the New Testament Christ Himself is depicted as being led by the good spirit into the desert, where He is tempted by the evil spirit (Matt. 4.1-11). St. John advises the faithful to "try the spirits if they be of God" and gives them signs whereby they may discern "the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 4.1-6). St. Paul places the discernment of spirits among the *charismata* infused by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12.10—"the discerning of spirits").

Hence it is no wonder that, from the earliest Christian times, ecclesiastical authors have inculcated the necessity for discerning the spirits by which man is influenced.

The Fathers of the Desert and the other founders of the monastic life developed and perfected this doctrine. St. Anthony did so, as related in his *Life* written by St. Athanasius; and Cassian, more fully, in his *Conferences*, especially in I, Ch. 16-23, II (all of which deals with discernment), VII (on fickleness of mind).

In the Middle Ages, St. Bernard speaks of the discernment of spirits; in the first part of the fourteenth century, Henry of Friemar, O.S.A., wrote a whole treatise entitled *On the Four Kinds of Instinct, Divine, Angelic, Diabolical, and Natural*; similar works were those of St. Bernardine of Siena. *On hispivations* (a.d. 1443); Denis the Carthusian, *On the Discernment and Examination of Spirits* (against Friemar): likewise Gerson and Peter de Alliaco,

who, however, treat principally of discerning true revelations from false.

Many of the more recent authors treat both the discernment of interior impulses and the discernment of revelations properly so called, whilst others, like St. Ignatius, deal only with the former.

An example of similar teaching among the Mohammedans is found in Algazel's book *Minhâdj* and takes its origin, most probably, from Christian writers of the East, among whose writings the doctrine appears earlier.

152 We must note, however, that while the authors commonly attribute good thoughts to a good spirit and evil thoughts to an evil spirit, *à. the devil*, yet from the very beginning they were aware that many thoughts and interior impulses come from human nature itself. Thus Origen says: "We find that the thoughts which arise in our hearts . . . come sometimes from ourselves, at times they are stirred up by counteracting virtues, and at other times they may be sent by God or the Good Angels." Similarly, Cassian (*Conferences*, I, Ch. 19) says: "In truth we should be aware above all that our thoughts have three possible sources—God, the devil and ourselves."

However, in modern times the psychological sciences, especially psychopathology, have made great progress, with the result that we can now readily recognize as entirely natural (whether diseased or normal) many phenomena which earlier authors attributed to the action of good or bad angels. Nevertheless the traditional rules of conduct are very prudent and should still be retained, with the proviso, however, that they be used rather cautiously in the matter of distinguishing natural impulses from angelic inspirations.

## B. What Exactly Are the "Spirits" that Are to Be Discerned?

### I. "*Spirits*"

153 The problem of the discernment of spirits arises from the fact that illusions and temptations in the guise of good are quite commonly met with in the spiritual life. Among the multitude of thoughts and impulses which continually surge through the mind some are immediately recognized as being bad, or at least less good than their opposites (ordinarily such bad or less good thoughts tire temptations). Others at first sight seem good, but experience proves that if we cultivate and follow them we come eventually to do evil, or at least something less good. For example, the thought

of a thing good in itself may stir us unduly and thence lead us to evil, or it may lead us to do something that is good in itself but which prevents us from doing something better and more necessary.

We know from revelation that such thoughts and impulses sometimes originate from or are fostered by either good angels or bad angels. It is obvious that the good angels desire only our spiritual welfare, whilst the bad angels seek our ruin. Therefore we should by all means follow the suggestions of the former whilst we resolutely reject those of the latter. Hence from the earliest ages of the Church spiritual authors have been very careful to distinguish between spirits.

Finally, very often it is not possible to distinguish with any kind of certitude the impulses and thoughts which we experience under the influence of the angels from those which are produced by our human nature, according to psychological laws, as effects of preceding internal states. Therefore it will suffice if we do not attempt to separate natural thoughts from angelic thoughts but rather try to solve the problem of how to pick out the thoughts or impulses which are not evil in themselves. We may, therefore, very well retain the definition proposed by Alvarez de Paz as best suited to our purpose here: "A spirit (if one idea can at all express its meaning) is that invisible element by which man is incited interiorly to do some human act, e.g. to live uprightly, to do penance for his sins, to choose a particular form of life, or, on the contrary, to perpetrate some disgraceful deed. . . . Or, again, a spirit is an internal impulse by which man feels himself urged to do something. It is nothing other than the understanding or judgment of the intellect concerning, and the inclination of the will towards, a work or the omission of a work, to which one is moved by an intrinsic or extrinsic principle. Here we shall deal with spirits understood in both these senses."

## II. *Three Types of Phenomena*

154 The rules for the discernment of spirits can be applied to three types of phenomena, and authors so apply them, but differ in their emphasis:

1. Revelations, visions, and locutions properly so called: namely, where a thought arises in consciousness through being received from outside by the medium of the senses of hearing or vision; some external shape appears or words are heard.

2. Internal enlightenment, or impulses concerning some determinate object: these arise in the mind without formal vision or hearing and in the ordinary manner in which thoughts and



impulses follow each other through the mind. However, because of unusual clarity of thought or vehemence of impulse, the soul may be more or less conscious of an external influence. For example, I may see, as never before, that the priestly life is the best way for me to serve God, or I may feel my will being strongly urged to adopt that state of life despite the protest of my lower self.

3. General states of consolation or desolation which the soul experiences and which can be an indication of the Divine Will. For if the soul finds that it is consoled or despondent when it does or wills something, it can conclude that its resolve or action is pleasing or displeasing either to God or the devil, even. (Cf. *supra*, par. 139.) Hence the importance of ascertaining whether consolation comes from God or from the devil, since the latter, too, can comfort the soul by working on the sense faculties, which are open to his influence.

Consolation or desolation are taken here in a very broad sense, according to the definition given by St. Ignatius in his "Rules for Discerning and Recognizing the Various Impulses . . . I, 3-4" (*Spiritual Exercises*, n. 316-317): "I call it consolation when an interior movement is started in the soul by which it begins to be inflamed with love for the Creator and Lord; when, as a consequence, it can love no created earthly thing for itself alone but only for the sake of the Creator of all. The soul is also consoled when it pours out tears of love for God. . . . Finally, I consider as consolation every increase of faith, hope and charity, and all interior joy which calls and attracts man to heavenly things and to the salvation of his soul, and which makes him to be at peace and at rest in his Creator and Lord. . . . I call every contrary thing desolation . . . all clouding and disturbance of the mind, impulses towards lower or earthly things; disquiet caused by agitation and temptations of various kinds, which incite to hopeless, loveless diffidence, because the soul finds itself altogether sluggish, tepid and sad, and, as it were, separated from its Lord and Creator." This describes both the more *sensory* as well as the more *spiritual* forms of consolation and desolation. The effects of the sensory forms are experienced in the sensory and imaginative part of the soul, from whence they react on the more spiritual faculties. And the more spiritual forms of consolation and desolation are really acts of the spiritual faculties, namely, indeliberate acts of intellect and will.

### III. *Causes of Phenomena*

155 The causes of all these changes can be reduced to the three which the Fathers gave—God and the good angels, the bad angels, and

human nature (viz., both our own temperament and the influence exercised on us by other men or natural circumstances). Other causes which various authors add, like "the worldly spirit," "the flesh," can be reduced to one of these three above. The "world" or "the worldly spirit" is the complexus of practical judgments about the things of this life that guides those people who take no account of supernatural things. And "the flesh" is simply our human nature insofar as it inordinately desires the pleasures of life. "The flesh," therefore, is merely the source of many impulses which can all be grouped among the impulses arising from our human nature.

1. We know from reason and experience that states of elation (*euphoria*') and depression succeed each other within us. And we know also that consolation and desolation go along with these states, especially in the case of those who, though they do not suffer from psychasthenia, yet have somewhat cyclothymic psychological dispositions [i.e., dispositions liable to experience alternating states of great elation and great depression: Tr.]. But this alternation of consolation and desolation occurs also in the case of those whose nervous system is quite healthy, since many extrinsic natural factors can bring about such a succession of states, e.g. fatigue, stomach trouble.

It is also possible that a radiant interior light or a vehement impulse can suddenly and quite naturally spring up in the mind after long subconscious psychological activity. Such a light or impulse can come either from the soul's preceding acts and reasoning or from things heard or seen.

Finally, we must note that visions and locutions may be due to hallucinations in the case of those who suffer from more or less psychopathological states.

2. We know from reason and faith that God can act immediately on all our faculties, both to impart concepts or images and to move our wills or sense appetites, as well as to change the natural condition of the body. From such Divine action will result either (1) a general new physical or psychological state; or, (2) new images or intellectual knowledge (brought about either *connaturally* through God's giving knowledge by utilizing *species* derived from images and already possessed by the mind, or *preternaturally* inasmuch as He elevates man to a mode of knowledge independent of images by directly imparting purely intellectual *species*) : or (3) new affective states of soul. [Concepts or ideas are elaborated by the intellect using the *species intellectuales* supplied by sense data or infused by God: Tr.]

3. God can bring about these effects either by His own immediate action or by action of the good angels. The angels can act, with

the permission or the command of God, on the sensory elements in man (his body, imagination, sensitive appetite). But they cannot act immediately on his intellect or will except as God's instruments and never as principal causes or by using their own powers. CL St. Thomas, I, q. III, a. 1-4. And since the good angels are completely conformed to the Divine Will, they will not do anything to man that is not for his good and in accord with the counsels of Divine Providence in his regard. Therefore, whether a thought or impulse proceeds immediately from God or from a good angel, in practice it can and should be accepted with equal confidence.

4. Finally, we know from faith that the *bad angels* can influence our body, imagination, and senses. This follows from the Catholic doctrine of diabolic temptation which, although not defined (it is presupposed by the Council of Trent in dealing with Extreme Unction), is yet found clearly in tradition, and especially in the Liturgy. But as we have just said, the bad angels cannot immediately influence our intellect, nor directly change our will. Cf. St. Thomas, I, q. 114, n. 1-3; I-IIae, q. 80, a. 1-4.

However, since the devil is irrevocably given over to evil, his action on man can only tend towards encompassing man's spiritual ruin positively, or at least negatively, i.e. by impeding a greater good. Moreover, we should be aware that the devil may use something good as a means to attain his ultimate evil end. It can easily happen that he may incite man to do something good in itself and even supernaturally meritorious, if he can use it as a means to procure a greater evil or impede a greater good. For example, he may encourage a mother to spend so much time at prayer that she neglects her children.

#### IV. *Natural Causes Can Concur with External Influences*

156 It is obvious that the influence of both good and bad angels cannot concur to bring about the same internal attraction. However, it can happen, and often does, that natural causes concur with the action of the good angels or of the bad angels, or even with the immediate operation of God Himself. For it is often the task of the good angels to strengthen and clarify the thoughts already possessed by man, whilst the bad angels may take a thought that arises naturally in man and strengthen it if it is evil, or turn it to their own bad purposes if it is good in itself.

Similarly, when an inspiration or consolation has been produced in the soul by God or a good angel, it does not necessarily follow that all that goes with or follows it also comes from God or a good

angel. When the inspiration or enlightenment has been granted, it is naturally followed by many changes, many deductions or thought-associations which are not the result of the preternatural influence received but are rather due to purely natural causes working according to their own laws.

In fact, it does not seem impossible that, after the soul receives a good impulse from a good angel, God may allow the influence of the devil to gain entry into the soul. It is not always easy to distinguish at a glance just where the good influence ceases and the bad one appears. Hence the conclusion which St. Ignatius, for example, emphasizes ("Rules for the Discernment of Spirits," II, 5, 8), viz., that because a consolation or impulse seems good and sent by God Himself or by a good angel, it does not follow that everything going with it is necessarily good too: rather, each movement should be considered in itself and its consequences.

It would not be right to conclude from what we have said in paragraph 116 above that an inspiration is not from God simply because its execution seems quite impossible. God can move the soul to desire some good that would be very useful for its sanctification, and yet at the same time He may not will that the good desire be fulfilled in action.

### C. What Is the Discernment of Spirits?

- 157 The traditional doctrine of the discernment of spirits has been formulated because it is both very difficult and vitally important for man to know the origin of the thoughts and inspirations which are constantly acting on him.

Discernment may be accomplished in two ways: either with the help of a *charism* or special grace, or by applying the *rules* given by spiritual men and by using supernatural prudence.

The gift or *charism* of the discernment of spirits consists in an infused instinct by which one can distinguish which thoughts and impulses come from God and which do not. It is mentioned by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 12.10, and seems to have been given to many saints, e.g. St. John Baptist Vianney. It always presupposes great sanctity in the recipient, combined with deep humility and perfect obedience to the hierarchy of the Church, and it is suspect if even one of these elements is missing. Even where the *charism* is actually and truly possessed it does not confer complete infallibility, since its possessor can err in using the gift and in drawing conclusions from what he observes by means of the gift. Furthermore the *charism* is rarely given in its full form. More often only a super-

natural enlightenment is conferred which helps man's acquired discernment and supernatural prudence in applying the traditional rules.

- 158 The traditional rules serve primarily to distinguish good impulses from bad, and, for the most part, we cannot ascertain whether a particular inspiration comes from nature or a good or bad preternatural source. Moreover, the traditional signs formerly used to mark inspirations as not coming from nature alone can be found also in what we now recognize as purely natural impulses. Modern psychology has made us aware of the workings of the subconscious mind and has pointed out that there are many impulses within us which originate in our sense-life and over which we have not full control. Again, the rule given by St. Ignatius ("Rules for the Discernment of Spirits," II, 2) is indeed theoretically true—"It is the privilege of God alone . . . to give consolation to the soul without any preceding cause . . . or without any foregoing experience or knowledge of some object from which such consolation may be derived"—but in practice one could scarcely say with confidence that consolation had no foregoing *conscious* or *unconscious* cause because it burst suddenly upon the mind. In the case of infused contemplation, however, we can be certain that the consolations received are from God because of their very nature. That is to say, he who has often experienced consolations and graces and knows from another source that they are from God (namely, from the great fruits of sanctity which they produce), will learn by experience to distinguish these graces from other internal impulses.

But since God can lead us equally well by acting immediately on us or by influencing us by secondary causes, it suffices in practice if we can recognize the impulses which come from God irrespective of the means He uses. Similarly, if any impulse tends to bring about our spiritual harm, it matters little for all practical purposes whether it comes from the devil or from natural causes. In fact, it is mostly better for us to be satisfied with this working solution, since it can be dangerous to search too keenly into the precise origin of the impulse, especially if we are motivated by anxiety or vain curiosity.

- 159 Bona prudently notes that "no rule can be devised which will be infallible, or even unlikely to fail in particular cases." All the usual rules, when applied to particular cases, provide only a probable argument for the goodness or evil of any interior impulse, an argument which is more or less valid but which is by no means an absolute criterion. Hence the rules should be applied as a whole in such a way that, gathering together the knowledge we obtain from

each, we may derive from the whole complexus a moral certitude as to the value of the impulses under judgment.

Prudence further requires that we take counsel with an experienced person as to the application of these rules to our own spiritual life. Here, too, as in applying the rules of any art, we should attach great importance to the experience which comes from long practice, lest our use of the rules be too material and lacking in intuition into all the circumstances of each case.

## D. The Principal Signs of Good and Bad Spirits

### I. *The Principal Indications of Each Kind of Spirit*

160 The principal indications of each kind of spirit are given by many authors, for example, St. Ignatius (*Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules," etc., I, 1-2; II, 1-4, 7-8) ; also St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, VIII, Chs. 10-13 (Signs of a good spirit . . . . perseverance in vocation, peace, obedience to authority) .<sup>2</sup> Scaramelli in his *Discernimento degli Spiriti* (1753), Chapters 6-9, gives the traditional rules in a short and complete form. We shall give here the signs garnered by him from the works of predecessors. (The numbers refer to the sections of his book in which he explains each.)

#### *Characteristics of a Good Spirit*

#### *Characteristics of a Bad Spirit*

#### *In the Intellect*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (1) True (61)   | False (75)   |
| (2) Not concerned with<br>useless affairs (63)  | Futile, useless, vain<br>preoccupations (78)             |
| (3) Illumines the intellect<br>(although the imagination<br>remains in darkness) (65) | Darkness, or deceptive light, in<br>the imagination (79) |
| (4) Docility of intellect (67)  | Obstinacy of opinion (81)                                |
| (5) Discretion (69)   | Exaggerations, excesses (84)                             |
| (6) Humble thoughts (71)  | Pride, vanity (91)                                       |

#### *In the Will*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (1) Interior peace (94)                       | Perturbation, disquiet (121)                             |
| (2) True, <i>efficacious</i> humility<br>(96) | Pride, or false humility (humble<br>in words only) (123) |
| (3) Trust in God, distrust of<br>self (102)   | Presumption or despair (127)                             |

*Characteristics of  
a Good Spirit**Characteristics of a  
Bad Spirit*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (4) Flexible will (ease in opening the heart to God or director) (104) | Obstinacy, hardness of heart, undue reticence with God or director (130) |
| (5) Right intention in action (100)                                    | Devious intention (135)  |
| (6) Patience in pains of mind and body (108)                           | Impatience with trials (138)   |
| (7) Interior mortification (112)                                       | Rebellion of the passions (141)  |
| (8) Simplicity, sincerity (115)  | Duplicity, dissimulation (144)   |
| (9) Liberty of spirit (116)  | Soul bound by earthly ties (145)   |
| (10) Zeal for the imitation of Christ (118)                            | Estrangement from Christ (146)   |
| (11) Charity that is meek, kindly, self-forgetful (119)                | False, bitter, pharisaical zeal (147)                                    |

In Chapter 10 Scaramelli gives the following as indications of a doubtful and suspected spirit: A suspect spirit is one which leans towards another state of life even after a good choice has been made, a spirit that has a penchant for unusual things, things unsuited to the soul's circumstances, or for extraordinary ways of exercising the virtues. Likewise, a spirit is to be suspected in which spiritual consolations are perpetual and without interruption. Also suspect are revelations if they are experienced frequently by a soul that does not possess great sanctity.

## II. *A Few Notes on Some of These Signs*

- 161 1. The sanctity of the person who experiences inspirations and impulses does not of itself exclude the possibility of illusion. Nevertheless God more readily and abundantly communicates Himself to holy souls who, since they are truly "interior," easily discern and listen to His voice. Such souls, as a result of their great Christian sense, often apply the rules for discerning spirits by a sort of intuition. Consequently an increase in true sanctity and perfection is a valid argument from which to judge, for example, a mode of prayer to which one is inclined, because such an increase, or the lack of it, will help to indicate whether or not one should persevere in the prayer. (Cf. the passage in St. Teresa referred to in paragraph 65 above.)

162 2. A thought which is contrary to the doctrine of the Church or which leads necessarily to a contradiction of that doctrine cannot be from God. Cf. St. Ignatius, "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits," II, 5-6. Likewise, an inspiration cannot come from God if it is contrary to the fulfillment of an obligation that is both certain and incompatible with the inspiration.

But if the inspiration is one which is difficult but not impossible to follow, then the more difficult the task, the greater must be the indications that God wants us to undertake it: for example, the case of the Ven. Mary of the Incarnation (Madame Martin) who entered an Ursuline convent, leaving her young son almost alone in the world. Therefore, in cases like this it is necessary to proceed very slowly and with great caution.

We should distinguish very carefully between the inspiration itself and whatever goes with it. We can mix our own erroneous thoughts or prejudices with a thought that comes from God. For example, one who is truly called to the priesthood can indulge his prejudices or inordinate inclinations in the manner in which he follows the call, without detracting in any way from the truth of his vocation.

Finally, because a thought contains nothing contrary to Church doctrine or because an impulse has nothing incompatible with the law of God in it, it does not thereby follow that either should be immediately regarded as an inspiration of a good spirit. Here again we are faced with the problem to which we referred above, of deciding whether such inspirations are all they seem to be or whether they are in reality temptations under the form of good. Therefore the criterion of goodness and truth is only a negative and not a positive one.

163 3. Interior peace is of itself a sign of God's action. The devil, on the contrary, disquiets the soul. The same holds good for natural thoughts: they are good when they render the soul tranquil and controlled, but bad when they agitate it. Therefore peace, or lack of it, is one of the principal means of discernment. (St. Ignatius, *loc. cit.*, I, 2 and II, 1 and 7, n. 315, 329, 335; St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, VIII, 12.)

However, we should note with St. Ignatius (*loc. cit.*, I, 1) that a good or bad spirit acts differently in the truly fervent person, in the sinner, and in the tepid soul. The devil encourages sinners and the tepid to cling to their evil state by giving them false peace, whereas God sends them pangs of conscience to arouse them from their lethargy. But even here the general principle just stated holds good, because the Devil's peace is altogether different from Divine peace, which is true, profound, spiritual, unshaken by adversity,



and which finds the things of earth repugnant. And the salutary disquiet caused by God brings with it, as soon as man follows its urging, an intimate sense of new-found peace unknown to the soul in its sinful or tepid state.

It therefore follows that the peace which is a sign of God's action can remain unshaken despite vehement temptations or the greatest natural aversion to the course of action to which He moves us by His inspiration.

- 164 4. Obedience to legitimate authority is an indispensable condition for any good inspiration. It is true that an inspiration may be from God and yet, God so permitting or decreeing, it may be rejected by superiors and its execution forbidden. But in such a case the soul should remain humble and docile, preferring in all simplicity the commands of legitimate authority to any interior inspiration. Examples of this are to be found in the life of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque/for instance.

We should be aware, however, that it is one thing to experience difficulty in speaking to one's superior about an inspiration received, because of timidity or repugnance to lay bare one's intimate relations with God, and it is quite another thing to form a resolve not to speak because of pride, or because of a desire to withdraw oneself from the censure of an authority which perhaps is incapable of judging these matters.

Similarly, true humility, a true love of contempt and humiliations, combined with strong and fervent diligence in God's service, is quite different from cowardice, laziness, or timidity due to self-love or human respect.

- 165 5. Enthusiasm for *extraordinary things* as such, for things which cause wonder, or are new, vain, and useless—such enthusiasm is not of itself a sign of a good spirit, especially if it is accompanied by dislike for the ordinary humbler, daily duties of state.

But an inspiration is not to be rejected immediately merely because it attracts the soul to something extraordinary and new. Rather, indications of the Divine Will should be sought in proportion to the unusualness of the thing inspired.

#### *Additional Notes*

- 166 1. *The discernment of consolations and desolations.* That which we have discussed at length above refers primarily to the discernment of *inspirations* which have a definite object. However, the rules given also hold good, and are used by authors, in the case of general states of consolation and desolation, and they have been developed (e.g., by St. Ignatius) by the addition of instructions as to how the soul should conduct itself in either state. We shall

treat elsewhere of consolation and desolation in prayer, contenting ourselves here with some observations on the two states so far as they affect the whole complexus of the spiritual life.

As already pointed out in paragraph 139, consolation and desolation can be signs of the Divine Will. We can know from experience that a certain mode of prayer or action is accompanied either by *consolations* which bear the mark of a good spirit or by *desolation* which shows up the action of a bad spirit trying to turn us away from our chosen mode of action or prayer. Or, on the contrary, God may draw us from an undesirable mode of action, whilst a bad spirit may impel us towards it by false consolations. That is very clear and plain in theory. But in practice we should be very cautious in using consolation or desolation to determine the Divine Will in our regard, and we should never act without the advice of an experienced director. This is especially true when it is a question of obtaining only a probability or confirmation. Moreover, accurate account should always be taken of the ordinary elements of psychology and even of physiology.

In the case of general states of consolation or desolation it is difficult to distinguish the results of the actions of God or the angels from the effects produced by natural causes, since general states of soul are much more complex than simple inspirations.

[>7 Therefore it is necessary to insist, as St. Ignatius does ("Rules," etc., I, 5-11, n. 318 sqq.), on the following points of conduct in either state:

We should never forget that consolation and desolation quite, naturally alternate in the spiritual life at longer or shorter intervals, and that frequently there is a predominance of one of them in a person's life. Hence one should not despair in desolation nor presume on one's own strength in consolation as if either were going to endure for ever.

St. Ignatius wisely advises that as far as possible we should make no change in our mode of life nor form any new resolve while we are in desolation. Rather we should strive to fulfill to the best of our ability all that we resolved when we were in a more peaceful state of mind. For if the desolation comes from a bad spirit, there is always a danger that we shall be influenced by it in forming our resolutions. And if the desolation comes from natural causes, then we are in a state of *depression* during which even our natural faculties function inefficiently or with difficulty in the course of our deliberations. Therefore it is wise to wait for a better, more normal psychological state.

168 2. *The discernment of revelations.* Poulain, in his *Graces of Interior Prayer* (Ch. 22; cf. Ch. 21), should be consulted as to the

way in which the rules given above may be applied to visions and interior locutions.

It will be sufficient here if we note that there are two classes of revelations; some are intended for the sanctification of him who receives them, others bring with them the obligation of fulfilling some external task, e.g. the promotion of a new devotion, the relaying of warnings or admonitions to others, the founding or reform of a religious institute, etc.

In the case of the first type of revelation it will usually be useless, and often harmful, to inquire into their preternatural origin. The things seen or heard may be good in themselves and their corollaries and may be useful for the perfection of the recipient. If this is so, then they come either from God or the good angels or from natural causes, and should be regarded as the effect of God's ordinary Providence. Hence such thoughts and inclinations should be cherished and used for the benefit of the soul. On the other hand, if the revelations are found to be in some way evil or dangerous, then they should be rejected whether they come from the devil or from nature.

This is the reason for the insistent teaching of St. John of the Cross (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, Ch. 11, especially n. 5-8; cf. Ch. 16) and St. Paul of the Cross, namely, that when any revelation really comes from God, the whole effect intended by Him is produced in the soul at the moment the revelation is granted. Therefore we should not go back on it to determine its origin. In fact, we should reject vision-engendered images, and we should rest assured that by doing so we shall in no way displease God even though the images actually came from Him.

169 Regarding revelations in which the soul is given a task to perform:

If the task is not extraordinary or beyond the capability and state of the recipient, then the revelation, whatever its origin, should be taken as an occasion and inducement to inquire whether the task is opportune. And if the task appears good and suitable in the light of reason illumined by faith, then it should be executed.

If the task enjoined is extraordinary or beyond the sphere and state of the recipient, then clear indications of the Divine origin of the mission (not excluding miraculous signs) should be sought in proportion as the task is more exalted, more extraordinary and more beyond the recipient's powers and the duties of his state. Account should be taken, in the first place, of the sanctity, or at least the innocence and simplicity, of the recipient of the revelation and the mission. But sanctity and simplicity alone do not suffice

to banish fear of illusion; nevertheless, if they are lacking, the revelation should be suspected.

Hence the spiritual director should beware of judging the sanctity of a soul from a "revelation" received, by it, and he should be careful not to make a hasty decision. On the contrary, he should not be afraid to wait a long time, or reluctant to test the soul, because, if the revelation comes from God, then neither delay nor testing will impede the attainment of the end intended by Him. He should guard against allowing himself to be directed by his spiritual child on the latter's plea of possessing revealed knowledge. He should show neither wonder nor contempt and harshness, but should prudently and prayerfully examine and adjudge. Nor should he act in any matter of importance without the permission of the ecclesiastical authorities. Rather, he should get the consent of the person receiving the revelation and submit the matter to the proper authority. If, however, the recipient refuses to let him put the content of the revelation before the authorities, then he should simply reserve judgment on the truth of the "revealed" mission and refrain from doing anything to further its accomplishment.

- 170 3. *Illusions*. Spiritual illusion exists when a person is attracted to evil or to a lesser good as the result of an erroneous judgment in spiritual matters, whether the error is speculative, or practical—i.e., wrongly applying right principles to a concrete case.<sup>3</sup>

The causes of illusions are the same as those of other temptations—nature or the devil. Therefore even good men and saints should fear them, though they are more liable to occur in the case of those whose inclinations are unruly or whose spirit of faith is weak.

Schram enumerates the principal sources of illusions: (1) Carelessness in spiritual matters; (2) lack of the right intention; (3) hastiness and lack of deliberation; (4) not consulting others; (5) taking what God has inspired or revealed and twisting it to suit one's own opinions; (6) desire for the extraordinary. To this list we can add *prejudices*, whether due to temperament or upbringing, which can foster illusions and which, though in no way culpable, are nevertheless dangerous. God, however, sometimes allows illusions of this type to exist even in holy souls for the same reason that He permits them to be tempted in other ways, namely, to try them and humble them.

It would take us too long to review even the more frequent types of illusion that occur in the course of the spiritual life. Both Schram<sup>4</sup> and Guillore have drawn up lists which may be consulted if further information is required. The latter, however, appears to

have fallen into the mistake of those who see or fear illusions everywhere, and who thus leave the way open for spiritual timidity, diffidence in seeking higher things, and even a kind of scepticism where the most extraordinary gifts of God are concerned. Yet the opposite extreme, the overconfidence of not fearing illusion, is no less harmful.

The general remedies for illusion are: candid manifestation of conscience and humble submission to one's spiritual director and superiors; prayer and the spirit of faith; self-abnegation and control of the passions; zeal for perfection in ordinary things.

However, when illusion springs from a deficiency in natural judgment the sole remedy is mistrust of oneself coupled with humble obedience and blind faith in accepting the opinion of competent persons when they tell us that our judgment is defective.

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## *Part Four*

MAN'S CO-OPERATION WITH  
GOD IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

171 God takes the initiative in every good work, moving the soul by His grace, and no good work can be done without the assistance of grace. Nevertheless, God requires man's co-operation in the work of his salvation. Even when He, in His goodness, leads a soul by special paths to the perfection of the spiritual life, He still demands co-operation. And just as in the present order of Providence men are brought to faith and salvation through the instrumentality of other men working in the society of the Church, so also it is the ordinary dispensation of Providence that men be guided to perfection by human directors. There are, therefore, two aspects to man's co-operation with God: (1) co-operation for the purpose of attaining his own perfection; (2) co-operation with God in leading others to perfection as a director of souls.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Co-operation with God in Obtaining One's Own Perfection

(How to Combine *Actively* with *Passivity*,  
and the Methods to be Used)

#### A. The Problem, and the Reason for Its Being Discussed

172 Many who strove for Christian perfection fell into one of *two* recurring errors.

*Pelagius* was a monk and a spiritual director who followed too closely the moral dictums of the Stoics. In order to rouse souls from sloth he exaggerated the role of man in the pursuit of perfection (and even in the working out of his salvation). He denied the functions of grace, or so minimized them that he finally fell into the errors which have made him notorious.

The errors of Semi-Pelagianism had a similar origin among the monks of Gaul and Africa, one of whom was Cassian. They thought that St. Augustine's doctrine made all effort useless in the pursuit of Christian perfection.

A similar naturalistic error appeared in the ninth century in John Scotus Eriugena's attack on Predestinationism, and also in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries among many of the humanists. The same false teaching was propounded, but this time outside the Church and Christianity, by the philosophers of the eighteenth century, by Rousseau and his followers, by the Positivists and others.

175 The various forms of *Quietism*, on the contrary, regarded as evil or less good, all effort, all personal activity, in repelling temptations, in correcting defects or in acquiring virtues, in applying the mind to prayer or meditation. They held that all such activity quite definitely impeded both the action of grace in man and all spiritual progress. They held that man should simply allow himself to be acted upon and should merely remain passive. Hence came their mistaken ideas about contemplation, about the way in which to resist temptations,



about the exercises of Christian piety, and even about the very use of the sacraments.

This was the teaching also of the Brethren of the Free Spirit and the Beghards in the Middle Ages, condemned by the Council of Vienne; of the Spanish Illuminati or *Alumbrados* in the sixteenth century, condemned many times by the Inquisition; of many in the seventeenth century, particularly of Michael Molinos; also Petrucci. Molinos thus expresses the fundamental principle of all these errors in his second and fifth propositions: "To will to operate actively is to offend God, because He wishes to be the sole agent. Therefore one must relinquish one's whole self totally to Him and thereafter remain as if dead. . . . By doing nothing the soul annihilates itself and returns to its beginning and its origin, the essence of God."

174 Mutually opposed *practical* exaggerations are to be found among directors who fall into no theoretical error:

Some encourage too much personal activity, with the result that the soul suffers from too great trust in its own good-will, from presumption, and, when it experiences difficulties, from dejection. The soul becomes deficient in true recollection and docility to the impulses of grace; it acquires a certain material rigidity in its activity, unrelieved by any flexibility. Others unduly repress personal activity and almost suppress it entirely in practice. Correction of faults is neglected, idleness and sentimentalism are nourished, emotion and wishful thinking are mistaken for true charity, which is both affective and *effective*, and therefore illusions and presumption are likely to follow.

175 Our concern here is to find the proper way to unite passivity under the guidance of grace with activity in co-operating with grace. But in every supernaturally good act there is both passivity under grace, and activity on man's part, at least inasmuch as he allows himself to be acted upon. Therefore we must state the problem more precisely. The Christian tends actively towards perfection when he selects and resolves to perform various exercises in order to attain to perfection. At such times he seems to be acting solely according to the dictates of knowledge and belief, but in reality he is being enlightened by faith and inspired by grace, without being aware of it himself. He tends more passively to perfection when he simply allows himself to be led and drawn by the interior impulses he experiences or by external circumstances which indicate God's will. Therefore the problem is rather to ascertain how to reconcile these two methods of selecting and utilizing the various means to perfection. Many authors call the first method the "ascetic method" and the second the "mystical method," but in

reality each method can be used whether it is a question of amending one's life, of exercising charity and zeal, or of praying, etc.

176 Thus it is clear that under this problem comes also the much disputed question of the *method* to be used in the spiritual life. The exercises which man uses when tending actively towards perfection can be employed either according to the opportunity afforded by each moment or to each person without a prearranged order; or, on the contrary, the order, time and method of employing spiritual exercises may be decided on beforehand. The term "methods" is used to signify the various ways of arranging spiritual exercises in order that they may be most efficacious for obtaining the desired end. There are, therefore, three essential elements in any method: some predetermined mode of action, the suitability of the mode of action for attaining the end, and the possibility of applying the method to any series of actual cases.

The principal subjects for which methods have been proposed by various authors are prayer, the union of the soul with God (e.g., practice of the presence of God), and the correction of defects and the acquisition of virtues (particular examen, trials, etc.).

Moreover, methods can be used in two ways: (1) They may be applied to actual cases only and never formulated into an express theory. For example, a director may have, as a result of experience or from tradition, a method of forming the souls committed to his care. Yet he may never reduce his procedure to a set formula although it consists in following a certain order of exercises and probations which he has found effective. (2) Or a director may reflect on his method and embody it in an expressed formula which he proposes to others for their use. Formulated methods of this second type may be either merely *empirical* or they may be *scientific*, that is, drawn from the principles of theology or of other sciences.

Historically speaking, and excluding the Liturgy which is the Church's authentic method of prayer and worship, we can say that from the very beginning private methods have been used in the spiritual life, e.g. by the Fathers of the Desert, in forming their disciples. At first the methods were not explicitly formulated, but later such monastic rules as those of Pachomius and Basil reduced them to a more definite system. In the Middle Ages methods were even more explicitly proposed, especially those dealing with mental prayer. And in the more modern schools (sixth to eighth centuries) the methods used became very systematized, and even intricate. But in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries simpler and less rigid methods were evolved by Louis of Granada, and, following him, by

St. Peter of Alcântara and the Carmelites; also by St. Ignatius, St. Francis de Sales, M. Olier, and St. Alphonsus Liguori. Cf. Part Five below, where we deal at length with methods of mental prayer.

Many authors think, however, that methods should play a very small part in the spiritual life because (1) they impede the free action of grace in the soul; (2) they lead man to place more reliance on his own industry than on the grace of God; (3) they make souls too apprehensive and too introspective; (4) they substitute minute practices for the great thoughts of the Faith and the fervor of charity; (5) finally, in their most objectionable form they are a comparatively recent innovation in the Church. Louismet says: "At most, methods are for beginners, and not even for all beginners" (*Christian Contemplation*, p. 277).

## B. Conclusions on the Union of Activity with Passivity, and on the Use of Methods

- 177 1. *The Quietists were condemned by the Church for holding that man ought to do nothing except when and insofar as he felt himself moved by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.*

Some of the more rigid Quietists held that this principle applied to all acts, even those commanded by God and the Church (e.g., acts of faith, penance, etc.). Others less rigid understood it to apply to acts which came under no precept.

In the strict sense the principle was condemned as heretical by the Bishops of France in the *Articles of Issy*. And Molinos' propositions nos. 13, 15, 17 were branded by the Roman Theologians as heretical or suspect of heresy because they intimated the same thing. In the wider sense the general principle was condemned as it appeared in Molinos' doctrine (props. 1, 2, 4, 5). Also condemned were his various applications of the principle: "one should not reflect on one's state of soul, nor on one's own acts or defects" (props. 8, 9, 10, 11); "one should ask for nothing" (14, 15); on prayer (20-21, 33, 34); on preparation for Communion (n. 32); on virtuous acts (35, 38, 39, 40).

The strict interpretation of the principle was condemned because it runs counter to the present order of Providence by subjecting the authority of Divine positive law and Church law to personal inspiration.

The principle was condemned in its wider sense because it is founded on a false supposition. Man, of course, must be moved by grace before he can do any salutary act. But the Quietists wrongly interpreted grace and presupposed that the operation of the Divine

action is always felt and recognized by the soul. It is true that grace sometimes acts in a perceptible manner, but its action is by no means *always* felt by the soul. (Cf. *supra*, nos. 129sq.) Moreover, such an interpretation of grace would foster laziness and inactivity, since the soul would not act unless it felt the Divine influence. Again, this interpretation is in opposition to the traditional teaching of the saints (e.g., St. Teresa in her *Life*, Ch. 12, especially n. 5; her *Interior Castle*, IV, Ch. 3; St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, Ch. 14, n. 6sq; cf. *trans, cit*).

178 2. *When the soul experiences enlightenment and promptings which, according to the rules for the discernment of spirits, it regards as good and as coming mediately or immediately from God, it must follow them if it wishes to make progress, laying aside all its own opinions and proposals. But it must not do so contrary to the obedience due to legitimate authority or the duties of its state in life, or the will of God manifested by circumstances.*

This is so because grace is the principal cause of perfection and to it must be subordinated man's judgment and will. Therefore where the action of grace is apparent, man must co-operate with it, and must follow it, neither outstripping it nor going against it. As we know from experience, grace contributes much more to our perfection and progress than all our own efforts and industry ever could.

Hence the rule of the saints (e.g., St. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, 1st Week, add. 4, n. 74; St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, VI, Ch. 9; etc.) that when God gives the grace of devotion in prayer, the soul should rest content with it and not seek further.

We must, however, note one exception. It sometimes happens that God moves the soul to desire something which is forbidden by superiors or made impossible by circumstances (e.g., He may inspire an invalid with a great desire to do works of zeal). Such a desire should by no means be rejected as evil, but should be regulated by the decrees of authority and Providence. God wishes the soul to sanctify itself through having this desire and being compelled to sacrifice it rather than through bringing it to fruition.

170 3. *There is general utility in the use of some methods in the spiritual life.*

When we wish to obtain a certain end we select and use appropriate means. And our choice and use of means will be all the better if we choose and act in accordance with the methodical principles handed down through the ages. It is only reasonable that we should utilize the wisdom gathered by others through long experience and mature thought.

Again, as we have just said, the action of grace in the spiritual life is often hidden completely, because God wants man to use his own judgment and reason. Therefore if the soul wishes to be directed safely and efficaciously in action, in prayer, and in the search for perfection, it must select and use appropriate means to the desired end. The choice of means, however, must not be left to chance or done on the spur of the moment or solely in the light of the soul's own experience, but rather in accordance with the methods evolved by men of experience and sanctity.

But these methods are only a means and not an end, a means moreover which is always subordinate to the grace of God. Therefore they should be used only insofar as they help in the attainment of the end, and they should be relinquished when the soul feels the Divine influence working in it. They should be resumed, of course, when God again leaves the soul to its own devices.

This applies, naturally, only to the *private* methods which each freely chooses and applies to his own case. It does not hold good for the methods commanded by the Church for use in public prayer (liturgical rules), or in the public profession of the higher Christian life (the rules of religious institutes, the precepts of ecclesiastical law which bind clerics). The ecclesiastical law also imposes the use of certain methods for the common good (e.g., for the better recitation of the Divine Office) and for the benefit of individuals (e.g., the practice of praying daily at a particular time, which is beneficial and even necessary for all in general).

180 There is a common objection to the use of methods: "When I choose a method and follow it I am not following the leading of grace but am rather imposing my chosen method on grace." The answer is: "I agree if you select a method without the help of grace or contrary to grace. But I disagree if grace itself inspires you (though imperceptibly) to select the method, as happens whenever you choose a method from supernatural motives and according to the laws of supernatural prudence. In that case, by inspiring you to select and follow a certain method, God points out the way He wants you to go and the works for which He will give you further graces."

181 4. *There will of necessity be great variety in the ways of using private methods.*

All methods are not of equal value, nor will they be all equally suitable for use by every temperament. For some people (e.g., those of nervous temperament) a strict method would be insupportable; it would endanger their peace of mind or expose them to scrupulosity. On the other hand, a very detailed method will help some souls and will not impede them: in fact, sometimes such a method is

necessary if they are to avoid indolence and consequent spiritual harm.

Vocations differ: those who serve God in the active life ordinarily have greater need of methods to assist them in the difficulties peculiar to that life.

God leads souls by different ways: He quite obviously directs some souls by the inspirations of grace and the dispositions of Providence, whilst He seems to leave others to make their own way to Him.

The same soul will pass through different stages of the spiritual life. Beginners generally need the assistance of methods because they lack the necessary experience. They must be educated in the exercises of the spiritual life. They have many exterior faults which are best corrected by the use of methods. They are little accustomed to recognizing and interpreting correctly the inspirations of grace and they are liable to self-deception and illusion. It generally happens, though, that according as the soul progresses, the methods employed become simpler, less rigid and play less and less part in the spiritual life.

As a result, there is great variety in the methods suggested by the Saints for use in the different necessities of the spiritual life. Some methods supply only a general scheme to be applied to various subjects; for example, the "application of the senses" recommended by St. Ignatius, which can be used in the consideration of any mystery. Other methods propose a definite order to be observed in prayer, examen of conscience, etc.; thus the seven meditations on the principal mysteries of the Faith which were popular in the Middle Ages, one meditation for every day of the week; or the whole *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, or the "trials" employed by the Salesian school.

1M2 5. *There are illusions and exaggerations which must be guarded against in the use of methods.*

In this context especially it is dangerous to forget the great variety to be met with in souls and in the ways through which God leads men to Himself. Some, oblivious of this pitfall, would like to impose their own meticulous methods on all; others, on the contrary, would have souls despise all methods in general; they find that methods are of little use in their own case and forget that these same methods may be very necessary for many people.

There is always a danger, when using methods, that we may come to confide too much in our own wisdom and strength, that we may think we can get everything with their help, that we may forget the prime necessity of grace, and neglect humble prayer. As a result, we are liable to become dejected when we are made aware of our powerlessness. There is also the danger that we may adhere too closely

to the methods and thus impede the action of grace in the soul, that we may become too introspective and a prey to anxiety and narrowness of soul.

We may also come to place all our perfection in the faithful, and hence almost material, use of the methods and think less of the true aim of the spiritual life and its great principles. In fact, fidelity to method may serve to nourish our self-love.

We should beware, on the other hand, of relinquishing methods too quickly, before the soul has been formed *psychologically*, that is, strengthened by solid principles and sound ideas. God, of course, could supply the necessary formation, but ordinarily He does not. Nor should we dispense with methods just because they are humble, unappealing, and laborious.

Finally, we may believe that we always act logically, and that therefore if we love God sincerely, we shall reject and amend spontaneously everything that is contrary to His will. But the fact is that our present defects and the virtues we must acquire, all have a *physical* element or substratum which cannot be removed or acquired except by persevering efforts and methodically repeated acts. Again, God could undoubtedly bring about the necessary change in an instant, but it would be presumptuous to expect Him to do so.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Spiritual Direction

IHI Just as we can co-operate with God in saving our fellow men, so also we can assist in bringing them to perfection through spiritual direction. Direction can be of different kinds. *Sacramental* is that given in the administration of the Sacrament of Penance in order to ensure the valid and fruitful reception of the sacrament (e.g., advising or even commanding the penitent to avoid the occasions of sin, to use certain measures when tempted—in general, helping him to form the necessary resolution of not sinning again). *Pastoral* direction is that which is given to souls by him to whose care they are committed: it may be in the form of exhortations and commands given to all in general, or it may be given privately to individuals (hence in practice this direction often develops into the spiritual direction of individual souls, although in itself it is quite a different thing). Finally, there is *spiritual* direction (ordinary or extraordinary), the aim of which is to bring souls to a higher perfection of the Christian life. Sacramental and pastoral direction are treated in moral and pastoral theology respectively; therefore we shall concern ourselves here only with spiritual direction in the strict sense.<sup>1</sup>

#### A. What Is Spiritual Direction?

IHI The spiritual director or master is “the one to whom a person manifests his state of soul and to whom he offers himself to be habitually directed (that is, instructed and urged on) in the way of perfection. He may choose as his confidant his superior, or another priest, either in confession or outside the confessional.”<sup>2</sup>

“One to whom a person . . . the immediate aim of direction is the individual good of the applicant for direction.

“—manifests his state of soul . . . habitually . . . properly speaking, one is not a director if only consulted on a particular subject, or even on the whole spiritual life but only once or occasionally or only sometimes (although such an occasional director can have a profound influence on the soul, as happened often in the case of the Saints).

“—and to whom he offers himself to be directed . . . ordinarily,



the director is chosen freely by the soul and is not designated by authority.

"—that is, instructed and urged on . . . the director performs his office by *teaching* the principles of the spiritual life, not in the abstract (as happens in the classroom and in sermons or lectures), but in the concrete, applying them to the individual soul: he also *urges* the soul on by arousing and helping the will, by making sure that the soul does not stop at resolving but that it goes on to action; the director is not only a teacher, he is also an educator in the full sense.

The director may be a "superior or a private individual," and the direction may be given "in confession or outside the confessional" by the confessor or another. (Cf. the description given by St. Francis de Sales in *introduction to the Devout Life*, I, 4.)<sup>3</sup>

- .85 The office of director must be distinguished from that of superior or confessor, although the same person may be both director and superior or confessor.

The *confessor* is a *judge*, with real authority in the internal forum, endowed with the power of the Church. Therefore, within the ambit of his authority he can pass judgments that are strictly binding. A penitent may freely choose his confessor from among those priests who possess the requisite faculties. Nevertheless he is not free to reject the commands of his chosen confessor except at the risk of being denied absolution. The director as such, however, receives no such jurisdiction from the Church.

The Church gives the *ecclesiastical superior* authority in the external forum for the supernatural good of the community.

The *religious superior* is given the duty of ruling a society of persons striving for perfection, but he is primarily elected by the Church for the common good, which he furthers principally by external means (whatever about the famous controversy on the legality of commanding internal acts). The director as such is given no authority by the Church: and he is concerned only with the individual welfare of the persons who consult him. Moreover, he is chosen freely, and his clients are always at liberty to withdraw from his direction.

- 186 Hence the problem: "*What obedience should be given to the spiritual director?*"

Some hold that "the traditional teaching on obedience applies fully to the obedience which the soul renders to the director or spiritual father" and that nothing should be done contrary to or even beyond his prescriptions. This is substantially the opinion of Tanqueray (n. 555), who is not quite so rigorous, however, and of many others both in theory and especially in *practice*. But there are

some who hold, on the contrary, that the spiritual director should be only a kind of counsellor or friend to whose advice one listens, accepting or rejecting it with perfect freedom.

IH7 Thesis I. *In the matters proper to his office the spiritual director as such has no authority strictly so called, requiring the strict exercise of the virtue of obedience.*

*Proof.* The director has no basic title to such authority. The person being directed is not naturally subject to the director as a son is to his father or as the citizen is to the civil society in which he is born or adopts a domicile. Nor is the director made a superior by positive Divine or ecclesiastical law as are bishops, pastors, and religious superiors (who are delegated by the Church to rule those who elect to live under the laws of a religious institute). Nor does one choose a director as one does a spouse, for example, that is, by entering into an association which is strictly defined by Divine law. Rather, the soul freely chooses its director and can just as freely leave him. In fact, there is no theological basis on which to define the nature of the relationship between the soul and the director. All that we know or can conclude from revelation is that the Church has jurisdictional and magisterial authority which she exercises through the *hierarchy* in the external forum and through the *Sacrament of Penance* in the internal forum in matters relevant to the purpose of the sacrament.

Authorities on the spiritual life do not impugn this viewpoint. Only a few explicitly deal with the question of the obedience due to the director, and even they understand obedience in this context in the broad sense of the word. That is our position too. It seems to be the opinion also of St. Francis de Sales. Cf. his letter dated Feb. 11, 1607, where he says: "These are counsels ... not commands"; and also a letter of June 24, 1604, "It is advisable to have only one spiritual father whose authority ought to be preferred to one's own will on every occasion and in every matter." Cf. his *Conferences*, XI; *Introduction to the Devout Life*, IV, 14.

Furthermore, the same person often fulfills the office of director and confessor or superior. Therefore it is not always possible to distinguish accurately in literature and in practice what authority he wields under either title. Thus it is, for example, in Cassian's writings and those of many ancient authors: the "venerable one" (*senex*), or abbot, was both superior and director. The same difficulty is found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because of the intimate connection then prevailing between the offices of confessor and director.

Thesis II. *The relationship between the director and the soul is nevertheless not that of equal to equal, or friend to friend. The*

*director's office confers a certain superiority, since he is an educator or teacher, and there is a corresponding submission due on the part of the soul being directed, a submission which is, strictly speaking, an act of prudence and humility rather than of obedience.*

*Proof.* This is proved by the authorities who stress "obedience" to the director, e.g. those cited by St. Francis de Sales, Olier, etc. The very names given to the director confirm our thesis—"father," "elder," "master," "guide."

Our thesis is evident *from the very nature of the office*. The function of a director in the pursuit of spiritual perfection is the same as that of a teacher in the study of the arts and sciences. A person goes to a teacher in order to learn an art and in order to be taught how to practise it. Therefore he would be both imprudent and unreasonable if he refused to acknowledge the teacher's superior knowledge or if he freely criticized his mentor's advice. For the same reason, when a person approaches a director with a view to being helped in his pursuit of perfection, he makes that director his superior after a fashion. And it is obvious that he will not benefit by the direction given unless he submits to the director.

Sometimes the submission due to the spiritual director is almost the same as that which a child should give the teacher entrusted with his education. This is the case when the director is suggested by authority, as often happens in seminaries. There is always this difference, though, that the teacher is *placed over* the child by the parents, whereas the spiritual father is only proposed and not strictly speaking imposed.

Our thesis follows *from the general economy of the spiritual life* by which God wills men to be led to Him by other men. Furthermore, just as Christ made good the disobedience of Adam by His own submission and humility, so also do the members of His Mystical Body grow spiritually through their submission and humility. Hence follows not only the hierarchical economy of the Christian faith and the practice of religious obedience, but also the practice of spiritual direction and that special grace which we know by experience is given by God to the words and admonitions of spiritual directors.

Submission to the director is more a part of *prudence and humility* than of obedience properly so called, since it cannot be *exacted* by the director in the same way as is obedience by a true superior.

Therefore the director can be called a friend (St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, I, 4—"the faithful friend"), though not by reason of the friendship which "presupposes or effects equality," but rather on the basis of the intimate relationship and charity

on which direction rests. Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *ibid.*, "Have the greatest confidence in him, combined with a holy respect."

*Corollaries*

- IB!) 1. *Can it be maintained that the advice given by the spiritual father is a sure indication of the Divine Will of Good Pleasure regarding the concrete circumstances of our individual lives?*

In the case of real superiors one can say: "From the very fact that these superiors are designated and set over me by God through the Church, I am certain that He wishes me to do what they command." But the spiritual director is not thus authentically designated. Therefore one cannot ordinarily show him the same blind obedience as one does to a superior. However, it remains true that God does not will man to be guided solely by his own judgment in the spiritual life.

Therefore the director cannot impose a strict command. He can, of course, give a conditional command—e.g., "If you don't do this, I cannot undertake your direction." He can also declare that, in the particular circumstances, a certain line of action is manifestly God's will, and the soul, in all prudence, ought to accept his judgment.

However, in the special case of *scrupulous souls*, prudence further requires that they surrender their judgment wholly into the hands of a capable man, namely, the director, since that is the only remedy for their disease.

- 190 2. *Is it necessary that the director be a priest?*

Many authors unequivocally say "Yes"; and the Code of Canon Law, canon 530, seems to support them. Canon 530, paragraph 2, says: "It is not, however, forbidden that subjects freely and voluntarily open their minds to superiors. In fact, it will be beneficial if they approach their superiors with filial trust, and, *if these superiors are priests*, make known to them their doubts and anxieties of conscience." The distinction made here is all the more notable because the Decree *Quemadmodum*, (Dec. 17, 1890) used similar words but without distinguishing between a superior who is a priest and one who is not.

However, history shows that many who were not priests nevertheless acted as directors. Not only did the Fathers of the Desert do so but also more recent saints such as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius Loyola (before his ordination in 1537), and even some women saints like St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa of Avila.

The conclusion is, therefore:

The office of director should ordinarily be reserved to priests . . . because of the general economy of the supernatural order in which the priest is given the office of teacher; because the priest generally

has a better grounding in the theory and practice of the art of direction; because the Church does not look with favor on the custom of seeking direction from those who are not priests, aware as she is that such lay direction may easily have great disadvantages.

Nevertheless, it does not seem that an absolute and universal law can be laid down strictly reserving spiritual direction to priests alone. It appears, though, that much greater sanctity and experience in the spiritual life is required in a lay person than in a priest for the fruitful exercise of direction. Therefore lay direction can be countenanced only rarely and only because of special circumstances. Less stringent, however, are the conditions under which a lay person may act as a counsellor or friend in spiritual matters. Cf. the treatment of spiritual friendships in paragraph 223 below.

191 3. *How is submission to the director to be reconciled with the obedience due to ecclesiastical and religious superiors?*

The Church has condemned the errors of Molinos in this matter, thereby demonstrating her right to inquire into and pass sentence on the manner in which a director guides his charges (with due regard, of course, for the sacramental seal and laws governing secrets).

In a conflict between the director's judgment and the commands of authority, the director can declare in a particular case that the command does not bind if his decision is firmly based on the general principles of moral theology. He may also declare that an obligation exists where authority leaves the individual free, e.g. in the question of seeking ordination. But a director, acting as such, cannot on his own authority exempt a person from the jurisdiction of superiors. It should be noted, however, that the director usually knows the soul more intimately and is aware of much that is hidden from the superior. This is particularly true where no command or law is concerned but only the greater good of the soul, and also where it is a question of carrying out regulations or directives which are not strictly binding. On the other hand, though, the superior knows many circumstances of which the director is ignorant, since the latter knows the soul only from its own account. Moreover, when the person concerned is a religious, the superior has a fuller and deeper knowledge of the religious life in general and of his own religious institute in particular than is ordinarily possible for a secular director or one who belongs to another Order.

Account must be taken, too, of possible scandal, wonder or discord. Nor should we forget that Providence sometimes uses painful and even disturbing advice or commands to try the soul. We must remember that the sole end of the spiritual life is the increase of

charity, and all the rest are but means. Therefore the director should employ great discretion and prudence in counselling a soul to withdraw in any way from its rule of life or even from the individual direction it has received from ecclesiastical or religious superiors. Above all, where there is any doubt the director should not recommend such a course of action, but he should rather advise the soul to manifest its difficulties as far as possible to the superior with a view to obtaining a dispensation or a change of instructions.

192 4. *What of obedience to the director in the matter of vocation or the choice of a state in life?*

The authors who most stress obedience to the director are especially insistent that the soul follow his advice in the choice of a vocation. Thus Boccardo says that the whole solution of the problem of vocation should be left to the judgment of the director and that the soul should do nothing except give its reasons for and against the proposed vocation. However, this author seems to confuse two very different things.

It is the duty of a director to tell his charge that, for example, he may prudently enter the religious life, or that the religious life is the most suitable and safest vocation for him. Or the director may judge that the soul cannot safely enter religion or is little fitted for that life. Moreover, the director can and should help the soul to make a choice by examining its motives and declaring whether they are good, sound, and supernatural, or weak, insufficient, and illusory. He should also help it to judge if the signs it takes to be indications of the Divine Will are such in reality. Furthermore, he should bring to the soul's attention various aspects of the problem which it has not considered. In a word, he should lead the soul to make a choice.

But granted all this, it is the *soul* and not the director who should make the final decision—"It is therefore God's Will that I embrace this state in life." Much harm can be done if the director makes the final choice and the soul blindly follows. For, ordinarily, the person being directed will at first unhesitatingly regard the director's opinion as a certain sign of the Divine Will, but afterwards, when he meets the difficulties from which no life is free, he may begin to think that his chosen state was *imposed* on him. Nevertheless, in the case of a very hesitant soul, the director can help it to arrive at a firm resolve by prudently revealing his own opinion in the matter or by indicating what his own decision would be if he himself were concerned. He should not, however, impose his own conclusions. As a matter of fact, when it is a question of a difficult vocation like that to the priesthood or the religious life, the soul's very hesitation

and inability to choose and decide will frequently be a sign that it is not fitted for either form of life, since both require a strong will if they are to be lived worthily.

193 5. *What of a vow of obedience made to the director?*

Many holy souls have vowed to obey the director in all things as a means of greater merit in God's sight; and the Church does not seem to disapprove of the practice. But the director should never propose the vow himself. Where the person involved is scrupulous the director should dissuade him from taking the vow. Instead he should impose perfect obedience in all matters of conscience without invoking a vow which would only be a source of new scruples. In the case of other souls it seems an abuse of authority to propose such a vow. It becomes all the more so if, as in the famous instance of St. Jane Frances de Chantal,<sup>5</sup> to the vow of obedience there are added other vows of never changing the director, of keeping secret all his advice, and of never consulting anyone else. If the soul spontaneously asks to be allowed to take a vow of obedience, the director should not be quick to grant permission, and when he does, it should be within narrow and well-defined limits. Ordinarily it would be very imprudent for the director to become the soul's true superior, since its whole mode of life would then depend on him and he would thus assume a certain responsibility for all its acts. But supposing the soul took such a vow, would it then *obey* the director in the strict sense and no longer merely submit out of humility and prudence? (Cf. par. 188.) It does not seem so, because the vow itself adds only an obligation from the virtue of *religion* and does not change the nature of the act to which this obligation is added, nor does it make the director a *superior* strictly so called, since he did not enjoy that privilege before the vow.

## B. The Way to Give Direction

194 It is the duty of the director to *know* the soul, to *teach* it, and to *help it make effective resolutions*.

### I. *The Director Must Know the Soul*

It is necessary that the director *know* the soul, its character, its natural gifts and shortcomings, its acquired habits, both good and bad. He must know what gifts of grace it has received, what progress it has already made, what sins it has committed. Furthermore, he must know its turn of mind, its present mode of conduct in spiritual affairs, as well as the path along which it is now being drawn by grace.

The primary source of all this information is the soul itself, which must give a faithful account of its spiritual state, an account that should be much wider in scope and more detailed than an ordinary confession.

However, not everyone can make a satisfactory declaration of conscience, since many do not know themselves well enough. Furthermore, timidity prevents some people from expressing themselves adequately; while others go to the opposite extreme and are so prolix and give so many unimportant details that they obscure the main issues, and make it ver}' difficult for the director to pick out the important points. Hence it is vital that the director assist the soul to know and express itself. This he can do by examining the soul on what seem to be its major characteristics. He should also watch it and its mode of conduct. He should sometimes even make experiments by proposing to it some new idea, a particular type of reading or a spiritual exercise or method. By noting the soul's reaction to these prepared stimuli he will gain a deeper insight into it. However, until he gets to know the soul well he should be prudent and should not impose changes in its spiritual life nor contradict the advice it has received from former directors.

195     *Should the director's only source of information be the soul's own account of itself?*

It is well to remember that we are dealing here'wdth direction and not with confession. In confession the priest is a judge and must therefore base his decision on the facts brought forward by the witness, that is, by the penitent, who must be believed both when he is speaking for himself and against himself. But in direction the spiritual father can use any knowledge that reaches him from a trustworthy source, in order that he may come to know the soul better and help it more effectively, due regard being had, of course, for the rules of discretion and prudence. Therefore he can take into account other people's opinions of the soul; of course, it goes without saying that he should be very cautious in this matter. He may even invoke the assistance of graphology [the study of handwriting to determine character] and other psychological aids, provided, *first*, that he does not rely blindly on their findings; *second*, that such tests are not burdensome or hateful to the soul; and *third*, that they do not lessen the soul's confidence in him.

196     *When a person, does not know himself well, should the director enlighten him?*

The director should impart to the soul some of the fruits of his observation, since one of the principal functions of direction is to guard the soul against illusion and help it to know itself better.

But the director should not tell everything. He usually knows



many things about the soul which help him in his task but which would be useless or even dangerous to the soul if he revealed them to it. Thus the director runs the risk of disheartening the soul if he tells it unsparingly of all its defects at once, or if he inopportunistically reveals to it that God is gradually leading it to make great sacrifices. On the other hand, when the soul has made great progress or has received signal graces all unknown to itself, there is a danger that it will be puffed up with pride if the director tells it how privileged it is. There is no reason why it should be told, since good direction requires only that the director know the soul's progress and the gifts of God, whilst the soul itself need not even suspect anything out of the ordinary.

Therefore the director should tell the soul in general terms whatever he judges will be useful for furthering its perfection.

197 *Should the director ask for written accounts of the soul's spiritual state or of the favors it has received from God?*

Written descriptions are sometimes useful in direction because they are often more accurate than the spoken word. They are also more enduring and can be read and re-read, thus admitting of deeper examination. But they can be also very harmful because, apart from the greater difficulty of keeping secret what is written, the soul can easily become self-complacent or too introspective, and the danger increases according as the written confidences are given more freely. Furthermore, when it is a question of more or less extraordinary events (visions, locutions) that are natural in origin, as often happens, then putting them in writing will tend to increase and prolong them. This is due to a kind of auto-suggestion, and it is not rare to find that these phenomena cease when the subject stops writing about them. The director should never ask for written accounts except for the good of the soul itself. He would be lacking in due reverence for God and the soul if he merely wished to obtain psychological data. It is not the director's task to collect such data for the benefit of other souls. God will find other ways to preserve accounts of His graces if such be His Will. Moreover, we are easily deluded as to the lasting value of such documents. Therefore, even when the director has a legitimate reason for requesting written descriptions he should not keep them but should return them when they cease to be useful for direction.

## II. *The Director Must Teach*

198 The director's teaching should not be purely theoretical but practical and concrete. He should outline for the soul the general principles of the spiritual life as applicable to its state, and he

should show it how to apply these general principles by giving it particularized directions. Neither the general principles nor individualized directions can be omitted without damage to the soul.

*General instruction in spiritual matters should not be omitted.* The director should not give all his instructions without any explanation: he should not be an overbearing empiricist. Rather he should show how his rules of action are based on dogma and experience, and thus little by little educate the soul until it is able to guide itself, at least in less difficult matters. He should take care to base the soul's spiritual life on solid doctrine and on an intimate knowledge of dogma and Liturgy.

On the other hand, however, direction should not concern itself with purely speculative questions or with the controversies that exist between Catholic theologians. Nothing should be taught as certain and common teaching if it really is not so; and, though in practice the client must follow one opinion out of many, he should at least know that there are other acceptable opinions. The director should be especially on his guard against looking for arguments or support for his own theories in the souls he directs. The differences between Catholic schools should not be exaggerated, nor should the director lightly speak of "defections from true tradition" in the spiritual practice of former ages. Rather should he stress the common and accepted elements in the schools, lest the soul be needlessly perturbed or lest its interior life come to lack a firm foundation.

It is not enough to teach the principles; they must also be applied explicitly to the case of the soul being directed. We often act illogically in our spiritual life; we hold the principles firmly but we do not correctly make the deductions from them because we are blinded by passion or prejudice. Hence it comes about that even advanced souls who know the principles quite well will need direction in many matters.

But this phase of direction must be handled prudently, suiting the teaching to the soul's status. It often happens that a soul will not understand or will be disturbed by a directive that is only a little more advanced or austere than usual. This readily occurs when the matter concerned is very profound, when it influences the soul's whole life and when it is unintelligible without the special light of grace, perhaps not yet received by the soul. Therefore two extremes must be avoided; one, not raising the soul up to higher things and not urging it on to a still more perfect life; or, two, proposing higher things too hastily and indiscreetly. Therefore in practice we should watch closely both the state of the soul and its own descriptions thereof, so that we may snatch at every chance of

laying higher things before it, and of urging it on to a greater progress. We should test it by making suggestions, by proposing a certain type of reading and then observe its reaction. But always we should act patiently and slowly, and never harshly reprimand the soul for its lack of understanding.

### III. *Good-will Must be Fostered and Resolutions Put into Practice*

199 There are very few souls, even among the advanced, who do not sometimes need help in making and keeping resolutions. Either their will is weak, unstable, inconstant, and hence needs strengthening; or it is strong, inflexible, harsh, and so needs to be made pliant. The director, as we said in paragraph 188, is not merely a sort of adviser who settles difficulties and problems but a real educator and teacher, who must help actively in the formation of the soul under his care. Therefore he should not substitute his own will for that of the soul but rather help the soul's will to resolve and act properly.

The director's action on the soul's will must be harmonized with the action of grace. The beginning of spiritual progress comes from God, and therefore all the director's co-operation must be subordinated to the impulses of grace. Hence he must not anticipate grace by urging the soul onwards too quickly, nor should he place obstacles to the Divine action. God leads souls along the paths He chooses, paths which can be very different from the ones the director imagines.

*Must the director aid in the formation and progress of the soul by imposing trials and humiliations, by being harsh, etc.?*

Such things should be used very cautiously, despite the fact that the Saints seem to have employed them often. When God sends a trial He also gives the grace necessary to turn it to spiritual benefit. But we have not grace at our beck and call, and therefore when we impose a rather severe trial we have no assurance that God will at once give the required special grace.

#### *Additional Notes*

200 *Should the director help the soul in temporal matters when they are connected with its spiritual welfare?*<sup>6</sup>

It is not uncommon for directors to give advice on the conduct of temporal affairs: in fact, such advice is often necessary to ensure, for example, the spiritual welfare of women who have no other trustworthy adviser. Moreover, the director's willingness to advise and assist can often be a very effective means of winning the soul's

confidence. But embroiling oneself in worldly concerns has so many dangers and undesirable features that the prudent director will not even give advice on, much less take over the management of, temporal concerns except in very unusual circumstances.

### C. Characteristics of a Good Director

201 From what we have just said it is obvious that the good director should have the following qualities:

1. *Knowledge*: primarily theological knowledge (dogmatic and practical, moral and spiritual) combined with an adequate acquaintance with the schools of spirituality. He should have a working knowledge of spiritual literature, so that he may be able to direct spiritual reading and adapt it to individual needs. He should have some knowledge of psychology and psychopathology, because he must be at least capable of suspecting pathological cases or the influence of diseases in order to know when to send his clients to a competent doctor. If the director lacks this minimum of knowledge, his guidance will be in danger of becoming purely empirical and he will not understand unusual or difficult cases.

2. *Prudence* and good judgment: to an extent this quality is in-born; it can be increased by curbing hastiness in judging, by reviewing the directions one gives and by asking advice; also by being careful to allow for the differences between souls, by guarding against prejudice, and by avoiding *a priori* conclusions. However, if one's natural lack of good judgment is so great that it cannot be rectified then one is wholly incapable of undertaking spiritual direction.

3. *Experience*, derived from one's own practice of the spiritual life or from direction received or given. Even bad direction received will teach one what to avoid when guiding others. And since direction is an *art* it is best learned from experience. That is to say, acquaintance with direction in its various forms is the best way to learn how to apply the principles of the spiritual life.

4. *Holiness*: since direction is essentially a co-operation with the Divine action in the souls whom he guides, then the holier the director, the more his life is ruled by charity, and the more he is united to God, so much the more efficacious will his guidance be, other things being equal. He will be able to merit Divine enlightenment and assistance for his charges. His authority will be enhanced by the good example he gives, and he will be free from many of the defects which can diminish the efficacy of direction.

Therefore a tepid priest, one who lacks a true interior life or who is too much taken up with exterior affairs, will be incapable

of giving good direction. It can easily happen that the influence of such a director will injure the souls who come to him. Therefore every real director needs a certain minimum of sanctity and interior life. Thus when a man possesses very great and exalted spiritual gifts he will be a great director, provided, of course, that he also has the other necessary qualities in an adequate degree.

202 Hence the problems:

Is it necessary for the director to have *personal experience* of the states enjoyed by the soul he directs? Is it especially requisite that the director of a soul that frequently enjoys the graces of infused contemplation should himself be gifted, at least occasionally, with the same graces? Undoubtedly it is a great advantage if the director has personal experience of the states through which his clients pass, or at least of similar states. For example, a director who is a religious will ordinarily be better equipped to guide religious than will a secular priest. It often happens, too, that God Himself forms directors by making them endure the trials through which they will have to guide others. Nevertheless, so long as one has real experience of the interior life, one can make up for the lack of personal experience by studying and by discussing infused contemplation with those who have been favored with it. If the director takes these steps to fill out his knowledge, there is no reason why he should not be quite capable of directing souls along paths he himself has not trodden. He will not be as skillful, of course, as one who combines personal experience of infused contemplation with the other requisite qualities, but he will often be more skilled than one who, though he has personal experience of higher states, yet does not possess sufficient theological and technical knowledge.

Hence arises the other problem which St. Teresa often discusses: When one is forced to make a choice between holiness and knowledge in a director, which should one choose? Cf. her *Life*, Ch. 5, n. 3; Ch. 13, n. 16ff.; *The Way of Perfection*, Ch. 5.

The Saint's solution appears to be the correct one. She says that it is preferable for the director to possess knowledge, so long as he is a man of true interior life, than for him to be holy but lacking in knowledge. Holiness alone will not avert very serious errors in difficult cases, as the Saint herself learned from her own experience of directors. And the directors who should be avoided most of all are those who have only a little knowledge but great self-confidence.

203 There is a *scarcity of good directors* because few possess the required combination of necessary qualities, as we shall see in paragraph 208. However, we must distinguish between *ordinary* direction, that which is required by souls following the more usual and

common paths, and *extraordinary* direction, namely, that which is required by souls receiving higher graces or undergoing great trials or experiencing extraordinary difficulties in the path of perfection. A distinction must also be made in the director's degree of skill. Some directors are outstanding, and are richly endowed with all the necessary qualities. And at the other end of the scale we find the *dangerous* directors, that is, those who totally lack even the most essential qualifications. But between these two extremes one may find *good*, directors possessing sufficient of the needed attributes, and *mediocre* directors in whom one or other of the afore-mentioned characteristics is lacking or very weak. However, it happens occasionally that these mediocre directors are quite adequately equipped to direct a certain type of soul. They are therefore not entirely unsuited and can be quite capable of assisting many souls.

Another reason for the scarcity of good directors is that there is a tendency to forget how large a part the work of direction should play in *every* priest's ministry. Everywhere there are souls capable of advancing to the higher Christian life. Everywhere it is vitally important that there should be some souls to leaven the earthbound masses. And everywhere there are many souls who need the help of some director to introduce them to the interior life.

Sometimes wrong ideas about the nature of direction are a factor in causing the scarcity of good directors. Many good people wait *passively* for direction when, by asking questions or in some other way, they could easily obtain it. And some priests, beset by timidity or undue diffidence, are afraid to direct souls to whom they could very advantageously give elementary yet nonetheless sufficient direction.

## D. The Necessity of Spiritual Direction

204 *Statement of the problem.* Some authors hold that direction is necessary for all whenever it can be obtained. Others hold, on the contrary, that ascetical direction is not generally necessary, though it is ordinarily useful despite the fact that there are many dangers to be avoided in it.<sup>7</sup>

It appears that we should distinguish between: (1) *simple* souls (e.g., good-living country people) whom God sometimes leads to true sanctity along an open path, through the easier forms of prayer and guided solely by the ordinary spiritual formation given to all; and (2) those souls whose interior life is *more complex* because of their character, education, vocation and other circumstances, or because of the special workings of grace. These latter

souls may be either just beginning or already formed in the spiritual life.

In the case of these simple souls, who, because of their circumstances, are not much in need of a director, there is scarcely any problem, because ordinarily they neither think of seeking direction in the strict sense, nor have they often the chance of choosing a director. However, if they do find one, they will derive many of the benefits of direction which we enumerate below. Properly speaking, the whole controversy revolves around the second, the more complex type of soul, especially those who, though still perhaps very imperfect, have already been formed and educated in the spiritual life. For authors are more or less agreed that all *beginners* do need direction to form them in the theory and practice of the spiritual life.

205     **Thesis III.** *Spiritual direction is God's normal and ordinary way of leading souls to perfection. Therefore when it is available it would be rash and harmful to neglect using it. This is especially true of beginners, but it holds good even for the experienced and the spiritually educated, though, of course, each type of soul needs very different direction.*<sup>6</sup>

*Proof.* From the authority of the Church; we do not base our proof, as is sometimes done, on the condemnation of Molinos' propositions 65ff., which do not in reality deal with the necessity of direction, nor on the condemned proposition of the Spanish Illuminati, who deny only the freedom of choosing a director. We find our authority in Leo XIII's letter to Cardinal Gibbons on Americanism, where the principle is stated: "Just as God decreed that men, ordinarily and for the most part be saved through men, so He decreed that those whom He calls to a high degree of sanctity be led to it also by men."

206     *From the authority of the saints, cited by Leo XIII:* The saints in general assert the necessity of direction: e.g., St. Basil says: "We consider that it is necessary for us to open our hearts to men who are of one mind with us and who are renowned for faith and prudence, in order that they may correct our defects and strengthen us in well-doing, and also in order that we may escape the judgment that awaits those who trust in themselves."

St. Gregory the Great recognized the fact that there are exceptional cases in which the Holy Ghost Himself teaches the soul without plan's help, but he goes on to assert that these exceptions do not abrogate the general law.

St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P., said: "I will go even further and say that Christ will never give man His grace (without which he can do nothing) if he neglects or does not take the trouble to follow

available guidance, believing that he can depend on himself and that he is capable of searching for and finding the means of salvation."

St. Francis de Sales:<sup>9</sup> "This is the most important of admonitions" (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, I, Ch. 4).

The saints advise direction *for beginners especially*; e.g., Gregory of Nyssa says: "Many young people eagerly undertake a life of virginity. But since their minds are yet untutored it is of prime importance that they seek out a wise teacher to guide them in their chosen vocation." Thus also Cassian (*Conferences*, II, "On Discretion," especially Chs. 10-11); St. John Climacus (*Scala*, I, 26); St. Bernard (*Sermo de Diversis*, 8, n. 7.)

Cassian also teaches that *even advanced souls need a director* (*Conferences*, XVI, Chs. 11-12): "No matter how learned a person is, it is only empty bombast for him to say that he does not need anyone's advice." St. Bernard in his letter to Ogerius, who had the care of souls, wrote: "He who sets himself up as his own teacher becomes the pupil of a fool."

*Theological Reason:*

207 The *general order of Providence* decrees that we must tend to perfection by following Christ's example of humble and spontaneous submission. This we can best do by seeking direction and by submitting our own judgment to that of another. Experience bears out the wisdom of this course of action, for God showers many graces on souls who seek direction, even though the director may tell them nothing that they do not already know.

Everyone, *even advanced souls*, must guard against illusion, since all are liable to be blinded at times by passion. Moreover, the acts of the spiritual life are so "infinitely diverse" that "they all cannot be sufficiently taken into account by one person in a short time but require a long period" (St. Thomas, II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 49, a. 3; "On Docility"). Experience proves this; a wise doctor does not try to cure his own ailments. We must remember, too, that everyone's will-power needs periodic help, encouragement, and stimulation.

*Beginners especially need a director*, because they are very much exposed to illusion. Moreover, direction is the easiest, safest, and quickest way for them to acquire knowledge of and practice in the spiritual life. They will thus avoid the usual faults of the self-taught, which in this matter are especially dangerous. For it is not a question of seeking some abstract perfection but rather the traditional Christian perfection as taught and practised in the Church in accordance with Christ's teaching and example.

208 But some may object: "*If good directors are so necessary, why does God permit them to be so scarce and so difficult to find?*"



This is a common complaint. However, even if *perfect* directors are not easily found because of the exacting combination of qualities required, yet there are very many other directors who, though imperfect, have sufficient skill in direction to help souls in a very real way. Furthermore, even if many souls lack suitable directors, they do not thereby lack a means that is *necessary* for the attainment of their supernatural end, but only one that would enable them to attain that end *more easily* and *more effectively*. 'I his is not an omission on the part of Providence, since God is not bound to provide always the best. We are only concerned here, rather, with the necessity of a director for Christian perfection, and we do not deny that many souls would attain a much higher degree of perfection if they had the best possible direction.

209 *The direction of beginners is different from that of proficients.*

Beginners must be instructed and formed in the affairs of the spiritual life. Hence in their direction a much larger place will be given to doctrine, to solving practical problems, to stirring up or moderating, as needed, the impulses of the will. They will therefore have to consult frequently with their director and will have to depend greatly on him. But proficients, since they are already educated and practised in the spiritual life, will be content with fewer consultations. They will give the director a general over-all view of their interior life to see if he approves, and they will seek his advice on the more pressing problems with which they are beset in their spiritual life or in their apostolic labors. Such souls need direction mostly in times of spiritual trial or crisis, or when they receive unusual new graces; whereas when they are following, even very fervently, a well-marked and approved way, they do not greatly need guidance. Thus what they want is a prudent person who knows them intimately and to whom their conscience is an open book and who, when they have problems, can give precise counsel instead of mere generalities and theory.

## E. Dangers To Be Avoided in Direction

210 Although direction is good and necessary, yet many defects can creep into it in practice.

*The person being directed* may have these faults:

Cowardice and fear of responsibility; a false security that imagines that the director will take care of everything; slackness in willing and determination; vainglory and self-love, manifested in speaking of self, in too much introspection; human respect, or, on the contrary, indiscreet garrulity; too great affection for the director.

*The director* may have faults too:

Despotism, treating souls as perennial juveniles, or imposing his own ideas and ways on everyone indiscriminately; incompetence, undertaking the direction of every type of soul without preparing himself; vainglory and self-complacency on the number and kind of his clients; waste of time and talkative curiosity; inefficiency, weakness, and human respect in his manner of directing, or perhaps even a too-natural liking for his spiritual child; "illumination" —i.e., directing the soul according to the lights which he thinks he has received directly from God and which he follows blindly.

Cf. below, *Spiritual Friendship* (par. 227f.) for the danger of too great affection.

211 These defects can be caused by:

*An erroneous concept of direction* (cf. par. 184 above), whereby the director is forced to judge and decide for others instead of educating them. This type of direction is effective to a certain extent inasmuch as it can get immediate good results or can ward off the more pressing errors.

*An abuse of "a priori" principles*, or, on the contrary, by an exclusive empiricism, or a presumption which leads people to believe that anyone can direct any soul, even the difficult cases.

*A kind of naturalism* which leads both director and client to rely too much on their own good qualities, on the means they employ, and on their natural judgment, whilst they forget that grace and supernatural means should play the main part in the spiritual life.

*The director's own natural defects*, especially, of which he is not sufficiently aware and which he does not try hard enough to correct. The director's defects may be such that they immediately render direction more difficult, e.g. asperity, lack of zeal. Or they may be such that they at first seem to improve direction, but in the long run render it less fruitful or even dangerous, thus giving rise to illusions on both sides. This happens when the director shows an excess of affection or affability, or when he is overbearing (especially if he is met by too great docility), eagerness to talk about self, or a corresponding natural affection on the part of the soul.

212 We can see now why authors like Plus are justified in speaking of the limits of direction, and of the moderation to be observed in its use. It would be erroneous to think, even in the case of beginners, that more progress is made, the more the soul depends on the director for everything and the more it refrains from action except when urged on and persuaded by him. Such an excess in passivity would prevent the soul from reaching maturity in the spiritual life, and would not result in true "spiritual childhood." Rather, the aim of the director should be to make the soul self-reliant, at

least in ordinary spiritual matters. Furthermore, too much direction fosters self-examination and introspection, and gives the soul a craving for speaking about and contemplating self. In a word, direction is not an end in itself but only a means of attaining an increase in charity and in the service of God.

## F. Choosing a Director

### 213 *When should the director be chosen?*

Providence Itself often indicates the director (the pastor, spiritual father) who should be the soul's first choice. For a special grace seems to go with choosing him whom authority indicates by the very fact of placing him within reach. Therefore it is better to choose such a "natural" director, provided, of course, that there is nothing to indicate the contrary.

However, a few meetings may convince the soul that the obvious director is not the most suitable one. Or perhaps the soul may be reasonably sure of his unsuitability without ever consulting him. This can happen, for example, when the soul knows full well that it is timid and that it would have difficulty in opening its mind to a harsh director; or when it is scrupulous and therefore chary of applying to a director who is too meticulous.

Finally, many people either have no special signs to guide them in their choice, or have equally valid signs pointing to more than one director.

### 214 *How is he to be chosen?*

More than once has the director of a saint been specially chosen and appointed by God, e.g. Claude de la Colombière for St. Margaret Mary Alacoque;<sup>10</sup> but this is an extraordinary occurrence.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially, many spiritual authors held that the choice of director was very important and that supernatural impulses and inclinations played a great part in it; e.g., Grou.<sup>11</sup> It is true that such inclinations should be taken into account if they are proved to be supernatural according to the rules for the discernment of spirits. But, as St. Francis de Sales<sup>12</sup> advises, they should be further supported by reflection and advice, and even then they only prepare for the final decision or help to narrow the choice still further when there are several directors with equal qualifications.

In practice, though, the choice is ordinarily made by weighing the director's qualities and the special circumstances in which the soul finds itself. That is to say, we should look to see if the director has the general qualities mentioned above, and in what degree. We should find out if he is readily available, and if we could easily

open our mind to him. We should ascertain how his character would harmonize with our own, viewed in the light of faith, of course, and not of mere natural sympathy, which would draw us to select a man who had the same defects as ourselves. Nor should we neglect to obtain the advice of prudent people, e.g. a former director. But we should remember that knowledge or advanced age, taken alone, or a large clientèle are not very secure bases for selection.

215 *May one change directors?*

Sometimes a change of dwelling or the inability of the existing director to continue his guidance will force us to seek a new guide. At such times it will ordinarily be better to change directors than to have practically no direction because of lack of time or to be directed by letter alone. Souls should be brought to accept such a change as part of God's plan and to see that no means of sanctification is so necessary that He cannot supply for it otherwise.

There can also be intrinsic reasons for making a change. For example, one may feel a real and constant difficulty in opening one's mind to the director. This difficulty must be fundamental, though, before it warrants a change; it must not merely be a temptation or the result of timidity, and therefore liable to happen with any director. Or, again, the direction received may be quite inefficacious, or the director may make great mistakes through misunderstanding the soul. In such cases it is better to change; but one should do so prudently, without haste, asking a third person's advice if possible. For it is very easy to become one of those who are always changing directors and who never find a suitable one.

716 *Ought the same man be both director and ordinary confessor?*

Such an arrangement has great advantages. Many questions of supreme importance in spiritual direction can be treated only in confession. Moreover, it makes for greater unity, since even the ordinary confessor must give some direction to his penitents.

Nevertheless, there can be grave reasons for keeping the two offices separate. It is commendable for good souls to confess frequently, and this necessitates easy access to the ordinary confessor. But the soul will not always be able to find a suitable director among the available confessors, especially when there are only a few of them: whilst a priest who comes only occasionally may be ideal as a director. However, this rarely happens when it is a question of ordinary elementary direction. It is more likely to occur when complex direction is needed or when extraordinary cases must be dealt with.

17 *When the same priest is both confessor and director, will it be better if he exercises each office separately?*

It is not preferable to have one place for confession and another for direction, at least where women are concerned: they should be directed in the place reserved for confessions. But the two offices can be usefully separated in time; it is better to administer the sacrament first and then give direction. In fact, when one is dealing with souls accustomed to the spiritual life, it will often be better to have infrequent but comprehensive consultations in order to know them more profoundly and help them more effectively. But this is only a general rule of procedure, since there are many circumstances which require different treatment.

218 *May a soul have more than one director?*

St. Teresa is sometimes cited as an example of a soul with many directors. In fact, in her *Relation IV* to Fr. Rodrigo Alvarez she was able to draw up a long list of those from whom she had received direction. But the great dangers and disadvantages of having many directors are immediately apparent, and St. Teresa herself experienced not a few difficulties, in the beginning especially, as a result of this multiplicity of advisers. In reality, there can be only one director. But it is quite possible to reconcile this with asking advice from others. Freedom to consult others cannot be altogether taken away without interfering with that liberty of soul which is so carefully protected by the Church. However, good souls must be impressed with the great harm they can do themselves if they go around asking advice indiscriminately. The guidance they thus receive cannot be based on adequate knowledge and so cannot be suitable to them. This is particularly true of souls who are prone to scruples and anxiety.

## G. Direction by Letter

### I. *Statement of the Problem*

- 219 1. We must first distinguish between:
- a. consultation on spiritual matters given once or only rarely by letter to one whom the writer does not habitually direct;
  - b. regular correspondence with a person who has his own ordinary director, in which the writer gives spiritual counsel but in which he also deals with many other matters;
  - c. spiritual direction properly so called, given regularly in letters by one who is the actual and sole director of the person concerned. This last is our subject here.
2. There are many dangers and difficulties inherent in this direction by letter:
- a. The difficulty, the impossibility even, of knowing the state

in which the person will be when he reads the letter of direction; the advice given may be little suited to his actual state at that moment. Thus errors could easily occur.

b. The impossibility of correcting an erroneous interpretation of what is written. In a conversation such an error would be easily set right.

c. Many useful and perhaps necessary matters can scarcely be committed to writing.

d. The letters may be passed on to others for whom the advice they contain is quite unsuitable and who may perhaps take scandal therefrom, since they do not know the circumstances in which they were written.

e. Moreover, much time can be spent without getting a due proportion of *real* results which could not be obtained in some other way.

f. In many cases it is difficult to keep the direction secret without causing wonder or scandal.

g. In the first and second cases cited above in 1. there is the danger of opposition between the direction received by letter and that given by the ordinary director.

3. However, in spite of all these disadvantages, many saints gave direction strictly so called, by letter; as, for example, St. Francis de Sales, St. John of the Cross, as well as many other truly supernatural and eminently prudent men.

## II. *Conclusion*

We therefore conclude:

1. Direction by word of mouth is the ordinary method and the one to be employed wherever there is no serious impediment. Therefore, when equally effective guidance is obtainable in the ordinary way, people should be dissuaded from seeking direction by letter. And the mere difficulty of changing directors and of opening one's mind to a new director is not ordinarily a sufficient reason for having recourse to the written word. We say, "ordinarily," because there are souls who find it so difficult to confide in others, that when they have done so to one person they can scarcely be expected to do so to another.

2. Direction by letter will scarcely ever be of any use when given to persons not already known to the director. The knowledge necessary for good direction cannot very well be acquired solely through the medium of letters. However, when one is asked for an answer to a rather theoretical question one may give it, but with caution, because such requests often come from people who are seeking

support for their theories, which are perhaps not in harmony with those of their ordinary director.

3. Very rarely will direction by letter be really useful when it has been preceded by only occasional oral direction, e.g. that given during the annual retreat. This is so because sufficient knowledge of the soul cannot be gathered in such a short time. Nevertheless, it is quite easy to see how letters may be useful to fill out the advice given at one of these intermittent personal contacts; for example, to complete the discussion of a choice of vocation. But this is not direction properly so called.

221 4. However, cases occur rather frequently in which circumstances make direction by letter desirable. For instance, if a soul's former director has guided it for quite a long time he will know it intimately and profoundly, he will have adapted his direction to its needs, and he will have had proof from its progress that his guidance is effective. And if, further, the state of the soul in question is complex or difficult, and if the present available directors are quite unsuited to its needs, then it will be better if it has recourse by letter to its former director. But rarely can a prudent director propose this expedient, because to propose it might seem to be to impose it. It will be sufficient if he accedes to the request made by the soul.

5. Occasional advice given by letter can be very useful, provided it is done prudently and with due regard for the actual director's greater authority. This is especially possible when the writer knows the recipient (a brother, a friend) very well; the close personal connection will give him a deep penetration into the inner recesses of his correspondent's soul. But in this context it is not so much a question of solving problems or directing the spiritual life as of giving encouragement, stirring up fervor, and laying stress on the principles of a deep, well-founded interior life.

### III. *When Direction by Letter Is Desirable, How Should It Be Given?*

222 1. There is a fundamental law in this matter that must be observed before all else: Write nothing that the recipient cannot safely show to others. Therefore a seemly gravity should pervade the letters; and one should avoid writing anything which, though good in itself, would be open to a wrong interpretation.

2. One should write in such a way that each letter is complete in itself as far as possible. Hence if one wishes to discuss something referred to in a former letter, one should refresh the reader's mind by a brief recapitulation, because often he will not be able to

recall the context and will not fully understand the matter being discussed.

3. The writer should stress the fact that the direction is given solely for the recipient and therefore should not be passed on to others, except perhaps to subsequent directors.

4. As far as possible the letters should be short.

5. In direction by letter even greater liberty than is usual in oral direction should be given the soul. It should be more free to consult others, and more at liberty to withdraw altogether from its present director, or simply to ask another's advice. The reason is that the soul can easily be confronted with difficulties in which direction by letter will be neither opportune nor sufficient.

6. Secrecy in exchanging letters should be avoided at all costs. Hence, when the person concerned is a member of a religious institute or is a married woman, it is essential that the direction by letter be approved by the superior or the husband, as the case may be. For hardly ever can the advantages of secrecy compensate for its disadvantages and dangers.

### Appendix: *Spiritual Friendship*

23 There are many notable examples of true spiritual friendship among the Saints, many of whom found therein great assistance on the road to perfection. Thus Sts. Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, St. Antonine, Bishop of Florence, and Bl. John Dominici. There have also been friendships between men and women saints, as St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal,<sup>13</sup> and between St. Catherine of Siena and Bl. Raymond of Capua and others of her "sons," like Stephen Macconi and Neri di Landoccio.

On the other hand, there have been lamentable falls in which souls, formerly fervent, gradually came to ruin through spiritual friendships which were entered into imprudently, though from a sincere and pure intention. Blessed Angela of Foligno vividly describes the course of such attachments.<sup>14</sup> There are also natural friendships which, though more or less based on sensible attractions, apparently are not a source of danger because of particular circumstances. However, even these friendships are altogether inimical to spiritual perfection; they are the occasion of many venial sins, they breed resistance to the inspirations of grace, and they stifle true liberty of spirit. This is true whether the friendship arises between the director and his client or between persons who are on an equal footing.

Friendship as an occasion of sin is already treated in moral theology. Here we are concerned with friendship only insofar as it



can help or hinder the pursuit of perfection, that is friendship between the director and his spiritual son or daughter, or friendship between two souls of equal standing.<sup>15</sup>

### I. Preliminary Notes

224 Friendship must be distinguished from the general love of one's neighbor, and from the special affection due to particular persons by reason of blood relationship (parents, brothers, sisters, relatives), by reason of gratitude (benefactors, teachers), or because of any similar special circumstances. Friendship presupposes some kind of choice as well as a similarity, affinity, and sharing of opinions and feelings, already possessed or which spring up and increase between the friends. Furthermore, friendship, "besides being love, also contains mutual affection and sharing" (St. Thomas, *Ia IIae*, q. 65, a. 5; *cl. IIa IIae*, q. 23, a. 1). Therefore, insofar as friendship adds another element to charity, it is not, like charity, a measure of perfection itself, but becomes a means which should be used only to the extent that it helps the perfection of the Christian life.

David of Augsburg distinguishes between carnal love, selfish love, natural love, social love, and spiritual love. Other authors make different distinctions. It is better, though, to distinguish between friendships which arise from a *supernatural* motive (charity, zeal), from a *legitimate natural* motive (e.g., similarity of character, mutual benefits, natural gifts of intelligence and will), from an *unlawful natural* motive (e.g., sexual attraction in the case of unmarried people, or a wish to use the friend for ambitious or selfish ends). On this basis, therefore, there are three types of friendship—supernatural, natural, and carnal.

But these various motives for friendship can be present all at once. Each motive can be either the prevailing one, or *secondary* and accessory, or only *concomitant*. Thus in supernatural friendship there can also be legitimate natural motives as well as evil inclinations which the will does not accept but endeavors to reject. Hence it can happen that, in spite of the first good intentions of the friends, the familiarity of friendship may gradually increase the power of the motives which were originally rejected. And these motives may come to influence the friends more or less consciously, and may finally lead them to actions quite alien to their first intentions.

Friendship, as considered here, can exist between many different types of person. However, we shall deal mainly with two kinds of friendship: (1) Friendship between *equals*—between companions in a seminary or university, between men religious, and between women religious, between priests in the ministry, and between men

or youths. This friendship can be found both between those who live together in the same community, and between those who to a great extent live apart from each other. (2) Friendship between the director and his spiritual sons and daughters.

## II. *Spiritual Friendship between Equals*

225 For the most part, ascetical writers speak severely against particular friendships. This may be because their books are mainly intended for religious living in a community where particular friendships among the religious can easily be a source of great danger. Or it may be because, generally speaking, any friendship can be injurious, since every true friendship will be, to some extent, a particular friendship.

The possible dangers of friendship are:

In the case of young people there are dangers to chastity which, of course, should not be pictured as greater than they actually are, but which should by no means be made light of or despised. There is a great danger that sensible affection will become excessive, resulting in a lack of that austere virility so necessary for the pursuit of perfection. Furthermore, the taste for spiritual things may quite easily be dulled, since the soul is no longer sufficiently free from creatures to allow it to rise up to the Creator.

In the case of older people friendship may become a means of satisfying ambition.

In the case of those living in community, fraternal charity is endangered by the exclusiveness of friendship, by the formation of cliques within the community, which then becomes divided into many groups. All this greatly injures union of heart, co-operation in community tasks, obedience, and the religious spirit.

Generally speaking, there is a danger that friendship may cause a fervent soul to descend to the level of his weaker friend.

But spiritual authors have often praised spiritual friendship for the great assistance it can afford to perfection and the service of God. This is especially true in the case of those who lead rather solitary lives and who find in spiritual friendship the encouragement others derive from community or family life.

The main advantages of a truly spiritual friendship are:

It can be a powerful aid to sanctity, since its genial familiarity lends itself to free exchange of lofty aspirations and to the correction of faults.

It has this effect especially where fervent souls, filled with holy resolves, associate with the tepid or less fervent. The weaker souls can be greatly assisted by participation in such a friendship, as wit-

ness the history of many reforms and foundations. It must be remembered, though, that here in particular even the faintest hint of Pharisaism must be avoided.

226 Therefore, in practice each case should be closely examined with these questions in mind:

Is the friendship still truly spiritual? Is there a proximate danger of its becoming merely natural or even carnal? Or, on the Contrary, is this danger present only in that remote and general way in which it is always possible in every human friendship?

Finally, are the spiritual advantages of the friendship much more numerous than the disadvantages? and are these disadvantages such as can be easily and effectively cured? or are they at least so slight that they can be permitted for the sake of the great advantages accruing from the friendship?

Hence special attention should be paid to the following points:

1. We should be alert for signs indicating that one of the friends is likely to exert a greater influence on the other. Account must be taken, too, of the character, capacity, various qualities and defects of each friend, to determine whether the dominant personality will communicate his defects or his good qualities to the other.

2. Attention should also be paid to humble sincerity, in order to see if signs of a less desirable friendship begin to appear.

3. A wide charity for others should be fostered as well as a right intention and the spirit of faith. Envy and the pharisaical attitude of "We are not like the rest of men" should be guarded against. Restraint should be exercised even in the quite legitimate external manifestations of friendship, especially where any tendency to increase them is noticed or where they could be a source of even slight disedification for others.

4. When the friends live in community the friendship must be subordinated to the demands of common life and common charity, care being taken to avoid the smallest *alienation* from the rest of the community. Moreover, the community exercises and gatherings must always take precedence over the private interests of the friends.

The following are the signs usually quoted as indicative of an imperfect friendship (cf. Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life*, n. 600-602) :

1. Exclusiveness; the friends barely tolerate the presence of a third person when they are conversing together, even though they may be speaking only of ordinary matters in no way secret. And each resents any marks of affection paid to the other by anyone else.

2. Thinking continually of the friend, even when engaged in matters of importance, e.g. while studying or praying; a continual desire to see him.

3. Restlessness of mind when the friend is absent, and useless conversation when he is present.

4. Frequent exchange of small gifts.

5. Inordinate hiding of the friend's faults or overreadiness to excuse them.

### III. *Friendship between the Director and His Spiritual Sons or Daughters*

227 This friendship can have many causes. It may come from the general causes responsible for other types of friendship—*bad causes* (e.g., sensual attraction) ; or *naturally good causes* (e.g., good external or internal personal qualities, or some circumstance, like coming from the same locality, or being interested in the same intellectual pursuits) ; or *supernaturally good causes* (e.g., holiness, special gifts of grace). Or the actual direction itself may give rise to friendship. Thus it is very easy to see how the director may come to have a *paternal affection* for his charges. This is especially likely when he has been able to help the soul greatly, when he knows that it badly needs his assistance, or when he sees its great efforts, its generosity, its zeal and the sacrifices it makes in God's service. Furthermore, he ordinarily knows the fervent souls among his clients more deeply and intimately than any outsider could, and therefore his opinion of their sanctity will be much higher than anyone else's.

*Filial affection* on the part of the soul can easily be aroused by direction. Ordinarily the soul is grateful for the assistance and favors it has received; it has confidence in the spiritual father, and it is aware of its weakness and so is happy to find a guide and a champion. This is true particularly in the case of women, since they are naturally inclined to look to a man for assistance. They find in the director one who is willing to listen to them, one to whom they can open their hearts and on whom they can depend when beset by difficulties.

'28 But this friendship has its own peculiar dangers.

1. Especially in friendships between the director and women clients there is great danger of a fall, and this danger is increased because matters of conscience must be discussed as well as, perhaps, temptations or even sins against chastity. Nor should one easily believe that there is no danger because of particular circumstances, such as age, physical temperament, or the like.

2. Besides this danger, which is treated expressly in moral theology and in pastoral theology, there are many others. For, though circumstances may preclude the danger of grave sin even after the friendship has descended to the natural level and now rests on sense

attraction mainly, yet many venial sins will be committed (envy, suspicion, waste of time) and people will be easily scandalized and may perhaps be led to suspect much graver lapses.

3. Here, however, we are mostly concerned with the harm done by a purely natural friendship to the spiritual life of the director and the souls concerned. A friendship of this type makes direction much more difficult, although at first glance it seems to do just the opposite. It makes direction less effective, since freedom, true authority, and the supernatural spirit are stifled by human respect on both sides, especially where gifts are accepted, favors, done—all of which are so many bonds about the soul. Such friendships support St. Teresa when she remarks (*Life*, Ch. 24, end) that neither of the friends possesses any longer that true liberty of heart without which any perfection of the Christian life is impossible.

229 In the lives of the Saints, however, there have been examples of truly supernatural friendship between the director and the directed. It is true that these examples prove that such friendship is possible and that it can be of great assistance in sanctification. But we should not forget that this supernatural affection sprang up only between persons who were already more than ordinarily holy, or between two souls one of whom was already very saintly. Hence a friendship of this nature should be regarded, in part at least, more as a *result* of sanctity than as a means towards it.

230 We can now see the procedure to be adopted in the different types of friendship between the director and the soul.

The bond of friendship may be an affection based on natural qualities and sense-attraction (although not gravely dangerous), an affection that is *mutual* and recognized as such by each party. If this is so, then real, serious, efficacious direction cannot even be thought of. Therefore the director should find some excuse to send the person, gently but firmly, in search of another guide. Obviously this will be all the more necessary where there is a danger of the friendship degenerating into carnal affection. But if the friendship on the whole continues to be truly spiritual and supernatural, care should be taken lest natural motives gradually gain the ascendancy and the supernatural friendship imperceptibly degenerate into natural affection. However, since, as we have just said, the only safeguard here is the high sanctity of at least one of the friends, and since they themselves cannot prudently assess that safeguard, it follows that recourse should be had to the counsel and judgment of a truly spiritual and prudent third party.

If the director feels a purely natural sense-affection for his client, he should never manifest it, especially when the client is a woman. And if this affection endangers the effectiveness of his direction, he

should prudently seek an opportunity or make some excuse to send the person to another director. If there is a danger of grave sin (internal or external), then the principles of moral theology dealing with the occasions of sin must be applied.

It may come to the director's<sup>1</sup> notice that a woman client loves him. When such affection is carnal and there is danger that it may lead to grave sin on the woman's part, she should be sent away, although the director himself is in no danger. That is, unless she is a neurotic who would become similarly attached to any director. In that case she must be treated as a sick person, precaution being taken as far as possible to see that she does not use the direction itself to foster her love. But the affection may be only a sense-affection, free of grave danger. In that case it may be an affection for a particular director for special reasons, and hence the client should be sent kindly, and with prudence, to another director, since there is danger of the current direction being inefficacious and useless. Or the affection may be a generalized state in regard to all directors, and thus nothing will be gained by sending her to another. The director should therefore keep on directing her but should be very careful not to permit her any familiarity nor allow her to show him any signs of affection or give him any gifts. He should rather treat her with severe clemency and charity.

## REFERENCES

1. Cassian, *Conferences*, II, 1-16; *Institutes*, IV, 9-10. St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, I, 4. Cf. Vincent, *S. François de Sales, Directeur*. St. Vincent de Paul, *Conferences*. Scaramelli, *Directorium Asceticum*, especially I, n. 92-131. Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, Ch. 18. L. Beaudcnom, *Spiritual Progress*. Tanqueray, *op. cit.*, n. 530-557. Meynard, *op. cit.*, I, n. 9-18.
2. La Reguera, *Praxis Theol. Myst.*, T. II, 8; Schram, *op. cit.*, T. II, n. 327-353.
3. Cf. also definitions given by Meynard, *op. cit.*, I, n. 11; and Saudreau, *Manual*, ¶156.
4. Cf. Vincent, *op. cit.*, pp. 408-438.
5. Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Letters*, nos. 221, 223 (*Oeuvres*, T. XXII, pp. 277-283).
6. Meynard, *op. cit.*, I, n. 11.
7. Translator's note: cf. Pius XII's *Menti Nostrae*, re the necessity of direction.
8. Tanqueray, *op. cit.*, n. 530-540.
9. Cf. *Conferences*, XII, and Vincent, *op. cit.*, pp. 397-407.

10. Cf. her Autobiography.
11. *Manual for Interior Souls*, Ch. 21, "On the Director"; also *Spiritual Maxims*, n. 3.
12. *Letters*, no. 234, *Oeuvres*, T. XII, p. 353.
13. Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Letters*, nos. 288, 304, 1377, *Oeuvres*, T. XIII, pp. 52, 84; T. XVII, p. 127.
14. *Book of Visions and Instructions* (2nd ed., 1888) , pp. 184(1).
15. St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, III, Chs. 17-22-Scaramelli, *Directorium Asceticum*, II, a. 9, n. 348-365. Rodriguez, *op. cit.*, I, Tract 4, Chs. 18-20. Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, n. 595-606.

## ***Part Five***

### MENTAL PRAYER





## CHAPTER ONE

### The Nature of Mental Prayer

231 Since the time of the Fathers three principal definitions of prayer have been in use. St. John Damascene joins two of them together when he says that prayer is an ascent of the mind to God or the asking of suitable things from Him. St. Augustine gives the third: "Your prayer is a speaking to God; when you read, God speaks to you; when you pray, you speak to God." St. John Climacus (*Scala*, 28) says: "Prayer, considered in its essence, is a conversation and union between God and man."

In the first sense, prayer means asking for something (according to the signification of the Greek words *eûché*, *proseuché*, and the Latin *precor* and *preces*). This meaning is found also in the definition given by St. Basil: "(Prayer is) an appeal for good things made to God by devout people." But St. Basil, as did St. Paul before him (1 Tim. 2.1), added thanksgiving to petition. And in actual fact there are many other acts in the Christian life beside petition—such as thanksgiving, adoration, praise—which are all alike in that they all refer directly to God. Hence the broader definitions, "speaking with God," "raising the mind to God."

When we ask God for something, we speak to Him, it is true; but there are many other things to say to Him. When we speak to God, we certainly raise our minds up to Him; but there are many other ways in which to raise the mind to God—we can do so in admiration, reverence, etc. But not every raising of the mind to God is the religious act commonly called prayer. One may be an atheist and yet think of God, e.g. when studying theodicy or the history of religion. Whence, nowadays, the definition is amplified to include the motive for raising the mind to God, e.g. Mutz's definition: "(Prayer is) a devout and humble raising of the mind to God in order to manifest to Him our love and our longings." Likewise Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, n. 51.

,32 Prayer is usually divided into *vocal* and *mental* prayer. Generally speaking, *vocal* prayer is that in which internal acts of the intellect and will are expressed externally in words. *Mental* prayer is that in which the internal acts are performed but are not expressed externally. Thus St. Thomas in *Ilallae*, q. 83, a. 12 teaches

that all prayer need not necessarily be vocal: however, he does not use the term "mental prayer." Suarez, though, treats of both mental prayer and vocal prayer. Prayer can be further divided into three kinds (following David of Augsburg): "The *first* kind is vocal and is made up of words cast in a set form and commonly employed in that form, as in the Psalms, and hymns . . . which we recite in fulfillment of an obligation or simply in order to stir up devotion in our hearts. . . . The *second* kind is that which is expressed in words that come from the heart, as when a man speaks to God in his own words, or even when he uses the words of another which express his feelings. The *third* kind is . . . mental prayer, which is made when the tongue is silent and the mind alone opens out its desires to God, pours out its love to Him, and inwardly embraces Him in love or reverently adores and worships Him."

'But in the actual practice of the spiritual life, prayer is divided into two main classes: the first, corresponding to the first kind just mentioned, and the second, including the two other types. That is to say, man either uses a set formula, making his own the ideas expressed therein—vocal prayer in the strict sense—or he stirs up affections and forms concepts within himself independently of any set formula. He may either express this inner activity in words, his own or perhaps in words already cast in a set formula which expresses his existing state of mind; or, on the contrary, he may not allow his thoughts and affections any outward expression: this is *mental* prayer, and its distinctive characteristic seems to be a complete freedom from and independence of fixed formulae.

233 But mental prayer, understood in this wide sense, can be made in many ways. Suarez notes two types of mental prayer: *first*, that which is made in a permanent and lasting way and according to a fixed rule—"When some hour of the day or a notable part thereof is assigned . . . to mental prayer, and when, in order to give oneself up solely to internal acts, one ceases from all exterior actions and movements, that is, from all actions that have external objects as their end"; *second*, that mental prayer which is made in an "occasional manner and only in passing—that is, when the mind, in the midst of external actions and occupations, is withdrawn momentarily and ascends to God, or is turned in on itself and its sins, or does something else of a like nature. All similar interior acts pertain to the mental prayer of which we are now speaking."

To these a *third* type may be added: a mental prayer that is lasting and extended, but which does not exclude exterior actions, namely, when the soul, without interrupting its external work, or even its mental labor, is able to think of God and love Him by cleaving to Him. This is the highest degree of prayer and is the

result of an infused Divine gift in the mystical state known as the Transforming Union or the Spiritual Marriage. But besides those favored with the strictly infused gifts, there are some truly recollected souls who never allow the love of God or the thought of Him to be far from the threshold of consciousness, even when the field of consciousness itself is fully occupied with other matters. Just as the thought of her sick child is never far from a mother's mind, even though she is busily engaged in her round of duties. This half-hidden thought of God and love for Him will continually influence these persons' mode of action and will readily emerge into clear consciousness on every possible occasion. This is all the more likely to occur, and true mental prayer will result, when a more express thought of God and love of Him are cultivated during material occupations which require only slight attention and which leave the mind free, as happens in the manual labor of contemplative Orders.

- 234     Therefore in the *wide*, though no less proper sense, the term "mental prayer" should be applied to every internal act of faith, hope, charity, every thought of God with the object of serving Him and of fostering charity and the other virtues, every movement of praise, thanksgiving, penance, petition, adoration, and love, whenever these acts or movements are elicited freely, spontaneously, and independently of any fixed formula (vocal prayer). More strictly, though, one makes mental prayer when one devotes set periods of time exclusively to God, not so much by saying vocal prayers, as by making internal acts.

Our principal concern here is mental prayer understood in this strict sense; however, many of our observations will hold good also for mental prayer in the wide sense, due allowance being made for the difference between the two concepts;

- 235     Henri Bremond<sup>1</sup> is of the opinion that, while the traditional definition of prayer is a good one—"An elevation of the mind to God to adore Him, to tell Him our needs, and to ask for the help of His grace"—it is yet only empirical and moral, not philosophical. Therefore he wishes to know wherein lies the metaphysical essence of prayer. He answers his own question by distinguishing between: (1) *prayer in the strict sense*, or pure prayer (*prière pure*), which is realized in all true prayer and which cannot but be prayer, since it is the adherence of the highest point or "apex" of the soul (*âme profonde*) to the divine operations that are taking place within it; and (2) *prayer in the wide sense*, or the dynamic complexus (*le bloc vivant*) of the various acts which in one way or another take part in the genesis and progress of true prayer, of "pure prayer," i.e. acts such as meditation, affections, petitions, resolutions—all of which

can be found outside prayer and which therefore do not pertain to its essence. Moreover, these acts are not always possible to man; e.g., we are sometimes unable to meditate because of fatigue or distractions. But prayer should be always possible to everyone. And that profound adherence which we have just mentioned is always possible. Therefore the essence of prayer lies therein.

This distinction, however, seems inadmissible. The whole of tradition, following the text of St. Paul just cited (I Tim. 2.1), acknowledges that acts like petition, thanksgiving, adoration, and praise of God are typical forms of prayer. But if Bremond's distinction were valid, these acts would be prayers only because they possessed that indefinite element, that profound adherence to the Divine operation. But that adherence can be equally found and realized in any act of our supernatural life, for in every supernatural act there is an adherence and consent of the will to the profound action of grace moving man and working -within him. Furthermore, this adherence does not seem to be any more formally present in a direct petitioning of God than in an act of mortification, for example, whereby man, under the impulse of grace, tries to offer God a reparation for his sins.

Moreover, a single broad concept of prayer is more in conformity with the traditional definitions expressed substantially by Heiler, for example: "(Prayer) is a kind of dynamic relationship between God and man; it unites man directly to God; and effects a personal contact between him and God." Again, an express adherence to the Divine operation in us is always a prayer, but there are many prayers in which the adherence is present only quite implicitly. But all prayer is truly and expressly a kind of elevation of the mind (intellect and will) to God, and every elevation of the mind is true prayer when it is done with the object of adoring God and of obtaining His assistance in the war against sin. However, elevation of the mind will sometimes be possible only through the medium of a profound and blind adherence to the Divine Will of Good Pleasure and operation, though this adherence alone will not therefore be true prayer. But every elevation of mind in petition or adoration, **no** matter in what form it appears, will be prayer in the strict sense.<sup>2</sup>

## REFERENCES

1. Cf. *A Literary History' of Religious Thought in France*.
2. Cf. among others, on mental prayer, St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, II, Chs. 1-13; *Treatise on the Love of God*, V and VI. V. Lehodey, *The Ways of Mental Prayer*. Meynard, *op. cit.*, I, n. 112-206. R. de Maumigny, *The Practice of Mental Prayer*.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Various Kinds of Mental Prayer

236 Many different divisions of prayer are found in the writings of the Fathers and early theologians. St. Paul in 1 Tim. 2.1 prescribes that "supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings" be offered (in public vocal prayer, as is evident from the context). Cassian also writes on the divisions of prayer, and, before him, St. Hilary. Likewise St. Bernard, St. Thomas (Ilallae, q. 83, a. 17), Suárez, and many others.

Pseudo-Dionysius distinguishes a triple movement in souls—straight, oblique, and circular. Authors apply this division to the triple motion of contemplation, insofar as the soul either "sees the invisible things of God through created visible things" (straight movement); or "is turned to God by the enlightenment received from Him, which enlightenment it receives after its own fashion, that is, hidden under sensible signs" (oblique movement); or it "puts away from it all sensible things and thinks of God before all else, even before itself" (circular movement). Cf. St. Thomas Ilallae, q. 180, a. 6.

The later classical division into "reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation" gives the parts of prayer rather than its distinct forms. Richard of St. Victor divides prayer into thought, meditation, and contemplation; and he distinguishes six modes in contemplation: in the imagination, imaginatively; in the imagination, rationally; in the reason, imaginatively; in the reason, rationally; above the reason, but not beyond it; above the reason, and apparently beyond it.

In the seventeenth century Alvarez de Paz explicitly proposed the distinction, afterwards commonly adopted, between *intellectual* and *affective* prayer. At almost the same time, and among the Carmelites especially, *acquired contemplation* was distinguished from *infused* contemplation, the former becoming known then as "the prayer of simplicity" pr "of simple intuition."<sup>1</sup>

237 In modern usage a more precise distinction is commonly drawn between *discursive prayer* (often called "meditation"), which is composed of many and varied acts of intellect and will and includes

reasoning, analyses of concepts, comparisons, as well as divers affections and resolutions, and communion with God und the saints,

and *affective prayer*, in which the intellect plays the smallest part, and wherein there is scarcely any reasoning, but rather brief intuitive glances and many acts of love, these acts of love constituting almost the entire prayer,

and *contemplative prayer*, which is made by a simple intuition of supernatural things and a simple movement of the heart, both of which are prolonged and in which the heart *rests*. This contemplative prayer may be viewed under *two* aspects; one, as *acquired* (in part at least), inasmuch as the simple intuition and love are caused in the soul not only by God's grace (which is the primary cause of every supernatural act) but also by the positive influence of the antecedent efforts which the soul has made, with the help of grace, during the discursive prayer that preceded the contemplation: two, as *simply infused*, inasmuch as the simple act of intuition and will, which constitutes it, is a gift infused by God in a special operation of grace for which man cannot prepare himself unless negatively, namely, by removing impediments. Therefore this prayer depends in no way upon our free-will: it is a completely gratuitous gift of God.

These concepts of prayer are admitted by all, though some use different formulae. As we shall see later, there is still some controversy as to whether there is a contemplation that is acquired, as distinct from that which is infused.

## A. Discursive Prayer or Meditation

258 The *characteristic element* of this prayer is mental discourse—i.e., the analysis of a concept or proposition, a descent from some general truth to a particular case or application, a reasoning some kind—and the consequent variety of affections, practical conclusions, and resolves which arise therefrom and to which the will assents.

Its *object* can be any religious truth or mystery of faith, any part of the life of Christ, or of the Saints, or of Church history, any text of Scripture, or the Liturgy or the writings of the Saints.

Its result will be to make him who meditates know the truths of faith more deeply. He will be more intimately and personally persuaded of the validity of these truths. He will be attached to them, he will apply them to himself and from them he will deduce and adopt practical conclusions that will aid in reforming his life and in uniting it with God. Meditation will also produce acts of love, hope, and humility that will become progressively more fer-



vent, more intense. The will also will be strengthened in well-doing; particular resolves will be formed of doing specified good acts for the better service of God. Finally, the soul thus prepared will seek more fervently the aid of God.

There are various forms of discursive prayer:

*Meditation* properly so called is described by Louis of Granada, St. Ignatius (*Spiritual Exercises*, 1st Week), St. Francis de Sales (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, Chs. 9-18), and, much earlier, by St. Bernard in some of his sermons.

A more imaginative consideration of the mysteries of Christ's life, as is found in the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* attributed to St. Bonaventure, or in the "contemplations" in St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, 2nd-4th Weeks.

*Thoughtful reading*; every single word of a text is taken up and considered in order to draw out all the spiritual good each contains. This method has often been applied to the Our Father; Cf. St. Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, Chs. 24ff.

*Meditative colloquies* with God or the saints in which there is discourse properly so called, but in which reasoning, analyses, affections, and resolves are not made as solitary reflections but rather in the course of conversation with God, Our Lord, or the Blessed Virgin. Alvarez de Paz's *Meditations* are a good example of this technique; and even better examples are to be found in many of the chapters of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, especially from book ten on, e.g. Bk. X, Chs. 22-30.

239 There is some question as to whether this discursive meditation can be regarded as true mental prayer (H. Bremond, especially, questions it). The reasons for denial are derived primarily from the definition of pure prayer given above in paragraph 235, since meditation and reasoning are acts which are in no way proper to prayer and are in fact habitually performed by any studious person. In like manner, though making acts of the different virtues or making resolves are both ascetical exercises aimed at reforming one's life, yet they are not prayer and could be done by any pagan philosopher. Moreover, prayer must always be possible to man; but meditation is not always possible because of pressure of business, fatigue, incapacity of intellect, mind-wandering. Finally, Catholic tradition supports the negative view, since discursive meditation has been proposed only since the sixteenth century, and as a result of over-enthusiasm for asceticism and ascetical practices.

For our part we think that the traditional definition of prayer ("an elevation of the mind to God") should be retained (par. 235), and we are also of the opinion that it is fully verified in discursive meditation as well as in the other two types of prayer

mentioned in paragraph 237. For there is a difference between the meditation of a person in prayer and that of a person at study. Each has a different aim—the one, religious; the other, speculative. Thus the Saints commonly insist that the act of the intellect is not the principal element in discursive prayer, but that the emphasis should be on acts of the will for which the intellectual acts should prepare the way (cf., e.g., St. Francis de Sales *Introduction*, etc.; II, 6, 8, and Rodriguez, *op. cit.*, I, Tract 5, Chs. 12-13). Furthermore spiritual meditation differs from scientific meditation in that it is intermingled with acts of petition for God's help, acts of repentance, of thanksgiving, of faith; again, it is not made separately or for its own sake, but is used as a means to an end. It must be conceded that discursive meditation is not always possible for everyone, whether because of incapacity brought on by fatigue, or some other natural cause, or because of inability induced by a special action of God on the soul. But it does not follow from this that discursive meditation is not true prayer; the only conclusion to be drawn is that meditation is not the only form of prayer. From what we have just said it is clear, and it will become clearer when we have dealt with methods of prayer, that meditation was by no means unknown as a form of prayer in the Middle Ages, or even in the time of the Fathers. Thus Pius X, while recommending the practice of mental prayer to priests in his *Exhortation* to the clergy, could also use the term "mental prayer" when speaking of meditation, making no distinction between them.

2 10 St. Francis de Sales (*Introduction*, etc., If, 6, 8), and others with him, seems to teach that all meditation must end with a particular resolution if it is to be fruitful. However, this must be properly understood. Discursive prayer is beneficial if it gives a deeper understanding of the truths of faith and if it produces general acts of the will. Hence in itself meditation can be of great benefit when it produces these effects; and St. Ignatius, for example, points out that these general results are to be arrived at by much meditation. However, the fruits of prayer will be few and unstable, especially in the case of beginners, if practical and immediate applications of the truths of faith are not made. This is so because one of the principal difficulties for beginners is the concrete application to their daily lives of the truths meditated upon.

## B. Affective Prayer

11 When one has meditated often on some mystery of faith it is quite usual to find that many acts of love are elicited the moment the mystery is recalled to mind. This is so because the mystery has

already been considered under every aspect and has been subjected to a close analysis, with the result that the soul's knowledge has become less abstract and speculative, more real, intimate and warm, as happens with any subject that has been studied long and fervently. Thus religious concepts appear before the mind, rich with the fruits of many meditations, and are able to stir up vehement acts of love in the heart. When this occurs, then almost all the mental prayer is taken up with acts of love and hence it is called *affective prayer*.

Should this affective prayer be regarded as a separate form of prayer? One could say that there is a *multiplicity* of acts of love in it and that therefore it remains discursive prayer; or on the contrary, one could say that reasoning is no longer employed and that therefore it is true contemplative prayer. Actually, though, we should distinguish between this prayer and the other types on the basis of both these facts, as do Alvarez de Paz, Lallemant, *op. cit.*, 7th Trim, Ch. 3; Saudreau, *Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, I, n. 307-320; Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, n. 9<sup>5</sup>-980; Meynard, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 168-186, since this prayer seems to be that employed by many fervent souls. There are many people who, on account of various circumstances (e.g., a mercurial temperament, affectionate temperament) find it hard to remain in the quiet of contemplation and who get no help from intellectual discourses. In fact, they are often incapable of pursuing a close line of reasoning, but can, on the contrary, easily make many acts of love. Finally, we should note that some authors, when using the term "affective prayer," mean, in part at least, true contemplation (sometimes even clearly infused contemplation) in which the characteristic element of love prevails (cf. those who distinguish *seraphic* contemplation from *cherubic* contemplation—Godinez, La Reguera, Schram).

242 Formerly there was some question as to whether a prayer that was purely affective could be realized without any act of the intellect. The question grew out of a problem posed towards the end of Hugo Balma's *De Mystica Theologia*, a work mistakenly attributed to St. Bonaventure. In reality, it can happen that the act of intellect which precedes the act of will can be so brief as to be scarcely noticed, and by a special operation of divine grace, the intensity of the act of will can far exceed that which would naturally follow from the act of intellect. But, since by the very nature of the human mind, nothing can be willed unless it is first known, there will always be some act of the intellect which in some way proposes the object of the affections to the will.

Doubt has also been cast on the usefulness of fostering acts of

love for particular virtues like humility, patience. It has been said that the exercise of these virtues quite apart from concrete occasions is mere wishful thinking, and altogether different from actually exercising the virtues—in accepting, for example, a humiliation that is offered here and now. Some say that the mere acts are of little value, whereas the practice of the virtues is truly meritorious.

Our reply is that those acts, although only internal, are meritorious in themselves if they are rightly made, just as any internal supernaturally good act is meritorious. The Church herself recommends such acts for this very reason. She recommends us, for example, to make acts accepting death at whatever time Providence may decree. Moreover, the exercise of internal acts truly prepares the soul to perform concrete acts of virtue when the occasion arises, since these internal acts lessen the natural repugnance to accepting, for example, a humiliation, and they strengthen in the soul the supernatural principles upon which the exercise of the virtues is founded. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that this practice can be abused. Purely hypothetical cases may be constructed under the pretext of exercising the will, with the result that the imagination or the sensibilities become inflamed. Or the contrary may happen, and the soul may concentrate wholly on fostering superficial acts of virtues which are rooted in the imagination and the senses rather than in the depths of the will.

### C. Contemplative Prayer

#### L *Definition: Infused Contemplation*

- 243 St. Thomas says that "Contemplation partakes of the nature of a simple gazing at the truth" (Ilallae, q. 180, a. 3, ad 1). In this he follows St. Bernard, who held that "*Contemplation* can be defined as an unwavering, fixed gaze of the mind at an object, or a firm grasp of the truth; whilst *consideration* is intense thought seeking the truth. . . ." Likewise in the book *De Spiritu et Anima* (Alcherus), popularly attributed in the Middle Ages to St. Augustine, we find the definition "Contemplation is a joyful and wondering gaze at a truth perceived," while meditation is called "the studious investigation of a hidden truth." And Richard of St. Victor calls contemplation "The mind's untrammelled beholding of the beauties of wisdom, a beholding that is prolonged in admiration, . . . The penetrating and unimpeded gaze of the mind ranging over the whole field of the truths beheld." (This last follows Hugh of St. Victor.) Therefore Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.,

can say with truth that the word contemplation "may be used in the strict sense only to signify the simple act of intellectual intuition," without regard for all the other elements—*affective, imaginative or discursive*—which can precede or accompany that act. Hence one can use the term "contemplative" when speaking of a prayer in which this act of intuition plays the greater part; and one should, on the contrary, call the prayer "meditation" when intellectual discourse plays the greater role. In this sense, then, the *affective* prayer just spoken of in paragraphs 241-242 can be called contemplative prayer. Furthermore, the repose of the intellect in the intuition of a truth already possessed can be distinguished from the effort of the intellect seeking the truth by reasoning. And similarly with the *repose* of the will in prolonging the acts and affections which have already been produced in it and which have become habitual inclinations: this repose of the will can be distinguished from the *efforts* of the will to elicit various new affections and acts. Hence one can apply the term "contemplative" in a special way to that prayer in which prevail, not only the intuitive acts of the intellect, but also those prolonged acts of the will. Therefore contemplative prayer may be generally defined as "An elevation of the mind to God by an intuition of the intellect and a cleaving of the will, both being simple and calm, and no effort being made at reasoning or at stirring up many affections." Or more briefly, following La Reguera and Schram, contemplative prayer is "An elevation-of the mind to God by means of a simple and ardently affectionate gaze."

Our definition is strictly verified in the prayer described by St. Teresa and others, and all theologians concede that such a prayer exists. And it is no less certain that this contemplative prayer is a gratuitous gift of God in the strict sense, and that it is given by Him to whom He wills and when He wills. Hence man can prepare himself for it only negatively by removing impediments. As a consequence, it is rightly called *infused* contemplation. We shall speak of it later in Part Seven.

## II. *Acquired Contemplation*

- 244 1. There is a vexed question as to whether there is also another prayer which is really contemplative but which is not infused by God in a wholly passive way but which, at least partly, is the fruit of man's antecedent efforts and which, therefore, he can exercise whenever he wills, once he has made due preparation and with the help of grace, which is never lacking to the just. This prayer is usually called *acquired* or active contemplation (or as Schram, following La Reguera, terms it, "ordinary" contemplation) in con-

trast to *infused*, passive contemplation (or as it is sometimes called, though less suitably, *extraordinary* contemplation). "Acquired" seems to be a better word than "active," though, because whilst there is no contemplation that is not in some way active, yet there is a contemplation which is strictly infused and can in no way be termed "acquired."

Many deny altogether that there is an acquired contemplation—Arintero, O.P., Menendez-Reigada, Saudreau, Lamballe, Diinmler, and Louismet, O.S.B.<sup>2</sup>

Others assert that acquired contemplation does exist—Meynard,<sup>3</sup> O.P.; de Maumigny, S.J.; Seisdedos, S.J.; Waffelacrt; Naval; Juan Vincente, O.C.D.; Tanquerey (who calls it "prayer of simplicity," which he distinguishes from infused contemplation); Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.;<sup>4</sup> Chrysogonus of the Blessed Sacrament, O.C.D.

Finally, some concede that it is possible after a fashion—Garrigou-Lagrange.<sup>5</sup> O.P.; Zahn.

245 In order to state the problem correctly we must remember that any contemplative prayer, just like any supernatural discursive prayer, must always be both active and passive. Contemplative prayer is made up of acts elicited by our faculties, and therefore it is not purely passive. Furthermore these acts are elicited under the (in some way) prevenient influence of grace, and therefore the prayer is not purely active. In fact, even discursive prayer could scarcely be made fervently for any length of time unless the soul received the help of grace or inspirations of the Holy Ghost. These graces and inspirations may be conscious or not, and the soul is rendered docile to their influence by the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, which have been infused into it with sanctifying grace. Therefore there is not, nor can there be, a contemplation which is wholly acquired and the result of our efforts alone. It must always be in some respect infused. There can be no contemplative prayer in which the Gifts of the Holy Ghost do not play some part at least.

But the real problem seems to be whether, besides purely infused contemplation, there exists also a real contemplative prayer which is at least partly the result of our foregoing efforts. We have already said that man can prepare himself only negatively for the reception of pure contemplative prayer (i.e., by removing obstacles). But if there is an acquired contemplation, then he should be able to prepare himself positively for its reception by using the grace that is always available to every fervent Christian. Furthermore, he should be able to tend actively towards it and should be able, having once begun using it, to apply himself to it whenever

he wishes, just as he can now apply himself at will to discursive prayer.

It is clearly important for us to reach a definite solution to this problem. For if acquired contemplation is possible, then contemplation is not only a Divine gift for which we must humbly wait, but also an exercise which we can make ourselves fit to attempt. We can attain to it by dint of our own efforts with the ever-available assistance of grace, and we can turn to it just as formerly we used to turn to meditation. And considering the great benefits which in the unanimous opinion of authors are to be derived from contemplative prayer, it is of supreme import for us to know whether we ought to expect that contemplative prayer solely as a free gift of God or whether we can positively and effectively work towards it.

The usual reasons for doubting the existence of acquired contemplation are:

a. There is no mention of it before the seventeenth century. Therefore it must have been unknown to the Fathers and to all in the Middle Ages; they recognized only one form of contemplation-infused contemplation. Furthermore, towards the end of the seventeenth century itself, acquired contemplation was apparently condemned in Molinos' propositions 28 and 27. In fact, it seems to have prepared the way for Quietism.

b. Before a person can give himself up to contemplation it seems that he requires a new disposition of soul (*habitus*) which must needs be infused, since not all of those who have only the habit of faith can engage in contemplation, though they all can meditate after a fashion.

c. To say the least of it, a discussion of acquired contemplation is useless, because even if it is possible, it exists only as a mere transition between discursive prayer and infused contemplation. And God does not usually deny further progress (infused contemplation) to those who have arrived at this transition stage (acquired contemplation).

246 2. There is proof that acquired contemplation does exist.

a. From *authority*.

It is certain that the distinction between infused and acquired contemplation was not proposed explicitly before the beginning of the seventeenth century, at which time the term "acquired contemplation" appeared almost simultaneously in many different books. The Carmelites were the first to popularize the distinction, especially Thomas of Jesus, who writes this of it in his book *De Contemplatione Divina*, a.d. 1620: "We call that contemplation acquired which we achieve by our own industry and endeavor,

though not without Divine co-operation and grace. We term that contemplation infused which flows solely either from grace or divine inspiration."

The distinction then came to be generally accepted not only among the Carmelites but also in the other schools of spirituality.

This general agreement shows that when Innocent X condemned the propositions of Molinos in which the term "acquired contemplation" was used, he did not wish to condemn the doctrine which was then widespread, just as he did not condemn the orthodox doctrine on abnegation and annihilation when he censured Molinos' opinions on these subjects. His denunciation was levelled only against acquired contemplation understood in the quietistic sense which implied the suspension of all action, and against the deductions arrived at by the Quietists. This is confirmed by the fact that those who first attacked Molinos, themselves retained the accepted distinction between acquired and infused contemplation (e.g., Segneri, S.J., G. Belfuomo), as did those also who later were prominent in refuting Quietism (e.g., Scaramelli, S.J., Honoratus a S. Maria, O.C.D., N. Terzago).

247 The following remarks will show that these theologians, in teaching this distinction, did not in any way deviate from the doctrine of the preceding centuries, but rather developed that doctrine by a legitimate process.

Neither among the Fathers nor in the Middle Ages was the word "contemplation" used *exclusively* to signify infused contemplation (cf. use of the word *theoria* among the Greeks). Thus St. Thomas, for example, says (*IV Sent.*, D. 15, q. 4, a. 1, qc. 2, ad 1) : "Contemplation is sometimes taken *strictly* to mean the act of the intellect meditating on divine things. . . . (It is) commonly (taken) in another way to mean every act by which one who has withdrawn from external affairs occupies himself with God alone in one of two ways . . . by reading . . . by prayer. Therefore Hugh enumerates the three parts of contemplation as being first, reading, second, meditation, and third, prayer." Cf. *idem* a. 2, qc. 1, ad 2, where he explains how vocal prayer and reading aloud can be parts of contemplation. Again in *III Sent.*, D. 36, q. 1, a. 3, ad 5, he says: "Although not everyone who is engaged in the active life arrives at the perfect state of contemplation, yet every Christian who is in the way of salvation must partake of contemplation to some extent, since it is commanded to all." Cf. Ilallae, q. 45, a. 5. Therefore nothing can be concluded from the use of the word "contemplation."

If we consider, not so much the word contemplation, but the idea behind it, we see that many authors in the Middle Ages



recognized a type of contemplation that was at least partly the result of man's efforts. Thus Guigo says: "If meditation is to be fruitful, it must be followed by devout prayer of which the *quasi-effect* is the sweetness of contemplation." Richard of St. Victor, after distinguishing three ways in which contemplation is made, says even more expressly: "The first (kind of contemplation) is the result of man's own efforts, the third comes from grace alone, but the second arises from a mixture of both, namely, a mixture of human effort and divine grace." Again, he says: "That which we say about human efforts must not be understood to mean that we can do even the smallest thing without the co-operation of grace. On the contrary, every one of our good acts stems from grace." From these texts Kulesza concludes that Richard admitted the existence of acquired contemplation. Likewise Gerson explains how meditation, "if properly made, passes into contemplation," as a result of the habits which originate in it. A little later Harphius says: "For, behold, studious meditation is profitably exercised and makes progress only inasmuch as it passes over into contemplation, because the mind is wont to receive with avidity, behold with joy, and cleave with wonder to the truth which it has long sought and at last finds through meditation. And this is to go beyond meditation by meditating and to pass from meditation to contemplation."

248 St. Teresa clearly assumes that there is a prayer which is not discursive and which, nevertheless, proficient souls can employ when they wish. In her *Interior Castle* (VI, Ch. 7, n. 7ff.) she explains how those people should act who have received the infused gift of prayer of full union (about which she is speaking in this Mansion) but who do not always enjoy it. She says that they who can no longer meditate discursively should not remain idle when God withdraws the grace of infused contemplation for a time. The Saint therefore teaches that they can always think, in a calm and simple way (i.e., contemplate), about some mystery of the life of Christ, especially about some part of His Passion, and thereby excite themselves to make acts of love, without any process of reasoning. This type of prayer is therefore truly contemplative.

In his *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (II, Chs. 13-15) St. John of the Cross, though he does not use the term "acquired contemplation," yet describes a prayer which he calls "contemplative" and which stems from a habit acquired by the prolonged use of meditation (Ch. 14, n. 2: Cf. Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, *Mistica Teresiana*, pp. 99ff. and, more fully, *St. John of the Cross*, p. 100, "Acquired Contemplation.") The Saint also notes that God gives this prayer directly to some souls "without the intervention of these

acts (or at least without many such acts having preceded it), by setting them at once in contemplation" (*trans. cit.*, I, p. 118). The fact that the saintly Doctor also speaks of a light infused by God in this prayer does not lessen the force of the argument (cf. Fr. Gabriel, *Mistica Teresiana*, p. 45); for not only must the Saint's words be understood in the light of his philosophical concepts, but we should also note that passive infusion of light by God is not necessarily excluded from the acquired contemplation which we are now discussing. We can only say that this prayer is, at least in part, the fruit of our efforts. Moreover, we must remember that the Saint is describing here the signs from which one can conclude that the time has come to *leave* meditation and discourse, and pass on to the state of contemplation (Ch. 13). In *The Dark Night*, on the other hand, he gives signs whereby one can know that "the spiritual man is passing through this night and purgation of the senses"—that is to say, he gives signs by which one can judge whether the aridity being suffered is the result of passive purgation or, instead, of some human defect. In the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, therefore, he is not concerned merely with discerning a state in which man is passively placed by God (as he is in *The Dark Night*), but rather with ascertaining whether man can now prudently leave discursive prayer and take up contemplative prayer *on his own initiative*. Therefore St. John is dealing here with a prayer which is acquired, at least after some fashion, and to which man can pass whenever he wills, provided that he has taken the necessary preliminary steps. This viewpoint of the Mystical Doctor is supported by the fact that, when his disciples afterwards dealt with acquired contemplation, they proposed the doctrine, not as their own and as something new, but as having been received from their master.

Hence one can say with perfect truth that this doctrine of acquired contemplation, afterwards commonly accepted, was not a deviation from but rather a legitimate evolution and progress in traditional teaching.

249      b. *From theological reason and experience.*

All agree, and experience proves, that analytical and discursive study of scientific truths or works of art is followed by acts of contemplation of the truth, or even by a real state of contemplation or rest in a simple intuition of the truth. Moreover, there is common consent that this natural contemplation is very desirable and of great benefit. Hence we can say *a priori*, and the facts will confirm our opinion, that the same process takes place when analysis and reasoning are applied in meditation to supernatural truths made known by faith; nor can any cogent reason be adduced for thinking otherwise.

The operations of grace in us do not stifle our natural activity but rather perfect it. But our minds naturally go through a process wherein an analytical and discursive search for the truth is followed by another activity, calmer and more unified, by which the mind cleaves to a truth already possessed, enjoying it with love and admiration. Hence when we apply ourselves in meditation to the supernatural truths known to us by faith, it would be contrary to our human nature if our minds did not gradually pass on to engage in a higher activity with regard to these supernatural truths, just as they would if we were concentrated on natural truths. This becomes even more evident when we consider that many of the truths of faith on which we meditate (e.g., the mysteries of the life and Passion of Christ) are much more proportioned to the human mind than many metaphysical truths which, it is conceded, can be the subject of "natural" contemplation for some minds. Furthermore, the repose of the mind in the truths of faith is made easier by the fervent soul's love for and devotion to God and the affairs of the spiritual life: the mind naturally enjoys calm, prolonged thought about an object that is loved intensely, as well as complacency of will in that object. Such a contemplation is obviously neither vain nor idle but is, on the contrary, useful and beneficial, since it enables the soul to prolong readily and gently that mental prayer in which it exercises fervent charity, and in which the soul penetrates more deeply into the mysteries of faith.

250 The objections brought against our thesis are not insuperable.

*It is impossible that the soul remain engaged for a long time with the same thought or act of will unless it be helped by the special grace of infused contemplation.*

*Reply:* We concede that the soul requires a special help from God in order to remain fervent in acquired contemplation for a long time, just as it needs help to persevere in fervent meditation. But we deny that that help is necessarily the same as that which constitutes the gift of infused contemplation: unless, of course, one wishes to give the name "infused contemplation" to any prayer in which man is assisted by the gifts of the Holy Ghost—but this brings us beyond the limits set in our statement of the problem. Moreover, the question is not how long can acquired contemplation be enjoyed, but whether or not it can exist at all.

*Acquired contemplation is only a transitory state of prayer, since the soul who reaches it will quickly be raised to infused contemplation by God, who is infinitely good.*

*Reply:* To this we could simply answer that man can at least actively try to reach acquired contemplation and enjoy it for the short space of time allowed him. As a matter of fact, this opinion

is quite gratuitous if "infused contemplation" is interpreted strictly, and as described by St. Teresa, for example. Experience proves that in reality not a few souls remain engaged in acquired contemplation over a long period or even during their whole life.

*Before one can engage in contemplation one needs, besides faith, a new disposition of soul (habitus). Otherwise, all who have faith could contemplate, which is evidently not the case. And, since it is a question of supernatural acts, this new disposition must be an infused one.*

*Reply:* Acquired contemplation is an act elicited by the habit of faith without the aid of any other infused habit. All cannot engage in it, it is true. But neither is everyone capable of making a genuine discursive meditation. Before man can rest in this contemplation he must remove such impediments to the habit of faith as instability of mind arising from disordered passions, or the darkening of the intellect as a result of worldly thoughts. And these are precisely the impediments which are removed by the use of discursive prayer. It is further required that the habit of faith be assisted by fervent charity.

*Contemplation is concerned with things seen, whilst faith deals with things unseen. Therefore, before contemplation is possible we must possess, besides faith, some experimental knowledge of divine things, like that found in infused contemplation.*

*Reply:* The intuition which is present in contemplation can be understood in the *strict* sense, namely, as meaning a knowledge that is in some way immediate; or it may be intuition in the *broad* sense, that is, as opposed not only to mediate knowledge but also to discursive thought and reasoning. Thus we can rest in an intuition of the things we know by faith and so contemplate them.

The difficulties found in tradition and in the condemnation of Molinos have been solved already.

#### *Additional Notes*

- 251 1. The prayer of simplicity<sup>6</sup> (cf. Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, n. 1363-84) receives its name from a work *Manière courte et facile pour faire l'oraison en foi et de simple présence de Dieu* which is usually attributed to Bossuet/ but the authenticity of which is not altogether certain.<sup>®</sup> This prayer is mostly identified with acquired contemplation by those who admit that acquired contemplation is possible; it consists in a kind of general and confused attention paid to the presence of God, accompanied by a general disposition of love and adoration without any distinct acts of any of the virtues. But even some of those who admit acquired contemplation think that the only genuine prayer of simplicity is that which is infused

(cf. de Maumigny, *op. cit.*, I, Part 3, Ch. 6) as does Saudreau (*op. cit.*, n. 124-125) among those who do not admit acquired contemplation. It should be added that if there actually is a legitimate prayer of simplicity which can be acquired, as seems probable, it can be included under the broad concept of acquired contemplation, since a contemplation can be truly called acquired if, in it, the mind rests in some specific mystery or in eliciting some definite act of will.

2. According to the classical distinction, acquired contemplation can be either *positive* or *negative*: *positive* when it attributes to God in an eminent degree all the perfections which we can discern as being participated by creatures; *negative*, when it denies to God all the limitations and analogous forms to which these perfections are subjected in creatures. We should note that not a few of the defenders of acquired contemplation, especially among the Carmelites, treat almost exclusively of this negative contemplation.

## REFERENCES

1. Pourrat, *op. cit.*, IV, Ch. 6, pp. 155-167.
2. Saudreau, *The Mystical State*, Ch. 11. Lamballe, *Mystical Contemplation*, pp. 89ff. Louismet, *La Contemplation Chrétienne*.
3. Meynard, *op. cit.*, I, n. 200ff. De Maumigny, *op. cit.*, II, Ch. 11.
4. *St. John of the Cross*, p. 100 "Acquired Contemplation."
5. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 221-235.
6. Cf. also Meynard, *op. cit.*, I, n. 1914. Lehodey, *op. cit.*, II, Ch. 9, pp. 199-223.
7. Cf. appendix to English translation of Grou's *Manuel des Âmes Intérieures*, "A Short and Simple Manner of Making Our Prayer in the Spirit of Faith and in the Simple Presence of God."—Tr's. note.
8. Cf. Pourrat, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 164, note.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Necessity and Fruits of Mental Prayer

#### A. The Necessity of Mental Prayer for Leading a Christian Life

252 We are not going to discuss whether mental prayer is a means necessary for salvation, as is prayer in general, nor whether there is a general precept to make mental prayer. Such an obligation certainly does not exist; cf. the errors of the Illuminati and the Quietists, who taught that mental prayer was commanded by a Divine precept.

We are concerned, rather, with determining the necessity of mental prayer for the leading of the perfect Christian life. However, we shall not discuss the necessity of that *diffused* mental prayer (or as Suarez calls it, “discontinuous,” “occasional” mental prayer) of which we spoke in paragraph 233, nor the necessity of joining internal affections to vocal prayer; for it is certain that the more perfect life cannot be lived without such an intimate union with God.

We are also concerned with ascertaining whether, in order to lead the perfect life, one must devote a special *period of time* to the sustained and exclusive practice of mental prayer. But we shall not seek to determine here whether mental prayer should be made every day, at a definite hour, and for the same length of time; these are only the external circumstances which help to assure and improve the practice of mental prayer, and we shall deal with them later on. In general, then, our aim is to find out if the constant use of mental prayer is necessary for the more perfect Christian life.

It seems that one could deny the necessity of habitual mental prayer; in fact, some do deny it, and for the following reasons: (1.) The practice of reserving a part of the day for mental prayer was unknown for many centuries. The earlier Christians used to pray the liturgy, and strove to pass the remainder of the day in union with God. Even today there are many simple souls who never even think of mental prayer and who are nevertheless united with

God by continually thinking of Him and walking in His presence.

(2) There is a danger that, when a person has spent his appointed time in prayer, he will afterwards become totally wrapped up in worldly affairs, with the result that only the smallest part of his life is given to God.

253 But as against these arguments we have the Church's authority in the Code of Canon Law, Canon 125, paragraph 2, that *clerics* "spend some time daily at mental prayer"; cf. Canon 1367, paragraph 1, on seminarians; Canon 595, paragraph 1, number 2, on "religious, who should "engage . . . daily in mental prayer." In like fashion, Pius X, in his Exhortation to the Clergy (*Haerent Animo*) of August 4, 1908, teaches that the fruitfulness of the priestly ministry comes from sanctity, and that zeal-for prayer is a great aid to sanctity (n. 6-7) ; and he adds (n. 8) : "It is of supreme importance that a certain time be given over each day to meditation on the eternal verities. No priest can omit this practice without suffering spiritual harm and being guilty of grave neglect." The Saints are of the same mind; for example, St. Bernard (who is cited by Pius X) admonished Eugene III thus: "(Do not) give yourself wholly and continually to action but devote to thought a part of yourself, a part of your heart, and a part of your time." Likewise St. Thomas in Hallae, q. 82, a. 3 says that essential devotion is nothing other than the fervor of charity, and that its "intrinsic cause on our part must be meditation or contemplation." St. Teresa often stresses the necessity of mental prayer in the strict sense (cf. *Life*, Ch. 8, n. 4-9; *The Way of Perfection*, Ch. 16, n. 3; Ch. 18, n. 4; Ch. 23, n. 2). St. Francis de Sales, in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, II, Chapter 1, prescribes for Philothea a definite time for mental prayer.

The conclusion to be drawn therefore seems to be: "Generally speaking, in order to reach perfection, it is necessary that a certain space of time be regularly devoted to mental prayer." This mental prayer can be made in any of the various ways mentioned above. Thus it will suffice to recite slowly and meditate upon some vocal prayer, to read meditatively, or, as is often the practice of simple souls, to recite the Rosary whilst thinking on the mysteries of the life of Christ. But this must be done in such a way that it becomes true, formal mental prayer and not a mere recitation, even an attentive recitation, of some set formula. Whilst we have no warrant for concluding that mental prayer is so necessary that it cannot be made up for in some other way, we do say, though, that it is a normal means of sanctification, like spiritual direction; and like spiritual direction, it cannot be wilfully neglected without grave harm being done to the soul's perfection.<sup>2</sup>

## B. Proof of the Necessity of Mental Prayer

I, *From Theological Reason*

254 That is, from the arguments adduced by Pius X, which hold good not only for priests but also in the main for all sincere souls:

"Although . . . the priestly functions are august in themselves . . . yet frequent use brings it about that they who perform them may not think on them as deeply as reverence requires."

Mental prayer (and, for the most part, only mental prayer) will bring it about that priests fulfill their sacred duties, dispense the sacraments, and say their vocal prayers (private and liturgical), with a true interior spirit. It will foster in them dispositions suitable for receiving the full benefit from the duties of their office and their vocal prayer, and will assist them to penetrate deeply into and savor the sense of the formulae employed.

"It is necessary that the priest conduct himself as one living in the midst of a depraved people." Not only priests but also many Christians must live besieged by worldly thoughts and in the midst of worldly opinions which press in upon them through the senses and which continually tend to stifle in the soul the remembrance of supernatural things and the workings of the Christian mind. Hence the necessity of mental prayer if they are to acquire and preserve supernatural convictions which will be strong enough to exert a practical influence on their whole lives.

The priest must "be equipped with a certain facility in striving for and mounting up to heavenly things . . . Daily meditation is the principal means of effecting and preserving this quasi-natural union with God." Through mental prayer all can acquire a facility in thinking of heavenly things, and thence they can come little by little to an habitual union of mind with God. This is so because mental prayer provides an opportunity for the deep recollection which is necessary if the soul is to retain any true thought of God at other times and in the midst of other occupations.

Finally, neglect of mental prayer has many bad effects—dissipation of mind, neglect of little things and of small faults (which are usually healed only by a strong supernatural spirit).

II *From the Authority of the Church*

255 We can also prove the necessity of mental prayer for perfection from the authority of the Church referred to above (*Haerent Animo*) which commands or at least strongly recommends the



daily use of mental prayer to priests and religious. The Church holds that mental prayer is the ordinary means by which God leads souls to the true interior life so necessary for them. The practice of mental prayer is nothing new: the charge that it was unknown to the ancients and the Middle Ages merits only a simple denial. Cassian wrote of engaging in private prayer after the nightly Divine Office was over (*Institutes*, II, 12-15). St. Benedict in his *Rule* refers many times to the practice of meditation (Chs. 8, 48, 58); and meditation and mental prayer strictly so called were by no means unknown to the early Benedictines. The advice given by Guigo, Hugh of St. Victor, and Aelred presupposes some familiarity with strict mental prayer. Fr. Devas, O.P.,<sup>3</sup> shows that mental prayer was practised among the Dominicans from the very first. He shows also that at a very early date it came to be regarded as a regular exercise performed at a stated time. Furthermore, he points out, the General Chapter of the Dominicans legislated extensively on mental prayer before the sixteenth century. Louis of Granada said that he who does not engage in meditation at least once a day does not deserve to be called a spiritual person or a religious. Cajetan also taught the same thing in almost the same words. We shall cite many more examples when we come to deal with methods of prayer.

### III. *Answer to a Difficulty*

There is another difficulty which is usually advanced against mental prayer: some mistakenly think that the time given to this exercise is so sharply defined that the rest of the day will be completely without prayer. But it is clear from what we have said, that in setting aside a fixed time for prayer we do not mean to limit prayer exclusively to any one time. On the contrary, we wish only to ensure that the soul will appoint a special period of the day for intimate and profound converse with God, free from the invasion of worldly cares, in order that it may be able to preserve greater union with God while engaged in its daily duties. Therefore it is, and ever has been, less necessary for those who lead a purely contemplative life in a monastery to have a fixed time for prayer. And so the practice of appointing a time for prayer became more widespread from the thirteenth century on, when there appeared forms of religious life which were devoted expressly to the apostolic life. The practice became even more common in the sixteenth century, when there was a great increase in clerical institutes which indeed led the religious life but not after the monastic pattern. And when the monastic way of life declined in fervor and in regular observ-

ance, many reforms in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were introduced principally by inaugurating the regular practice of mental prayer (e.g., the reforms of Louis Barbo in Italy and Cisneros in Spain).

#### *Additional Notes*

256 In paragraphs 296ff., when dealing with the external conditions of prayer, we shall discuss the amount of time to be given to it, at what hour of the day and in what place it should be made.

Suffice it to say here that for many people these circumstances have been already settled by authority, e.g. for seminarians, religious. However, those who are not thus legislated for, will often find it impossible to engage in strict mental prayer at the time and in the place they have chosen. Nevertheless, whenever it is possible, a set time and place for prayer should be decided upon, because a definite schedule will ordinarily be of great assistance in assuring regular prayer, especially in the case of those who are weighed down by many duties. The selection of time and place should be made primarily with the idea of obtaining a daily interval to be given over to profound recollection, a daily period unlikely to be disturbed by frequent interruptions. For unless mental prayer is habitual and free from external distractions the soul will not be able, in actual practice, to derive full benefit from it.

## REFERENCES

1. Cf. Woywod, *Practical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*.
2. Translator's note: Pius XII in his Exhortation *Menti Nostrae* says that it cannot be supplied for.
3. See the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, XVI, 1920, pp. 117-193.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### States and Habits of Mind Which Help or Hinder Mental Prayer

- 257 The practice of mental prayer will be difficult or easy, depending on whether the soul is distracted by wandering thoughts or is, on the contrary, habitually recollected; on whether it is dry or full of devotion. We must therefore inquire into the origin of these and other similar circumstances which help or hinder prayer and which arise from within the soul itself.

#### A. Distractions

##### I. *What Are Distractions?*

- 258 The *imagination can wander*. Though the intellect may be actually thinking of God and using images, verbal or otherwise, yet other visual and auditory images may come to consciousness and strive to draw away the intellect. In spite of these distractions, however, the mind can remain fixed on God, but with greater effort and less depth of penetration. The *mind* itself can wander: when it does there is no longer actual thought of God but of the object proposed to the mind by images. St. Teresa points out the importance of this distinction in her *Interior Castle* (IV, 1, n. 8-11). Distractions of the first type make prayer more difficult, it is true, but they do not interrupt it. The second kind do not completely interrupt vocal prayer, at least where the semi-conscious attention remains sufficient for the proper recitation of the formula and for the habitual intention of the soul. But in mental prayer, when the mind itself wanders and when consequently there is no act of intellect or will centred on Divine things, then formal prayer no longer exists. However, even then mental prayer may not be totally disrupted. The distractions may not be fully voluntary and the will to pray may be habitual or, in a way, even virtual. If this is the case, then the moment the soul perceives the distraction, it rejects it and returns immediately to God.

## II. Causes of Distraction

259 The causes of distraction are many, some independent of our will, others dependent on it.

### 1. Causes *independent of the will*.

Character and temperament; a vivid and unstable imagination; extroversion; inability to fix the attention or to elicit acts of will; lively and ill-restrained passions which continually draw the mind to think of things loved, feared, or hated.

Weak health, excessive fatigue; which make application of mind difficult and hinder abstraction from one's surroundings.

Unsuitable direction; being under a director who wishes to impose his own ideas *a priori* and without taking into consideration the influence of grace, the character, spiritual state, and needs of his client. Thus, the director may force discursive meditation on one whom God inspires to practise a simple form of prayer; or, on the contrary, when a soul really needs discursive meditation, he may make it apply itself to the prayer of simplicity.

The devil may interfere directly -with the soul or, more usually, may make use of the ordinary sources of distraction by increasing their efficacy. His aim is to perturb the soul and turn it away from prayer if he can, or at least to deprive it of the benefits it should derive from prayer.

Father Faber (*Growth in Holiness*, Ch. 24) notes, in somewhat the same way as Schram, that the *Holy Ghost Himself* may cause distractions in order to purify the soul or move it to change the manner or matter of its prayer. It is indubitable that God uses for this purpose the distractions which He permits; but we cannot very well say that He positively causes these distractions. For, though He uses the temptations which He permits, yet He Himself does not tempt or solicit anyone to evil by any positive act. So it is that, if a person approaches God in prayer and intends to persevere therein and yet at the same time deliberately thinks of extraneous things, he is guilty of some irreverence and is therefore guilty also of a fault. Hence distractions during prayer are a form of temptation.

### 2. Causes *depending on the will*.

Lack of due proximate preparation, neglect of the ordinary means of acquiring recollection of mind, i.e. failing to take account of the time, place, posture best suited to prayer, passing too quickly from other occupations to prayer without allowing the mind first to rest a little in the presence of God (cf. St. Ignatius, *Exercises*, add. 3, n. 75).

Lack of remote preparation, namely, habitual lack of recollection (of which we speak in par. 261) ; general tepidity in the spiritual life, and a multiplicity of deliberate venial faults; curiosity about useless, vain, and new things, avidity in reading everything available.

### III. *Practical Remedies for Distraction*

260 It is impossible to avoid all distractions in prayer unless one gets a very special grace from God or enjoys the higher degrees of infused contemplation. But we should strive to lessen their number and not to allow them to deprive prayer of its fruit. Therefore:

We must do our best to remove the causes of distraction which depend on our wills, and we must be careful during prayer not to consent to distraction. We shall speak presently about recollection, the principal remedy for distractions.

We can at least *moderate* the influence of those causes of distraction which do not directly depend on our will. We can do this by better adapting our prayer to the circumstances in which we find ourselves, by using devices for fixing our attention, like reading or writing, even; by making use of pictures; by selecting a concrete subject for meditation, by praying more with the heart than with the head, by speaking with God and the Saints as friend to friend.

We can fight distractions directly. When we realize that our mind has strayed, we can bring it back to bear on the matter in hand, but patiently, humbly and quietly, never violently, although we may have been guilty of negligence. We can reap the fruit of humility intended by God when He permits our attention to wander. But if only the imagination strays and cannot occupy itself with the objects we propose to it, we must just bear with it patiently, and cling with our intellect, and especially with our will, to spiritual things.

## B. Habitual Recollection of Mind<sup>2</sup>

### I. *Definition of Recollection*

261 Recollection is the principal remedy against distractions and dissipation of mind. Masters of the spiritual life stress its importance either directly, or indirectly by advising silence, custody of the senses, of the imagination, of the heart, and avoidance of vain curiosity.

In the context of the spiritual life, recollection means having one's attention fixée on spiritual things. Recollection is actual when one

thinks here and now of God, of the supernatural life, and when the mind is occupied with these objects. It is habitual when one often thinks attentively and lovingly of interior things, with the result that one acquires the habit of returning quickly and of remaining attentive to these thoughts after one has had to concern oneself with externals. Therefore habitual recollection is altogether different from the examen of conscience and from a more or less continuous preoccupation with our mode of conduct and the interior state of our soul. Often, in fact nearly always, recollection will keep our minds fixed on God and divine things and not on ourselves. Therefore there is no need to fear that recollection will result in too much introversion or beget the habit of anxiously examining our actions and feelings. Recollection must not be confused with total or excessive abstraction from the concrete circumstances of real life. Nothing is more *real* than the affairs of the supernatural life. True recollection does not consist in banishing all thought of everyday matters but rather in thinking of them in the light of faith.

## II. *Effects of Recollection and Reasons for Cultivating It*

262 The effects of recollection are obvious; they are practically the same as those arising from union of mind and will with God, of which we spoke in paragraph 89. Recollection means the habits of mind which spiritual masters call the interior spirit, the supernatural spirit, the spirit of prayer, and to which they attribute so much importance. It consists in the soul's having the highest estimation for supernatural things, and an intense love for them; that is, it is the logical consequence of the dominion of charity in the soul.

Therefore the primary source of recollection is the grace of God inasmuch as that grace restrains the natural instability and fickleness of the human mind, makes man's thoughts of supernatural things more intense and gives them more influence over him. This operation of grace, however, does not set aside the natural operations of the mind but rather perfects them, and so we may not neglect to secure the psychological conditions necessary for recollection.

It must be noted that every image formed in the mind through the perception of the external senses tends to re appear before consciousness. Thus an image will return to consciousness more frequently and vividly the more firmly it holds the attention, the more it is associated with other images, the oftener it has returned to mind and the deeper are the responses it evokes from the will or emotions. Therefore one condition of recollection is that man avoid as much

as possible any unnecessary increase or intensification of images (and the concepts which accompany them) that are foreign or contrary to spiritual matters. Conversely, he must take care to multiply and intensify his images and concepts of supernatural things. It is true that he must perforce entertain a host of images and thoughts of secular affairs, living as he does in worldly surroundings. Nevertheless, he must be careful not to dwell on these thoughts more than is necessary and not to allow his mind to become immersed in them. Rather he must try to link up his thoughts on worldly affairs with thoughts on spiritual things and the truths of faith.

This is the foundation for many of the counsels given by spiritual men.

### III. *Silence as a Safeguard of Recollection*<sup>3</sup>

263 Over-indulgence in speech dissipates the mind. Not only that, but the thoughts to which we give voice receive new force, even for ourselves, from their external expression in words. Hence the benefits of holy conversations and the harm done by vain and useless talk. Furthermore, silence helps the mind to attend to and penetrate deeper into good thoughts. Of course, all cannot keep silence in the same degree; the degree of silence will differ in the contemplative life, the apostolic life, and family life. Yet all who wish to acquire true recollection of mind and a spirit of prayer must (1) keep silence readily whenever possible, and thus overcome the human urge to speak; (2) avoid garrulity and loquacity when they do have to speak; (3) never speak on impulse and without weighing their words, so that they may always remain master of the tongue. In certain circumstances strict silence should be observed—during retreat, before prayer or Mass, morning and evening in religious communities.

God Himself set the example of silence: He performed His greatest works in silence—the Incarnation, the sanctification of souls. Christ in His mortal life has left us many examples of silence. And the whole of spiritual tradition recommends the practice of silence.<sup>4</sup>

### IV. *Avoidance of Vain Curiosity*<sup>6</sup>

264 The desire to know truth is good in itself, just as the desire to eat is good. But either desire can become inordinate, and as eating can degenerate into intemperance, so the desire to know can become mere vain curiosity. (Cf. St. Thomas, *IIallae*, q. 167.) Vain curi-

osity, the desire to know everything, to hear news and to see unusual things has many bad effects even when concentrated on spiritual things. (Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, I, 3, on spiritual avarice.) It hinders recollection because it begets a multiplicity of distracting thoughts and ideas to which the mind becomes inordinately attached. However, curiosity about things which we are bound to study is good and legitimate and should be retained and fostered, since it greatly assists us to perform our allotted tasks. All the same, even laudable curiosity will often render recollection very difficult; hence the frequent distractions and aridity suffered by those who must engage in study. It is therefore important that students often refer their studies to God, their real end and object, and that they preserve the greatest possible purity of intention while engaged in them.

#### V. *Custody of the Senses*<sup>0</sup>

- 265 The manner of keeping guard over the senses will differ in the various walks of life; the way in which a military officer should bear himself will not be the same as that which one expects to see practised by a religious, especially a contemplative religious. Everyone, monk and soldier, should of course allow himself sufficient relaxation and recreation. But each should guard against dangerous amusements which open the way for temptations. Not only that, but each should eschew also those pursuits which are likely to take hold on the mind and render recollection difficult. Special care should be taken not to allow the intellect and will to lose their control over the senses, leaving them free to be drawn away by every passing sensation. Therefore even necessary relaxation should be sought in things which are least likely to turn the mind away from God. In fact, where possible, recreations should be such that they will tend to lead the soul to God. The practice of keeping to one's cell, so often recommended to religious, is but a part of this custody of the senses. (Cf. *Imitation of Christ*, I, 20.)

#### VI. *Custody of the Heart and Imagination*

- 266 The habit of day-dreaming is a big obstacle to recollection. For, when we day-dream, our imagination wanders unchecked, we summon up whatever images we like, and we may even fabricate whole series of imaginary events. We allow our affections, especially our sensible affections, and our hearts to be drawn away by the various objects offered by imagination or proposed in any other



way. We follow, instead of checking, the various emotions that rise in the soul, though they are useless or even wrong. (All this is most likely to happen when we are idle, that is, when we cannot or don't want to apply ourselves physically or mentally to the labor at hand.) Hence lack of control over the emotions and imagination, besides opening the door to temptations of various kinds, weakens the power of attention, fills the mind with vain images and emotions, and causes the will to lose its dominion over this part of the soul's activity. Therefore discipline must be imposed on the imagination and emotions if recollection is to be secured. However, one should not try to gain control by using violence or by engaging in mental strife; instead, it should be accomplished gradually, by a gentle and faithful co-operation with grace.

## C. Aridity

### I. Definition of Aridity

267 Quite often authors make little or no distinction between aridity and desolation; thus Godinez defines aridity as "an interior weariness, an exhaustion of soul which impedes the use of meditation and cuts off all affection for holy things."

Similarly de Maumigny (*op. cit.*, I, Part 4, Ch. 2) calls it "a lack of light in the intellect and of fervor in the will," and enlarges on it by referring to St. Ignatius' account of desolation (*Exercises*, n. 317). Aridity, however, should be distinguished from desolation, since desolation presupposes sadness, weariness, and anxiety, which need not be present in aridity. Furthermore, desolation affects the whole spiritual life, but aridity occurs only in prayer; and it is not rare to find that the soul retains a taste for spiritual things and a facility in thinking of God outside prayer.

Aridity is more properly defined as "a certain powerlessness during prayer to elicit thoughts or affections about spiritual things." (Ribet, Zimmerman, following Alvarez de Paz, give almost the same definition.)

"Powerlessness"—the soul is as powerless to produce good thoughts as drought-stricken land is to produce crops. However, scarcely ever does one find a case in which there is absolutely no thought or affection; the soul can always say at least, "Lord, have mercy on me. Thy Will be done." Aridity rather consists in the fact that the soul cannot apply itself as it -wills to a particular object or cannot elicit a particular act of will. The mind need not necessarily be distracted or drawn to think of mundane affairs, but in true aridity it will always be void and empty during prayer.

"Powerlessness to elicit acts"—the soul can still know quite clearly what its duties are, and it can retain a firm will to serve God.

"Thoughts and affections"—if the soul can rest in some simple thought or affection, it is not in aridity, although it may be quite unable to form definite resolutions or to multiply acts of will or love.

We must draw a distinction between *absolute* aridity, or real powerlessness to apply oneself to prayer, and *relative* aridity, or great difficulty in eliciting acts. In addition there is *intermittent* aridity, which, at longer or shorter intervals, alternates with a certain facility in prayer; and *continuous* aridity, which continues unbroken for a long time.

## II. The Causes of Aridity

268 Some are external and accidental: an unhealthy physiological state which hinders the free use of one's powers, especially of one's spiritual powers, and which may be due to disease or fatigue; temptations so insistent that the soul almost exhausts all its spiritual forces in repelling them; a great number of pressing business affairs, or many cares, great anxieties, intense mental application. Sometimes the cause may be wrong education in prayer—one may have been taught a mode of prayer that is little suited to one's character and circumstances. Finally, aridity may be caused by some notable infidelity or resistance to the inspirations of grace, or a fault which, though light, is quite deliberate, causing God to hide Himself from the soul. The aridity caused by these defects will, for the most part, be transitory and relative only. However, if the unhealthy physiological state mentioned first above is due to a permanent neurasthenic or similar condition, then for a protracted period the soul will be completely or almost completely unable to make mental prayer and will sometimes be unable to say even vocal prayers.

269 Other causes of aridity strike deep and are more permanent, usually causing habitual aridity:

*Tepidity.* God usually withdraws the grace of devotion from the soul when fully deliberate venial sins become habitual and ordinary, and, *a fortiori*, when the soul habitually and with full deliberation resists the inspirations of grace. Purely psychological causes can have the same results. When a person is tepid he has little love for spiritual things, his thoughts about them are superficial and without deep conviction, and hence he is unable to apply his mind diligently and intensely to them.

But the main causes of aridity in a tepid soul are *sensuality* in

any form (since it immerses the soul in material things) and *vain curiosity* about worldly affairs and news. These two failings give rise to dissipation and superficiality of mind, which are directly opposed to the interior life.

- 270 **A trial sent by God.** God sometimes withdraws the feeling of devotion (but not the substance of devotion, as we shall see) even from a fervent soul. He does so (1) to purify the soul by making it expiate its faults, by depriving it of everything that is not in accord with His will—thus the soul acquires the habit of cleaving to Him alone and of resting and confiding in Him alone; (2) to make the soul really humble by showing it that whatever spark of devotion and facility in prayer it may possess is purely His gift and that of itself can do nothing; (3) to increase its merits—God surrounds the soul with difficulties in order that it may act with more intense charity; (4) finally, God thus prepares the soul to receive fruitfully greater and more exalted graces.

But how are we to know when habitual aridity is really sent by God and not caused by tepidity? We can be sure that aridity is a Divine trial when the soul is faithful to prayer despite the aridity, and when it is careful to fulfill exactly the other duties of its state. St. John of the Cross (*Dark Night*, I, Ch. 9) gives three signs of a good aridity: (1) if the soul in practice spurns worldly things and earthly consolations (we say “in practice” because it can happen that in the midst of aridity the soul may suffer an attraction to earthly things or even to sinful things, but nevertheless resists strongly); (2) if, in spite of the aridity, the soul has an intense desire to serve God and be united to Him; (3) if, finally, the soul’s inability to meditate is *permanent*.

### III. Remedies for Aridity

- 271 The first step to a cure is removing the cause of aridity as far as we can. Therefore, we must rid ourselves of tepidity and negligence; we must, when possible, cure or alleviate any physical illness present. We must correct the faults in our education and learn a more suitable way of prayer.

When the cause is one which cannot be removed—e.g., bad health, pressure of business, or something similar—then a method of prayer must be sought which will result in an adequate union with God and which at the same time can be reconciled with the soul’s actual circumstances. Such a method may consist in frequent, short ejaculatory prayers, or in thinking over some simple reading-matter, or in a simple talk with God—according to each one’s ability.

When aridity is sent by God as a trial we must first of all co-

operate with the divine purifying action. We must conform our will to the designs of Divine Providence, turning away from all that is not God or willed by Him. We must stand before Him in profound humility, complete resignation, and supreme fidelity, and calmly persevere in making whatever acts remain possible (e.g., "Thy Will be done," "Lord, have mercy on me"). Such a prayer will be truly good.

## D. Devotion<sup>8</sup>

### I. Definition: Essential Devotion, Accidental Devotion

272 In the words of St. Francis de Sales,<sup>9</sup> "True devotion . . . presupposes love of God; rather it is nothing else than true love of God, but it is not any kind of love . . . When love reaches such a degree of perfection that it not only causes us to do good but to do it carefully, frequently, and readily (*soigneusement, fréquemment et promptement*), then it is called devotion. . . . Devotion is\* nothing other than a spiritual readiness and energy whereby charity works in us promptly and zealously (*promptement, et affectionnement*).<sup>\*</sup> St. Thomas, in Hallae, q. 82, a. 1, defines devotion as "the will to give oneself readily to those things which pertain to the service of God." In a. 3 he speaks in similar terms, and in a. 1, ad 1 he calls devotion "the act of man's will by which he offers himself to God in service." He regards devotion as an act of the virtue of religion and speaks thus of its relation to charity (a. 2, ad 1): "The immediate object of charity is to cause man to give himself to God, cleaving to Him by a union of soul; but the immediate object of religion, and the mediate object of charity, which is the principle of religion, is to cause man to give himself to God for the performance of certain works of Divine worship." He goes on to say (ad. 2): "Charity causes devotion, since love makes one prompt to serve one's friend; and charity is also nourished by devotion—a friendship is preserved and increased by the practice and remembrance of friendly deeds."

Hugh of St. Victor, urging the necessity of meditation, says: "Assiduous meditation begets knowledge, knowledge . . . begets compunction. . . . Compunction begets devotion, devotion perfects prayer. Man possesses knowledge when he comes to know himself; he possesses compunction when his heart is deeply moved by the thought of his evil deeds. Devotion is a heartfelt, humble love for God, begotten of compunction. . . . Therefore devotion is a turning to God inspired by a humble, heartfelt love; it is humble because it knows its own weakness, it is heartfelt in consideration

of the Divine clemency. It therefore has within it the three principal virtues—faith, hope and charity.”

These definitions speak of essential or substantial devotion, a ready eagerness in the service of God, springing from the fervor of charity, an eagerness in the service of God as a whole (service in the wide sense), or in worshipping Him or in any form of prayer (strict sense). With the help of grace this essential devotion can exist even in the midst of the worst aridity or desolation, so long as the soul is still resolved to perform promptly and carefully everything that pertains to the service of God. Essential devotion can therefore always be procured in prayer. Essential devotion is, moreover, a remedy for aridity insofar as it makes us overcome aridity and persevere in prayer despite it.

273 *Accidental devotion* is the same as consolation in prayer (cf. par. 154, above). Like consolation in general it can be either mainly *spiritual* or mainly *sensible* (we say "mainly" because spiritual devotion will usually have repercussions on the sensible part of the soul, and vice versa).

*Spiritual* devotion is present when the soul feels vivid faith, ardent love, a sense of interior peace, of deep compunction; when it finds prayer and recollection easy, when it tastes how sweet is the Lord and scorns earthly joys. But *sensible* devotion may issue from a sensible cause like the sight of a beautiful sacred image, the sound of music, the hush of silence, the contemplation of the sky or the sea. . . . Or it may come from a spiritual cause which, because of its vehemence, has overflowed upon the sensible faculties of the soul—hence sighs, canticles, tears, warmth of feeling. . . . Or it may be nothing else than the general consequence of a feeling of organic well-being whereby one is enabled to pray with ease and unction or to engage, with no less alacrity and ease, in literary studies.

It does not seem entirely correct to say, as some do (La Reguera, and Schram after him), that all *intellectual* devotion is substantial devotion, whilst all *affective* devotion is accidental. We cannot admit this division, because the essential devotion of which St. Thomas speaks consists principally in the deliberate desire of the will to serve God readily; whilst, on the contrary, a sensible vividness of faith, which can be lacking even in the holiest souls, should apparently be wholly ascribed to accidental devotion.

## II. *Should We Seek Accidental Devotion?*

274 As we have just said, substantial devotion can be always obtained with the help of grace, and it *must* be obtained, since it is

nothing other than the very fervor of charity itself. But accidental devotion is *not* always available; furthermore one can reach any and every degree of charity without its aid. Hence the problem: "Can or should one seek accidental devotion, either spiritual or even sensible?"

There is some reason for doubting that one should seek this devotion. Many authors (e.g., *Imitation of Christ*, II, 9; cf. III, 6) teach that we show true love for God when we love Him without the reward of consolation; whence the desire for accidental devotion seems to involve an imperfection and is a sign of a love that is still mercenary. As against this there is the condemnation of Molinos' propositions 27-30 and 33 (cf. par. 244). For example, the following proposition (n. 27) was condemned: "He who desires and clings to sensible devotion does not desire or seek God, but rather himself, and he acts badly when he desires it and tries to possess it."

1. *Thesis*. As a consequence we state our thesis thus:

a. *Accidental devotion, whether spiritual or sensible, can, and per se should be sought, just like any other spiritual aid, as something good in itself and helpful to true spiritual progress.*

b. *But since accidental devotion is not always necessary for spiritual progress and can be made up for by other graces, we may lack it without suffering spiritual harm. Hence it should be sought with discretion and resignation. In fact, we may be, and sometimes must be, deprived of it for our own greater good; moreover, we ourselves may place the causes of this privation.*

275 2. *Proof and explanation.*

a. *From authority*. Cf. the condemnation of Molinos' proposition cited above. In addition, the practice of the Church in her Liturgy has always been to use all suitable means of exciting devotion, even sensible devotion, e.g. singing, the splendor of ceremony, lights, flowers. Nor can one say that these things are used solely to give greater glory to God, since the Church is always careful to see that they are not only beautiful in themselves and in accord with the canons of art, but also that they are suited to fostering piety among the faithful. The Church in like manner encourages many customs such as pilgrimages to holy places and similar observances, part of whose role is to stir up devotion. One cannot say with truth that such things are promoted only for the benefit of simple souls and beginners, and are useless or even harmful for the more proficient. Such an assertion does not hold good in the case of the Liturgy at least, since the Church obliges everyone to take part in it, adapted as it is to the good of the whole Mystical Body.

Another proof can be drawn from the teaching of the Saints on "the tears of compunction," e.g. St. Gregory the Great, who speaks

often on the subject, following Cassian (*Conferences*, IX, "On Prayer"); and from the saints' teaching on the tears shed in fervent prayer. Similarly St. Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises* often recommends us to ask for tears (n. 55, 87, 195), and in a fragment of his spiritual journal for the year 1544 he shows how highly he esteemed the gift of tears. Cf. St. Robert Bellarmine and Navatel.

Sacred Scripture plainly points out the prominence in the spiritual life of joy and consolation and the relish for spiritual things. Nor does Scripture always refer only to essential devotion and joy: it speaks of accidental joy also, especially in the Psalms and St. Paul.

Reason and experience confirm what we have just said. As Suarez observes, experience proves that "this kind of consolation or joy contributes much to readiness in action because we can more promptly and more easily do things when we find delight and joy in them." Therefore in itself this devotion, even when only sensible, is useful because it encourages the soul to pray longer and more fervently; because, in other words, it encourages and fosters essential devotion, and because, on account of the close union between body and soul, essential spiritual devotion in turn affects the sensible part of the soul unless it encounters some obstacle. Hence accidental devotion, whether spiritual or sensible, should be desired and sought.

276      b. *Accidental devotion should be sought, however, with discretion and resignation.*

This is so because accidental devotion is not an end in itself but only a means to foster and increase charity in us; and it is only a *secondary* means, not absolutely necessary but one which can be made up for by more abundant grace. It is also a means which for the most part does not depend on us but on grace and many other internal and external circumstances not at our command.

Accidental devotion should hence be sought with full resignation to the Divine Will and the counsels of Providence, and its absence or removal should be borne patiently and trustfully. We should first ask God for it; and although we do use human industry to foster it, we should never forget that here, too, grace plays the greatest role. In fact, in order to do the works of charity we may sometimes have to cease from using means which foster this devotion, such as solitude, long periods of prayer; or we may even have to embark on various undertakings which we foresee will cut short accidental devotion.

277      c. *Some depreciate accidental devotion by saying, "There is more merit when one serves God without the reward of consolation." To this we answer:*

We grant that a person will receive greater merit if he serves

God in aridity and desolation with the same fidelity as he would when buoyed up by accidental devotion (this must be understood in accordance with our remarks in paragraph 109 above). That is not the problem, but rather whether a person will labor equally well without, devotion as with it; for devotion must not be regarded as being primarily a *reward* given by God but as a *means* to serve Him better, and desirable as such.

Spiritual authors do not inveigh against every desire for devotion but only against every inordinate, impatient desire. *The Imitation of Christ* itself proposes for our use a "Prayer for Imploring the Grace of Devotion" (III, Ch. 3, end) and is undoubtedly dealing in that context with accidental devotion and not with essential devotion, which is nothing other than the fervor of charity.

It is true that St. John of the Cross (e.g., *Dark Night*, I, Chs. 3 and 6) considers that the desire for sensible devotion is *useless* because this devotion does not unite the soul to God. He even regards such a desire as dangerous because it is the result of a kind of spiritual gluttony and is wont to impede the soul's union with God. In fact he stresses the necessity of withdrawing oneself from all sensible things in order that the soul may be united to God.

But as is evident from the examples he adduces—e.g., in Ch. 6, n. 5-6—the Saint is speaking here of an inordinate desire which causes the soul greedily to seize and feast on the gift of devotion with no thought of it as a means to greater love and service of God. It is also undoubtedly true that real union with God is not effected by this sensible devotion, but that does not mean to say that sensible devotion cannot help true union. Sensible things in general will have to be rejected when God withdraws the soul from them by a special action of His grace in order to raise it to a higher state of union with Him, or when these sensible things become an obstacle to the soul's cleaving by pure faith to God. Yet we can see from the example left by St. John of the Cross' own life that even the contemplatives who enjoyed the highest degrees of the mystical life were often greatly inspired by the sights of nature—trees, rivers, the sea, the sky, the birds, etc.

### III. *Compunction of Heart*

278 Closely connected with devotion is *compunction of heart*, of which Dom Columba Marmion, O.S.B., speaks in his *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*.

Many of the Church Fathers (especially St. Gregory the Great) and many medieval authorities attached great importance to compunction and to tears of sorrow for sin. In practice, compunction



is sometimes identified with devotion, with a deep sense of supernatural truths, of supernatural good and evil. It is thus opposed to hardness of heart, insensibility to supernatural things. But it is also sometimes restricted to mean habitual sorrow and contrition for our own sins and those of others. The best definition, however, seems to be that indicated by St. Gregory—a deep penetrating sense of the miseries of this life (sins, temptations, the dangers and obstacles opposed to the spiritual life, and the other sorrows of our earthly existence) coupled with a desire for the things of eternity, a desire that is at once ardent and full of filial trust. To put it more briefly, compunction is a vivid realization of our present state of *exile* accompanied by a desire for our eternal home, as expressed so beautifully in the prayer “Hail, Holy Queen!” Hence compunction is important for our whole spiritual life: it is directly opposed to the worldly and mundane spirit; and a keen sense of one’s needs and an ardent desire for Heaven greatly helps and incites one to cling to God and beseech His help.

### E. Routine and Natural Activity

279 *Routine* can be another source of difficulty in mental prayer, though it more usually occurs in vocal prayer. Routine can occur in mental prayer because, when we have meditated often upon certain mysteries, they no longer move us in the same way as when first we thought on them. This can be due to our first fervor’s having passed and given place to tepidity. But it can also be just the result of “use lessening marvel.” That which is new stirs us more than that which is familiar. Furthermore, grace usually helps us more sensibly at first to overcome the initial difficulties of the spiritual life; but when we have passed the stage of spiritual infancy, and when we should be ready to act as men, the sensible assistance of grace is withdrawn. Thus if we are to penetrate ever more deeply into the mysteries upon which we are accustomed to meditate we must form in ourselves an ever-increasing personal and profound spiritual life. If we do not achieve this, if our interior spirit does not grow step by step with our exterior formation, then the balance of our spiritual life will be disturbed; we shall have lost the milk of childhood whilst we are still unable to assimilate solid food. The best way to avoid routine is to increase the interior spirit by cherishing the truths, the mysteries and the more fundamental, essential and solid concepts of the spiritual life, especially those from which the soul knows it can derive greatest benefit.

280 *Excessive or too-natural activity* is another obstacle to mental prayer. It may be the result of a kind of internal garrulity that

conjures up such a host of words, reasonings and various acts that the soul is not allowed to rest in and feed upon any one thought. Or it may come from curiosity, a liking for unusual ideas, flights of imagination, lofty speculations, etc. Thus the soul comes to rest in things which ought to be only means to union with God. The remedy for this is 'to cultivate a simple, humble self-distrust and a docility under the operation of grace; the soul should become accustomed to remaining silent at times in prayer and allowing God to speak in it.

## F. How to Judge Mental Prayer

- 281 We do not judge prayer on the presence or absence of sensible or even spiritual accidental devotion, nor from the ease with which acts are elicited, nor from the number of acts made, nor from the careful use of methods of prayer. All these are only means, and non-essential means at that, to obtaining the real benefits of prayer, and so they can be supplied for by grace. Nor are they efficacious in themselves, since we can, for example, make bad use of the devotion we receive from God, or can cling to a method against the inspirations of grace or from the purely human motive of self-complacency. On the other hand, however, a prayer that is arid and full of desolation can be very good, as St. Francis de Sales teaches (*Introduction*, II, 9, after Louis of Granada).

It seems, therefore, that we should follow the rule laid down by St. Teresa (*Letter to Fr. Jerome Gracian*, 23 Oct., 1576) <sup>10</sup> and judge prayer on its results. That is to say, we can conclude that our prayer is good if, after it, we are more united to God, more humble, more faithful to the duties of our state, or if we at least strive for union, humility and fidelity.

## REFERENCES

1. Cassian, *Conferences*, I, Chs. 16-18; VII, Chs. 1-8; IX, Chs. 4-7; X, Chs. 12-14. Rodriguez, *op. cit.*, I, Tract 5, Chs. 23-25. Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, Ch. 24.
2. Lallemand, *op. cit.*, 5th Principle. Meynard, *op. cit.*, I, n. 305-306.
3. Rodriguez, *op. cit.*, II, Tract 2, Chs. 4-8. Tr's. note: cf. Edward Leen, *Progress through Mental Prayer*, pp. 255-276.

4. E.g. Cassian, *Institutes*, II, 10, 15; IV, 17.
5. Grou, *Spiritual Maxims*.
6. Rodriguez, *op. cit.*, II, Tract 2, Chs. 2-3.
7. St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, II, Ch. 9; IV, Ch. 14-15. Scaramelli, *Directorium Asceticum*, III, n. 243-254. Lehodey, *op. cit.*, Ch. 6. Tanqueray, *op. cit.*, n. 925-931.
8. *S.T.*, IIallae, q. 82. St. Francis de Sales, *op. cit.*, I, Ch. 1; IV, Ch. 1. Scaramelli, *op. cit.*, III, n. 210-226. Faber, *op. cit.*, Chs. 22-23.
9. *Loc. cit.*
10. Cf. translation by E. Allison Peers.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Way to Make Mental Prayer

#### A. Methods of Discursive Prayer

282 The first problem that confronts us is whether or not the use of methods in mental prayer is legitimate, good, and necessary. But this problem can be solved from what we have said above in paragraphs 176-182 on methods in general. However, there is a peculiar difficulty in the relationship of methods to prayer, since the common opinion of the saints is that the Holy Ghost is the One True Teacher of prayer; moreover, there have been many souls who have practised the highest forms of prayer and yet never made use of methods. On the other hand, though, there have been Doctors of the Church, like St. Francis de Sales and St. Alphonsus Liguori, who have explicitly taught the use of methods, and the Church has given special approval to books such as the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius which teach the same thing.

In reality the apparent difficulties presented by the use of methods arise mostly from the mistaken view that the selection and use of a method are made by man alone without the prevenient and supporting influence of grace. On the contrary, inspiring man to select a method and then helping him to employ it properly is just one of the many ways in which grace is accustomed to lead souls. The process is much the same as when grace inspires the soul to recite a vocal prayer and then assists it to conform its acts to the ideas expressed in the prayer. People sometimes think, though, that methods are set up as inviolable laws that must be rigidly observed during mental prayer. But in fact the contrary is true, since methods are suggested only as mere means or aids which one should cast oft when they have ceased to be useful.

Hence we could by no means assert that the use of methods is necessary *universally and for its own sake*, since it is only an aid to prayer and one which does not help everyone equally, and which, in many cases, can be made up for by other means. Nevertheless, for the most part, the use of methods will be useful, especially in the beginning of the spiritual life before supernatural truths have been examined closely and have struck their roots deep into the

soul. Methods are of value even afterwards too, when the soul, because of temperament or external circumstances, finds it difficult to be recollected and apply itself to prayer. At such a time the simpler and better forms of prayer are liable to leave the soul empty and idle, and will serve to keep it recollected only for a very short time. Hence a person will suffer real spiritual harm if, having the ever-available assistance of methods at hand, he yet neglects them through presumption or laziness. It is true that the methods used today were not employed in former ages. God, however, assisted souls then by other means, e.g. by more severe bodily mortification; He provides each age with helps to sanctity suitable to its needs. (Cf. the present-day emphasis on frequent Communion and devotion to the Sacred Heart.)

### I. *The Principal Methods of Mental Prayer*

283 1. *Cassian* in his *Conferences* (X, 10) has left us a "formula of spiritual theory" which he culled from the most ancient authorities and by means of which "the monk, having rid himself of a multiplicity of thoughts, becomes accustomed to think continually of God and to turn his heart incessantly towards Him." This "spiritual theory" is the earnest and frequent repetition of the versicle "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me" (Ps. 69.2).

2. *In the Middle Ages*, the book *De Consideratione*, written by St. Bernard and dedicated to Pope Eugene III, outlined a formula for meditation. The Saint's disciple, Aelred of Rievaulx, in his opuscle *De Vita Eremitica ad Sororem* and also in his *De Jesu Puero Duodenni*, proposed a method of contemplating the mysteries of Christ which was later elaborated upon by Ludolph the Carthusian, St. Ignatius, and the author of the *Meditationes de Vita Christi* (once attributed to St. Bonaventure).

Hugh of St. Victor, writing in the eleventh century, gives five degrees of prayer: "First, reading supplies material for the understanding of truth, meditation prepares the material, prayer elevates it, operation arranges it, and contemplation rejoices in it" (*De Meditandi Artificio*); but in *De Modo Dicendi et Meditandi* we find only three degrees—thought, meditation and contemplation. Guigo the Carthusian, in his *Scala Claustralium*, gives four degrees of "man's spiritual exercise"—reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation—all of which are so linked together that "the first degrees are of little or no benefit without the others, whilst the last degrees are rarely if ever reached except through the first" (Ch. 71).

284 3. In the thirteenth century St. Edmund of Canterbury proposed various ways of contemplating God (*Speculum Ecclesiae*) — in any creature (Ch. 6), in Scripture (Ch. 7: he gives some verses of seven lines each, to help those who cannot read), in the humanity of Christ (Ch. 19: he divides Our Lord's life into seven parts according to the canonical hours). William of Paris, in his *Rhetorica Divina*, applies the rules of oratory in a somewhat artificial way to prayer. At the end of the same century, Raymond Lull in his *Blanquerna* wrote two opuscles—*De Arte Contemplationis* (applying the three powers of the soul, the memory, the intellect and the will, with examples), and *Librum de Amico et Amato*, in which he gives 365 "moral metaphors" as subject-matter for daily contemplation throughout the year, the method being the same as in his first opuscle. St. Bonaventure, in his *De Triplici Via*, draws up a plan of the whole spiritual life and suggests both matter and method for prayer (e.g., I, 19, "On the Application of the Faculties in Meditation"). In his *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum* he gives a method of contemplating God, taking creatures as the starting-point. In his *Vitis Mystica*, *Lignum Vitae* and *De V Festivitatibus Pueri Jesu* he proposed a method of contemplating the mysteries of the life and Passion of Christ; cf. also his *Soliloquium* on the four mental exercises (on sin, the world, and the last things). In the fifteenth century Gerson, in his *De Monte Contemplationis*, sets forth the various methods of meditation proposed by the saints and adds his own, "after the fashion of a beggar." However, methods of prayer flourished best among the "modern devotional" writers, but not without becoming rather too involved.

285 4. In the sixteenth century the use of methods in prayer became widespread due to the invention of printing and also to the fact that the methods were being simplified. There were then three principal types of methods:

a. *Louis of Granada*, following the above-mentioned medieval authors, distinguishes five parts in mental prayer in his book *Libro de Oracion y Meditation* (1553)—preparation, reading, meditation, thanksgiving, and petition—which he explains with examples (in Ch. 3 he gives two seven-line verses of meditations). Later, in his *Memorial de Vida Cristiana*, he joins reading with meditation and puts oblation in the second-last place, before petition. More recently, Meynard (*op. cit.*, I, n. 146) writes in almost the same way and tries to reduce this method to that which Massoulié proposed, that is, a division of prayer into acceptance of the principles, meditation (deduction), and contemplation of the truth (in which he includes acts of the will).

St. Peter of Alcântara in his *Tratado de la Oracion* (1556)

synopsizes Louis of Granada's work and gives six divisions—preparation, reading, meditation, thanksgiving, oblation and petition. Many Franciscans follow him, e.g. Murillo, Adolphus a Denderwindeke, O.F.M. Cap.

In their manual *Instruction de los Novicios*, approved in 1590 by the definitory in which St. John of the Cross took part, the Discalced Carmelites, following Louis of Granada and St. Peter of Alcantara, give the same six divisions and add contemplation as a seventh, after meditation. So does Jerome Gracian, though John a Jesu Maria in Italy returns to the formula of St. Peter of Alcântara and gives only six divisions.

- 286      b. *St. Ignatius*, following "the modern devotion" and the Franciscan meditations on the mysteries of the life of Christ, proposes many methods in his *Spiritual Exercises* (1548)—the application of the three faculties, memory, intellect, and will (n. 45-54); the imaginative contemplation of the mysteries of the life of Christ (i.e., depicting to oneself the persons, words, and actions) n. 101-109, 110-117; application of the five senses (n. 65-71, on Hell, 121-126, on the mysteries of Christ); "the three ways of praying" (η. 2381Ī.), the first being in the form of an examen, the second being a "contemplation" of the meaning of each word in a vocal prayer like the "Our Father," the third being a kind of slow rhythmic recitation; finally, his contemplation for obtaining love is a method of rising from creatures to God (n. 230-237) like the *Itinerarium* of St. Bonaventure.<sup>2</sup> In all these methods there are preparatory prayers said in God's presence, preludes and, at the close, a colloquy and a brief examen on the prayer itself.

St. Francis de Sales in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, II, 2-7 (cf. I, 8-18, where he gives examples of meditations) follows St. Ignatius and Louis of Granada and distinguishes: preparation (the presence of God, invocation, selecting the mystery), considerations, affections and resolutions, conclusion and fruits to be gathered, to which he adds a spiritual nosegay. Cf. F. Vincent, *S. François de Sales, Directeur*, and, similarly, Lehodey, *The Ways of Mental Prayer*, II, Chs. 1-7 (although he also includes some things taken from Olier).

St. Alphonsus of Liguori in his *Praxis Confessarii* and his *True Spouse* proposes a very similar but simpler method: preparation (faith, humility, contrition, petition); considerations; affections, petition and resolves; conclusion (thanksgiving, renewal of resolves, petition for help, and spiritual nosegay).

- 287      c. The method proposed by Olier<sup>3</sup> is founded on Bérulle's teaching of cleaving to the permanent states of the Incarnate Word, or the internal life of Jesus living in us. After the preparation

(presence of God, contrition, and appeal for assistance) come adoration (Christ before one's eyes; adore and praise God in some mystery or virtue of Christ); communion (Christ in one's heart; accept, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, a communication of the benefits of Christ, cleave to Him); cooperation (Christ in one's hands: cooperate with the action of grace in us). Later on, Tronson simplified this method for beginners and added considerations, reflections on oneself, resolutions and a conclusion containing a spiritual nosegay. Cf. Tanqueray, n. 697-702.

St. John Baptist de la Salle proposes for his religious a method related to that of Saint Sulpice (he was taught by Tronson). He stresses the cultivation of the presence of God in the preparation (His presence in creatures, in us, in the Church): then follow three acts to Christ (faith, adoration, thanksgiving), three acts in regard to oneself (confession, contrition, application of the mystery), and three final acts (union with Christ, petition, invocation of the Saints).

288 This brief historical review answers the objection that earlier ages knew nothing of methods. As is obvious from the dates given above, methods were in use at least from the Middle Ages on. It is true that they became very popular in the sixteenth century and have steadily increased in popularity since then. But the sudden emphasis on methods cannot very well be ascribed to any kind of anti-mystical reaction, because almost all the more modern propagators of methods were themselves liberally endowed with the gifts of contemplation. The real reasons for the change were, first, the possibility of popularizing methods with the aid of the printing press; second, the changes brought about in the lives of the religious orders (more attention being given to external works of zeal); third, the practice of mental prayer became more widespread precisely because the variety and convenience of the methods made ordinary mental prayer possible not only for contemplative souls who had no methods, but also for the average good-living person who would rarely, if ever, attain to real mental prayer without the assistance of the methods.

## II. *The Preparation for and the Conclusion of Prayer*

289 If we examine the elements common to the various methods, we shall find that all stress the importance of preparation and conclusion.

1. All urge the necessity of *preparation*: we must, however, distinguish between remote and proximate preparation.

- a. *Remote preparation* consists in the conditions necessary for



good mental prayer of which we spoke above (recollection, devotion). L. de Grandmaison gives the following as the necessary conditions: sincerely to prefer divine things to all others; to have confidence that God's friendship is possible for us and relatively easy; at least an elementary and fundamental mortification of childish, egotistical, and carnal desires; furthermore, in order to render prayer easy, one must seek God peacefully in all things, cultivate interior silence, and think and act in every circumstance as Christ Himself would.

290      b. The *proximate preparation* is twofold, that which is made before beginning prayer, and that which is made in beginning prayer.

*Before beginning prayer* (for example, during the evening preparation for the next morning's prayer), one should select the material for prayer and should read or think about it. Many, however, like St. Francis de Sales (*Introduction*, etc., II, 2), do not deal expressly with this preparation and seem to presuppose that the choice of matter is made when one actually starts to pray. Others, like St. Ignatius (*Exercises*, n. 73), explicitly recommend this proximate preparation, and it is quite common nowadays among those who are in the habit of making their mental prayer in the early morning. Although such preparation is certainly not necessary in itself, at least when not prescribed by authority, it yet has many advantages: we show greater reverence towards God if, before we approach Him, we carefully consider what we are going to say to Him; we are more recollected, because we do not have to spend the first moments of our prayer in choosing our subject; finally, if we prepare the evening before for our morning prayer, then, during the night, the subject chosen subconsciously pervades our mind and thus, when we set ourselves down to pray, our minds are already filled with good thoughts. (Cf. *Exercises*, n. 74.) But, of course, in all this we must avoid worry and overstrictness.

How should the choice of material be made? In many religious institutes the theme for the next morning's prayer is read out each evening for the community as a whole. This practice takes no account of the needs, inclinations, and character of the individual. Hence, whenever possible, individual preparation for prayer is to be preferred. Nowadays proximate preparation is often done in accordance with the plan supplied by a book of meditations, whereas in former times several religious verses were suggested for each day of the week, or the mysteries of Christ's life were considered in order, one after the other (Pseudo-Bonaventure, Ludolph), or verses were proposed for each of the three ways of the spiritual life. The more modern practice is to provide matter for each day

of the calendar year (Alexius Segala of Salo had already begun to do so in the early seventeenth century), or better still (cf. St. Francis Borgia), the subjects are divided according to the order of the liturgical year. Such collections of meditations can be very useful, in the beginning especially, or when one is very tired, so long as one takes care not to become tied down to them and so long as one chooses the material most suited to oneself, or freely changes the order of the subjects according to circumstances. And since there is such a wealth of material to choose from, one should experiment in order to ascertain which subject-matter suits one best. There is no one subject from which all can derive equal benefit, but there are many which can be useful, provided that one does not use them passively only. If one uses the ordinary set lists of meditations properly, one will gradually learn how to prepare matter for prayer directly from Sacred Scripture or the writings of the Fathers and the Saints.

- 291 Almost all authors suggest the same acts for use *at the beginning of prayer*:

Acts of faith and recollection in God's presence, which are very important if the mind is to be recollected and converse with God made easier. There are several ways of cultivating the presence of God. For example, we may say "God is present here by His power," or "The Holy Trinity is dwelling in me through grace." But such considerations must not be merely perfunctory or superficial. We shall derive great benefit if we dwell on such thoughts for a short time rather than if we begin prayer with undisciplined minds.

Acts of humble adoration, accompanied where possible by some external sign of reverence.

A petition for the grace to pray well.

- 292 *Is it useful or even necessary to picture ourselves the subject of our meditations, to make the "composition of place," as suggested by St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises (n. 47, 91, 103, 112)?* Many authors advise us to do so when contemplating the mysteries of the life of Christ, so that we may be present in imagination in the place where these mysteries occurred or even that we may take part in them. (Cf. Ps.-Bonaventure, St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction*, II, 4.)

St. Francis de Sales (*ibid.*), however, warns us against artificial and symbolic composition of place when we are meditating on subjects which are, of their very nature, invisible. Others, e.g. the Carmelites (cf. Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen), although they do not reject all employment of the imagination in prayer, yet stress the need for caution if one is to avoid the dangers that can arise from over-stimulation of the imagination.

It does not seem possible, though, to lay down a general rule in this matter, since both the benefits and the dangers of using imagination depend in great part on the temperament of the individual. But one should always remember that the imaginative part of prayer is of value only insofar as it assists the intellect and will.

*At the beginning of prayer should the soul ask any special grace of God (e.g., contrition, trust) which it desires to obtain in prayer?* St. Ignatius advises it all through his *Exercises*, and rightly so, since one must necessarily stir up in oneself certain specified affections if one is to follow the *Exercises* and derive benefit therefrom. In daily prayer, too, this concentration on a particular virtue is useful, since it gives the soul a definite aim, thus increasing its desire and directing its efforts. But it is by no means always necessary to concentrate on or ask for a particular virtue or grace.

293 2. Prayer should have a special *conclusion* as well as a special introduction. For St. Ignatius the conclusion consists in a fervent colloquy (*ibid.*, n. 53-54, 199; cf. 63; 109; 147) wherein all the benefits of the prayer are brought together. In the various methods, different acts are suggested, «especially thanksgiving, resolves, petitions for the divine help. St. Francis de Sales (*Introduction*, II, 7) and many after him, advise the gathering of a spiritual nosegay, that is, some thought or affection that can be pondered on during the day. Most methods conclude with the recitation of some vocal prayer (the Our Father, Hail Mary, *Miserere* or some other psalm).

All, therefore, agree that prayer should be concluded with acts of affection, directed to God Himself and, in the case of daily prayer, all stress the necessity of making sure that as far as possible our prayer be intimately linked up with all our other daily activities.

294 *Is it always necessary to conclude prayer with some specific resolution for the day, as urged by St. Francis de Sales (Introduction, II, 6, 8)?* We should note that the Saint is dealing in that context with beginners whose affections will very easily remain unfruitful for action unless reduced to practical, immediate, and concrete resolves. Though such resolves are always beneficial, yet they are not always necessary, since prayer can bear much fruit even without them if it intensifies the soul's love for God even in a general way, or if it deepens the soul's understanding of, and faith in, supernatural truths. (Cf. par. 240 above.)

*What of the examen into prayer and its benefits, made immediately after prayer, as advised by St. Ignatius (n. 77) and others after him?* Where it is possible, this examen is very useful for teaching beginners the way to pray well. It is also beneficial for others when

their prayer has been very laborious or very fervent, since it enables them to review the fruits of prayer in an atmosphere of quiet and calm.

*What of keeping records of lights or affections experienced in prayer?* It is very profitable to keep a written record of the more noteworthy lights received during retreat or in other special circumstances, so that one may recall them later. The notes should be brief, written for one's personal use only, and not as a source of material for lectures, etc. One should be even more circumspect in taking notes on one's daily prayer; because of the danger of over-introspection, it is usually not advisable to write down practically everything one feels and experiences in daily prayer.

### III. *The Body of Prayer*

295 Besides containing directions for the preparation and conclusion of prayer, the various methods usually supply suggestions for the *body of prayer*.<sup>4</sup> The more important of these recommendations are:

1. When one finds devotion in any point, one should stop there, allowing the soul to dwell upon it without being anxious to pass on to other points prepared. (St. Ignatius, *op. cit.*, add. 4, n. 76; Lehodey, *op. cit.*, II, 1-2.)

2. More attention should be paid to affections than to considerations—Louis of Granada says, "The intellect is the watch-dog, the gatekeeper of the will" (cf., Lehodey, 5; Alcantara, 2). Rodriguez (*op. cit.*, I, tr. 5, Ch. 11) says, "consideration is the needle, affections the thread."

3. But considerations should not be abandoned too hastily, because if only a spark of love has been enkindled, it will quickly die again if it is not fed. (Alcantara, 6.)

4. One should not make violent efforts to obtain devotion. (Alcantara, 3.)

5. Prayer should be continued for the full fixed time even in aridity and desolation, just as it should not be prolonged in times of fervor for the mere sake of consolation. (Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *op. cit.*, II, 9; Lehodey, 6-7; St. Ignatius, *Annot.* 13, n. 13.)

6. After prayer one should not return too quickly to other things lest the devotion received in prayer be prematurely lost. (St. Francis de Sales, *op. cit.*, II, 8; Lehodey, 8-9.)

### IV. *The External Circumstances of Prayer*

296 The following counsels on the *external circumstances* of prayer should be noted. (St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Praxis Confessarii*, Ch.

10, η. 218-219: de Maumigny, *op. cit.*, I, Part 2, Chap. 30.)

1. *Duration*: Louis of Granada, and after him St. Peter of Alcantara (Ch. 12, n. 6), teach that anything less than an hour and a half or two hours is not sufficient for good prayer, since often half an hour is needed to compose the soul. Therefore the time can be shorter if prayer is made in the early morning or if it follows some other religious exercise like the recitation of the Divine Office. St. Ignatius specifies one hour during the *Exercises* (n. 13), although he set ? shorter period for the daily prayer of his religious, at least during their studies. [The custom of the Order since the days of St. Francis Borgia, Third General of the Society of Jesus, confirmed by numerous General Congregations, has made one hour of prayer mandatory on all members of the Order. Tr.] St. Francis de Sales advises Philothea to spend an hour every morning in prayer (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, II, Ch. 1, n. 3). Earlier authors insisted rather on frequent short, intense prayers (cf. St. Benedict, *Rule*, 20), a practice that accorded very well with the habitual recollection possible in the monastic life. For the rest, St. Ignatius held that "a quarter-hour is sufficient for a truly mortified man to become united with God in prayer."

It seems, therefore, that the time to be allotted to daily prayer will vary according to vocation and state of life, to the degree of habitual recollection and mortification of the passions. In general, though, and especially in the case of those who engage in much external activity, true mental prayer does not seem possible in any space of time less than half an hour, some brief moments of recollection being added throughout the day (cf. the "retreats" mentioned by St. Francis de Sales in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, II, 12). It does not appear possible to achieve in a shorter time that profound and intimate recollection of soul before God, on which the fruits of mental prayer principally depend; and frequent brief moments of recollection in the course of the day will be of great assistance in supplementing this minimum period. In fact, a full hour of mental prayer will usually be necessary for those who wish to lead a true interior life but who are prevented from spending almost the whole day in prayer of one kind or another as do the contemplative orders. Present-day practice in religious and ecclesiastical institutes confirms this view, since we are here concerned with ascertaining the time to be given to prayer in the actual modern conditions under which we must live the spiritual life: other ages had other needs as well as other means of supplying those things which we today must derive from prayer.

297 2. *Time*: Suárez has written on the advantages of the early morning as a time for prayer, and St. Francis de Sales agrees with his

conclusions (*op. cit.*, II, 1). In the morning the mind is as yet free from the cares of the day; in addition, morning prayer can be prepared the evening before and the subject can be thought over and absorbed subconsciously in the interval. Furthermore, morning prayer seems to be the more frequent practice of priests and religious. Yet we must note that not a few people are very tired and sleepy in the morning, and others, for example priests engaged in pastoral work, are often very busy hearing confessions or attending to other duties in the morning hours. Therefore, although the morning is to be preferred as a time for prayer, yet one can lay down only the following general rule (for those only, of course, who are not subject to authority in the matter): one should select a time that allows one to make prayer in greatest calm and recollection, that is most likely to be free from hindrances and interruptions, and that can be most constantly reserved for prayer.

3. *Place and posture.* The best place is usually the church or chapel, one's room or cubicle. Prayer can also be made at times outdoors in a solitary place. One's main concern should be that the location chosen lend itself to recollection and devotion in accordance with the state of the soul and the type of mystery chosen as the subject of prayer. (St. Ignatius' advice in the *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 78, 130, 229.)

When choosing a posture for prayer, one should bear in mind the reverence due to God, especially when one speaks to Him directly, and also the benefit hoped for from prayer. Hence one should take up the position that will be of greatest assistance in attaining the object intended in prayer (*Exercises*, n. 76, cf. 3). But this does not mean that one should choose an uncomfortable posture for the sake of mortification if one foresees that it will make prayer almost impossible.

## B. The Way to Make Affective and Contemplative Prayer

### I. *The Transition from Discursive Prayer to Affective and Contemplative Prayer*

298 In most cases this transition is made gradually, and not absolutely and immediately. The soul abandons reasoning because it begins to see at one glance truths which before it had to seek out. It follows the counsels given for discursive prayer and allows the affections to play an ever-increasing part until they occupy almost the whole time of prayer. In like manner, when its internal acts of love and will have become strong and habitual, they tend to lessen in number and kind, they become simpler and more pro-

longed. Thus the stage is set for the further transition to true acquired contemplation.

The transition is not so absolute as to banish all, or practically all, discourse from affective prayer, or even from contemplative prayer. Even in these forms of prayer there are some simple and direct lines of reasoning, of which the soul is scarcely aware. Moreover, the soul which is accustomed to make affective prayer will have to spend the greater part of its prayer in discourse when circumstances demand or warrant it.

Hence we are not dealing with a transition that can be made once and for all, but rather with the lessening of considerations and discourse, and the prolonging of acts by resting in them. The best criteria for judging if the transition is being properly made in individual cases are the signs given by St. John of the Cross to indicate whether or not one should leave meditation and discursive prayer (*Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, II, Chs. 13-14). As we have noted before, these signs are:

1. The soul can reason only with difficulty, and without savor or results (this is so because it has already extracted and made its own all the good to be derived from its considerations).

2. It does not voluntarily seek pleasure in other things through the imagination or the senses (this sign combined with the first will show that the difficulty in meditating is not due to tepidity).

3. The final, surest, and principal sign is that the soul finds savor and spiritual nourishment in its general loving attention to God, or at least in making its acts. In other words, if the soul derives real spiritual benefit from this simpler form of prayer, then the prayer is suitable for it, according to the rule laid down by St. Teresa (cf. par. 281 above). Thus in practice it often happens that the soul engages for some time in discursive prayer and is content to follow the accepted procedure of stopping wherever it finds devotion or enlightenment. But after a longer or shorter interval it experiences increasing difficulty in obtaining light or fervor by means of discourse, and it becomes tired of reasoning. When this occurs the soul should be advised to try to rest in a brief, more general and more intuitive thought in order to foster internal acts and make them simpler and more prolonged. And if this form of prayer renders the soul more united to God, more faithful in fulfilling the duties of its state, more humble, patient, and generous, it should be continued, since it obviously suits the soul.

299 All that we have just said will *ordinarily* hold good. Nevertheless the transition from discursive prayer may take place either much more quickly than we have indicated or much more slowly. In fact, there are people who are so warm-hearted and intuitive that

they are scarcely capable of making real discursive prayer and who pray from the very beginning by means of loving colloquies or contemplative intuitions. When dealing with souls of this type one must make sure that they do not lack those solid foundations of the spiritual life, that deep and firm understanding of supernatural truths and that personal conviction regarding these truths which are usually obtainable only by the faithful and proper exercise of discursive prayer. If they have not these qualities, then their spiritual life will depend on their emotions or will be wholly based on confused and not altogether correct intuitions, metaphors, or formulae that are little more than mere words. And God will not always intervene with His grace to supply in full the missing fundamentals.

Hence one must *neither be too hasty nor too tardy* in passing over to the simpler forms of prayer:

*Not too tardy*, because prayer will become difficult, unfruitful, and tedious, so that there is a danger that the soul will gradually weary of prayer or will become less zealous in its exercise; and the longer the delay, the longer is the soul being deprived of the greater good which Providence has prepared for it in the new form of prayer.

*Not too hasty*; the soul will remain empty because it is not yet spiritually mature or properly fitted for the new form of prayer; this is especially true of a hasty transition to contemplative prayer, since the soul will be able to rest therein only for a short time or at the expense of violent efforts. In addition, a person who enters contemplative prayer prematurely is not yet sufficiently cleansed from inordinate passions and exercised in abnegation and recollection. As a result he will mix worldly affections with holy desires, and distractions with contemplation, and often he will be quite unaware that he is doing so.

The director must accordingly be on his guard against judging *a priori* in this matter, and against giving the same advice indiscriminately to everyone. He should introduce each soul gradually to the simpler forms of prayer, and should take into account the results of the experiments he has conducted with each. Finally, he must be more careful here than anywhere else to follow, and not to anticipate, the inspirations of grace.

## II. Dangers To Be Avoided

**300** Even when the transition to affective and contemplative prayer has been made prudently and at the right time, there are still some *dangers to be avoided*:



1. In *affective prayer* (cf. Tanqueray, *op. cit.*, n. 984sq.) there is an especial danger of *violent efforts* to elicit acts, to make them vehement. This is often due to confusing sensible affections with firm resolves of the will. *Spiritual gluttony*, intent on tasting these sensible affections (St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, I, Ch. 6), leads to a neglect of duty for fear that spiritual consolation will be lost therein. *Presumption*—the soul thinks that it has made great progress because it feels lively affections, and so it comes to have too much confidence in itself.

2. In *contemplative prayer*, or in the *prayer of simplicity*, there is danger of *dejection* when the contemplative rest which at first was sweet now becomes arid and monotonous, with the result that the soul thinks that it is idle and unfeeling. It is tempted to look for a more fruitful source of spiritual joy. Or, on the contrary, the soul may look down on other forms of prayer, thus being guilty of *complacency* in its own progress; or it may feel a repugnance for making distinct acts or for returning to discourse when grace urges it to do so. Finally, there may be real *laziness* and *superficiality* in the interior life due to lack of co-operation with the graces proper to this form of prayer. The soul may be deceived by the apparent easiness of contemplative prayer and allow itself to be carried along, content with almost the same degree of fidelity as it exercised before. Whereas in reality faithful and generous co-operation is needed more in this prayer than in the more elementary forms; in fact, the greatest fidelity even in the smallest things must be practised here.

### HI. *Precautions*

301 In order, therefore, to derive the full benefit of these forms of prayer and to avoid the dangers to which the soul is here exposed, the following precautions must be taken: dispositions of mind and heart that are solid and basic must be fostered rather than emotions which are tender, superficial, select, and full of delight; an habitual recollection deeper than ever before must be preserved throughout the day (in the next chapter we shall suggest some means of promoting this recollection); the examen of conscience should not by any means be omitted but should be made more accurately than ever, although in a shorter and simpler manner, and the greatest purity of soul should be striven for; above all, the soul should avoid any resistance, especially deliberate resistance, to the impulses and inspirations of grace.

## REFERENCES

1. Translated by Fr. James, O.F.M. Cap., under the title *The Franciscan Vision*.
2. Cf. translation cited.
3. *Introduction à la Vie Chrétienne*, Ch. 4; *Catechism for an Interior Life*, II, 8.
4. St. Peter of Alcântara, *op. cit.*, Ch. 12. St. Francis de Sales, *op. cit.*, Ch. 8. Lehodey, *Ways of Mental Prayer*, II, 1, par. 4.
5. Lehodey, *op. cit.*, II, Chs. 8-9. Saudreau, *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, I, n. 320ff. Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, n. 977ff., 1374ff. De Maumigny, *op. cit.*, I, Part 3, Chs. 2, 4-6.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Prolonging Mental Prayer

302 We have treated of formal mental prayer in which the soul concerns itself exclusively with God for a specified length of time. We now come to deal with mental prayer understood in a *wider sense*, that is, as continued throughout the whole day and intermingled with each day's tasks. L. de Grandmaison, S.J., calls such a prayer "virtual prayer" and defines it thus: "Virtual prayer consists in first placing oneself in the presence of God and then in giving preference to apostolic interests over selfish ones, to the Divine viewpoint over the human, to the spirit of Christ over the worldly spirit. . . . It is a prayer because it unites us to God. . . . We call it 'virtual' because, although it does presuppose a certain number of positive acts, it yet remains for a long time after, and pervades our life far beyond the few moments given to these acts." These positive acts whose influence pervades and directs our lives are of many kinds—aspirations, ejaculatory prayers, acts of the presence of God, renewing purity of intention. One characteristic they all have in common, and in this they differ from formal prayer—they are brief and frequent, do not interrupt other occupations, and so they give souls an habitual love and penchant for supernatural things. Thus they both supplement formal prayer by preserving and increasing its fruits (cf. the "spiritual nosegay" of St. Francis de Sales) and they can also even take its place whenever it cannot be made. We shall speak of them in general first, and then go on to consider in detail the practice of the presence of God.<sup>1</sup>

#### A. Aspirations and Ejaculatory Prayer in General

##### I. Scriptural Foundation

303 The various practices with which we are concerned here took their origin from the words of Christ, "You ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke 18.1), re-echoed by St. Paul's counsel (1 Thess. 5.7), "Pray without ceasing." Cf. also "Be instant in prayer" (Rom. 12.12); Col. 4.2; and the example left by the

Apostles and the first Christians, who were "persevering in prayer" (Acts 1.14; 2.42; 6.4—where the same Greek word, *proskarterein*, is used, indicating assiduous application). Hence the zeal, from the very beginning of the Christian era, to acquire this, "uninterrupted prayer," and the use of ejaculatory prayers for this purpose. Thus Cassian writes "Inner perfection consists in perennial and uninterrupted perseverance in prayer, which is the aim of every monk," and to attain this end he proposes the continuous use of the formula "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me" (*Conferences*, X, 10). He gives another reason for using these "short but very frequent prayers," namely, the difficulty of keeping the mind long fixed on God: "We should pray frequently, it is true, but our prayer should be brief lest, while we linger, the deceitful enemy find an opportunity of invading our hearts" (*Conferences*, IX, 36). Cf. *The Rule of St. Benedict*, where he says that prayer "should be brief and pure" (Ch. 20).

These brief prayers have been given various names. Even as early as St. Augustine, the term "ejaculated prayer" (*oratio jaculata*)' is found: "It is said that the brethren in Egypt pray frequently but that their prayers are very brief and are quickly sped forth (*raptim . . . jaculatas*), lest that watchful and alert attention which is needed for prayer be weakened and lost through long delays." In the Middle Ages they were called "aspirations"—fiery, burning aspirations—or "anagogical movements" [i.e., a raising of the mind to heavenly things: Tr.]. These are the terms used by the Carthusian, Hugo of Balma, towards the end of the thirteenth century in his *Theologia Mystica* ("which is often placed among the *Opuscula* of St Bonaventure), and by Guigo de Ponte and Denis the Carthusian after him. Harphius adds the terms "aspirations" and "ejaculations." St. Francis de Sales also enumerates aspirations, ejaculations, good thoughts (*Introduction*, II, 13) as well as the practice of the presence of God and brief "retreats" (*retraites*, *idem*, 12) made in the midst of one's daily duties.

## II. Tradition

304 The authority of tradition clearly indicates the importance of these brief elevations of soul. St. Francis de Sales summarizes the traditional teaching in one sentence: "This is one of the surest aids to your spiritual progress" (*Introduction*, II, 12). In fact, following Hugo of Balma, authors have proposed a special mystical way of arriving at union with God through aspirations and anagogical movements; thus Harphius; Augustine Baker, following the English mystics of the Middle Ages; Bona, Constantine of Barbanson.

The use of ejaculatory prayer is a natural way of linking our formal prayer closely with all our other acts, so that supernatural dispositions and the habit of judging according to faith may come gradually to pervade our whole mind and affect our whole mode of judging and willing, thus unifying our lives.

Intensity is more easily attained in short aspirations, which are always possible after some fashion even in aridity and desolation. We can always cry, "Lord, have mercy on me!", "Thy will be done!", and the like, thus making up for more formal prayer when for any reason it is impracticable.

Finally, this mode of prayer is always at hand for use in temptation and difficulty.

### III. *Practical Suggestions*

305 We shall speak later on about the presence of God and other forms of aspiration. In the meantime the following can be noted about all prayers of this kind, whatever form they take (acts of love, oblation, reparation, adoration . . . recalling the Passion).

Aspirations should be made *from the heart* and not from the lips only. They should not be mere reflex actions like those exclamations which some people like to use at every turn, some of which are not very refined whilst others preserve a semblance of piety at least; for example, "My God!" Nor is it necessary to have that feeling of accidental devotion of which we spoke above. It is enough if, fundamentally, our will is in harmony with our words, or if we elicit a silent act of will or love, e.g. a silent act of conformity to the Will of God.

They should be made *without mental strain*, without violent physical attempts to feel and experience the sentiments expressed. If we do receive the gift of tears or sensible devotion, we should accept it gratefully, since it can be of assistance. If we feel nothing, then we should be content with an act of will.

They should be made *in peace*, without any uneasy desire to multiply them, to omit none, to make as many as this or that saint. Therefore they should be made only as grace inspires, and in accordance with one's vocation, and any increase in their number should be brought about gradually and gently.

### IV. *Extraordinary Cases*

306 What are we to think about those extraordinary cases of which we sometimes hear—for example, the case of Fr. Willie Doyle, who seems to have been able to make 100,000 ejaculations each day? 2

Omitting more ancient examples of the same thing, we can cite also the comparable case of a certain Fr. Cerruti whom Lancicius (died 1625) mentions as renewing his religious vows 3,000 times a day and "once, on the octave of the Epiphany, he offered his vows 24,000 times." At least in the case of Fr. Doyle, the fact cannot be simply denied or doubted, nor can it be explained by saying that he increased his ejaculations by some such device as offering every breath as an act of love. The many documents he left show that his progress in making ejaculations was slow and laborious, and so the large number of aspirations he made seems to have been a great sacrifice which God inspired him to offer, one, however, which cannot be prudently imitated by others. Especially in cases like that of Fr. Doyle, whose later days were filled with his duties as military chaplain, such a great number of ejaculations seems to be quite beyond the powers of nature. Perhaps, therefore, in similar circumstances an infused and extraordinary gift of God comes into play. It is known that in some states of infused contemplation the natural powers are increased, enabling the soul to remain suspended and fixed on God for many hours. It may, therefore, be that the natural powers can be increased so that ejaculations can be multiplied to an extraordinary degree.

## B. The Practice of the Presence of God

307 One of the principal forms of short prayer is the remembrance or loving thought of God as present to us, or "the practice of the presence of God," as it is called. We must make a distinction between this practice of the presence of God (or even the habitual loving thought of God as present) "which is acquired in some degree by our efforts, and the strictly infused gift as found in the Transforming Union or the Mystical Marriage. In these latter states the experimental knowledge of God and joy in Him are possessed continuously, even in the midst of the day's duties, whereas in the prayers of quiet and union, they are given to the soul only weakly or, if intensely, at rare intervals and for a short time. (Cf. below in Part Seven.) We can have frequent thought of the presence of God as the result of our own efforts aided by grace: it may even become almost habitual if God gives special help. It is that active cultivation of the presence of God with which we deal here.

### I. *The Foundation of the Practice*

308 The foundation of this practice is the doctrine of the presence of God as set forth briefly by Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Divinum*

*illud munus*, on the Holy Ghost (May 9, 1897), where he distinguishes between God's being present by His immensity and by His indwelling through grace.

God is present by His immensity "by reason of His *power*, inasmuch as all things are subject to it; by His *presence*, inasmuch as all things are naked and open to His eyes; by His *essence*, inasmuch as He is present in all things as the cause of their being" (St. Thomas, I, q. 8, a. 3). Peter the Lombard had already proposed this triple way in which God is in things, and he drew a distinction between it and His indwelling by grace: "Though God is in everything generally by His presence, power and substance (or essence), yet He is said to be present in a more intimate way through His grace in those who regard with keen and faithful eyes the wonder of His words." St. Anselm also wrote of these three ways of God's being in things. Richard of St. Victor, too, wrote on them, and they were explained in various ways by commentators who followed Peter the Lombard. St. Thomas also, and St. Bonaventure, treated of them, the latter saying " (*God is present*) b\* the nearness of all-presence, by the inflowing of His power, and the closeness of His nature."

God is present in the soul of the just man by the indwelling of the Three Persons. This indwelling is certainly common to the Three Persons. It is predicated in a special way of the Holy Ghost, probably by appropriation only and not by reason of a special union of the Holy Ghost with the just man which would make it proper to the Third Person. (Cf. par. 91 above.) It is true that God can be said to be present in the just man in a special way insofar as he knows Him by faith and loves Him by charity, in the same way as the known can be said to be present in the knower. Yet the substantial indwelling of the Three Persons in the just comes about even before they make any act of knowledge or love (i.e., in infancy) in the same way as justification takes place. For God, being a Pure Spirit, is where He acts and is therefore everywhere present because He acts in every creature to conserve it in being. On the other hand, the Divine Persons make man just, by imprinting their image on his soul, and by giving him a participation in the Divine Nature by the infusion of grace and the Gifts. But that operation is essentially diverse from any creative and conservative action since, according to the common opinion of theologians, it is intrinsically repugnant that there be any created thing which could be constituted in this state of supernatural life by virtue of the very act of creation. Therefore the Divine Persons are made present in the soul by this, their operation, and this presence is essentially distinct from their presence by immensity; it is a presence of loving

indwelling by which, in order to be known and loved, they give themselves to the soul in that supernatural way which is begun here below by faith and which will be perfected in Heaven by the Beatific Vision.

God is also present in a special way wherever the Blessed Eucharist is reserved, because of the Hypostatic Union of the Word with the Humanity of Christ which is really present in this Sacrament.

## II. Various Methods

309 There are various methods of practising the presence of God:

*Corporal* presence—by looking at some sensible object (the stars, a flower, the sea, a light) and thence raising the mind to God present therein by His presence, His power, His essence. (Cf. St. Ignatius' "Contemplation for Arousing Love," *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 235-237.)

*Imaginative* presence—by summoning up an imaginative picture or by looking at a holy picture and making-believe that it is not a mere representation but that God is really present.

*Intellectual* presence—by considering, with the help of reason and faith, that God is present by His immensity, and that He dwells within us through grace. In this method images properly so called are not used, but only those *phantasmata* which are necessary for thought.

*Affective* presence—by eliciting some act (of love, trust, adoration) towards God as present or by holding converse with Him.

It will be immediately apparent that the intellectual method and the affective method cannot be fully separated, since the former would be mere speculation if unaccompanied by acts; it would be of no benefit to the soul and is never recommended for practice. Nor can the latter, the purely affective method, be employed without some previous thought of God as present to us. But it is right to draw a distinction between them because sometimes thought will be prominent or more intense, whilst at other times affections will predominate. It is also clear that the corporal and imaginative methods are of value only as means to foster thoughts and acts.

## III. Practical Notes on the Use of These Methods

310 The imaginative method is definitely inferior to the others; in fact, some authors, like Lancicius, reject it. This is so because images are not something real and concrete, and are therefore not without their danger for some people. Nevertheless they can help; they are not evil in themselves and they can have good effects in



channelling the imagination and in fostering acts which are made, in the end, to a real object, namely, God present in us.

The corporal method, on the other hand, is based on a firm foundation. God is truly present in the sensible object which we look at to fix our attention and to make the thought of His presence more concrete. Many of the saints used this method, e.g. St. Francis, St. Ignatius, St. John of the Cross, all of whom employed sensible things as stepping-stones to God. If the soul becomes accustomed to seeing God present in all things, then they are no longer impediments, but become aids to union with Him. Yet care should be taken not to rest in the creatures themselves. And lest the soul stop at a kind of aesthetic contemplation of God, it should not be forgotten that this method of cultivating God's presence is only a means to fostering deeper dispositions of mind and heart. Hence if this mode of raising the soul to God is to bear full fruit, the soul must already have rid itself of inordinate attachment to sensible things and must have made real progress in self-abnegation.

The intellectual-affective method is the essential one, since the benefits to be derived from the practice of the presence of God flow directly from it. (Cf. Tanqueray, n. 447.)

#### IV. *Is a Special Gift Necessary?*

- 311 But is this habitual loving thought of God's presence possible without a special infused gift? And if so, how? How can it be harmonized with the multitude of other thoughts which of necessity we must entertain? A. Mager points out that we cannot think of two different things at the same time. When people imagine that they are thinking of two things at once, they are really only thinking of each one alternately and in quick succession; and even this requires a strenuous effort of mind. A more realistic conception of our thinking processes is that suggested by Lindworsky and Gemelli, namely, that many objects can be truly present to the mind at the same time, but each in a different way. One object only can clearly and explicitly occupy the field of consciousness as the primary object of our attention at a given moment. But another object can truly remain present to the mind at the same time, especially if it is one which moves us deeply, and although it is less clear in consciousness, yet the memory of it influences continuously our way of acting and thinking, and it comes immediately into full consciousness when we cease attending to the other object. Thus it can be seen how the habitual memory of God's presence is possible without an extraordinary gift. But of course special graces are required, though not for the act of memory itself but rather to help the soul

to attain that mortification of inordinate affections and that great fidelity to grace which are essential to the practice.

It is clear, therefore, that the way to an ever-increasing consciousness of God's presence lies less in the use of the intellect (as proposed by Hock, for example) than in the cultivation of acts of love, etc., by means of aspirations, about which we spoke above in paragraph 304. The intellectual effort of thinking continually about God's presence can easily cause great harm, whilst in the natural order there are many examples of habitual thoughts which are generated by intense love and which are not the product of sustained mental effort; e.g., the classic instance of the mother who thinks continually of her sick child even when she is occupied with her other duties.

### C. Conformity with the Will of God, and Purity of Intention

312 We have already shown the relationship between conformity to the Divine Will and Christian perfection (par. IIff, above). Because of this relationship great importance must be attached to acts of conformity to God's Will, commanding or permitting. These acts should be made frequently during the day and especially when difficult things have to be done or harsh ones borne.<sup>3</sup>

This type of aspiration deserves special commendation because of its excellence, since it leads to acts of purest love, because it is possible in any state of soul, in any depth of aridity or desolation, and because it is the best way to free the soul from self-love, from inordinate affections and to make it upright and true. Of course, conformity must not be merely passive but should be motivated by intense love.

313 Purity of intention is achieved by suppressing bad or merely natural intentions or motives for action, and substituting others which are supernaturally good, and as perfect and as intense as possible. We must note, though, that purity of intention does not require us to act only from the most perfect motive of pure charity. Supernaturally good motives like the desire for one's own eternal happiness or the fear of punishment, although less perfect, should not be abandoned but should be supplemented by higher motives.

We should be careful to renew our purity of intention because the more actual, fervent and perfect is our intention, then the greater is our merit and the greater glory do we give to God, other things being equal. We say "other things being equal" because a supernaturally good motive that is not quite perfect may be more efficacious than a perfect motive in moving a person to do good.

For, it may be that if he were to act from a higher motive he would not act as well, nor with as much fervor and care. Therefore, in practice, when we are renewing our intention we should select those supernatural motives that move us most efficaciously to serve God. And if these motives are not perfect they should be improved gradually, that is to say, we should not immediately omit the elements that make them appeal to us but should rather supplement them by the consideration of higher reasons for action.<sup>4</sup>

## REFERENCES

1. Blossius, *A Book of Spiritual Instruction*. St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, II, Chs. 12–13– St. Alphonsus Liguori, *True Spouse*, Ch. 18. Phis. *How to Pray Always*. Re remaining in the presence of God, cf. Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, I, Tract 6.
2. Cf. A. O'Rahilly, *Father William Doyle, S.J.*, especially pp. 114ff.; cf. p. 270.
3. Cf. Scaramelli, *op. cit.*, IV, a. 4, especially n. 273-295.
4. Re renewal of intention, cf. Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, I, Tract 3.

## *Part Six*

### THE DEGREES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

314 All that has been said about the nature of perfection, the factors influencing its development, and the exercises which lead to further it, applies in some way to everyone who leads the spiritual life.

But even among those who seek perfection one can find different applications of the general principles given above and different ways of using the various means and instruments of perfection. The principal causes of this diversity are: differences of character, of physical temperament, of natural gifts to which grace usually accommodates itself; the various degrees reached in the spiritual life; the state of life in which each person is placed by Providence (married life, business career) or to which each has been led by grace (the priesthood, the religious life in a particular order); the various forms of the interior life towards which grace moves souls, a variety observable even among those who follow the same exterior vocation.

Hence, when spiritual theology has ascertained and formulated the general principles of the spiritual life, it must go on to show how these principles are to be applied to particular manifestations of the more perfect Christian life. It must be remarked, though, that there is little one can say about many parts of this "particular" spiritual theology.

315 In the matter of differences of character and temperament much has been written about the direction of scrupulous souls (c.g., by Eymieu, Gemelli), about the correction of grave defects (Cassian's *Institutes*), and about the healing-of spiritual ailments. Practically all of this, though, deals with the negative aspect of sanctification. But each of the different temperaments has not only its own defects but also its own good qualities, which can greatly help in the pursuit of perfection if one knows how to use them properly. Therefore one should try to find out how the search for perfection can best be pursued by the various kinds of temperament—affectionate, emotional, imperious, phlegmatic. The lives of the Saints can be of great assistance here if they define sufficiently the character of their subject and if they do not obscure his individuality under general formulae.

As regards the various states in life, much has been written from the time of the Fathers onward about the state of virginity, the priestly and pastoral life, the monastic and religious life. But the other vocations have not been so thoroughly treated, though in the Middle Ages several *Specula* appeared, a *speculum* being a sort of directory for a special class of people. Denis the Carthusian wrote tracts for princes, lords, merchants, and married people, whilst St. Antonine and Bl. John Dominici wrote for the instruction of highborn ladies. In modern times we find St. Francis de Sales (*Introduction to the Devout Life*'), as well as others, e.g. Louis de la Puente, writing for the layman.

In the main, the constitutions of the religious orders and societies are but adaptations of the principles of the spiritual life to the particular vocation of each institute. Hence in many of the spiritual writings addressed to the members of the different religious orders and institutes one finds an adaptation of general principles to each one's vocation and mode of life. And from thence arise the schools of spirituality. But we should note that very often in these writings no distinction is made between that which is common to all religious and that which is proper to a particular institute and which is an application of the common elements to one particular form of life. Sec, however, Adolphus of Denderwindeke's *Compendium Theologiae Asceticae*, which carefully points out those things which are proper to the Franciscan way of life.

Finally, quite a lot has been written about some of the "ways" of the spiritual life, e.g. the way of spiritual childhood, the way of reparation or victim souls, the contemplative way.

■§16

In these last two Parts we shall touch briefly on the degrees of the spiritual life and the way of infused contemplation. In this Part (Part Six) we intend to speak of (1) the existence of different degrees in the spiritual life; (2) the distinction between them; (3) the distinction between the active life and the contemplative life, and the relationship existing between these two and the degrees of the spiritual life.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Degrees of the Spiritual Life in General

317 It is obvious that all men are not equally perfect in the spiritual life. We wish to determine here whether or not one can discern a succession of well-defined degrees through which God *usually* leads souls to greater perfection. It is true that since He is Omnipotent He can totally change a person in a flash as He did St. Paul. But He usually leads man in an orderly fashion from the initial stages of the spiritual life step by step up to the highest stage. We wish to ascertain, then, whether it is possible for us to detect the degrees of man's spiritual ascent and if so, whether souls are to be directed differently in the different degrees, and whether some exercises, modes of prayer, etc., are particularly suited to certain souls.<sup>1</sup>

#### A. Statement of the Problem

318 Since the time of the Fathers it has been usual to distinguish three principal degrees in the spiritual life. But all authors do not give the same divisions, some making a distinction between beginners, the proficient, and the perfect, whilst others hold that there are three *ways*—the purgative, illuminative, and unitive (perfective). There are also authors (like Alvarez de Paz) for whom the degrees take the form of three types of spiritual life—the active, the contemplative, and the mixed. But since it is not the usual practice to regard the three forms of the spiritual life as degrees, we shall deal with them separately in Chapter Three of this Part.

The division into three *ways* is based on the *main* spiritual pre-occupation proper to the soul in each of the degrees, but each way is not completely independent of the others. For example, although purification of soul should be the chief concern of beginners, yet the perfect cannot afford to neglect it, because man cannot be altogether free from venial sin as long as he lives, and also because the sources of sin are never completely dried up within him. On the other hand, even in the beginning of justification man possesses

essential union with God through sanctifying grace, a union which can be increased from its very inception. Beginners also possess "illumination," that is, they acquire and make progress in the virtues, whilst the perfect, too, must always advance through the stages of heroic virtue.

The division of the spiritual life into three ways has not always been in use. Pseudo-Dionysius was the one to popularize this division; he distinguished between "the purification of the uninitiated," "the initiation of the purified," and "the perfecting of the initiated." He derives his distinction from the terms used in the pagan mysteries and the writings of the philosophers. Although St. Augustine had already spoken of Porphyry as teaching the purification of the soul by "theurgy" and by "theurgical consecrations" which perfect and fit the soul "to see the gods," yet he never applied these notions to the Christian life. It was only in the thirteenth century that the three ways were paralleled with the three degrees which had been in use from the beginning.

Properly speaking, the three degrees of the Christian life are the beginners', the proficients' and that of the perfect. This division best follows out the meaning of the word "degree," since souls in the higher degrees are capable of higher activity than those in the first, and souls in the first degrees have needs which are no longer experienced by the more advanced. Again, the emphasis on particular points is different in each degree, each has its own graces, and the souls in each degree need different direction. We are concerned here mainly with these three stages of the spiritual life.

319 Molinos explicitly rejected the division of the spiritual life into degrees. His denial was in reality one of the sources of Quietist error; he wanted to apply always and everywhere that which is good only sometimes and for some souls.

## B. The Substance of the Doctrine

Though Catholic authors use different formulae, there is no dissent among them as to the substance of this doctrine. That is to say, they all admit that, in general, there are degrees in the spiritual life. But in practice they do differ on the subject of the direction to be given in each degree and on how and when souls pass from one degree to the other.

However, it can be laid down as certain, and even as Catholic doctrine, that

*Thesis. God usually leads men to Christian perfection step by step, and therefore beginners, proficients, and the perfect are each to be directed differently in the spiritual life.*



*Proof*1. *From Ecclesiastical Documents*

- 320 First, from the condemnation of Molinos' proposition number 26: "The three ways, the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive are a great absurdity in mystical theology, since there is only one way, the interior way." (Cf. the *Articles of Issy*, Art. 34.) And in Pius XI's Encyclical *Mens Nostra* (December 20, 1929) it is taken for granted that the soul ascends gradually to full perfection.

II. *Argument from Reason and Experience*

We have already noted that many natural causes exercise an influence on the perfection of the spiritual life, e.g. temperament, natural and acquired habits which can help or impede the dominion of charity in the soul. But, apart from a miraculous intervention by God, all these factors improve only gradually and with the lapse of time. God does elevate and help our nature, but He does not change or extirpate it. Obviously then, these transformations of habits are ordinarily accomplished only by degrees, and little by little.

Experience teaches that much harm can be done if beginners try to act like proficients, and vice versa. For example, beginners will expose themselves to many dangers and illusions if they attempt to pray like the proficients, whilst the latter will find themselves hedged in and confined if they are made do exercises proper to beginners.

III. *From Tradition*

- 321 The whole of tradition teaches very clearly the two points made in our thesis (gradual progress, need for varied direction), although different views have been held on the mode of progress through the degrees.

Some authors preface the traditional teaching with various Scripture texts (e.g., Tanqueray, n. 621-622)—Luke 9.23: 1 Cor. 9.26; Phil. 3.13-17; Gal. 2.20; Hebr. 12.1-2; or Ps. 33.15, from which Alvarez de Paz derives the division which he uses in his book ("Turn away from evil and do good; seek after peace and pursue it"). But although these texts can be adapted to fit the degrees of the spiritual life, they do not in any way *teach* that these degrees *do exist*. More to the point would be 1 Cor. 3.1-2, which declares that men need stronger food than children, and which draws a

distinction between those who are already "spiritual" and those who, though Christian, are "still carnal."

Among the Alexandrians, Clement draws a distinction between children, men and gnostics ("the wise," "the initiated"). Philo before him had said, "One chorus is of children, the other is of the perfect; the former is called *ascesis*, the latter, wisdom (*sophia*)". Origen distinguishes between those who simply believe and please God by good works, and the more perfect, who make wisdom their concern; or between the "contemplatives," who are in the very house of God, and the "active ones," who stand at the entrance. But he also gives three degrees—"practice, natural speculation, and the knowledge of divine things." St. Ambrose bases his conception of the degrees on the manifestation of the Word to the soul. He speaks of the "instruction of the soul" in which "the soul still sees only shadows and is not roused by the revelation of the approaching Word"; progress, in which "it (the soul) emerges from the shadows and enjoys holy presentiments"; perfection, in which the soul "is now perfect and provides within itself a haven of rest for the Word." St. Gregory of Nyssa says that some are saved through fear, some through hope of reward, and some through charity, which is the most perfect way. He also says that the Book of Proverbs gives beginners the desire for wisdom, the Book of Ecclesiastes purges the mind of dependence on externals, and finally, the Canticle of Canticles leads the soul into the divine retreats.

Evagrius (and following him, Maximus the Confessor), like Origen distinguishes between the practical life and *gnosis* (wisdom, contemplation); he also gives three divisions—the practical life, the theoretic life, and the theological life (cf. the hierarchy of acts given by Pseudo-Dionysius—purgation, illumination, and perfecting).

St. John Climacus gives thirty degrees and divides them into three series: 1-7, renunciation of earthly things; 8-26, rooting out vices and acquiring virtues; 27-30, the perfect life. In the twenty-sixth degree he makes a distinction between the untutored, the proficient, and the masters. Isaac the Ninivite marks out three degrees, that of novices, the middle degree, and the perfect degree, in relation to impassibility.

322 Cassian (*Conferences*, XI, 6-12) has three degrees—servile fear, mercenary hope, and filial love. Elsewhere he gives a more detailed series—fear, compunction, renunciation, humility, mortification of desires, rooting out of vices, the beginning of the virtues, purity of heart, perfection of apostolic charity.

St. Augustine gives four degrees of charity (and of perfection) besides those quoted above in paragraph 53: "But is charity alto-

gether perfect as soon as it is born? It is born in order that it may be perfected; when it has been born it is fed; when it has been fed it grows strong; and when it is strong it is made perfect." When speaking elsewhere of charity, he refers more explicitly to its beginning, its increase, and its perfection.

St. Gregory the Great says, "There are three degrees among good-living people—the beginning, the middle, and perfection." In another place he gives eight degrees—the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost (fear, piety, etc.) and the degree of the perfect "who are nourished on deep contemplation."

323 In the Middle Ages St. Bernard enumerated four degrees "of love": man loves himself for his own sake; he loves God, but for his own sake and not for God's; he loves God for Himself; he loves himself for God's sake only. Of this last St. Bernard says, "I do not know if this ... is perfectly accomplished by any man. . . . Let those who have experienced this make such a statement; but as for myself, I must confess, it seems impossible." William of St. Theodoric divides religious into beginners (the "animal state"), proficients (the "rational state"), and the perfect (the "spiritual state").

St. Thomas says, "Just as in the growth of the body one may distinguish the different ages by the different perceptible effects to which nature advances and which it could not accomplish before, so also in spiritual growth the different degrees of charity are made evident by the perceptible effects which charity works in him who possesses it. The *first* effect of charity is, therefore, that man withdraws from sin, and thus the mind of one who possesses charity is mainly intent on becoming cleansed of past sin and avoiding future sin. And because this charity has this effect it is called incipient charity. The *second* effect is that one who is assured that he is free from sin, exerts himself to achieve good; this is therefore called progressive charity. The *third* effect is that one who has been well nourished on the good, comes to regard it as his natural food and takes pleasure in it and is satisfied by it. This is perfect charity. But the middle state has two facets: one, that whereby it is in contrast to the first state, since it is strengthened against the evils to which incipient charity is tempted; two, inasmuch as it is strengthened to tend to the third state by incorporating the good more and more into itself, as it were. Likewise perfect charity has two different aspects: one, insofar as it rests as if already secure in the elements common to all good souls; two, insofar as it sets its hand to any difficult tiling that presents itself, and thus it is called most perfect." Cf. Ilallae, q. 24, a. 8; also Ilallae, q. 183, a. 4 and q. 184, a. 2, where he treats of the degrees from another point of view.

St. Bonaventure distinguishes three ways, the purgative, the illuminative, and the perfective in the exercise of meditation. However, he does not treat of them as degrees but only as tendencies. Elsewhere he gives three degrees of perfection; the lowest (observance of the Commandments), the middle (fulfillment of spiritual counsels, insofar as evil is avoided, good is done and trials borne—all in supererogation), the highest (the deep fruition of eternal joys).

Hugo of Balma writes of the purgative way, "which is that of beginners and the immature," the illuminative and the unitive. He seems to be the first to have thus correlated the triple way with the three traditional degrees.

324 Most of the more recent authors give the three ways; many, however, follow St. Thomas and are more inclined to keep to the traditional degrees of beginners, proficients, and the perfect. Thus Suarez aligns these three degrees with the various states in life; he also connects the degrees with the three ways when dealing with mental prayer.

St. John of the Cross (*Dark Night*, I, Ch. 1, n. 1) explains the distinction in relation to infused contemplation. The beginners are those who still meditate, the proficients are contemplatives, the perfect are those who are in the state of divine union. Cf. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I, Ch. 1, n. 3, where he apportions the first night (of the senses) to beginners and the second (of the spirit) to the proficients when God wishes to lead them to the third degree of perfect union. φ

St. Francis de Sales (*Treatise on the Love of God*, X, 4-5) names (1) souls recently freed from sin who, besides loving God, also love many vain and perilous things; (2) those who no longer love dangerous things but who love good things excessively; (3) souls who love nothing useless, who love nothing too vehemently, but love only what God wishes and as He wishes; they love many things besides God, but only in God and for His sake; (4) souls who not only love God in all and above all but who love nothing in other things except God; this degree was possessed perfectly only by the Blessed Virgin.

Brancatus de Laurea speaks of (1) those who possess only the habit of charity, and who have not performed any acts of charity, e.g. baptized children who have not yet reached the use of reason; (2) those who keep the commandments; (3) those who observe both the commandments and the evangelical counsels; (4) those who, in addition, "observe the harder counsels or are prepared to observe them, or who do other works of supererogation which do not come under any specific counsel but which nevertheless are pleasing to God." Zimmerman, more recently, gives almost the same

division; he enumerates the way of the commandments in grave matters, the way of the commandments in light matters, and the way of the counsels.

325 Among present-day authors Saudreau (*The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*) places in the *purgative* way (1) souls who merely believe, (2) good souls; in the *illuminative* way (3) pious souls, (4) fervent souls; in the *unitive* way (5) perfect souls, (6) heroic souls, (7) great saints. Others like Meynard (*op. cit.*, I, 5-8), Tanqueray (n. 340-343, and 619sq.), and Naval usually join the three ways and the three degrees, so that the purgative way is that of beginners, the illuminative that of those making progress, and the unitive that of the perfect.

From the examples we have given and from many others which could be cited, it is obvious that, despite differences among authors as to how the spiritual life should be graded, there is general consent that (1) there are definite degrees in the perfection of the spiritual life; (2) the other divisions can more or less be reduced to the threefold one of beginners, the proficient, and the perfect; (3) each degree has its own particular preoccupation, and those in the higher degrees can do that which those in the lower cannot attain to, and therefore the souls in each degree need different direction.

## REFERENCES

1. S.T., IIallae, q. 21, a. 9; q. 183. a. 4; *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*, Saudreau, *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*. Tanqueray, *op. cit.*, n. 618-633. Tissot, *The Interior Life*, I, Chs. 9-15. Ganigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*.
2. *Institutes*, IV, 39, 43.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Three Degrees

#### A. Beginners' Degree

##### I. *Who Are Beginners?*

326 In general, beginners are those who live the spiritual life but have not yet made progress in it. They are those in whom the impediments to charity remain almost unchecked, who have not yet set themselves seriously to remove the impediments, great and small, to charity which arise from character or other causes, who have not yet applied themselves to the exercises of the spiritual life and have neither practice nor experience therein.

Therefore, though this degree includes many varieties of souls, it does not include habitual *sinners* because they are spiritually *dead* and so do not belong to any stage of the spiritual life. We say “habitual sinners” because a beginner (or even a proficient) may fall into mortal sin. But if he arises immediately by doing penance, his sin will not necessarily exile him from the degree of beginner or even proficient. And consequently he may continue to be directed by the principles governing his habitual degree in the spiritual life.

It is controverted whether spiritual theology should deal with the methods of converting sinners.

According to Saudreau (*The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, I, n. 36, 50) beginners include both those who, strictly speaking, are beginning the spiritual life, namely, children and converted sinners, and also habitués who have remained a long time in the primary stages, as well as souls who have fallen back into tepidity. According to Hayneufve beginners are children and youths who have not yet chosen a vocation, also those who are established in a calling and who wish to pass to a more fervent life.

327 1. For all practical purposes the following are the beginners in the spiritual life:

a. Innocent children who have not yet attempted to correct their natural defects and curb their evil inclinations and who are not formed in the spiritual life. Similar to these are simple good

souls who never think of anything else except the daily duties of their state and the exercises of the Christian life prescribed by the Church, who do not try to correct their defects or live a more perfect life, but who have already acquired many merits. Sometimes God supplies for the spiritual formation these people have missed, for often it happens that with scarcely any teaching they make great progress,

^28      b. Recently converted sinners; i.e., those who have lived long in sin and who now wish to lead a truly Christian life. Their passions are still unruly, they experience great temptations, they have no skill in the interior life (that is, ordinarily and apart from miraculous Divine intervention). But they can have at the same time a generous, even an heroic will to make up for the sins they have committed and to use the great graces God has given them. Therefore among souls of this kind there will be different degrees of fervor, a difference in gifts received, and different degrees of perfection acquired. Partly comparable to these are souls converted to Catholicism from heresy or infidelity in which they had lived in good faith. It can happen that they have been living in grace for quite a long time, or that they have led a fervent interior life and have been formed by its exercises (cf. Newman's case). But even so, they must be instructed in the real Catholic spiritual life.

329      c. Souls who have not made any progress and who have always been content to remain in the lowest stage of the Christian life, not because they do not know better, like the simple souls of which we have just spoken, but because they are too indolent, or because they think that perfection is not for them and so do not trouble themselves about it. Such attitudes result in lack of spiritual formation and cause great defects.

d. There are also souls who, because of an erroneous concept of perfection, have entered on a false way of spiritual life. They think they have made progress, whilst in reality they retain all their defects and have no real practice of the interior life. Such are those who think that perfection consists in a multiplicity of vocal prayers or external works.

e. Souls who have grown tepid are beginners in many respects: that is, souls who were once fervent and had made progress but afterwards relapsed through carelessness into real tepidity. They live habitually in fully deliberate venial sins, and if they do not sink further they owe it to the mercy of God. It is true that they do not totally lack spiritual formation and experience, but they no longer live the interior life, they have become burdened with many defects and unruly passions. (Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, I, "Retarded Souls.")

## 330 2. The principal concerns of beginners.

There are three things which, first of all, should be effected in all beginners: they should be led to desire and strive for higher perfection; they should be taught how to perform correctly the exercises of the interior life; and they should be purged of those things which impede the dominion of charity in them.

a. *The desire for higher perfection.* There are many ways in which it may be aroused: by an exhortation or holy reading; by the example of the Saints; by some external event (a death, disease, danger, a catastrophe, or on the contrary, by some signal favor from God); frequently it is aroused by the making of a retreat; not infrequently by a more than usually abundant internal grace. Sometimes, too, in the very act of conversion from sin, a complete transition is made to the resolution to embrace the Christian life completely, and all the practical conclusions included in this resolution are at once deduced.

There are also various motives from which the desire may spring—the logic of the Christian life seen clearly in the light of grace; gratitude to God because of His benefits (the Passion, etc.); zeal for perfection at the sight of the misery and want of the souls in the pagan missions or even among Christian peoples.

331 *What should we priests do about this desire for perfection?* We must always remember that the Gospel proposes perfection of the Christian life to all and that therefore nobody and no state of life can be excluded *a priori* from pursuing it. But we should remember too that God does not give everyone equal graces. Therefore in practice we should suggest to all in general that they do not stop at doing the minimum required for salvation but that they go on to serve God in some degree at least more perfectly. Furthermore, we can and should urge individual souls not to be content with what is strictly necessary for salvation, and so we can open the way for Divine grace to move these souls from within. When helping the individual to attain higher things we must follow and not anticipate the work of grace within him. First, we should clear away prejudices by showing him that perfection is in itself desirable, and that it is actually possible in his case and will be of great benefit to him. We must make him realize that perfection is not something extraordinary, reserved for a few, that it does not consist in unusual ways of life (cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction*, I, 1-3). Then we should assist him to discern and follow the motions of grace within him. For the most part, however, concrete means to perfection should not be proposed until after some desire for perfection has been aroused. Cf. St. Ignatius' practice of giving the *Exercises* in their entirety only to those who had already desired perfection for



a long time. Similarly it is a fact that these *Exercises* in the short form commonly used nowadays, will not produce the fruits of perfection in most cases until they have been performed two or three times. This is so because the first time they are done they only help to form some notions of the more perfect life.

The recently reformed soul should be especially protected against diffidence and false humility. Again, it is rather difficult to revive an efficacious desire for perfection in souls that have grown tepid, because in their case many motives for seeking perfection have lost their force. Therefore we must look for some means to arouse them from their torpor, as for example, a sense of responsibility for the graces they have received in the past.

332      b. *Introduction to a more intense interior life.* Beginners must be given some knowledge of the affairs of the spiritual life. Just as a knowledge of Christian doctrine and the Commandments is necessary for Christian living, so the more perfect life requires a deeper knowledge of spiritual things, i.e. knowledge of the mysteries of the faith, of perfection itself, so that the soul may know what is more pleasing to God and what can be safely attempted. Not infrequently does God supply this knowledge interiorly, but the solid doctrine that can be derived from direction, reading, or sermons is always useful, and its deep-reaching force will be gradually and increasingly seen in mental prayer. The function of the director here will be to explain whatever is not clear; to resolve difficulties patiently, even though they may sometimes seem childish to him; to point out what is essential and what is secondary; to keep the\* real object of the spiritual life before the soul; little by little to suggest higher and more difficult aims, in keeping with the progress made by the soul and the enlightenment it has received from God.

333      *Self-knowledge must be acquired.* Most beginners are little accustomed to thinking about their spiritual state. Their knowledge of their own shortcomings is very faulty, since they judge them from a human point of view and pay little attention to the really fundamental and dangerous defects in their characters. But intimate self-knowledge is necessary for any serious reformation of life, for avoiding dangerous illusions, and for a solid grounding in humility. Therefore, from the very beginning, souls should set about acquiring a general knowledge of their character and their predominant passion. They should learn to recognize the more obvious manifestations of their main defects and in particular the external manifestations of these defects. Then, enlightened by grace, they will gradually deepen their knowledge of self. Finally, they should be helped to recognize their own good qualities and to use them in their pursuit of perfection.

The principal aids to self-knowledge are *the examen of conscience* performed daily, and also after any important action (cf. St. Ignatius, *Exercises*, 1st Week, add. 5, n. 77 on the examen on mental prayer), and after exercises that occur only at long intervals, e.g. periods of recollection, retreats;

*the advice of the director* or one's superiors, or even of one's friends;

*spiritual reading*, lectures—care being taken that the soul knows how to make proper use of these aids.

However, the soul's striving to attain self-knowledge must not be allowed to degenerate into a mere psychological inquisition. Stress must be laid on prayer; the ultimate end of the spiritual life, Divine glory, must be always kept before the soul, and the grace of God must be given the largest rôle to play. The director's duty here will be to help the soul make a self-analysis. But he should not make the analysis himself and present it ready-made to his client. Rather, he should only assist in the examination by asking suitable questions, giving advice, citing apposite examples, directing the soul's attention to the more important matters, correcting errors. To him mainly falls the task of guarding the soul from the not inconsiderable dangers inherent in these analyses—scrupulosity, over-introspection, despair, or loss of interior peace. Hence here, too, progress must be gradual and the director should not be in haste to reveal to the soul everything that he himself sees very clearly.

334 *Beginners should be introduced to the practice of recollection and mental prayer.* By these means they will become accustomed to withdrawing themselves from exterior, sensible things. They will not allow themselves to be agitated by people or circumstances but will act from within and according to spiritual principles (the interior life). They will be able to see deeper into the truths of faith in such a way that these truths will become more than mere verbal formulae. They will be united in mind and will to God. The means to attain all this are mental prayer (at least half an hour daily should be given to it regularly), liturgical prayer, and frequent raising of the mind to God (by aspirations, ejaculatory prayers, renewing the intention of serving God, cultivating the thought of His presence, renewing conformity to His Will).

The mental prayer of beginners will be mostly discursive (examining the mysteries of the Faith, applying the truths of faith to everyday actions). But it will not necessarily be speculative and abstract; the discourse can be carried on with love, e.g. in a colloquy with Christ. The life of Christ and the Gospel teachings will be the principal material for their prayer, since these subjects readily lend themselves to prayer and provide that solid foundation which is so necessary for the whole spiritual life.

It is also the duty of the director to regulate their efforts at cultivating recollection of mind, lest they try to obtain too hastily that which, apart from special Divine help, can be acquired only gradually. Indiscreet and overeager efforts to attain recollection may have a deleterious effect on the mind and the nervous system. They should be taught how to remove the impediments to true recollection. The director must also teach them the true nature of prayer, so that they will not place too much value on consolation and will not have an inordinate fear of desolation or aridity. They must be shown how to distinguish involuntary feelings and inclinations from deliberate acts of the will. From the very start let them learn how all things, even the more severe, should be sweetened with the love of Christ.

335 The following are the chief faults of beginners with which the director will have to contend:

*Indiscreet fervor* in prolonging prayer and in mortification; a sort of youthful presumption after they have made some progress—they want to pass on to higher things, although they have not yet laid firm foundations; here they must be gravely warned that they still have defects and they must be shown where true sanctity lies.

Or, on the contrary, they may become *dejected* when confronted with some of the more difficult preliminary obstacles to perfection, or when they find out that mere good-will is not all-sufficient, and that in spite of their good intention they remain weighed down by their defects. When they become downcast the director should encourage them, but he should also make use of the occasion to teach them a practical lesson in humility.

*Scruples* (not morbid scruples of which we speak elsewhere, but rather those which usually arise out of lack of spiritual formation and experience); scruples in a beginner require very careful treatment, since the soul's wholesome tenderness of conscience must not be lessened.

336 c. *Purification of soul.* The soul must be specially freed of the following three obstacles if charity is to gain full dominion over it (cf. St. Ignatius' *Exercises*, n. 63):

*Sin*; not only *mortal* sins, which are so contrary to charity that they destroy it, and which cannot remain in a soul along with the habit of charity; but also *venial* sins, namely, acts which cannot be referred to the ultimate end, and which therefore cannot in any way be subjected to the dominion of charity. (St. Thomas, I-II, q. 87, a. 5; q. 88, a. 1-2.) Hence venial sins render the soul less acceptable to God because they turn aside a part of human life from its one end, the service of God. Special attention should be

paid to *fully deliberate venial* sins, which are venial only by reason of parvity of matter. And not only should these be combatted but also those venial sins which are not fully deliberate but which nevertheless are often the fruit of some inordinate inclination or habit that is not seriously fought but allowed to remain active. Both these types of venial sin are very great obstacles to spiritual progress because, in both, the will deliberately falls short of sincere seeking after perfection. At least this is so to the extent that the soul refuses to fight against a habit which it recognizes as the cause of so many offences against God. It seems, however, that both kinds of venial sin can be avoided with the help of grace. But not all sins of frailty can be avoided (cf. Council of Trent, VI, can. 23). In fact, many of them are brought to the notice of the soul only gradually and with the enlightenment of grace. But they are not to be made little of, because, though light, they are nevertheless real offences against God and therefore efforts should be made to reduce them as much as possible. On the contrary, however, the soul should not lose its internal peace and spiritual joy because of them but should rather co-operate with Providence, which permits them in order that the soul may derive new humility from this manifestation of its weakness.

- 337 The soul must be purified of unruly inclinations that spring from its character or from the bad habits it has acquired. These inclinations are a source of many sins, and even when they do not lead to sin, they both weaken the dominion of charity in the soul and make it more difficult of attainment. Therefore we must not think that we shall rid ourselves of these defects solely by being eager to love God sincerely and without applying special corrective measures. (It is an illusion to think that we shall always act *logically*.) Nor should we believe that our efforts can totally uproot them, since, even though given the powerful aid of grace, we shall always have the remains of concupiscence w'ithin us (apart from the special privilege mentioned by the Council of Trent). Ordinarily we should begin with correcting our more noticeable and external defects, which can easily give scandal and which foster interior rebellion. Then we should work inwards, as it were, so that according as we advance in the spiritual life our purification will become progressively deeper.

Thirdly, the soul must be purged of the *worldly spirit*, of worldly judgments and desires. In Sacred Scripture (St. John and St. Paul) and in spiritual writings, the world is spoken of as being opposed to Christ. In this sense, the "w~~o~~orld" is made up of those who, at least in practice, seek their happiness in the goods of this life and make them their goal, whether these goods be material, intel-

lectual, or artistic; and who despise supernatural goods or at least regard them as secondary and accessory only. Therefore the worldly spirit is the whole body of practical judgments about the affairs and circumstances of this life (i.e., a practical philosophy) which flows logically from this time-centred attitude. Hence it is opposed to the spirit of Christ, which regards life on earth as merely the road to supernatural happiness in Heaven. Therefore the judgments of the two spirits about riches, honors, comforts, even in those things which are of themselves good and licet, will be directly opposed to each other. The wisdom of the flesh (cf. 1 Cor. 2. 12ff.) must therefore be laid aside, so that "the mind of Christ" may grow within us; the dominion of charity necessarily presupposes that we are of one mind with Christ in all things.

338     *How can this purification be achieved?* We shall speak elsewhere of the specific means of purification—frequent confession, mortification, examen of conscience, etc. Here we shall content ourselves with a brief description of the two modes of purification—active and passive.

*Active purification* is never purely active, since it is always done under the impulse and with the help of grace. It is achieved by means of acts which we ourselves deliberately choose and intend. These acts can be external or wholly internal. Purification can be either *negative*, that is, avoiding evil or imperfect acts, resisting unruly inclinations; or it can be *positive*, that is, acting contrary to these inclinations and the spirit of the world, e.g. freely choosing humiliations in order to destroy pride more completely. Ordinarily, though, positive purification does not mean exposing oneself to temptations; and it never means exposing oneself to temptations of the external senses. Purification can be *direct*, fighting against the defects themselves; or *indirect*, striving to exercise those virtues which are opposed to these defects, e.g. trying to practise charity.

339     *Passive purification* is done by means which we ourselves do not choose. Instead, God Himself provides instruments of purification which He wills or permits to affect us; or He may act immediately within the soul. Thus *external* purifications of this type may take the form of poverty, contempt, calumny, disease, the inequalities of the weather, persecution, separation. *Internal* purifications may be aridity, desolation, scruples or doubts, persistent temptations. And either of these types of trial may be experienced to a normal degree, that is, not exceeding the ordinary circumstances of life; or either may be undergone to a more or less extraordinary degree.

Though these more advanced and more penetrating passive purifications are usually a sign and a condition of forthcoming graces of infused contemplation, we cannot conclude that only in the

*strictly mystical* way are souls thus passively purged. Even beginners are passively purified by God, though ordinarily in an external and perceptible manner. And at such times beginners, just like those who have progressed, must give themselves over with docility to these purifications by accepting them and entering into God's plan, e.g. by suffering humiliations in such a way as to be truly humbled by them.

The main effects of these purifications on beginners will be: purity and tenderness of conscience; mortification of the passions, that is to say, the passions, though not yet completely under control, are no longer a source of proximate danger of grave sin, nor do they greatly impede the soul from acting according to the dictates of charity; the mind is no longer over-attentive to earthly things; a humble, filial love of God combined with trust in Him and deep compunction of heart.

## B. The Degree of Proficients?

### I. *Who Should Be Regarded as Proficient?*

340 Proficients are those who have so tamed their passions that they are ordinarily free from the danger of sinning mortally and who resist the ordinary temptations easily enough. However, they may fall into grave sin as a result of an unexpected and violent temptation, but they will not thereby lose their habitual place in the spiritual life if they quickly and fervently repent. They are careful to avoid venial sins, especially those which are fully deliberate. In fact, such deliberate sins are rare among them; they would become tepid if they frequently committed deliberate venial sins. They know themselves well and are practised in the principal exercises of the spiritual life, performing them conscientiously (i.e., liturgical prayer, mental prayer, examen of conscience, spiritual reading). They have a firm, penetrating, and personal knowledge and conviction of the fundamental truths of the spiritual life.

Following Saudreau, we can divide proficients into two classes — *pious* souls and *ferrent* souls. Pious souls lead a well-ordered life, at least in matters of greater moment and in the externals of the spiritual life. But they still have many internal defects which they do not try to combat seriously and efficaciously, e.g. gluttony, vanity, curiosity, talkativeness. Hence not infrequently they commit venial sins which are more or less deliberate; they are guilty of many imperfections, especially in their internal dispositions and the intention for which they act. In particular, they fail to grasp fully the Gospel doctrine of self-abnegation and so do not strive to

put it into practice. (Saudreau, *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, n. 336.)

Fervent souls, on the other hand, "understand this doctrine better and try sincerely to put it into practice. . . . They have a sincere desire to deny themselves in all things, and they seriously strive to attain perfect abnegation, but they have not yet reached it" (*ibid.*, n. 358). Furthermore, whilst pious souls, though good and industrious, are yet greatly taken up with externals and have not yet a good practical grasp of the importance of a true interior life and of real interior recollection, these fervent souls have already become interior, they have a high regard for silence (both exterior and interior), they avoid curious and useless thoughts and they are imbued with the true spirit of prayer.

### II. *Why Do So Many Souls Never Progress Beyond This Stage?*

341 Actually, even among those who by their very profession and state in life should tend to perfection, it is rare to find souls who attain to the third degree (that of the perfect). Most religious remain in the degree of proficients all their lives, and, in fact, they often stop short and never leave the ranks of the merely pious. Yet, properly speaking, they cannot be called tepid but rather *mediocre*. There are two reasons why souls such as these come to a halt.

1. They lack a *serious and efficacious desire for progress*. This may be due to the advance of age and the cooling of youthful ardor; or it may be caused by a kind of lassitude brought on by the monotony of the spiritual life (the same acts and efforts have to be repeated over and over without any easily detectable results); or it may be due to the pressure of many undertakings (even though they are done for God); or to the reaction and discouragement which follows from an indiscreet, anxious, impatient and too-human struggle for perfection that has not produced the desired result; or it may even be due to an erroneous concept of resignation, whereby the soul thinks that it should no longer be solicitous about progress in perfection but that it should commit everything to God alone. Whatever causes the decline, the soul gradually loses its zeal for progress and finally comes to a halt. Nevertheless, its merits go on increasing because it does many supernaturally good and meritorious acts every day. Sometimes even, e.g. during the annual retreat, the soul again renews its resolution to make progress, that is, it resolves to make up for the losses of the year but does not set out to acquire further gains. Hence for all practical purposes it will

remain stationary for many years and will not make any real advance in actual perfection,

2. A really interior life is lacking; among souls of this type who lead an active life, external works and human devices predominate and true recollection gives place to dissipation of mind. Those who lead a contemplative life become content with a kind of interior superficiality; they allow themselves to be carried along by any peaceful thought of God or by some liturgical prayer; they are taken up with the affairs of their daily lives and lack, a deep and strong perception and appreciation of Divine things. But recollection of mind, custody of the heart, the spirit of prayer, and an habitual and increasingly profound union of mind and will with God are all essential to progress because these qualities allow the supernatural motives (which prevent us from settling down in mediocrity) to exert their full power on the soul. And these supernatural motives in turn effect the full and complete substitution of the mind of Christ for the spirit of the world, so that in the end charity holds full sway over one's whole life.

### III..What, Therefore, Should Be the Principal Concerns of Proficients?

- 342 1. *An interior re-forming.* They must continue the work of purifying the soul and conforming it to Christ. But with this difference, that the purification should now reach into the depths of the soul. Not only should their exterior life be regulated and conformed to Christ, but their unruly affections must also be attacked and progressively reduced in order to increase their interior freedom. Much of the required purification must still be done actively, though in a more positive manner than heretofore (i.e., cultivating the virtues), and more gently and with greater love. Often at this stage God assists the soul more directly by sending it exterior trials and interior aridity, sometimes even permitting it to remain as it were powerless to correct certain external defects, so that by acknowledging its weakness it may progress in the essentials, e.g. in humility, the spirit of prayer, etc. But the soul must not be in haste to abandon active purification. Many do not make progress because they convince themselves too easily that they are exempt from active mortification. (Cf. Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, Ch. 19.) *Positive* striving for conformity with Christ implies three things; first, a deep *knowledge* of His example, His outlook, His affections, His mode of action and His motives, His dispositions in acting and in suffering. This knowledge will in turn produce ardent *devotion* to Christ our Head, our King, our Teacher and Brother. In the designs



of Providence such a love for Christ the Man, the One Way to God, is a singular incentive to fervor, and the more the soul becomes freed of earth, the more can this love increase\*. Then will follow, finally, *imitation* of the example set by Christ and conformity to Him, and perfection will grow according as the soul becomes more like to Christ and more conformed to Him, as we have already noted in paragraph 103 above. Of course, this striving to imitate the virtues shown us by Christ must include all the virtues, just as accepting His doctrinal teaching means accepting it in its entirety. Nevertheless everyone need not strive to attain the virtues one after the other, beginning with the highest, nor is there any need to go from one virtue to another, following the speculative connection between them. In practice, one should begin with those virtues upon which all spiritual progress depends, i.e. one may start with humility, or may select the virtues most suited to one's character, vocation, and circumstances. However, one's initial selection should be made especially in accordance with the inspirations of grace.

- 343 2. *Recollection of mind and custody of the heart.* In passing through the first degree (that of beginners), the soul has already been introduced to the interior life. But in order that this life may grow\* and a greater union with God in mental prayer may be achieved, the soul must gradually acquire recollection of mind and custody of the heart. Recollection puts a check on man's insatiable desire to know and delight in a multitude of things, especially those things which appeal greatly to his fallen nature, namely, the goods of this world, human affairs. *External* recollection keeps the soul from seeking knowledge that is not, in some way at least, supernaturally useful; for example, it will not seek for new's or be eager to see novelties, even when they relate to its scientific studies. External recollection will also make the soul unwilling to spread such knowledge by means of useless conversations. *Internal* recollection does not allow the imagination to feed on useless dreams and reveries. Instead, the mind will be occupied with the thought of supernatural things and of those things which in any way help in the procuring of the supernatural end.

*Custody of the heart* means something more than fighting against our bad or disorderly inclinations (temptations). It also means curbing our natural longings for things which are good in themselves and subjecting these longings to the dominion of reason enlightened by faith, in such a way that we do not blindly and unhesitatingly follow' even our good desires. Instead, if we practise custody of the heart, we shall enquire at least briefly into the object proposed, to ascertain whether it is, in the actual circumstances,

suitable and good. As is immediately apparent, custody of the heart is intimately connected with recollection. The soul that is continually taken up with earthly things is, by that very fact, prevented from paying adequate attention to the continuous inspirations of grace, and vice versa, an ill-guarded heart is continually distracted by vain curiosity about the things it sees and hears.

344 Both recollection and custody of the heart are necessary if we wish to make progress in the interior life by conformity to Christ and by habitual docility to the leading of grace. For, since supernatural things are unseen and are known only by faith, they are little proportioned to our natural mode of knowing. Hence when a soul is taken up with curiosity about earthly things and is overwhelmed with other impediments, only with great difficulty can it be moved by supernatural considerations and occupy itself intensely with the thought of God. Furthermore, such a soul has little concern for interior freedom; it is ruled not by charity but rather by impulse.

This is confirmed by the fact that masters of the spiritual life lay great stress on the use of the principal methods for acquiring both recollection and custody of the heart. They particularly stress *silence*. *Exterior* silence (since every conversation arouses many thoughts and emotions), may be *absolute*, at least on many occasions and in many places; or *relative*, i.e. speaking briefly and in moderation and avoiding loquacity. *Interior* silence means checking the flow of vain or useless thoughts (cf. par. 263 above).

Then *modesty* in the use of the eyes and the other senses should be practised. We must also suppress excessive liveliness of mind and affection; otherwise our perception will be too acute and we shall thoughtlessly and unhesitatingly allow ourselves to be led astray by our senses. We must also suppress what is usually known as "natural activity"; we must not follow our natural impetuosity and rush headlong into action without waiting for the guidance of faith.

345 3. *A special cultivation of the virtue of religion*. Religion is that part of justice whereby we render due worship and honor to God, the First Principle and Ruler of all things. (St. Thomas, II<sup>II</sup>ae, q. 81.) The principal acts of religion are, according to St. Thomas, devotion (*idem.*, q. 82), prayer (q. 83), adoration (q. 84), sacrifice (q. 85), interior oblation (q. 86), vow (q. 88), oath (q. 89), adjuring in the name of God (q. 90), using the Divine name in prayer and praise (q. 91; he does not deal separately here with *worship*, which he treats in III, q. 63, a. 2, since, actually, worship as a whole is made up of all the acts just listed, i.e. sacrifice, adoration, praise, etc.).

From this short description it is immediately apparent that, although religion is not a theological virtue, it is still of great

importance, not only because of its intrinsic excellence and the value of its acts, but also because it is of great assistance in cultivating recollection of mind and interior union with God. Therefore the virtue of religion should be especially cultivated by proficients. The acts of this virtue, e.g. prayer, sacrifice, liturgical worship, cannot be performed without many acts of the theological virtues being elicited at the same time. Hence acts of religion are very well suited to fostering the interior life and to uniting the intellect and will with God. In fact, acts of religion not only remove the opposition of the senses and the imagination to union with God but actually make use of them to cement that union. Again, the exercise of this virtue greatly assists recollection of mind and custody of the heart, since it keeps before us our true relationship to God insofar as it marks out the relations of the creature to the Creator, and imbues our whole lives with reverence for His Supreme Majesty. For, although charity makes us *friends* of God, and our adoption and elevation by grace makes us His *sons*, yet we always remain His *servants*, because we are creatures. Hence, no matter how wonderful the kindness with which God receives us, this essential relationship between Him and us, which is fully expressed by the virtue of religion, can never be taken away. Finally, this virtue is of great importance for proficients because, just as charity remains the same in this as in the future life, so also religion in its higher manifestations, adoration and praise, remains the same in Heaven as it was on earth.

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Hence the importance of performing acts of religion to express our subjection to God, and to show our reverence for Him. There is nothing to prevent these acts from being commanded and informed by charity, since there is no opposition between humblest reverence and filial love. But care should be taken that this sense of reverence does not vanish from the spiritual life, since it expresses an essential relationship between God and the soul. Therefore the special atmosphere imparted by the virtue of religion should pervade our whole life, just as filial reverence and love should inform all our dealings with our parents. The main source of this atmosphere is the spirit of faith, which gives us a deep, knowledge and vivid realization of what we are in the sight of God. All this applies in a special way to the life of the priest because, by virtue of his office, he is deputed to offer worship to God in the name of the Church. This is the reason why such pre-eminence is given to the virtue of religion by those spiritual authors who are mainly concerned with the spirituality of the priest, e.g. Condren, Olier.

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4. *Perfect self-abnegation and humility.*<sup>5</sup> Catholic spiritual tradition as a whole is agreed that charity is the bond and culmination

of perfection; and it is no less agreed that humility and self-abnegation are the foundation of perfection and the condition of any real progress. Thus Cassian says (*Institutes*, XII, 23; cf. par. 303): "It is plain to see, then, that no advance in perfection and purity of life can be made except through real humility, which is to be shown first towards the brethren and also to God in the depths of the heart." Again, he says (*ibid.*, IV, 39), that humility, "when once really possessed, speedily leads one to a high degree of that love which knows no fear." St. Benedict uses almost the same words in his *Rule* (Ch. 7; cf. C, Butler),<sup>4</sup> St. Leo says: "Dearly beloved, the whole science of Christian wisdom consists in true and voluntary humility."

St. Gregory the Great calls humility "the mother and mistress of all the virtues." And elsewhere he says: "Since humility is the very source of virtue, it follows that a virtue will spring up and endure if it is rooted in humility, but if it is cut off from this root, it will wither away because it lacks the life-giving sap of charity." In like fashion Climacus, among the Eastern Fathers, calls humility "the royal gateway, through which one approaches the inner courts" (*Scala*, 25th step). And Thomas à Kempis expresses thus the teaching of the Middle Ages: "Never think that thou hast made any progress till thou look upon thyself as inferior to all" (Bk. II, Ch. 2).

348 In more recent times, St. Ignatius' meditation on the "two Standards," his meditation on the Kingdom of Christ, and his description of the degrees of humility, are all directed towards planting deep in the mind and heart the conviction that sanctity and the special service of Christ depend on humility, and that if once humility is acquired, then the other virtues will follow easily. Therefore he says: "Let each one remember that he will make progress in spiritual things only insofar as he relinquishes self-love, self-will, and self-interest" (*Exercises*, n. 189). St. John of the Cross says: "If thou wilt be perfect, sell thy will, and give it to the poor in spirit; come to Christ through meekness and humility; and follow Him to Calvary and the grave."<sup>5</sup> Similarly in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (II, 7) he teaches how Christ is the Way to life through the example of His sufferings, His humility, and His death, and that "the more completely (man) is annihilated for God's sake, according to these two parts, the sensual and the spiritual, the more completely is he united to God and the greater is the work which he accomplishes" (n. 11; cf. *ibid.*, III, 9). St. Francis de Sales speaks in somewhat the same way when concluding his Eighth Conference ("On the Despoiling of Self"): "Charity is humility that mounts up on high, and humility is charity coming down from

above. I should prefer to see you with more humility and less of the other perfections than with more of the other perfections and less humility."

349 St. Bernard in his *Degrees of Humility* (I, 2) defines humility as "a virtue by which man, acting on real self-knowledge, despises himself." St. Thomas (II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 161, a. 1) defines it as "a virtue which checks and restrains the mind from tending immoderately to lofty things." La Reguera says that it is "a virtue which checks and restrains the mind from tending immoderately to lofty things and keeps it instead on the lower levels in accordance with man's subjection to God." It is a virtue by which one also humbles oneself by subjecting oneself to others (St. Thomas, *ibid.*, ad. 5). Therefore a distinction must be made between the humility that is necessary to avoid the sin of pride (seeking or loving inordinately one's own excellence), with which St. Thomas is chiefly concerned in q. 161, and humility in the fuller sense, by which man "despises himself" (St. Bonaventure) and strives to overcome his pride and rid himself of it. St. Bernard (*loc. cit.*) and other masters of the spiritual life are mainly concerned with this more perfect form of humility. (Cf. St. Thomas, *loc. cit.*, a. 6, ad 1.)

Like charity, humility has a double application: *towards God* and *towards the neighbor*. By humility towards God we acknowledge that we are creatures and therefore as nothing in the presence of the Creator, that we are sinners in fact, and therefore less than nothing in the sight of God, our Benefactor, our Redeemer, our Judge; not that we should be complacent about our sins but that, granting that they are a reality, we should regard them in their true light. We can also exercise humility *towards our neighbor*. We know that of ourselves we have nothing that is good and that we cannot place ourselves above anyone because of our own merits. Instead, "each one of us should not only *say* that he is beneath all and more wretched than any, but he should also believe it wholeheartedly" (St. Benedict, *Rule*, Ch. 7; cf. C. Butler<sup>6</sup>); consequently each of us should accept and even welcome insult and contempt as his due.

350 *Self-abnegation* is not so much a virtue as a certain general habit of will by which man, acting against the natural leaning towards self-love and egoism, subordinates all the spiritual and material goods of this life to the promotion of God's glory in everything. When man practises self-abnegation he no longer regards himself as the centre of the universe, but rather recognizes that he is destined for and bound up with a higher good, namely, God's glory. Hence an act of self-abnegation is one in which we make a full and notable sacrifice of our own self-interest. This seems to be what

Christ meant when He spoke of denying oneself (Matt. 16.24; Luke 9.23; Mark 8.34; cf. Matt. 26.34-35 and 74, where the same word is used of Peter's denial of Christ) and of losing one's life (John 12.35; Matt. 16.25; 10.39; cf. par. 305).

351 Humility and self-abnegation are given pre-eminence in the science of spiritual perfection not because they have a greater intrinsic dignity than the other virtues (the theological virtues and some of the moral virtues are more exalted; cf. St. Thomas, *Ilallae*, q. 161, a. 5), but because they are essential conditions and key-points in the spiritual life. For without them no higher perfection is possible, and when they are present all the rest follows easily enough. Hence one can judge whether a soul has or has not arrived at high perfection almost solely by examining its attitude towards and its progress in humility and self-abnegation.

The theological reason for this pre-eminence is as follows: the measure or gauge of Christian perfection is charity, and the greatest impediment to charity is self-love, since the inordinate love of self, the not-subordinating fully one's own interests to the glory of God, is simply opposed to that charity whereby God is loved above all and hence more than oneself. But self-abnegation wages war on self-love, and humility makes a direct attack on egoism by rooting out inordinate self-esteem and the desire for honors. Now man is naturally inclined to love God, the Highest Good. As St. Thomas says; "Loving that which is good is the first and most natural act of man, and this is especially true when the good in question is the Divine Goodness Itself" (*Ilallae*, q. 34, a. 5). Therefore there is no intrinsic obstacle to man's loving God, once he has received knowledge of Him through faith. Consequently, love of God is prevented from increasing solely by the encroachment of worldly cares on man's heart and by his contrary love of earthly goods and the things which are his own. Therefore, once these obstacles are removed by humility and self-abnegation, charity spontaneously grows in man's soul and freely follows its innate tendency to increase.

352 *This is confirmed by experience.* It is not rare to find in history souls who seem to have been born to achieve the highest perfection, endowed as they were with fervor, a deep interior life, and other gifts of nature and grace. But it has often happened that the greatest danger and obstacle to their progress was this very wealth of endowment, since it engendered a more or less conscious pride. This pride, this lack of humility, was frequently the reason for their failure to reach real sanctity, or even for their absolute defection from grace. We must insist strongly, though, that humility is quite different from listless, passive timidity, and that self-renunciation does not mean spiritless dejection of soul. In reality, timidity and lack of

spirit are only other forms of self-love which make the soul prefer to do without earthly pleasures rather than inconvenience itself or disrupt the even tenor of its way in order to obtain them.

353 There is a necessary connection between humility towards God and humility towards man, just as there is a connection between charity towards God and fraternal charity. Certainly humility towards God is the more essential, but it will not be true and sincere unless accompanied by humility towards the neighbor. For if we feel any complacency in our own goodness, at least if we think we are better than others, then we are still clinging, illogically but none the less really, to that love of self which hinders both true love of neighbor and true love of God. That is why tradition lays so much stress on the necessity of suffering external and internal humiliations. Humiliation is at once the touchstone of true, sincere humility and its most fertile source, since a humiliation affords us a concrete experience of our own nothingness which is more effective than any reasoning process for showing us how really unimportant we are. Nevertheless, though the ready acceptance of humiliation is very beneficial, yet it would be mere hypocrisy if unaccompanied by the proper interior dispositions, just as internal humility is an illusion if it does not inspire us to accept humiliations.

Some may ask how the Saints could truly and sincerely believe that they were the worst of men, e.g. St. Francis of Assisi (*The Legend of St. Francis*, by St. Bonaventure, VI, 6; cf. St. Thomas, *Ilallae*, q. 161, a. 3). It would seem that the main source of their heroic humility was a special light infused by God which enabled them to see vividly how displeasing to Him were their faults and omissions and how hideous these faults were in a Christian soul adorned with grace. And so clearly did they realize their unworthiness and so deeply did the realization pierce them that they were unable any longer even to think of the greater sins committed by others. The perfect humility of the Saints is therefore a special gift of God which made them immune from any temptation to vain-glory even when He showered them with favors and men venerated them.

### C. The Degree of the Perfect

#### I. *In What Sense Can We Say that There Is Such a Thing as a "State of Perfection" on Earth?*

354 Man's ultimate end is the glorification of God in the Beatific Vision. But this end can be attained only after death, and therefore life on earth is only the road to it. Therefore it follows immediately

that, here below, man can never reach that fullness of perfection of which his nature is capable. All authors admit, though, that he can reach a state of *relative perfection* in the spiritual life while still on earth. But in the course of history many erroneous concepts of this state have been elaborated; it will hence be of benefit if we first examine some of these errors before we attempt to determine the proper meaning of the term "state of perfection."

355 1. In what sense does the "state of perfection" *not* exist?

Already in paragraph 51 we have given a brief account of the mistaken ideas about perfection entertained by the Gnostics, the Messalians, and the pseudo-mystics of the Middle Ages and modern times. To these can be added the Manicheans, who constituted their "Elect Ones" in the state of perfection by the rite of "Consolation." [The Manicheans were divided into two groups—the Elect and the Hearers, or ordinary faithful. The Elect were in the state of perfection; they were relatively very few in number. In the rite of "Consolation" one of the Elect imposed hands on a Hearer, thus receiving him into the ranks of the perfect: Tr.] Mention must be made too of the Amalricians and the other sects who taught that the Holy Ghost became incarnate in the perfect or that at least He came down upon them in a new manner.

All these sects had the following points in common, more or less: man was introduced into the state of the perfect either by some rite or initiation or by some gift of God received once for all, or by the knowledge of some truth, or the choice of some simple way to perfection that was universally efficacious. Thus perfection was attainable quickly and definitively and without prolonged personal effort. In this state man was deemed to be so united to God that all personal action ceased (sometimes even all personality was thought lost). Hence, even while he was on earth, man had reached the final end, he was beatified, impeccable, with the result that none of his material acts was either good or bad. Therefore it was useless for him to do the common works of piety; even the Mass itself was of no benefit to him: in fact, all such Christian acts were harmful inasmuch as they might distract him from his union with God Himself. Those who had reached the state of perfection were thought to be even above the hierarchical authority of the Church, because that authority was so far from perfect that it concerned itself only with externals and therefore the perfect were not bound to submit their interior life to it.

356 As against these and like errors the Church teaches that by its very nature the charity whereby man is made relatively perfect in this life *can always be lost*. Even the privilege of confirmation in grace does not remove this intrinsic possibility of defection, since



this privilege rests only on the extrinsic promise of those graces which certainly prevent sin. Theologians are agreed in teaching that, apart from the privilege mentioned in the Canons of the Council of Trent (VI, Can. 23), no one can avoid all venial sins of frailty for a notable space of time; and they are of the opinion that only the Blessed Virgin Mary received that privilege. Furthermore, even though acquired merit and the degree of sanctifying grace cannot decrease in the soul, yet the *fervor of charity and its dominion* over all man's acts can always grow less. Finally, all theologians hold, in modern times at least, that even the Blessed Virgin made progress in grace throughout her whole life, and that consequently there can be no state in which man cannot advance in perfection and sanctity (against the Beghards).

Nor is there any state of perfection in which the soul is placed *above* the exercise of the virtues, *above* the precepts of the Church, *above* the necessity of external worship (against the Beghards and Molinos). There is no state of perfection in which man's spiritual life is exempted from hierarchical authority (against the Beghards and Molinos), or in which he becomes absolutely passive under the Divine action (against Molinos, Petrucci). However, in accordance with our remarks in paragraph 95 above and in Part Seven, where we deal with infused contemplation, we must note that the soul which enjoys infused contemplation may not be able to elicit acts of the different virtues or of external worship while experiencing the Divine infusion. Just as it can happen that the soul, for the most part, may elicit acts of the various virtues only under the command of charity. But this does not exclude acts of virtue from the habitual state of the soul, nor do the commanded acts of virtue just mentioned cease to be real acts of these virtues.

357 2. In what sense can we say that there are perfect *souls*?

All agree that there is a state of the perfect which implies a certain *stability in acting in a relatively perfect way*, and which involves certain characteristics of the spiritual life. This state is a *degree*, since it is higher than the preceding states; and it is also a *way*, since the soul does not come to rest therein but goes on to greater heights and proceeds in a manner different from its former mode of progress.

The degree of the perfect is divided into two sub-degrees:

a. Full and perfect charity, or *heroic charity*, which is usually required by the Church in the beatification of the Servants of God. Benedict XIV, having compared the various definitions proposed by theologians, defines this heroic charity thus: "Christian virtue, to be heroic, must make its possessor act readily, joyfully, and with ease in a way that is above the ordinary: he must act from a super-

natural motive, and not from motives of human consideration; and in his actions he must manifest self-abnegation and full control over his human inclinations.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore the heroicity must be so outstanding that the Servant of God may be proposed as an exemplar to other Christians in the same walk of life.

b. *A less full and less resplendent perfection of charity*, but one which is nevertheless sufficient to lift the soul out of the ranks of the simply proficient. That is to say, the soul must have reached such a degree of self-abnegation and recollection that it is habitually docile to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, and charity has universal dominion over its whole life, despite some faults due to human frailty.

In both these senses we can say that there are perfect souls even here on earth.

358 That there is such a thing as *heroic sanctity* is evident from the procedure adopted by the Church in the canonization of the Servants of God. Since the time of Urban VIII the practice of the Church has been to examine and assess carefully the heroicity of the virtues practised by the Servant of God, except in the case of martyrs. And the wording of the decrees of beatification and canonization clearly shows that the Saints and Blessed mentioned therein are proposed to the faithful as being worthy of veneration, not only because they are in Heaven but also because they are true exemplars of the perfect Christian life. Catholic tradition also has expressly acknowledged many holy persons as perfect friends of God. For, by its Divine teaching power, expressed in various documents, the Church has proposed many such souls to the faithful as worthy of imitation. Furthermore, these holy people are acknowledged as Saints by the common consent of theologians and the unanimous opinion of Christian peoples.

We can also prove that heroic sanctity does exist by using the arguments employed in the dogmatic tract on the Church which prove that the consummate sanctity and fullness of the supernatural life which Christ made possible to man cannot be lacking in at least some of the Church's children.

359 There are souls who have gone beyond the degree of proficient, but who do not yet possess heroic sanctity. Proof of this is found in the common consent of spiritual authors; they recognize such a third stage in the spiritual life and they propose norms of action and direction for the souls therein, norms which are different from those suitable for beginners and proficient. Nor does it seem that these norms are applicable only to the few souls whom the Church raises or could raise to the honors of the altar. For, as we all know from experience, there are many people who, though they do not

possess extraordinary sanctity, yet lead truly holy lives in union with God, in self-abnegation and in the perfect fulfillment of the duties of their state in life. Some authors, like La Reguera, try to prove from Scripture that there are such souls. However, the texts they cite (Matt. 19.21; 5.48; 1 Cor. 2.5; Phil. 3.15; James 3.2) either refer to the perfection that is to be *striven for*, or, if they do treat of perfection actually possessed, they take it in a broader sense than we do in this context.

360 3. A more exact definition of the state of such perfect souls is possible, since it presupposes that the fruits of sanctity, which have been cultivated in the first two degrees, are now acquired and possessed with a certain measure of stability. Therefore perfect souls are those who enjoy freedom from sins and inordinate inclinations, to such an extent that only faint traces of them remain (these traces are still responsible for faults of surprise); facility in the exercise of the different virtues; habitual self-abnegation, humility, etc., even in unforeseen circumstances; true recollection of soul amongst external works that are done for God. St. Thomas says that "Man's principal aim is to cleave to God and rejoice in Him" (IIallae, q. 24, a. 9); in the state of perfection the main concern of the soul is to cleave ever closer to God and to follow His inspirations ever more faithfully. Charity, faith, and hope now freely exercise dominion over the soul and inform all its actions. The Gifts of the Holy Ghost can now perform their functions in the soul freely and without notable obstruction; they can make it habitually docile to the guidance of the Holy Ghost (cf. *supra*, pars. 135ff.).

361 Must the gift of infused contemplation be included among the essential elements of this state of perfection? We do not think so, although some, like Saudreau and Arintero, more or less expressly assert the affirmative opinion. We hold that it is one thing to say that the gift of infused contemplation is a *necessary means* to attain the degree of the perfect (we shall treat this point later), whilst it is quite another matter to say that infused contemplation is an *essential element* of that degree. Many who, like Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, hold the former opinion ("Infused contemplation is a necessary means to the attainment of the state of perfection") explicitly concede that it is possible, in extraordinary cases, that a soul may come to this degree without infused contemplation. They assert only that such is not the *normal* way of arriving at perfection. The practice of the Church confirms this opinion; in her inquiries into the heroic sanctity of a Servant of God she does not in any way demand proofs that the gift of infused contemplation was possessed by the Servant of God. In fact, even if it is positively

proved that he lacked this gift, the Church does not deem the lack an impediment to beatification. (Cf. Benedict XIV.®)

Whether the state of perfection is to be regarded as a *mystical state* is quite another question. The word "mystical" can be interpreted in several ways (cf. *supra*, par. 8). If it is taken to denote the state of a soul which habitually enjoys the gift of infused contemplation, then, from what we have just said about sanctity and infused contemplation, it follows that the perfect are not necessarily and automatically in the mystical state just because they are perfect. But "mystical" can also be taken in its proper and wider sense as meaning the state of a soul which acts under the habitual influence of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. In this sense the mystical state is *per se* the state of the perfect; and, *a fortiori*, the same can be said if the mystical state is identified with the *unitive way*.

362 In practice, how is it possible to identify the souls who have reached the state of perfection? The ability to make this identification is important because, according to the common teaching of authors (*Articles of Issy*, n. 34), the perfect are not to be directed in the same way as beginners or proficients. But it is difficult to distinguish the perfect from other souls, because we cannot easily and directly discern the full dominion of charity in a soul or the soul's constant fidelity in obeying the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. We can easily confuse vehement sensible attractions towards God with that profound and powerful devotion of the will which gives charity its dominion over the soul. Or, again, urgings which arise in the senses can be mistaken for the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Therefore we shall be much less open to error if we use the following easily discernible characteristics to identify perfect souls—victory over disorderly passions, exercise of difficult virtues (especially of those virtues which are, as it were, opposed to each other, e.g. intense apostolic activity coupled with profound recollection of mind and zeal for prayer); but, above all, total self-abnegation and deep humility.

## II. *The Charity of the Perfect*

363 According to St. Thomas Ilallae, q. 24, a. 9: "Man's third concern is chiefly to cleave to God and to rejoice in Him; this is the aim of perfect souls." In the same place (ad 3) he goes on to say: "Even the perfect make progress in charity, but this is not their main concern; their principal object is rather that they may cleave to God. And although beginners and proficients also seek this same end, yet they are more concerned with other things, the beginners with

avoiding sin, and the proficients with advancing in virtue." But the perfect cleave to God by their love for Him, which dominates their whole lives. Hence, in order that their state be more clearly known, we shall briefly examine the charity they practise; first we shall see how free this charity is from any motives of self-interest; and then we shall examine the extent of its dominion over their acts.

364 Before proceeding we must recall what the dogmatic tract on the Theological Virtues has to say about these two points, about which there is still some controversy among theologians. We wish to recapitulate because we shall then be able to form more easily the correct concept of the dominion of charity in the perfect, and we shall also be able to see how that dominion fits in with the exercise of the virtue of hope.

It is certain that charity is a kind of friendship between God and man by which God is loved above all else, *for His own sake*, and not for benefits received or expected from Him. The whole of tradition accepts this general concept of charity.

It is certain that the hope by which man expects to possess God in the Beatific Vision is good and necessary in every stage of the spiritual life and that it cannot detract in any way from the perfection of any spiritual state (from the condemnation of Fénelon's propositions 4-6).

It is certain that there is no *state of pure love* in which every self-interested motive of fear or hope disappears (from the same condemnation, props. 1 and 2).

It is also certain from the common consent of theologians that there can be acts of pure love of benevolence towards God, namely, acts by which man loves God for His infinite Goodness alone and without thinking in any way consciously of God's being a good *for him*. This is confirmed by the fact that in the writings of the Saints we find many express acts of this love, as well as by the analogy with human love where we can sometimes find similar love of benevolence without any thought of self in it.

Finally, it is certain and held by all that though the act by which man desires his own happiness in the Vision of God is supernaturally good, yet it is not an act of charity; this is the act which is meant when authors speak in the strict sense of *love of concupiscence* for God.

365 Authors are not agreed on the nature of the desire for God, or, as many call it, the *love of amicable concupiscence* towards God. Some do not distinguish between this love and the love of concupiscence strictly so called, because it is a self-interested act by which one desires to possess God for oneself. On the other hand,

others hold that the love of amicable concupiscence is quite different from the love of concupiscence. They say that, in the former, the will is not moved by the desire to find one's happiness in God as is the case in the latter. Rather, in the love of amicable concupiscence the will is moved by God's intrinsic goodness to which it desires to be united, just as there is a desire in every friendship to be united with the loved one. Hence, according to these authors, it follows that such a desire for God is a true act of charity, since by it God is truly loved *for Himself*. Therefore they distinguish a triple act of charity, namely, (1) love of pure benevolence, by which the will rejoices in God's supreme goodness without thinking of union with Him; this is the highest act of charity; (2) a desire for union with God, the Infinite Good—this is the secondary act of charity, namely, that which St. Thomas refers to so often when he teaches that it is the function of charity to cleave to God as the Ultimate End (e.g., Hallae, q. 17, a. 6; q. 23, a. 4; q. 26, a. 1, ad 1); (3) the love by which we wish for our neighbor that same union with God. Thus St. Bonaventure says: "By an act of charity man desires the highest good, sometimes for God, sometimes for himself, and sometimes for his neighbor. Therefore, generally speaking, in the act of charity itself, the good desired is *one*, although those for whom it is desired may be many; and the good desired is the principal object of the habit of love itself, since that good is chosen by charity for the good's own sake. Thus the good desired is at once an object which attracts and an end which satisfies. Moreover, the habit of charity must be one because its object is always one, irrespective of whether that object is considered in relation to itself, or to him who has charity, or to his neighbor." Again he says: "By charity I desire the highest good for God and the highest good for myself, so that I wish that God have the highest good and that He be the highest good by essence, but that He be the highest good for me by participation. Further, I wish it for Him much more than I do for myself."

366     Granted that this last concept of charity is the true one (and it most probably is), we may propose the following as the essential elements of the pure love that is proper to perfect souls:

By the triple act of charity, we desire the highest good first for God Himself, then for ourselves, and our neighbor, and this triple act is so essential to the virtue of charity that, like the virtue itself, it will continue eternally in Heaven. And because the powers of intellect and will, will be increased in the fathomless intuitive vision of God, we shall elicit that triple act as one act, since our will and intellect will be directed towards these three objects simultaneously, each in its own order. Thus we shall be able to

love our neighbor in Heaven more than we could love him on earth, but without lessening in any way the joy of our own union with God and without preferring God less purely to all things by the love of benevolence and by complacency in His infinite goodness. But in this earthly life, the weakness of our faculties prevents us from exercising the triple act of charity in such a full and perfect manner. And so, ordinarily, intense pure love of benevolence for God cannot be reconciled with a simultaneous intense desire for union with Him. Hence, though the holy soul is drawn towards both objects, with full subordination of the second to the first, yet the will is ordinarily able only successively to elicit intense acts of tendency to each. The same must be said when this love of benevolence and this desire for union have to be reconciled, each in its turn, with acts of charity towards one's neighbors, each of whom must be loved individually. Thus it may seem to some souls that, while we are on earth, our love of charity for ourselves or for our neighbor always detracts from the purity of our love for God. Such souls, consequently, are solicitous about making their charity ever more free from self-interest, and they are always concerned about the supposed opposition between supernaturally selfish desires and those which they regard as purely God-centered and disinterested. But actually, in this context, when there is question of acts which truly pertain to charity, there is no real opposition between these three tendencies. On the contrary, each in its own order is perfectly united to the others even here on earth by the habit of charity. The only thing lacking is the ability to follow each of them simultaneously with equal intensity.

367 When souls reach the state of perfection they decrease more and more the infirmities of the human will, they live an increasingly intense interior life, they become ever more habitually docile to the movements of grace and the guidance of the Holy Ghost through His Gifts. The result is that their charity approaches ever closer to the plenitude which it will possess in Heaven. Hence the desire of God and the love of the neighbor are always united in a lofty synthesis with the love of pure benevolence towards God in such a way that the desire of God and love of the neighbor sometimes seem to be absorbed, as it were, into the love of benevolence. Yet in reality the three acts remain distinct from each other, and, in fact, are more intense in the perfect than they are in beginners; however, the desire of God and love of the neighbor remain, each in its own order, under the dominion of complacency in God's goodness. This synthesis will never be fully realized on earth even in the Saints. For even they will always be guilty of some very light faults of frailty. Moreover, and especially, they will not be able to

perform this act with all possible perfection but will be forced more or less frequently by human frailty to perform it in a way that is less perfect.

Thus "the state of pure love" postulated by Fénelon was condemned because, at least in practice, he held that secondary acts of charity somehow detracted from the purity of the virtue itself, and also because he thought that man could reach a state in which he would elicit only the supreme act of charity.

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7. Saudreau, *op. cit.*, II, Bks. 5-7.
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## CHAPTER THREE

### The Active Life and the Contemplative Life

368 Alvarez de Paz, comparing the three lives, active, contemplative, and mixed, says: "In the active life we begin; in the contemplative we progress; and in the mixed we are perfected and brought to the final end." Among religious, he says, "the active life is properly that of novices and of those brethren who pass their time in temporal affairs. The contemplative is the life, not only of those who dwell in the desert but also of those who study the sciences suitable to the religious state in order to render themselves fit to assist their neighbors. The mixed life is that of superiors and of those who have been ordained and are engaged in the work of saving souls." Therefore we must complete our account of the three degrees of the spiritual life (beginners, proficient, and the perfect) by inquiring into the relationship between them and the twofold, or threefold, life—the active, the contemplative, and the mixed. We shall first give the historical background. Then, secondly, we shall attempt to determine the right interpretation of the distinction between the active and contemplative life, and also to see whether one can validly distinguish the mixed life from the other two. Thirdly, we shall try to ascertain the proper meaning of the traditional assertion that the contemplative life is superior to the others.

#### A. Historical Notes

##### I. *Pagan Concepts of the Two Lives*

369 The Greek and Latin philosophers drew a distinction between the active and the contemplative life and they argued as to which was the better. Plato in his *Statesman* (2-4, 258e-259d) draws a distinction between practical knowledge and speculative knowledge; and in *Philebus* (61c) he teaches that we should "seek the good, not in the unmixed life, but in the mixed," that is, in the life composed of pleasure and knowledge which he opposes to the "middle" life.

Aristotle in his *Nichomachean Ethics* (1, 3 [5], 1095: cf. X, 7-8,

1177) distinguishes three types of life—the life of pleasure, which is that of the beasts; active (or civil), the life of man; and contemplative, the super-human life. J. Souilh , in commenting on this passage, says that this triple distinction originated with the Pythagoreans and perhaps with Pythagoras himself. There is a similar division found in Plutarch,<sup>3</sup> but he has a different sequence, the contemplative life, which is “useless, hurtful,” being placed below the active life. Seneca<sup>3</sup> also speaks of three kinds of life, “one of which is given over to pleasure, the second to contemplation, and the third to action.”

The controversy about the superiority of either form of human life was classical. Cicero wrote: “There is a great deal of argument between your good friend Dicaearchus and mine, Theophrastus, the former holding that the active life is by far the better whilst the latter prefers the contemplative life. I am firmly resolved to defer to them both.”<sup>4</sup> And Maximus Tyrius wrote two treatises, the first of which proves that the contemplative life is preferable, whilst the second proves the superiority of the active life.

But, generally speaking, by “contemplative life” the pagan philosophers meant a life given over to study, particularly to the study of philosophy, and by “active life” they meant the political life, spent in the public service.

## II. Christian Tradition

370 Among Christians, the Alexandrians accepted the distinction between the contemplative and the active life; Clement of Alexandria accepted it in a less rigid sense and was content to say that there was a twofold way to perfection, “works and knowledge.” However, as Viller notes, it is easy to agree with the Stoics (e.g., Seneca, *op. cit.*, 5) that by nature we are destined both for contemplation and action. Origen draws a more rigid distinction between the two lives (cf. *supra*, par. 321), and he agrees with the philosophers that the contemplative life is the better. He quotes the incident of Martha and Mary in support of his thesis (Luke 10.38-42): “Mary is a figure of the contemplative life, Martha of the active.”

Similarly in the writings of Evagrius the distinction between the active and the contemplative life is fundamental, though, like Origen, he does divide the contemplative life into two parts—natural contemplation and knowledge of divine things, a division also adopted by Maximus the Confessor.

371 St. Augustine in his *City of God* (XIX, 19) notes that the triple distinction made by the philosophers can be applied to the Christian life: “A man can live in any one of the three types of life—the

life of leisure, the active life, or the life which is a composite of both—and still arrive at eternal bliss, provided of course that he keeps the Faith. But he must always love truth and engage in works of charity. For no one should be so inactive that he does not give thought to the service of his neighbor, or so active that he does not seek to contemplate God.” He draws the same distinction from Sacred Scripture, especially from the comparison of Martha and Mary. He refers also to Lia and Rachel, and he teaches that the contemplative life can be lived only in a rudimentary fashion on earth and that it receives its perfection in Heaven. He says, ‘Contemplation remains in its first stages while I am coming to Heaven, and it will be perfected when I shall have arrived there.’ Julianus Pomerius begins his book *De Vita Contemplationis* by speaking of the perfect contemplative life in Heaven. Then he goes on to treat of its beginning on earth, and, starting with the activity of pastors in caring for souls, he compares the contemplative with the active or present life.

Cassian, influenced by the Fathers of the East, applies the distinction mainly to the monastic life (active) and the eremetical life (contemplative).

It was from St. Gregory especially that the medieval theologians received their doctrine on the twofold life and their union in one, the mixed life. Dom Cuthbert Butler<sup>5</sup> rightly regards this as the holy Doctor's greatest contribution to the theory and practice of the spiritual life. According to the Saint: “The active life means to give bread to the hungry, to teach words of wisdom to the ignorant, to correct the erring. . . . The contemplative life means loving God and the neighbor with all one's mind, abstaining from outward action, and longing only for God in such a way that one no longer wants to engage in exterior affairs, but spurning all earthly cares, one burns with the desire of seeing the face of the Creator.” And he goes on to say: “It is good to live in such a way that one's tendency is away from the active life and towards the contemplative. So too, for the most part, it is useful for the soul to turn from the contemplative life to the active so that the mind, enkindled by the contemplative life, may engage more perfectly in the active life.”

372 In the Middle Ages, Peter the Lombard, speaking of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, in his work *The Third Book of the Sentences*, teaches that the gift of Wisdom is proper to the contemplative life and the gift of Knowledge to the active life. Commentators on his works use this distinction as an opportunity for expounding their own teaching on the two lives. St. Thomas does so in his commentary, and he also writes on the two lives in his commentary on Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. But he sets forth his whole teach-

ing in Ilallae, q. 179-182 (and it is here too that *his* commentators usually give their opinions on the matter). St. Thomas derives his doctrine both from tradition, especially from St. Gregory, and from Aristotle. For example, see Ilallae, q. 179, a. 1-2, where he bases the division of the two lives on the distinction between the active and contemplative intellects, according to which "the end of intellectual cognition is either the knowledge itself of truth ... or some exterior action." Though sometimes he does treat of the third type of life (q. 181, a. 2, ad 3) which St. Augustine held was "a mean between the active and contemplative life," and sometimes of the union of both lives in superiors or preachers, nevertheless when he is dealing professedly with the matter he admits only the existence of the twofold division (q. 179, a. 2: "Therefore the division of life into active and contemplative is quite adequate"). He holds that the third type of life mentioned by St. Augustine "refers not so much to a difference in life as to a difference in people."

In more modern times the distinction between the two forms of life is mentioned mainly in connection with the difference between the various religious orders, and therefore the mixed life or composite type of religious life is brought into consideration. This is in accordance with the teaching of St. Thomas, although different words are used (e.g., Ilallae, q. 188, a. 6). Similarly Passerini notes that contemplation keeps its primacy in the mixed life.

## B. What Exactly Is the Difference Between the Active and the Contemplative Life?

### I. *The Active Life*

- 373 Following the traditional teaching as expressed by St. Thomas (Ilallae, q. 182, a. 1, ad 1), we can regard the active life under two aspects: (1) Inasmuch as it restrains and directs the interior passions of the soul, that is to say, we can take it to mean the ascetical life in the proper sense, the active exercise of the virtues both in discursive meditation and in external works. Thus the active life is opposed to the calm of contemplation for which it prepares the soul and which it must therefore precede (Ilallae, q. 182, a. 4). (2) Or the active life may imply "zeal for and exercise of external actions," or external activity, especially in the spiritual or corporal service of the neighbor. Thus to a certain extent the active life can be a preparation for contemplation inasmuch as in these external works the soul exercises virtues which order and regulate its passions. On the contrary, however, the active life may follow contemplation; these external works of spiritual or corporal charity

may be the fruits of interior charity, conceived and enkindled in contemplation, by which man is moved to help his neighbor for the love of God.

## II. *The Contemplative Life*

The contemplative life can also be understood in two senses: (1) As it was interpreted in ancient philosophy, i.e. the study of truth and, among Christians, particularly the study of revealed truth, or *religious speculation*. This meaning of the term, although it is much less used than the one given immediately below, is sometimes confused with it. This is due to the fact that theologians are influenced by the formulas employed by the ancient philosophers.

(2) In the ordinary sense, as meaning *zeal for prayer*; prayer understood in the wide sense and in general (vocal prayer, whether liturgical or private, mental prayer of all kinds), the practice of the presence of God; or the interior life, all our acts which directly tend towards the worship and love of God; or sometimes it may also mean zeal for contemplative prayer in the strict sense, as defined in paragraph 243 above (thus discursive prayer would be included in the active life).

374 If we consider the individual acts which go to make up our spiritual life, then: here on earth, our life must be called *active* because it includes our pursuit of perfection through the exercise of the moral virtues which remove the obstacles to the dominion of charity and by which each of our actions can be directed by charity towards the ultimate end. Our life is active also because it includes the exterior activity which is a consequence of interior charity. In other words, our earthly life is an active one because in it we exercise effective charity (cf. pars. 6 Iff.) by working for the spiritual or temporal good of the neighbor or by performing external works directed to the glory of God. But in Heaven our active life, taken in either of these senses, will no longer exist (Ilallae, q. 181, a. 4).

## III. *Life on Earth both Active and Contemplative*

Life on earth is made *contemplative* especially through the exercise of the affective charity by which we cleave to God and through the interior acts of the other virtues which have God as their direct object, e.g. acts of adoration, thanksgiving, reparation. But the future life, life in Heaven, will be wholly and perfectly contemplative according to the capacity of each soul, and thus it will not need to be made more perfect still. It will consist in the contemplation of the Beatific Vision and the love that flows therefrom,

to which all the other acts of the Blessed, spiritual and corporal, will be spontaneously, effortlessly, and harmoniously referred. Thus the contemplation experienced in this life is the imperfect beginning of the contemplation of Heaven, and so we can say that it will endure and will not be lost in eternity.

#### IV. *No Christian Life Is Wholly Active or Contemplative*

375 If we consider the various vocations in life or the different types of religious life, taking each as a whole, we must say that there is no kind of Christian life that is wholly contemplative or wholly active; that is to say, there is no life that is confined entirely to acts of either form as we have just defined them. Instead, both types of action are found, in some degree at least, in each kind of life. There is no life that is purely contemplative; continual contemplation is hindered by all the necessities of this world, even in the case of very mortified souls living the eremetical life. Moreover, since concupiscence is never wholly destroyed, it will always be active in some way and will always oppose contemplation. Nor can there be a life that is purely active, because, as St. Thomas says, "Every Christian who is in the way of salvation must partake in some way in contemplation because it is commanded to all."<sup>10</sup> Therefore every form of Christian life is, to some degree, a mixture of action and contemplation. But in the life of some souls contemplation is by far the dominant element, whilst others place the emphasis on action, or at least allot more time to it than to contemplation. The term "action" is to be understood here in the second sense given above, namely, that which is done for the spiritual or corporal good of the neighbor. The other type of action consists in the exercise of the moral virtues, which removes the obstacles to contemplation; this action is necessary in both forms of life and can be called a dominant feature in the *degree* of beginners rather than in any *state of life*.

#### V. *The Mixed Life*

376 It is quite easy to see now in what sense we must admit the existence of the mixed life, as distinct from the active and contemplative forms, and also in what sense we must deny it. If we consider the single acts which go to make up the sum total of the spiritual life, then we must say with St. Thomas that there are only two forms of life, the active and the contemplative. This is so because each of our actions must be referred to either form, and there cannot be *acts* of the mixed life. But if we consider the whole complexus of the individual's spiritual life or vocation, then it follows

from what we have said that the spiritual life of every Christian is in some degree a composite of action and contemplation. However, a man's life can rightly be called active or contemplative according as action or contemplation greatly predominates therein; and if neither is obviously predominant, then we can say that he leads the mixed life. Or, better still, we can call a person's life active or contemplative or mixed, according as its principal object is action or contemplation or both together.

Since the thirteenth, and especially since the sixteenth century, it has been customary to use the term "mixed life" to designate the life of the religious orders which unite contemplation with the apostolic ministry in the care of souls. The term "contemplative life" is used for the life of those who apply themselves wholly to contemplation, though they may sometimes, in particular cases, exercise the apostolic ministry outside their monasteries. And the "active life" designates the life of those whose main occupation is ministering to the corporal needs of the neighbor. In former times the military orders were looked upon as especially typical of the active life, and in them action received very much more stress than contemplation. But in the light of present-day ecclesiastical discipline, which prescribes an ample measure of contemplation or prayer for all religious institutes, the life of those who take care of the sick, for example, must be called the mixed life. And in the case of those orders whose end is to pass on to others the fruits of contemplation [*"contemplata tradere,"* to use the formula of the Dominicans], whose work for the spiritual good of others is the fruit of contemplation itself, the life they lead should rather be called the "*apostolic life*."

### C. In What Sense Is the Contemplative Life Superior to the Others?

- 377 From the very beginning, Catholic tradition has asserted the superiority of the contemplative life over the active, and since the time of Origen (cf. par. 317) the words of Christ referring to the "better part" chosen by Mary (Luke 10.42) have been applied to the contemplative life. Thus Evagrius and his disciples in the East, thus St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great.<sup>7</sup> Thus also St. Thomas (IIaIIae, q. 182, a. 1) gives the eight reasons by which Aristotle<sup>8</sup> proves that the contemplative life is the better, and he corroborates each reason by quoting texts from Scripture. He also adds a ninth reason, namely, that contemplation will not be lost in the next life, in accordance with the words of Christ to Martha. He says also, however, that though the active life is inferior in itself, there may

be special concrete circumstances in which it should be selected as relatively the better because of the exigencies of life (and the need of the neighbor). This teaching is accepted by all authors.

The contemplative life is sometimes therefore called superior because it has "the characteristic of the final end" of the spiritual life. St. Thomas teaches in *IIallae*, q. 180, a. 4: "The contemplation of Divine truth is the object of all human life." Suarez, following him, distinguishes between theological or religious contemplation and philosophical contemplation, and he says: "This theological contemplation is the end of human life." Whereas the elements of the active life are not *ends* but only *means*.

In order to determine *in what sense* the contemplative life must be regarded as superior, we must again distinguish between the single acts which go to make up the spiritual life of each Christian, and the whole complex of this life or the state in life proper to each individual.

Among the *acts* of our spiritual life those are superior which pertain to the contemplative life, as we have just said; in other words, the contemplative part of our spiritual life is superior to its active part. In paragraphs 61 and the following we said that, in itself, the perfection of the spiritual life depends primarily and essentially on affective charity (love of God), and that all the other acts either dispose the soul for the exercise of this affective charity or are its consequences. Hence the affective exercise of charity is the first and most essential element of the contemplative life (*IIallae*, q. 180, a. 2). Therefore from its very nature the contemplative life is the more perfect and meritorious form of life, since it unites the soul with God, the Ultimate End, so much more directly than the other forms. And in reality it also merits more graces for the salvation of the neighbor, and therefore, even in the apostolic labor of ministering to souls, "the Apostolate of Prayer" should be placed above all external activity. This is the doctrine of St. Ignatius, who says: "For the attainment of the end . . . the help of souls . . . such means as unite the instrument to God . . . are more effective than those which dispose the instrument towards men . . . The former are the interior means which must impart efficacy to the external means we employ in attaining the end proposed to us" (*Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, X, 2). Cf. also Dom Chautard, O.C.S.O., *The Soul of the Apostolate*. Our external activity can be of no benefit to our neighbor unless it is assisted by grace, whilst grace alone can supply absolutely for all external aids. And it is by prayer especially, and the other acts of the contemplative life, that we ask for graces for ourselves and others.

The acts of the contemplative life are superior also because they



"remain and shall not be taken away" for all eternity. But the acts of the active life are concerned with the means of arriving at the end, and so they will cease when the end is attained, whilst the acts of the contemplative life, concerned as they are with God, the End Himself, will never cease even when the End is possessed. Therefore the contemplative life on earth is a beginning of Heavenly contemplation and thus, absolutely speaking, it is "the better part" of earthly life. However, it can often happen that there is greater merit in relinquishing contemplation in order to engage in the active life for the good of the neighbor or where circumstances require it. For although God can make up for all external aids by giving His grace, yet it is the order of His Providence that men help each other externally in attaining the ultimate end. Hence it will be better and more meritorious to conform to these dispositions of Providence and, where it is God's will, to relinquish contemplation for a time and engage in external activity. (Hallaë, q. 182, a. 2.)

379 Thus we can see in what sense contemplation has "the characteristic of an end" in the spiritual life. St. Thomas, Suarez, and before them, St. Augustine, in the texts cited above, treat of the contemplation of the *future life*, as is clear from the context; and this contemplation is the real ultimate end of man by which he gives glory to God and by which he is made eternally happy. But in the present life the essential end is that man be always preserved and grow in sanctifying grace and charity and that he be thus made capable of giving greater glory to God in a higher degree of the Beatific Vision. Everything else is only a means to that end. Therefore, if contemplation is taken to mean prayer and all the other exercises of the interior life, it is no longer an end but only a means to fostering and increasing charity, as Suarez notes: "It is certain, nevertheless, that charity predominates there, for on earth it is more perfect by far than all the rest, and it ought to be the end and aim of all contemplation." Not every act of interior charity can be identified with contemplation, since, when a soul undertakes a task inspired by charity, it is not rare to find that its interior acts of charity are made more intensely than in prayer itself; and it is only by an arbitrary extension of the meaning of the word "contemplation" that these interior acts of charity can be said to pertain to the *contemplative life*.

380 We can also take the contemplative life to mean a general *state of life*, e.g. in a particular form of the religious life. In this connection St. Thomas distinguishes a two-fold function of the active life—"one which is derived from the fullness of contemplation, like teaching and preaching. . . . This is more excellent than simple

contemplation . . . since it is better to pass on to others the fruits of contemplation than simply to contemplate. The other work of the active life consists totally in external occupations. . . . Therefore the highest place among religious orders is held by those who are destined to teach and preach, this state being the nearest to the perfection of bishops. . . . The second place is held by those who are destined for contemplation. The third place belongs to those who are engaged in external work" (Ilallae, q. 188, a. 6). Suarez holds the same opinion, although, like many more recent authors, he applies the term "mixed" to those religious institutes which engage both in contemplation and the apostolic ministry. Therefore^ granted that in itself contemplation is superior to external action, then the dignity and intrinsic worth of a state of life increases according as the act of contemplation plays a greater part therein and according as contemplation becomes the principal object of that life. However, it is better not to stop short at contemplation but rather to allow others to partake of the benefits one derives therefrom. Therefore first place must be given to that state in life whose aim is not simply to contemplate but further to pass on to others the fruits of contemplation.

But if the different types of life are compared to each other not so much from the point of view of their intrinsic dignity but more as regards their efficacy in giving greater glory to God and in acquiring greater perfection for man, then no one of these three forms of life can be said to be better for everyone and in all circumstances. In practice, any one of the three forms will be better than the others for a particular person, depending on God's will in his regard. For God governs the whole body of the Church and allots to the individual members the duties that must be performed.

## REFERENCES

1. Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism*; the whole of Part II in general, and especially on St. Augustine, St. Gregory and St. Bernard.
2. *Moralia; de Liberis Educandis*, 10, 8.
3. *Dialog., de Otio*, 7.
4. *Ad Atticum*.
5. Butler, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 221.
6. *III Sent.* D. 36, q. 1, a. 3, ad 5; cf. Ilallae, q. 45, a. 5.
7. Butler, *op. cit.*, Part II. ¶\*
- S *is'ichornachean Ethics*, X, 7, 8.

## ***Part Seven***

INFUSED CONTEMPLATION

381 In paragraphs 244-250 above we dealt with the theological controversy as to whether or not there is a mental prayer that is at once *truly contemplative* and *truly acquired* (in part at least), and we came to the conclusion that most probably there is such a prayer. However, no theologian denies that there is a contemplative prayer which is *infused* in the strict sense, and that no efforts of ours can contribute positively to its exercise, even when we are aided by grace. From the very beginning the Fathers and theologians have evolved the doctrine that contemplation is a simple intuition of Divine things accompanied by admiration and love, and they have praised it as being a very precious gift. In the course of the centuries they marked out various forms and degrees of contemplation, but an explicit distinction between acquired and infused contemplation was not expressly proposed before the end of the sixteenth century, as we have seen. But no matter how we understand the lower degrees of contemplation as described by the ancients, it is certain that at least the higher degrees correspond to infused contemplation in the strict sense as described in accordance with the doctrine of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. Here we propose to treat of this strictly infused contemplation under the following headings: (1) What is it? (2) Where does it begin? (3) How is it related to Christian perfection? (4) What is the connection between it and the extraordinary occurrences (ecstasies, visions) which sometimes accompany it? (5) Practical conclusions for spiritual direction deduced from our inquiry.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Nature of Infused Contemplation

#### A. General Description

382 If we examine the modes of prayer which are regarded by all as being strictly infused contemplation (e.g., the prayers described by St. Teresa in her *Interior Castle*, at least from the Fifth Mansion to the Seventh, or the prayers of full union and transforming union), we shall see that all authors agree in recognizing many features as characteristic of these prayers. As a consequence, we can give a general description of them which will be devoid of controversial elements and which will give us a sound and well-defined foundation for our inquiry. Cf. similar general descriptions in Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, Chs. 5-14; Lehodey, *The Ways of Mental Prayer*, II. Ch. 4; Browne, *Darkness or Light?*, Ch. 6; Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life*, pars. 1386-1401. (But Poulain incorporates explanations in his descriptions.) Cf. especially de Grandmaison, *Personal Religion*, pp. 101ff.

In this contemplation *the soul feels that God is present within it*, whereas formerly, though it knew that God dwelt in it and acted upon it, yet its knowledge was indirect, and derived only from the testimony of faith. But now the soul *actually experiences* what it only knew before. Léonce de Grandmaison, S.J., says: "Man feels that he is entering into immediate contact with Infinite Goodness, not as the result of his own efforts but rather as the result of a call; and this contact is without imagery, without reasoning, but not without light (*loc. cit.*)."

This *direct and experimental perception of God's presence is general and confused*: it is not accompanied by new concepts, it teaches nothing new but consists in a deep and intense intuition that is at once *simple and most rich*. The will is not drawn to elicit many distinct acts but is snatched up and, as it were, held in one simple act by which it cleaves wholly to God.

Man *receives the experience passively*. He cannot obtain it by his own industry nor can he in any way foresee when he will receive it. Neither can he retain the experience when it begins to fade, nor can he summon it up again when it has departed. But when the

experience is granted, he feels beyond all doubt that he is attracted, acted upon, and taken up by God. He may doubt the validity of the experience afterwards, but at the actual moment of contemplation he feels full assurance that it is God who is present and acting upon him.

383 Besides these *three main characteristics* (actual experience, simplicity, passivity) there are some *others* which can be connected with them:

The experience is ineffable, that is to say, it cannot be explained exactly to those who have never known it; this is the unanimous opinion of mystics. To a certain extent it can be explained by the use of metaphors; an analogy between it and the bodily senses serves best to describe it, e.g. it is a kind of spiritual tasting, touching.

Either enlightenment of the mind or stirring of the will may prevail in it; hence the distinction between cherubic and seraphic contemplation which is found in the older spiritual writers.

It may either be full of delights or full of pain. The soul may enjoy the keenest pleasure, or on the contrary it may be tortured by a hunger and thirst for a fuller possession of the Supreme Goodness of God, or by a vivid sense of its own misery before the Infinite Sanctity of God, in whose presence it stands. Sometimes it may be at once both bitter and delightful.

It may be given in varying degrees of intensity. The soul may not be able to apply itself to anything else, though it wishes to do so. Or the soul may be more or less completely deprived of the use of the senses. Or, on the contrary, the imagination may wander, whilst the will is passively united to God.

It may be granted rarely, briefly, and passingly (mystical "touches"), or on the contrary it may be given frequently and ordinarily, to such an extent that the soul enjoys the gift almost every time it prays. In fact, as we shall explain more fully later, in the transforming union the soul continually feels the presence of God, even when engaged in external activities.

It may be given even to souls who are still quite imperfect (but who are, nevertheless, in the state of grace), and it may not be granted to souls who are relatively perfect. Ordinarily, however, it is given only to those who have been purified, and who are very fervent and closely united to God.

Finally, the gift of infused contemplation is of great assistance in increasing charity in the soul, and it usually brings forth abundant fruits of sanctity, because if the soul does not respond faithfully to this great grace, God soon ceases to grant it. Therefore infused contemplation should be held in high esteem and, in itself, it should be desired as a very precious gift.

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Infused contemplation in the strict sense and properly so called consists solely in that act by which the soul feels that God is present to it and by which it lovingly clings to Him. All the rest that may accompany this act (like ecstasies, distinct visions, and interior locutions) do not pertain to it, though not a few authors treat of these phenomena along with the various degrees of union through infused contemplation. Nowadays, however, all authors are careful to distinguish between these phenomena and infused contemplation.

We can now see the answer to the question whether infused contemplation is a *gratia gratis data* or a *gratia gratum faciens*. If we understand *gratia gratis data* in its proper and strict sense, namely, as a gift which is given to a person primarily and *per se* for the common good of others and not for his own sanctification (e.g., prophecy, or the power of miracles; cf. St. Thomas, II<sup>ae</sup>ae, q. 111, a. 1 and a. 4-5), then visions and revelations seem to pertain, for the most part at least, to the order of *gratiae gratis datae*; but not so the gift of infused contemplation, since authors agree that *primarily and per se* it is given for the sanctification of him upon whom it is conferred. If we take *gratia gratis data* in its wider sense as meaning a gift which of itself is not necessary for the sanctification of the soul, then our answer will be different, in accordance with the solution given below to the problem of the relationship between infused contemplation and spiritual perfection. In fact, the authors who place infused contemplation among the *gratiae gratis datae* seem to understand this term in the second and wider sense ["not necessary for salvation"—at least the more recent authors do: Tr.], and they do not in any way confuse infused contemplation with visions and other gifts that are *gratis data* in the strict sense. [*Gratia gratum faciens* means a grace which is granted primarily and *per se* for the sanctification of the recipient: Tr.]

## B. How State and Solve the Problem of the Exact Nature of Infused Contemplation?

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We must first answer the objection of those who think that our question should not be asked at all. For example, A. Fonck thinks that the problem of the essence of mystic states is a "false problem" which should not even be stated. According to him: "The term 'mystical' can be applied to any psychological state in which man thinks that he attains immediately and directly to God, or, in a word, in which he 'experiences' God." This experience may be active, achieved by some personal effort at *finding* God, or it may be passive, granted by the Divine condescension which moves God

to *touch* us so that we may feel His presence or His influence. But even if one restricts the use of the word "mystical" to this second, passive sense, one is left with a group of different states all of which verify the definition just given but which do not possess any common essence that can be defined; included among such states are intuition of God or Divine things, experimental knowledge of them, a sense of the Divine presence, distinct cognitions, interior words or visions, passively infused love, joy and consolations, the transforming union or the "theopathic state," passive purifications, even corporal phenomena like the stigmata.

We answer as follows: We grant that our problem would be a false problem if we were seeking for the essence of mystical states understood in the wide sense as described in paragraph 9 above. But when we are striving to isolate the essence of supernatural infused contemplation, then our problem is not only not false or fictitious but rather is very real, especially when it is theologically stated, as it is here. For it is certain that, since the time of the Fathers, Catholic tradition has recognized a special form of prayer which the Fathers called *contemplation* and which they regarded as a special gift of God and supremely desirable. It is also certain that, as in the case of many other theological ideas, this concept of contemplation infused by God was only gradually distinguished from many other related ideas. This is especially true of the distinction between infused contemplation and those phenomena which were formerly deemed mystical and which most theologians today regard as quite distinct from infused contemplation strictly so called, as described above in paragraphs 383-384. Hence it is right and profitable for us to inquire into the exact nature of this infused contemplation, especially if we confine our examination to those forms of mental prayer in which the generally accepted description is verified fully, clearly, and incontrovertibly; that is to say, if we inquire into the nature of the prayer of full union and the higher degrees of infused contemplation as described by St. Teresa from the Fifth Mansion on. Once we have determined the essence of this contemplation, it will be both easier and more profitable for us to inquire whether we can include in the same species with it those other forms of contemplation which, like the Prayer of Quiet, seem to be midway between the prayers that are strictly and fully infused and those prayers which are at least partly acquired.

**386** There are two ways of beginning our inquiry, both of which accept the general description of infused contemplation just given and both of which seek to know the exact nature of that infused contemplation by examining the traditional and theological teach-



ing on grace, and the infused virtues and gifts. Both ways are, therefore, at once *a posteriori* and *a priori*.

1. The more *deductive* and *a priori* method (e.g., that of Garrigou-Lagrange, Arintero, Krebs). Theological tradition, especially since the Middle Ages, teaches not a little about contemplation and the Gifts, particularly Understanding and Wisdom. This method examines the dogmatic and systematic doctrine of the Gifts with a view to deducing therefrom the nature of the contemplation which man enjoys with their aid; and it uses the conclusions so deduced to interpret the experiences described by the mystics.

A. Stolz notes that this method, based on the concepts of the medieval scholastics, was once almost the only one used. He tries to complete the findings of this method by invoking the support of the events and teaching recorded in the New Testament (St. Paul's ecstasy, his teaching on the charisms) and in the writing of the Fathers.

2. The more *inductive* and *a posteriori* method begins with the examples and properties of infused contemplation which are found in and supported by the descriptions of the mystics. This method tries to give an explanation of those examples, an explanation which gives reasons for those properties of contemplation and which is founded on undisputed documents of revelation and theology and which also is the one which harmonizes best with the whole doctrine of man's sanctification.

387 Both methods have disadvantages. The disadvantage of the first method is that, as we said in paragraphs 141ff., there is not much certainly dogmatic doctrine on the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. Thus we cannot say dogmatically that there is a real distinction between the Gifts and the infused virtues, and much less that there is a really distinct habit for each of the seven Gifts. The most we can say about these points is that they are certain. Moreover, the teachings on the Gifts on which theologians are more or less agreed pertain only to the general functions of the Gifts in the whole Christian life. For example, when St. Thomas says that the Gift of Wisdom has two different functions, he teaches that the higher of the two comes into play, not in contemplation, but in the gifts *gratis data*, e.g. in prophecy (Ilallae, q. 45, a. 5). And not less general is the medieval teaching on contemplation; the authors of the Middle Ages, as we said in paragraph 247, used the word "contemplation" indiscriminately to designate things which certainly do not pertain in any way to infused contemplation as described above. Again, it is true that the Fathers, especially the Greek Fathers, wrote much about infused contemplation. But in their writings there is such an intermingling of dogma and philosophic

speculation that only a long and painstaking inquiry can succeed in discerning the really dogmatic elements upon which a deductive inquiry can be founded. Furthermore, in later theological tradition (from the sixteenth century on) there is no definite and commonly accepted teaching on the exact nature of infused contemplation. Consequently it would be difficult to make deductions that are certain and exact unless one were to take it for granted *a priori* that infused contemplation does not involve any element that is specifically different from those which are common to the whole Christian life. And that is not evident enough to be assumed without any proof. In fact, though errors about contemplation are condemned in documents of the Church (beginning with the condemnation of the Messalians in the fifth century), yet one can find scarcely any basis for a positive statement on the nature of contemplation. (There are some documents which might be regarded as doing so, but they are only secondary documents.) Moreover, the pertinent parts of Scripture either refer to gifts which are *gratis data*, like the revelations and the extraordinary charisms of the primitive Church, or they refer to the supernatural life in general and cannot be regarded as so restricted to infused contemplation that they describe its real nature.

The second method (*inductive, a posteriori*) seems to be merely empirical and not theological. It seems to lend itself to drawing conclusions that are useful and practical or even scientifically psychological, but it does not seem suited to evolving a theological doctrine. Furthermore, scarcely anything certain and exact can be drawn from the descriptions left by the mystics; their accounts lack theological exactitude; they speak metaphorically, often poetically, and so it is next to impossible to make rigid deductions from their writings. And when the mystics are also theologians, like St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, Bl. John Ruysbroeck, St. John of the Cross, they do not give just bare descriptions but rather interpret their experiences in the light of their own theological doctrines. For the rest, all the mystics warn us that it is impossible to give an exact idea of these gifts to those who have never experienced them.

388 Nevertheless this second method (*inductive, a posteriori*) seems preferable, so long as it is properly used and so long as it does not stop at mere description (as Fr. Poulain, for example, was inclined to do); whilst the first method has disadvantages which cannot be sufficiently overcome. We deny the charge that the second method is untheological. It is not a mere experimental study; it collects the facts of experience, it is true, but it goes on to interpret them in the light of theological principles. And the conclusions reached from this combination of experience and theological principles are theo-

logical conclusions. A parallel procedure is used in dogmatic theology in the question of the Church's power over the sacramental rites. It is a fact of history that changes were made in the rites required for the validity of the Sacraments; and from that fact, as well as from revealed principles, one can deduce theological conclusions about the power of the Church in this matter.

A direct and explicit solution of the problem of the nature of infused contemplation must not be sought from the descriptions of the mystics. But though their mode of speaking is inexact and metaphorical, yet we shall be able to derive therefrom more or less certain elements from which, in turn, we can arrive at a solution. The descriptions left by mystics who were also theologians and learned men are not always the most useful for our purpose, since they are liable to be influenced by the writers' preconceived theories. Instead, in this context, the best descriptions are often those left by untutored women who admit that they know nothing and who simply repeat what they experience, e.g. St. Teresa, Ven. Mary of the Incarnation. In fact, especially since the sixteenth century and as a result of the writings of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, a sharper distinction has been drawn between strictly infused contemplation and other prayers that are more or less contemplative, as well as between infused contemplation and visions and revelations. Most theologians followed this method, among the first being those of the Carmelite school. (Some, however, like Suarez and John of St. Thomas followed the first method mainly.)

389 We have just spoken about the theological aspect of the problem. There are other aspects too, the *psychological* and *apologetic* implications of infused contemplation.

From an apologetic standpoint we can inquire whether all the descriptions of the mystics can be fully explained by the common laws of normal or pathological psychology and quite apart from the intervention of any outside cause. Again, we may ask if the phenomena of orthodox Catholic mysticism are specifically the same as or different from the phenomena of mystical contemplation frequently found in many other religions (e.g., in Mohammedanism and Hinduism). Cf. Maréchal, *op. cit.*, pp. 239ff.

The problem will also be psychological, even for us Catholics who hold that God influences our spiritual life by His grace. If in infused contemplation the influence of that grace is manifest and easily observable, we are prompted to ask, How is that special action of divine grace introduced among the phenomena of our natural psychological life? What elements of our psychological life does grace use for its purpose, directing, increasing, and elevating them? Are there perhaps some altogether new elements introduced into

our psychological life which may be isolated by observing and analyzing mystical experiences? Cf. Maréchal, *op. cit.*, Section I.

However, although there are other theological, apologetic, and psychological problems in infused contemplation, it is evident that they are not independent of each other but are instead closely interconnected, as we shall see soon, especially if we use the second method to solve the theological problem.

### C. Does Infused Contemplation Differ in Kind or Only in Degree from the Other Forms of Mental Prayer?

390 Authors are agreed that infused contemplation is different in some respects from other forms of mental prayer and that it has special characteristics of its own and special effects on the soul. And they are equally unanimous in holding that infused contemplation does not beget in the soul a union different from that which it already possesses through sanctifying grace and charity and which is begun, during life, by faith and which will be perfected in Heaven by the Beatific Vision. But even though each of these statements is true, we can conceive *a priori* a *twofold explanation* of the difference between infused contemplation and the other prayers.

1. The diversity may be due to the altogether different degree in which certain elements are possessed by and act in the soul, elements which are found to some extent in every soul in the state of grace; e.g., the super-human mode of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, or, passivity under the action of grace. It is obvious that, even in natural things, a difference of degree can cause totally new effects, e.g. changes in temperature or pressure. The same can be true in the supernatural order; elements which before were possessed rarely, in a hidden and rudimentary way, and which were hindered by many obstacles, may so increase in power that now they exercise their functions in the soul frequently, openly, fully, and freely, causing new and very beneficial effects.

2. Or the diversity between infused contemplation and the other prayers may be due to the presence of some altogether new element which was not possessed before even in a rudimentary fashion, as for example, new intelligible *species* directly infused by God. If this is so, then the new effects characteristic of infused contemplation must be caused by a new element which is introduced into the soul by infused contemplation and which is totally absent in other forms of prayer. Consequently, the difference between infused contemplation and the other forms of prayer is a difference of *kind*.

391 Not a few authors absolutely deny such a difference of kind between infused contemplation and other prayers. For example, Fr.

Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., defines infused contemplation thus: "Infused contemplation is an act which, as far as its substance is concerned, proceeds from infused faith, and which, as far as its super-human mode is concerned, proceeds from the Gift of Wisdom."<sup>2</sup> Certainly there is a difference of kind between the *human* mode of action of the virtues and the super human mode of action of the Gifts, which is not guided by human reason, even though it is enlightened by faith, but rather by a divine instinct which moves and guides man directly and without any intermediary. This super-human mode is present from the very beginning of the spiritual life but is hidden and appears only rarely. But when it becomes frequent and manifest, then infused contemplation is present.<sup>3</sup>

Arintero holds almost the same view, whilst Saudreau<sup>4</sup> and Lamballe<sup>5</sup> require a greater passivity in knowledge and in love especially. Zahn, too, holds that infused contemplation consists in greater passivity and a greater consciousness of this passivity; this would mean that there is simply a difference in degree between infused contemplation and the other prayers. Louismet, Dimmler, and Joret—all explicitly reject any difference in kind.

On the other hand, Poulain, Bainvel, Maréchal, Seisdedos, Mager, Richstätter, Sharpe, Farges and Waffelaert (at least in the higher degrees) hold that there is a new element present in infused contemplation, and hence they are all of the opinion that it is different in kind from other forms of prayer. Later on we shall examine the various ways in which they present their theories.

Finally, there are others who agree with the authors just mentioned that the characteristic element of infused contemplation is a new element, e.g. a certain obscure intuition of God. But they deny that it is absolutely new and that no trace of it is found in the ordinary supernatural or even natural life. Instead, they try to show that, broadly speaking, there is a certain continuity between the different forms of the interior life (cf. Dom John Chapman, O.S.B., *Spiritual Letters*; Appendix, "What Is Mysticism?").

392 Here we shall first try to show by negative and positive arguments that a difference of degree only is less probable than a difference of kind. Then we shall attempt to establish the greater probability of the difference in kind.

1. Our *negative argument* is that the reasons adduced against any difference in kind are not cogent, for it is said that:

*The documents of the faith supply no foundation for asserting a difference in kind.*

*Reply:* We grant that they do not supply any positive foundation for asserting that infused contemplation is different in kind from the other forms of prayer. But we deny that they prevent us from

so interpreting the facts we derive from experience. It is one thing to interpret a fact *against* a document of faith, whilst it is quite another matter if the interpretation simply *goes beyond* the contents of the documents, provided, of course, that the interpretation follows the analogy of faith.

*The Gifts of the Holy Ghost are differentiated from each other by the formal object of the acts for which they are infused into us. And all authors agree that infused contemplation is accomplished through the agency of the Gift of Wisdom. Now all just ?men possess the Gift of Wisdom. But if the acts performed by this Gift are specifically different from each other [i.e., if ordinary prayer is specifically different from infused contemplation: Tr.], then we must postulate not merely one but two different Gifts of Wisdom.*

*Reply:* We grant the whole objection if the Gifts are conceived as being seven operative habits, really distinct from each other and each specified by its formal object. But that view can be questioned. If, however (following St. Thomas, cf. above par. 148) the Gifts are viewed as habits which dispose the soul to receive different Divine impulses, then there seems to be nothing against the opinion that the same Gift of Wisdom may dispose the soul for impulses which are specifically different from each other. St. Thomas (IIallae, q. 45, q. 5) seems to hint at this where he treats of the various ways of partaking in wisdom. And the objection is still further weakened by the fact that we have no certain knowledge, but only the opinions of theologians, as to the way in which the Gifts are distinguished from each other.

393 2. *If one grants the specific difference, then the unity of the spiritual life is lost as well as its progressive continuity up to the fullness of the Beatific Vision in Heaven.*

*Reply:* The essential unity and continuity of the spiritual life resides in charity, which always remains the same throughout its continual progress on earth, and in Heaven, that is, from the beginning to the consummation of the spiritual life. Nor is this continuity and unity lost because God uses different means (both internal and external) to promote the progress of charity, means which vary in different ages and in different vocations. For the gift itself of contemplation is one thing, whilst the free act of charity elicited by means of this gift is another; and the act of charity remains the same whether it is performed with the help of infused contemplation or with another Divine aid. Moreover, the unity of charity seems to be the only unity that can be deduced with certainty from the documents of tradition.

8. *If one grants the specific difference, then infused contempla-*

tion becomes, in opposition to the common traditional meaning, something miraculous, extraordinary, and abnormal.

*Reply:* It is true that tradition teaches that those who enjoy infused contemplation are not *outside* the normal way of sanctification and that they are not following an exceptional path *in opposition* to the ordinary laws of the spiritual life. But, at the same time, tradition teaches no less clearly and unanimously that this gift is dispensed by God when He wills and to whom He wills among those who already possess the supernatural life. Hence there is something in infused contemplation which does not spontaneously follow from mere progress in the spiritual life.

1'M Our view ["infused contemplation is specifically different from the other forms of prayer": Tr.] gets positive support from the way in which infused contemplation is described by those who experienced it. Their descriptions unhesitatingly presuppose a difference between it and other prayers, a difference that is more than a mere diversity in degree. Moreover, it is certain that many of the mystics do not distinguish either clearly or explicitly between the various kinds of prayer, and much less do they differentiate between the various kinds of consolation and gifts received from God, of which they speak indiscriminately. However, this lack of sharply defined divisions does not warrant any conclusions on the question under discussion. We could draw conclusions if the mystics explicitly said, or if their descriptions clearly presupposed, that all their prayers and gifts were positively of one kind; but that is not the case. Instead, the mystics, who are most careful to distinguish between and describe these ways of prayer, employ modes of expression which seem to argue a certain difference in kind between infused contemplation and the other forms of prayer.

1. They say that something *new* is given, something that is altogether different from all the graces and consolations hitherto received. Consequently, the new element cannot be adequately described to those who have not experienced it. Common words do not suffice and it can be described analogically only, by using comparisons, which always remain very inadequate, however. Blessed Angela of Foligno often refers to this ineffability (cf. *Book of Visions and Instructions: trans. cit.*, Ch. 27): "Holy Scripture is so exalted that there is no one in the world . . . wise enough to understand it so fully that his intellect is not overcome by it. Nevertheless, man can stammer something about it. But he cannot say or even stammer anything at all about these ineffable divine operations which take place in the soul when God manifests Himself. . . . And, therefore, after returning from the secrets of God,

I can safely say a few words from outside; my words describe from the outside and do not in any way approach the reality of those ineffable divine operations which take place in the soul. Even my speaking about them is a desecration" (p. 94; cf. p. 93: "My words are more of a desecration and a blasphemy than a description"). Thus also St. Teresa, e.g. *Interior Castle*, V, I, n. 1; VI, 2, η. 1, 5; and St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night* II, 17, n. 3, 6.

395 2. These mystics say they know *directly and by actual experience* things which, outside infused contemplation, are known only indirectly through faith or reason, e.g. the presence of God within us by His Immensity and by His indwelling through grace, or the Trinity of the Divine Persons. St. Teresa, in her second *Relation* to Fr. Rodrigo Alvarez,<sup>®</sup> says that in the state of infused contemplation, "I see the Persons, distinct One from Another, as clearly as I saw two persons yesterday when Your Reverence was talking to the Provincial; only, as I have already told Your Reverence, I actually see and hear nothing at all. Yet, although this may not be seen by the eyes of the soul, there is a strange certainty about it; and as soon as the presence is no longer there, its absence is noticed. How this happens, I cannot say, but I am quite sure it is not imagination; for, even if I do my very utmost to recall the vision—and I have tried to do so—I cannot succeed." In her *Interior Castle*, V, 1, n. 9-10 (cf. *Life*, 18, n. 15) she speaks in the same way of the Divine Presence. Mary of the Incarnation, Ursuline, refers in like manner to the Trinity.

396 3. The mystics say that our efforts can do absolutely nothing positive to obtain this prayer. As a consequence, St. Teresa in her own particular way calls this prayer supernatural; cf. her second *Relation* to Fr. R. Alvarez.<sup>7</sup> In fact, she uses our inability to acquire them as a reason for calling some prayers (e.g., the Prayer of Quiet) *supernatural* in this sense (*Life*, 12, n. 4). Thus the mystics seem to hold that we are incapable of positive efforts towards infused contemplation not only because our powers are weak (e.g., we are unable to remain long at prayer without being distracted) but also because the very nature of contemplation prevents us from doing anything positive to acquire or exercise it even for a short time.

4. The specific difference between infused contemplation and the other prayers finds further support in the fact that the mystics say that though these graces are very brief in duration (at least in the beginning) yet they produce such great effects in the soul that it cannot forget them even after the lapse of many years. St. Teresa (*Interior Castle*, V, 1, n. 9) speaks thus of the prayer of union. But, of course, this point would be quite consistent with a mere difference of degree, if the difference were very great.



## D. Wherein Lies the Specific Difference of Strictly Infused Contemplation?

117 Those who hold that there is a specifically new element in infused contemplation suggest many ways of proving it and of best explaining the descriptions of the mystics.

Here we can only propose some hypotheses which take into consideration both the experiences described by the mystics and the conclusions supplied by theology. For when the mystics themselves propose any explanation of the graces they have received, they are really interpreting their own experiences. Hence it is sufficiently clear that our opinions are to be regarded as being only probable or likely.

Some authors hold that in this prayer of union, or at least in its higher degrees, there is a certain *direct intuition of God*, which is obscure, however, and not clear, as the Beatific Vision is. Thus Philip of the Trinity teaches that the soul, with the help of an infused light, may contemplate divine things in infused *species*. "Or we may say," he continues, "and perhaps with more truth, that because the superior light which has been communicated to the intellect is a kind of participation in the light of glory (*Lumen Gloræ*'), it so disposes the intellect that God, as He is, may be immediately united to it as by means of an infused *species*. But this union will not be perfect because, though God is seen as He is in Himself, yet He is not seen as clearly or as perfectly as in the Beatific Vision. This is so because the infused light lacks the perfection of the light of glory, both in its power of disposing the soul and in its power of manifesting God to it and of elevating it to God. Hence, though the vision which follows this infused light is immediate, like the vision of God as He is in Himself, yet it is not as clear as the Beatific Vision but remains obscured by darkness." So also Antony of the Holy Ghost; and more recently, A. B. Sharpe, "*Mysticism, Its True Nature and Value*" (Ch. 4); also Poulain, *op. cit.*, Ch. 31, n. 28-32, who favors this explanation. Likewise G. Picard postulates a direct intuition of God, present in the soul, which "is not a vision, but an *intellectual experience* of the same order as our direct consciousness of ourselves."

J. Maréchal (*op. cit.*) holds that some few souls probably attain a true intuition of the Divine Essence when their infused contemplation reaches its highest point; and that this intuition is different from the Beatific Vision mainly because it is always transitory and does not by any means completely satisfy the soul. And he maintains that infused contemplation in general should be defined in

terms of this highest point, although it is only very rarely attained.

We do not think that this explanation of Maréchal's is the true one. We grant that there seems to be no way of proving *a priori* that man cannot receive an immediate obscure intuition of the Divine Essence, distinct from the Beatific Vision. But we believe that the mystics' descriptions of God's presence within them do not require such a difficult explanation, and we hold that their experiences can be understood in a simpler way, as we shall see later. In the appendix to this chapter, however, we shall inquire whether some few mystics received, as the crowning glory of their infused contemplation, a very brief participation in the intuitive vision of God's Essence. Our reason for doing so is that all those who admit the possibility of such a communication distinguish it from the union proper to infused contemplation.

- 398 Other authors hold that infused contemplation presupposes that God infuses intelligible *species* into the soul, by means of which it knows divine things in a way similar to the *angels'* mode of knowledge. Thus Farges (*op. cit.*, pp. 67ff.) argues from that text of St. Thomas where he teaches that God can be seen in three ways: "First, through His Essence; second, through some Divine effect which flows in upon the intellect of the person seeing; and third, by some effect outside the onlooker's intellect in which the Divine likeness shines forth." The first mode is that of the Blessed, the third is that mode common to man; "but the second mode is natural to the angels and above the nature of man. Man is raised to it by grace, even after the Fall, as is clear from the case of contemplatives who merit divine revelations. But it was much fuller in his first state, by reason of original justice." The following authors also postulate *species* infused by God, at least in the higher degrees of infused contemplation—Brancatus de Laurea, Dominic of the Trinity, Joseph of the Holy Ghost (Lusitania), and Joseph of the Holy Ghost (Spain), who says: "Contemplation, in its higher degrees, is an act elicited by knowledge that is, of its very nature, infused."

It is certain that God can infuse *species* directly into the soul. We cannot deny *a priori*, in fact we can easily concede, that such an infusion does sometimes take place in souls enjoying infused contemplation. But there does not seem to be any proof that this infusion is the essential element which distinguishes infused contemplation (at least in its higher degrees with which we are dealing here) from the other forms of prayer. Furthermore, such a Divine intervention as the infusion of *species* should not be invoked without necessity, and we believe that the experiences of the mystics can be explained without having recourse to it. Again, for the most part, the mystics' accounts do not hint at anything of that kind.

Moreover, *species* infused by God are not consistent with a confused and obscure apprehension of His presence. Then, too, the knowledge induced by an infused *species* should be called a "vision" or a "hearing" rather than a "touch" or a "taste," as it is usually called.

- 199 Many of the older authors and even more of the modern ones isolate the essence of infused contemplation as follows:

When God gives infused contemplation He acts on the soul by means of supernatural gifts. The soul is directly and immediately conscious of these gifts, and through them it comes in contact with God Himself, who is present and working in it. Hence there is no *direct* intuition of God but only an intuition "as in a glass," through an objective medium, that is, not through infused *species*, but through the supernatural gifts already present in the soul. This explanation is proposed in different ways by different authors, but they seem to be in substantial agreement on the point. This is the view held by the teachers of "introversion" mentioned by L. Reypens. Others who taught likewise were Balthasar of St. Catherine, and more recently, Kleutgen, Ribet, Bainvel, Poulain, K. Richstätter, A. Gardeil, M. de la Taille. And the teaching of A. Stolz on the exact nature of the mystics' gifts does not differ greatly from the explanation just given. He regards the essence of infused contemplation as being a "transpsychological experience," which apparently is to be understood as referring to any experience transcending the ambit of our natural human psychology.

This theological interpretation of the mystics' experiences seems to be the more probable one, and so we shall proceed to explain it.

- 100 The salutary acts of faith and charity by which Christians tend towards God are supernatural in essence and hence are different in their physical reality from natural acts of the same kind. Again, sanctifying grace adorns the soul of the just man and makes him a sharer in the Divine Nature, like unto God, and an image of the Blessed Trinity dwelling in him. Sanctifying grace is also a physical supernatural gift inhering in the soul, as are the infused habits which accompany it, namely, the virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. We know by the teaching of the faith, which we receive from outside (*ab extrinseco*), that all these things exist in the soul of the just man, but it is only through a process of reasoning that we can conclude that we possess any one of them, e.g. inasmuch as we are conscious that we have performed an act of perfect charity or that, well disposed, we have received sacramental absolution. We also know by faith that our salutary acts are done under some special Divine impulse, distinct from the divine concursus which is required for any act of a creature; and so we know

that there is a certain special passivity in our salutary acts. Thus we can conclude that this passivity is present in every one of those acts. Or we may sometimes even *know* it *indirectly*, and to a certain extent experimentally, from its effects, inasmuch as we feel that we are enlightened or strengthened in a certain way that seems to presuppose the special action of God. (Cf. what we said in paragraph 129 about the inspirations of the Holy Ghost.) But in the common circumstances of the spiritual life we never have a *direct and immediate* consciousness of these supernatural realities as such. We are never as directly conscious of them as of our thinking about something or of our willing something or of our willing something strongly or remissly.

401 On the other hand, in strict infused contemplation the soul, under a new and special Divine influence, is made *directly and immediately* conscious of these gifts as present in it. It is made conscious of the passivity of its supernatural acts, and thereby these acts immediately show themselves as being different from natural acts. But the new divine influence is not exercised through the infusion of new intelligible *species*. New intelligible *species* are not necessary, since the very reality to be attained by consciousness is already present to the soul, namely, the gifts inhering in it, the supernatural quality of its acts. We reason as follows: In heaven the light of glory (*lumen gloriæ*) will enable the soul to see God intuitively. But here on earth, although He is already present to it in the same way through His immensity and grace, it cannot see Him because it lacks the light of glory. In like fashion, the infused light of contemplation makes the soul capable of perceiving supernatural gifts inhering in it, whereas formerly its unaided consciousness could not attain directly to that perception. Similarly the souls in Purgatory, separated as they are from the body, can no longer exercise faith and charity in the same way as they did on earth. And they are not yet able to enjoy the Beatific Vision and love God as do the Blessed. However, God gives them a special help which enables them to believe and love in a new way. For the rest, theologians make a precise comparison between infused contemplation and the mode of knowing and loving exercised by disembodied souls or even by pure spirits. Cf. all the doctrine on the angelic state; and also the psychological conclusions arrived at by some authors, e.g. by A. Mager, who says that in infused contemplation the soul's mode of knowledge is no longer the ordinary human mode exercised by a soul united to a body (*Liebseele*) but that its knowledge is the knowledge proper to a spirit (*Geist*) and that it knows after the fashion of pure spirits.

One must not conclude, however, that the object of infused

contemplation is not God Himself but only His gifts. As we have said, these gifts are only a mirror, or medium through which the soul reaches God. It does not attain to Him by a dialectical or reasoning process but by intuition, just as, for example, when a person sees some object in a mirror he does not fix his attention on the mirror but rather on the object seen therein. In like manner, during contemplation both the mind and the will are carried to God and do not come to rest in attending to or taking pleasure in the supernatural gifts which are the medium of this contemplation.

402 With many authors we can also add that this light is infused by God as a certainly new element, but that it is not absolutely foreign to the natural way in which man is conscious of himself and his acts. In reality, his natural consciousness is only extended and made deeper by supernatural means which enable his soul to attain in itself that which it could not reach by merely natural introversion. This concept of infused contemplation enables us to understand more easily the resemblance between infused contemplation and the natural contemplation reached by the philosophers and pagans, who, in their purifications and efforts at fixing the mind on God, turn their gaze into the depths of their souls.

Finally, theologians are commonly agreed that the function of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost is to dispose the soul to receive these special aids given by God, as we have said in paragraph 143. But if the seven Gifts are to be viewed, not as seven habits really distinct from each other, but rather as seven principal kinds of impulse of the Holy Ghost, received in the soul with the help of an infused habit (cf. par. 143), then the special light of infused contemplation must be regarded as the principal among those aids by which God usually assists the exercise of charity and which constitute the Gift of Wisdom.

403 It seems that infused contemplation, as it is actually experienced by souls, can be very well explained by what we have just said.

For the most part, the direct light which gives a consciousness of the supernatural gifts is not conceded by God as a permanent habit but only as a transitory help. It follows, then, that various souls, and even the same soul at different times, will be enlightened in different ways. Thus the consciousness will vary, and so we can easily explain the fluctuations of infused contemplation. A soul may be made conscious only of the supernaturality and passivity of the love by which it is united to God in the act of charity, or, on the contrary, it may also become conscious of the Divine indwelling through sanctifying grace. There are, consequently, different degrees and modes of consciousness; we shall discuss them later in paragraphs 412ff.

We can understand, then, how the mystics can speak of the direct vision of God, or of the Trinity, obtainable in infused contemplation; they are in reality referring to their vision of the union of their souls with the Trinity. They do not see the Trinity Itself; for that is the Beatific Vision, reserved for Heaven. Instead they see the union which is in the soul and which is neither infinite nor eternal but is the same as the sanctifying grace which is given to the soul on earth. The soul thus adorned with grace is made into the likeness of God and in it, as in a perfect mirror or image, the Trinity appears in an altogether new way. And so clearly does the Trinity appear that the soul readily believes that the knowledge it enjoys is nothing less than actual direct vision. It is just as if a man blind from birth were suddenly to receive the gift of sight. Hitherto he knew many things—the sea, for example—only through descriptions. And if he were now shown a painting of the sea he would think that he was looking at the reality. Only afterwards, when he actually saw the ocean, would he perceive how very inadequate was the painting.

This offers a good explanation of that sense of the presence of God which is characteristic of infused contemplation. (Maréchal, *op. cit.*, I.) By the immediate consciousness of the supernatural gifts the soul is made experimentally aware of its union with God and His operation in it, and it is carried towards Him without any reasoning process. The direct experience towards which it is carried by all its love is not its own supernatural activity or its own substance made like unto God, but God Himself, who is made present to it by the supernatural gifts as by a mirror or an image. In these gifts the soul reaches God directly and without reasoning. This is not unlike the process described by Fr. V. Cepari, who distinguishes between a certain “infused, perfect” presence of God and an “acquired presence” (i.e., the acquired remembrance of His presence). He defines the “infused presence” as “an actual, loving, practical and experimental knowledge possessed by some just souls who are favored by God. Through the perfect light of holy faith and special enlightenments given them by God they know that He is present in us by grace. Furthermore, they are raised even to the knowledge of the Divine Nature and Persons, of the divine attributes and perfections, and of the effects which proceed from God. . .

404 Hence we can also see why this experience appears new and ineffable. A blind man who has been given his sight cannot explain to a person still blind what it means to see a painting of the sea, or how seeing the painting differs from just hearing the description. In the case of infused contemplation this inability to explain is

heightened by the fact that the direct consciousness experienced by the soul is intuitive and is not the result of concepts which can be expressed in words. Hence this consciousness can be described analogically only; and analogies drawn from the operation of the senses are especially suitable because our process of receiving knowledge through the senses is an obvious and familiar type of intuition. Hence comes the doctrine of the "spiritual senses." We must note here that the mystics use the analogy of touch and taste rather than that of sight and hearing to express their experiences in infused contemplation. Their choice is easily understood when we remember that the direct consciousness of the supernatural gifts in infused contemplation is altogether different from our normal mode of knowing through concepts.

Finally, our explanation makes it easier to see how infused contemplation remains in the order of *gratia gratum faciens* [grace given for the sanctification of the recipient: Tr.J, although it is a very special and quite gratuitous gift. Infused contemplation is only a higher way of possessing this grace, or a fuller possession of it. It is not something quite extraordinary and foreign to the process by which this grace evolves and grows in us. Hence also we can see how infused contemplation is truly a sort of foretaste of Heaven. For the happiness of Heaven will consist in the fact that the sanctifying grace which we already possess on earth will achieve its full effects when we see God in the Light of glory. And even on earth, in a somewhat similar way, when sanctifying grace is assisted by infused contemplation it will produce some of the effects of the Beatific Vision, though in a much lower degree.

105 The principal objection to this concept of infused contemplation is the undoubted existence of arid and desolate contemplation, or the "nights," to use the term employed by St. John of the Cross. St. John held, and all authors agree with him, that these "nights" certainly pertain to infused contemplation. But the consciousness of the supernatural gifts can beget only joy at God's presence and operation in us. And how can joy and desolation or aridity exist together in the soul? There are two answers to this objection:

1. Some say that the experimental sense of God's presence (or, as we have said, the consciousness of His supernatural action in the soul) is so essential to infused contemplation that only those states in which it is present pertain to infused contemplation, but that states in which this consciousness is in any way absent pertain to infused contemplation *only as a foreshadowing of it*, that is, inasmuch as these states are a preparation for infused contemplation or inasmuch as the soul is passive both in these states and in infused contemplation.

2. But there is a better way to solve the difficulty. Even in the passive nights or arid and desolate contemplation this immediate consciousness of the supernatural divine action is present, but in a manner different from that in which it is found in joyful contemplation. Many mystics—especially St. Catherine of Genoa in her *Treatise on Purgatory*, Chapter 17—say that there is a similarity between the trials of contemplatives and the pains of Purgatory. For, although the Holy Souls see that they are in the state of grace and that they are confirmed in their divine sonship, yet they experience intense sorrow. They know that they cannot yet reap the connatural reward of sanctifying grace, that is, the Beatific Vision. They also see that they still bear the marks of sin, and they perceive very vividly the hideousness of such blemishes in souls which are so intimately united to God. In a similar way the light of infused contemplation makes the soul conscious both of its union with God and of its own deformity, as well as of the inadequacy of the union. Thence arises in the soul that feeling of hunger, of emptiness, or even of horror at itself. Therefore, according as the soul is enlightened and allowed to see the different aspects of the supernatural life, it will experience either great joy or great sorrow, or even both together, as St. Catherine of Genoa says of the souls in Purgatory (*Treatise on Purgatory*, Chs. 5, 12, 16). “The soul in purgatory feels great happiness and great sorrow, and the one does not hinder the other” (Ch. 12, n. 3).

#### *Additional Notes*

- 406** 1. *In the highest degree of infused contemplation does the soul receive an intuition into the Divine Essence?*

Here we are not discussing the opinion of those who say that infused contemplation consists in a certain obscure intuition of God, quite distinct from the Beatific Vision (cf. *supra*, par. 398). Nor are we trying to find out if the intuitive vision of God should be regarded as a normal part of the soul's experiences in infused contemplation; no one teaches that. Instead, our aim is to ascertain whether, quite out of the ordinary and in the rarest cases, the highest point of infused contemplation can be a brief and unsatisfying communication of that intuitive vision which is granted permanently and in full measure to the Blessed. The question is important because, if such a vision is possible, even though very rare, then infused contemplation obviously tends towards it as towards its highest point. For the sake of clarity we shall divide the problem into two parts: (1) Is it possible that such a communication be given to a person who is still on earth? (2) Was it actually ever given to anyone?<sup>8</sup>



407 With St. Augustine and St. Thomas we assert that the immediate vision of God *can* be given as a privilege to a person on earth.

St. Augustine clearly says that Moses and St. Paul received such a vision, and, following him, St. Thomas teaches the same, both where he speaks of the vision of God in His Essence (I, q. 12, a. 11, ad 2; cf. par. 353), and especially where he deals with rapture (IIallae, q. 175, a. 3-5) and with the peak-point of the contemplative life (IIallae, q. 180, a. 5).

There do not seem to be any cogent reasons for denying the possibility of a fact so obviously admitted by both of these Doctors. But some may advance the objection that God cannot be seen by any operation possible to man while he is on earth. St. Thomas replies that rapture can place man temporarily outside the conditions of earthly life. Thus, though the Saint first says that the vision of God is excluded from life on earth, he goes on to admit that it is possible in some exceptional cases, but he adds that even these rare cases are not possible outside of rapture. Another objection may be raised by saying that such a vision would not be in harmony with the purpose of life on earth since, during the vision, man would not be free in his love of God and so could not merit. We reply by conceding that the freedom necessary for merit is lost during the brief moment of the vision; but there is no proof that such a loss militates against the final end of man's earthly life; instead, the remembrance of this grace will be a very strong motive for loving God. Again, it is not easy to prove that there can be no difference of degree in direct vision, or that that vision must necessarily impart the fullness of heavenly beatitude.

408 St. Thomas says *floc. cit.*) that Moses and St. Paul *actually did see God*. But he denies that St. Benedict was granted the intuitive vision (IIallae, q. 180, a. 5, ad 3). He bases his denial on the absence of proof. He says that, from St. Gregory's account of St. Benedict's vision, it appears that the Saint was not enraptured and so could not see God, since the vision is impossible outside rapture. Apparently Ruysbroeck holds, and certainly some authors of his school hold, that a very few other souls were granted the privilege. Thus, if they are right, this vision is the highest point of contemplation. On the contrary, though, Blessed Angela of Foligno, when speaking of the apex of infused contemplation, expressly says: "The aforesaid ineffable good is' that which the saints possess in eternal life. . . . But there (in Heaven) it is another experience: and that which is possessed in eternal life is so much another experience and is so different from that which we have referred to, that the least of the Blessed, possessing the least share of it in eternal life, has more than can be given to any soul in this life, before the death of the

body" (*Book of Visions and Instructions*; cf. *trans. cit.*, pp. 99-100). St. John of the Cross, though he concedes that Moses and St. Paul received the intuitive vision, no less explicitly denies that contemplation on earth can ever penetrate *all* the veils that hang between us and the face of the Most High (*Living Flame of Love*, IV, 1, n. 7; cf. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, Ch. 24, n. 1-3). However, Maréchal thinks that in this matter St. John is not far from the position taken by Ruysbroeck. Others like Recupito and, following him, La Reguera, think that the Blessed Virgin saw the Divine Essence sometimes during her life; they base their opinion on the fittingness of this privilege in her case, and on the authority of the theologians; and they deny that it was granted to anyone else.

Therefore, although the possibility of the privilege cannot be excluded *a priori*, there does not seem to be any actual concrete case of its being granted that is supported by solid arguments, by positive reasons derived from Scripture or tradition. Even the reasons adduced in the case of Moses and St. Paul do not seem to be fully convincing. Our Lady, then, is the only one about whom we can say that we have positive reasons for believing she received the intuitive vision, since by her dignity as the Mother of God, by the privileges of the Immaculate Conception, and by her immunity from the least stain of sin she is placed above the common state of man on earth.

It seems impossible to obtain proof of the intuitive vision because, as we have said in paragraph 403, while we are on earth we can know' the Beatific Vision only from revelation, and so we can never be certain that any infused knowledge we receive is in reality this intuitive vision. We can never exclude the possibility of our mistaking a vision granted through some very perfect medium, as through a perfect mirror, for the actual direct vision of the Divine Essence.

**409**     2. *Is infused contemplation possible in the case of sinners? in the case of those outside the Catholic Church?*

Those who have discussed this problem are commonly agreed that God does not give infused contemplation to souls in mortal sin. The reason is that infused contemplation, no matter how its nature is viewed, certainly involves an act of intense love and presupposes a close union between God and man, neither of which is found in the sinner. And, granting the explanation given in Chapter One of this Part, infused contemplation further presupposes the presence of sanctifying grace and charity in the soul. Some may object and say that even if the foregoing hypothesis is true, it is not impossible that God could give the consciousness of the supernatural character of his acts to a sinner who makes acts of faith and

hope. We grant that it is not absolutely impossible that a sinner should receive such a consciousness. But we hold that that consciousness is very much more difficult of realization in the case of one who does not possess the Gifts of the Holy Ghost; and we hold that, if it were granted, it would not be true infused contemplation, because in infused contemplation the sense of God's acting and being present in the soul cannot be separated from love of God. However, we do concede that God may sometimes grant to a sinner whom He wishes to convert, not only a vision or a revelation (that is undisputed) but also a certain immediate experimental sense of grace working in him. This explains the similarity between infused contemplation and some of those lights by which sinners say they were converted instantaneously.

110 It is certain that a soul can reach the state of grace by an act of charity and the implicit resolve to receive baptism and to enter the visible society of the Catholic Church. Hence there can be souls *outside the visible Church* who are in the state of grace. There is no reason why God may not grant the grace of infused contemplation to such souls. That God may do so becomes all the more reasonable when we remember that infused contemplation, as we have said, is primarily granted for the benefit and sanctification of the recipient. Hence it is especially fitting that God should give this grace to a soul of good-will who, without any fault of its own, is deprived of the many spiritual aids supplied by the Church. Thus God may give infused contemplation to compensate for the ordinary spiritual assistance available to Catholics. Therefore the problem as to whether or not pagans attain natural mystical contemplation is distinct from the question as to whether some pagans (and *a fortiori*, Jews and non-Catholic Christians) received supernatural infused contemplation. (Cf. J. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, Ch. 6, pp. 331 ff.; Maréchal, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-281.)

## REFERENCES

1. Cf. bibliography in Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*. Maréchal, *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics*, pp. 118ff. Saudreau, *The Mystical State; The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, II. A. Farges, *Mystical Phenomena*. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*. B. Williamson, *Supernatural Mysticism*. Lehodey, *The Ways of Mental Prayer*.

### *infused Contemplation*

- H. Browne, *Darkness or Light?* J. and R. Maritain, *La Vie d'Oraison*.  
J. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, De Maumigny, *op. cit.*, II.
2. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 330. Tr.'s note: cf. *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, II, pp. 313ff.
  3. *Ibid.*, pp. 324ff.
  4. *The Mystical State*, n. 69.
  5. *Mystical Contemplation*.
  6. Cf. Peers' translation, I, p. 332.
  7. Cf. Peers' translation, I, p. 327.
  8. Maréchal, *op. cit.*, pp. 102ff., 407.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Degrees of Infused Contemplation

- 111 It is obvious and admitted by all that there are various degrees of infused contemplation, inasmuch as its main characteristics may differ in intensity; that is to say, according as there may be differences in passivity, in the focussing of the intellect and will in one simple intuition and act of love, in the experimental sense of God's presence. Before going on to discuss the various series of degrees we must note the sense in which the mystics propose them. For, when the mystics set forth a series of grades or states or "mansions," they are usually describing their own mystical progress; and it seems that sometimes they, and especially their biographers, tried to make their descriptions fit into a preconceived system of theology. Therefore, when degrees and steps are proposed even by theologians and psychologists they must not be accepted absolutely and rigidly, especially when they descend to details. The reason is that the mode of progress in the way of contemplation is essentially variable, just as it is in the spiritual life in general. Moreover, the ways of the contemplative life are all the more manifold, since contemplation depends even more exclusively on the Will of God, who grants it to whom He wills, when He wills, how He wills and in the measure He wills. Hence the degrees of infused contemplation are to be regarded as the general way in which God *usually* leads souls along the path of contemplation. This is principally true of the *nights* or the periods of interior trial by which souls are tried before being raised to higher levels; for these nights follow each other in very different ways, as we shall see. Again, one can lay down only general rules regarding the transition from one degree to another; sometimes the change is made insensibly, as it were, and sometimes, on the contrary, it occurs abruptly.]

#### A. The Commonly Accepted Degrees of Infused Contemplation

##### I. *Historical Notes*

- 412 Since the medieval theologians did not usually make any explicit distinction between acquired and infused contemplation (cf. par.

246), the steps they marked out included degrees that are certainly acquired as well as those that are undoubtedly infused. Thus Richard of St. Victor gave six degrees: . . . in the imagination, imaginatively only; in the imagination, rationally; in the reason, imaginatively; in the reason, rationally; above the reason but not beyond it; and the sixth, above the reason and apparently beyond it." E. Kulesza and Vernet hold that Richard foreshadows, in another work, the four degrees of infused contemplation which St. Teresa later distinguished; that is, when he enumerates *insuperable* charity, wherein the mind cannot resist its desire for God; *inseparable* charity, wherein the mind cannot forget its desire; *singular* charity, which has no equal, when the mind can relish nothing else; *insatiable* charity, when the mind cannot be satisfied even by its desire for God.

Likewise St. Bonaventure, in his *The Ascent of the Mind to God*,<sup>2</sup> distinguishes the degree of ascent to God according as the ascent takes place through the vestiges of God in the universe, through the vestiges of God in the world, through His image impressed on the natural powers, in His image formed by the gratuitous gifts, through the primary name of Divine unity which is being, in the name of the Most Blessed Trinity which is the Good, in the mystical transport of mind in which rest is given to the intellect when the soul has totally lost itself in God through excess of love. Similarly Rudolph of Biberach enumerates seven paths on the way by which "one comes to the inner, secret, and eternal mansion of God: an upright striving for the things of eternity; studious meditation; limpid contemplation; the love of charity; secret revelation; experimental foretaste; deiform operation."

413 The degrees given in the treatise *De Septem Gradibus Contemplationis* refer more exclusively to infused contemplation. This work was once attributed to St. Bonaventure, but Théry thinks it was written by Thomas of Vercelli, who borrowed the teaching of Brother Giles, found also in St. Bonaventure's writings, namely that the degrees of prayer are fire, unction, ecstasy, thought, contemplation, taste, rest, glory (in the future life). David of Augsburg, in his *De Septem Gradibus Orationis*, says that the fourth degree is infused contemplation; the fifth, inebriating contemplation; the sixth, excess of mind; and then he gives as the seventh degree the vision of God to be acquired in Heaven.

Bl. Angela of Foligno first enumerates her twenty stages of penance and then describes, in a purely experimental way, seven last steps, all of which seem to pertain wholly to infused contemplation—the revelation of the divine intimacy; of the divine unction; of the divine instruction; of our own salvation and the divine reform-

ing; of the divine union and love; of many torments through infirmities and the demons; and a revelation that can be described only as something that cannot be thought by human minds.<sup>3</sup>

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In the sixteenth century St. Teresa described a series of degrees which were substantially accepted by all later authors. She writes of them in her *Life* (Chs. 14–16; a.d. 1575); in her *Second Relation to Fr. R. Alvarez* (1575); and especially in her *Interior Castle* (1577). In this last-named work she adds a Seventh Mansion, transforming union or the spiritual marriage. In her previous works she had given only six "mansions," the fourth of which was infused recollection and quiet; the fifth, prayer of union; the sixth, the wound of love and ecstatic union. St. John of the Cross in his *Dark Night* describes accurately the two degrees of passive purification, of the senses and of the soul. In his *Living Flame of Love* he names as a degree the spiritual marriage, with full and habitual infused union. There is less certainty about the proper interpretation of the degrees found in his *Spiritual Canticle*, since there is a dispute about the authenticity of the second version- (B) of this Canticle. This version contains forty verses, whilst the first version (A) has only thirty-nine and has them in a different order. (Chevallier, O.S.B., admits only the first version (A); Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., retains B as being at least probably authentic.)

The description which St. John of the Cross gives of the soul's ascent through contemplation is in substantial agreement with that given by St. Teresa. However, St. John throws more light on the process of purification and on the manner in which the soul passes into the way of contemplation, whilst St. Teresa distinguishes between the various degrees with greater psychological precision. The Carmelite school adopted and developed the teaching of both Saints on the degrees and the nights.

Many authors follow St. Teresa's divisions but add to them by regarding as degrees the various mystical graces which she describes throughout her works. Hence these authors give more divisions than she does. For example, Alvarez de Paz gives fifteen degrees, the last of which is the vision of God reserved for Heaven. López Ezquera, too, gives more divisions than St. Teresa, but the increase in number is due mainly to his method of enumeration; he gives the spiritual betrothal and marriage as the last degree. Scaramelli<sup>4</sup> is careful to distinguish between contemplation and distinct revelations; and he gives twelve degrees of contemplation: "recollection; spiritual silence; quiet; intoxication of love; spiritual sleep; anxiety and thirst of love; divine touches; fruitive union; simple union and espousal; ecstatic union, rapture; perfect, stable union."

St. Alphonsus Liguori (*Praxis Confessarii*; Appendix) gives:

spiritual purgation; recollection; quiet; simple union; betrothal; consummated union, or spiritual marriage. Most of the more recent authors give almost the same degrees as St. Teresa—Kibet, Poulain, Meynard, Garrigou-Lagrange, Arintero, Zahn, Lehodey, Tanqueray (*Spiritual Life*, n. 1418) de Maumigny (*op. cit.*, II, Part 1, Chs. 13-17), Lamballe (*op. cit.*, Ch. 4).

## II. The Three Principal Degrees

415 If we examine closely the degrees given by St. Teresa, we shall see that they can be reduced to three, of which the others are only variations. Thus, passive recollection and quiet pertain to a contemplation that is not yet fully passive, or in other words, to an infused union that is still *imperfect*. Simple union and ecstatic union are only two unequal degrees of the same full union, given *temporarily*. And the spiritual marriage is full union given *permanently*. Therefore the gift that constitutes infused contemplation is usually given by God either imperfectly and transitorily, or fully but only transitorily, or fully and permanently.

As we said in Chapter One of this Part, we hold that the constitutive element of infused contemplation is the direct consciousness of the supernatural gifts as such. Consequently we shall interpret the degrees of infused contemplation in terms of that consciousness.

416 1. *Recollection and quiet*. In the first imperfect degree of infused contemplation, recollection and quiet, the infused light shows only the supernatural character of the acts of faith and especially of charity. This would explain what St. Teresa says in her various works about quiet. The soul feels that its *will* is passively fixed on God. However, this union only overflows, as it were, on the intellect, and thus the intellect can still be distracted (St. Teresa, *Way of Perfection*, Ch. 31; *Life*, Ch. 15, n. 1; cf., e.g., Poulain, *op. cit.*, Ch. 16; Garrigou-Lagrange, *op. cit.* pp. 250ff.). Hence the soul must continue to make some efforts if it is to remain thus united to God, since the union is broken if the will follows the wanderings of the mind or the imagination. Again, in the beginning, when the soul first receives this prayer, and ordinarily for a short period thereafter, this light is given only in brief flashes, brief "touches." That is why the soul may not immediately recognize that these first infused lights are different from other quite ordinary enlightenments. Afterwards, though, this grace is prolonged and becomes almost habitual, in the sense that when the soul engages in mental prayer, it will almost always pray in this way.

Finally, this prayer of quiet will sometimes be delightful and some-



times so dry and full of sorrow that the will, unsupported as it is, feels that it really is united to God but without any sense of pleasure. This explains how, in the act of supernatural faith, there can be both a certain possession of supernatural truth as well as obscurity, in the sense that the soul is unable to attain to that truth in itself and in a satisfying way. Similarly in the act of charity, man can reach a true union with God through the love of friendship, although perfect adherence to the Infinite Good still remains unattainable in this life. Therefore according as the experimental intuition (given by the infused light) rests on one or the other of these aspects of the acts of faith or charity, it will cause the soul to feel either keen delight or piercing sorrow.

2. *Full union* (others call it "simple union") consists in this, that God lays hold of all the powers of the soul and renders them fully passive, so that the soul no longer has any distractions and need make no effort to preserve the union. (St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, V, 1; cf. Poulain, *op. cit.*, Ch. 17; Garrigou-Lagrange, *op. cit.*, pp. 251ff.). In this union the Divine action may vary in power, with the result that the use of the external senses and the ability to move may be rendered more difficult but not wholly taken away; or, on the contrary, one may be totally deprived of them (ecstasy). Hence there are two forms of full union—ecstatic and non-ecstatic. But, according to St. Teresa, who was the first to distinguish between them, they differ only in the intensity and not in the nature of the union; thus in ecstasy the union is much greater. However, since ecstasy is only the result of the overflow of the interior union on to man's external faculties, it does not make the union itself different. In fact, an equally intense union may or may not be accompanied by ecstasy, depending on the physical constitution of the recipient. Thus there are mystics who received this degree of infused contemplation in an intense form and who apparently did not have even light ecstasies (e.g., the Ursuline, Mary of the Incarnation). Finally, St. Teresa notes that, in the beginning, this union is given only for a very brief period, although its effects on the soul are great; and she says too that an ecstasy is quite prolonged if it lasts for half an hour (*Life*, Ch. 18, n. 12).

Full union and its consequences can perhaps be aptly explained by saying that the soul is made directly conscious of the effects of sanctifying grace on it. This would account for God's full possession of all the soul's spiritual activity and also for the great effects worked in the soul by even the shortest moments of union. Thus in ecstasy the consciousness of the effects of grace becomes so profound that God is seen therein in an altogether new way. At the same time, the will feels that it is united to Him in a very powerful and intimate

manner. In fact, man may become conscious that God dwells and is present in the very substance of his soul.

- 417 3. *Transforming union* (spiritual marriage, permanent union) consists in this, that the soul habitually experiences that God is present and acting in it. This experience varies in clarity and is intermittent but, “under the influence of this grace the soul cannot doubt that the Divine Persons are present in it, and it is almost never deprived of Their company” (Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 257; cf. Poulain, *op. cit.*, Ch. 19; following St. Teresa [cf. *Int. Castle*, VII] who does not speak elsewhere of this degree; cf. St. John of the Cross, especially in the *Living Flame of Love* and the *Spiritual Canticle*.) Hence those “awakenings” (*recuerdos*) by which the Son of God rouses the soul to His presence in it or makes His presence more manifest (*The Living Flame of Love*, IV, ¶. 145). Hence also the permanent consciousness which the soul has of its likeness to God, of its participation in the divine life, which Poulain correctly regards as the distinguishing element of this state. This union also results in that “division in the soul” about which St. Teresa speaks (*Interior Castle*, VII, 1, n. 10)—the soul continues to converse with God whilst attending to its external duties. (Cf. Mary of the Incarnation.)

This degree of infused contemplation can be well explained by saying that in it the soul habitually receives infused light by which it is made conscious of the state of sanctifying grace, although the light is not always given in the same way and with the same intensity.

### III. *The Two Nights*

*Where, among these degrees, must we place the two Nights described by St. John of the Cross?*

- 418 We have already noted that by the word “nights” St. John means the various states in which the soul is purified of its defects in order that it may arrive at contemplative union with God. He makes a distinction between the *active* and the *passive* elements of these nights (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I, Ch. 1, n. 2, “with respect to the activity of the soul . . . with respect to its passivity”<sup>8</sup> and also between the night of the *senses* and the night of the *soul*. In the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (I and II–III) he speaks of the more active night of purification of the senses through mortification, and of the soul through the exercise of the theological virtues. Although God’s special action is not absent from these active nights, they do not constitute a state of infused contemplation but remain outside

it and are possible to beginners who are still in meditation. (*Dark Night of the Soul*, I, Ch. 1, n. 2.) But the *passive night of the senses* (*ibid.*, I) and the *passive night of the soul* (*ibid.*, II) are states into which the soul is placed by God: therefore we can try to ascertain where they usually occur in the series of degrees mentioned above. It is clear, then, that we are not here considering passive purifications of the senses and the soul in the broad meaning of the term, that is, as effected by external trials sent by God, e.g. illness and humiliation. Instead, we are dealing with the passive purification of the senses and of the soul, taken strictly. That is to say, we are here concerned with these purifications only inasmuch as they are effected by aridities, desolations, darkness, doubts and other internal trials positively willed by God, or, like diabolical temptation, at least permitted by Him.

St. John of the Cross teaches plainly (*Dark Night of the Soul*, I, Ch. 1, n. 1) that souls are led into the passive night of the senses when God raises them from the state of beginners in contemplation to the state of proficients, that is, when they begin to partake of the first gifts of infused contemplation. Hence some authors (e.g., Tanqueray, *op. cit.*, n. 1420) regard this passive night of the senses as the first form of the prayer of quiet; they call it the prayer of arid quiet, which is usually followed by the prayer of sweet quiet. Poulain holds (*op. cit.*, Ch. 15, n. 40) that the other passive night, that of the soul, is "the whole complexus of the mystic states below the spiritual marriage, inasmuch as these states involve darkness and trials." However, St. John of the Cross seems to regard it as a special period of trial; for he says (*Dark Night of the Soul*, II, Ch. 1, n. 1) that it does not start immediately after the soul has emerged from the passive night of the senses but that, instead, there is usually a long interval, even a lapse of years, between the two.

419 If we compare the teaching of St. John with the descriptions of other mystics, we can make the following observations:

God does not usually grant the graces of infused contemplation even frequently, much less habitually, unless He has first purified the soul by some internal passive purgation. And the higher the graces He wishes to grant, the more profound and rigorous is the purgation. But it does not seem that a period of passive night strictly so called must always precede every brief grace or "touch." It must be conceded, however, that even outside the way of strict contemplation (as defined in pars. 430-431), no soul can ascend to even a slightly higher degree of perfection without being passively purified by God through some internal trial of this kind.

The soul usually passes through the two periods of trial described by St. John of the Cross. During the first period the soul

is led into the way of infused contemplation whilst it is being stripped of the more sensible forms of the interior life. The second period occurs before the soul is raised to the spiritual marriage and transforming union so that, as far as is possible in this life, it (the soul) may be purged of every deep-rooted and subtle disorder caused by self-love. But there can also be other nights at other times.

Even after the transforming union has been granted, the soul may have to endure real nights of the soul. For example, the Ursuline, Mary of the Incarnation, seems to have been granted the transforming union in 1631. Nevertheless, soon afterwards she entered a night that was more profound and sustained than that which she had undergone from 1624 to 1625. But this night did not deprive her of the knowledge of the continual presence of God. Again, after her arrival in Canada, from 1639 to 1647 she endured a new and more trying night, which was accompanied, however, by the consciousness of her union with the Divine Word, her Spouse. In like manner St. Paul of the Cross was given the grace of the spiritual marriage about the year 1723; yet from 1725 to 1770, a period of forty-five years, he suffered almost uninterrupted desolation. However, in the closing years of his life, from 1770 to 1775, the cloud was partly lifted, and during his last months he was filled with heavenly joy. There are other examples of this phenomenon in the lives of the Saints and Blessed. But St. John of the Cross seems to assert clearly (*Spiritual Canticle*, Str. 14-15, n. 30) that the trials and disturbances which proceed from the lower part of the soul and from the devil cease in the spiritual marriage. However, the text is a doubtful one, since it is part of the second version of the *Canticle*. Moreover, it can be understood as being only a relative, and not an absolute, assertion, in accordance with the less rigid opinion found in the first version of the *Canticle*, Str. 27, 5, i. In fact, in another part of the *Canticle*, Str. 29, 5, r (version \*B," Str. 20. n. 10), the Saint expressly teaches that there are exceptions to his rule. We shall see in the next chapter the graces for which these nights prepare the soul.

#### IV. Transforming Union

*In what sense must we regard the transforming union as the highest point in infused contemplation and the mystical ascent of the soul?*

420

In the writings of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross the transforming union is clearly set forth as being the highest point in the contemplative life. But Ven. Mary of the Incarnation seems to

express a different opinion. In the course of an account which she wrote in 1654 she gives a description of a state which she calls the "eighth state." As described by her this state corresponds closely to the transforming union as found in the writings of the two great Carmelite mystics. And she then goes on to write of *five* other states (ninth to thirteenth), which she clearly regards as real degrees of progress in the divine union.

This apparent opposition disappears if we remember that the experiences of the mystics differ. Thus St. Teresa describes the way by which she was led, whilst Mary of the Incarnation gives an account of *her* own experiences. It does not follow that St. Teresa's way was less exalted than Mary of the Incarnation's simply because the latter made progress even after she had received the transforming union. The perfection of union with God is not necessarily equal in every soul whose infused contemplation shows the characteristics of the spiritual marriage. Besides, it can be simply conceded that there is no form of union with God through contemplation higher than the transforming union, and that there is no higher kind of union. But this does not mean to say that the soul which has entered the spiritual marriage cannot make progress in sanctifying grace and charity; it is evident that it can. Nor does it mean that the soul cannot be advanced by passive trials along the way of the apostolate, of reparation, of conformity with some mystery or office of Christ. This progress, as we have said, may be prepared for by new *nights* of trial; or the night may even constitute the progress, as in the case of St. Paul of the Cross, who was conformed to the sufferings of Christ by the severe probation he underwent for almost fifty years, which we mentioned above.

There may even be "mystical journeys" along paths that are quite different from those we have described. For example, in the case of St. Ignatius there is nothing that can be properly compared to the transforming union as found in St. John of the Cross. Instead, for him, the eminent graces of infused contemplation had as their centre the service of the Holy Trinity, through Christ the Mediator, rather than an ever closer union, though he displayed all the characteristics of infused contemplation. Therefore, just as there can be a way of mystic union, there can also be a way of mystic service, or some other mystic way.

## B. The Beginning of Infused Contemplation

- 421 Authors are not agreed in determining the beginning of infused contemplation or in selecting one form of mental prayer from among all the others as the first form of infused contemplation.

The principal reason for their lack of agreement is that many authors differ in the way they distinguish between infused and acquired contemplation, whilst others regard all contemplation as infused. And even if they admit the distinction between acquired and infused contemplation, authors may disagree on other points. For example, de Maumigny (*op. cit.*, III, Ch. 6) places the prayer of simplicity properly so called, with a general confused attention to the presence of God, within the limits of infused contemplation, whilst Fr. Antony of the Presentation, O.C.D., thinks that the prayer of quiet, since it is not fully passive, should be placed outside infused contemplation, which, he holds, begins with the prayer of union. However, differences between writers are often due more to a difference in terms than to a disagreement about facts.

One might say that all those prayers are infused for which the soul requires a special help of God which is not given always or to all, and which cannot be obtained through condign merit [i.e., as a recompense due in justice: Tr.] or infallible congruous merit [i.e., as a promised and fitting bounty or recompense: Tr.]. But even then one would have to take account of the fact that Scaramelli,<sup>7</sup> for example, requires such a special help for contemplation which he calls acquired, and to which, therefore, the soul cannot pass unless there is good reason to believe that it has that help.

422 Most authors hold that the first form of infused contemplation is the passive recollection and quiet (whether arid or sweet) which St. Teresa describes in her Fourth Mansion. She expressly calls these prayers the first *supernatural* prayers, in the special sense in which she uses the word (cf. *supra*, par. 396). Furthermore, no one places the prayer of union outside infused contemplation, just as no one includes therein discursive prayer and affective prayer (in its commonly accepted sense). In his treatise on affective prayer the Ven. Libermann gives the term a wider meaning than is usual; and in parts of this work he describes prayers that seem undoubtedly infused.

But most authors note that in practice the transition from non-infused prayer to the first forms of infused contemplation is usually effected in a scarcely perceptible way. In the beginning there are brief touches which the soul is not able to distinguish clearly from those consolations or periods of deeper recollection or more intimate union with God which it used to experience before being introduced into the way of contemplation. Afterwards, however, when the characteristics of infused contemplation appear more clearly, it will be able to look back and see that it has received graces which were the first beginnings of those which it now more manifestly enjoys. Sometimes, however, this transition from the

common spiritual life to the life of passivity and contemplation occurs suddenly and openly.

## REFERENCES

1. Meynard, *op. cit.*, II, Bk. 3, Chs. 1-4. Poulain, *op. cit.*, Chs. 15ff. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 238-259. Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, n. 1418-1479. Lehodey, *The Ways of Mental Prayer*, III, Chs. 5-9.
2. Cf. the translation by Fr. James, *The Franciscan Vision*.
3. Cf. the translation *The Book of Visions and Instructions of B. Angela of Foligno*, pp. 17-100.
4. *Direttorio Mistico*, III, Chs. 1-24.
5. Cf. Peers' translation, III, p. 214.
6. Cf. *ibid.*, I, p. 18.
7. *Direttorio Mistico*, II, Ch. 7, n. 69.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **What Is the Relation Between Infused Contemplation and Perfection?**

#### A. Statement of the Problem

##### *I. How State the Problem?*

- 423 There are various ways of presenting the problem. Is infused contemplation necessary for all if they are to reach perfection or sanctity? Are all Christians called, at least remotely, to infused contemplation? Is infused contemplation the normal way to perfection, or is it an extraordinary way? Is there only one way to sanctity, or are there, on the contrary, two ways, each of which is equally normal, just as there are in the Church equally normal vocations to the lay state, the religious state, and the priestly state?

It seems preferable to retain the first statement of the problem: "Is infused contemplation necessary for all if they are to reach perfection or sanctity?" For, in the other forms, the problem of the universal vocation to infused contemplation necessarily involves the difficult question of the remote vocation of every Christian to high sanctity. It is certain that all men are called to the happiness of Heaven and that therefore they are all called to sanctifying grace. It is also certain that no adult lacks the aids necessary for obtaining justification and that, therefore, no adult will be deprived of eternal bliss except through his own fault and because of mortal sin. But in order that one be not only saved but also arrive at perfection and high sanctity, one needs more abundant graces and special aids, and it is not certain that, according to God's will, these graces and aids are as readily available for everyone as the graces necessary for salvation. Thus, even if it were granted that infused contemplation is necessary for obtaining high sanctity, it would not immediately follow that every Christian is called to infused contemplation. Furthermore, if one says that all are at least remotely called to it (meaning that if a soul co-operates faithfully with the graces it receives from God, it will at length certainly obtain infused contemplation), even then it would be very difficult, in fact it



would be impossible, to determine even speculatively and theoretically the degree of fidelity required to assure the soul of its reward. It is true that no theologian holds that mere avoidance of mortal sin is enough; and it is certain that no one can avoid all venial sin, much less all imperfections. But, even so, it would be impossible to ascertain how long the soul would have to maintain perfect fidelity in order to receive infused contemplation—all its life? or only since its conversion to a fervent life? Thus, if the problem is stated in this way, scarcely anything more precise can be asserted than that which is admitted by alj, namely, that no one is excluded beforehand from infused contemplation.

i 11 Here we shall examine more closely the statement of the problem which we have chosen; we shall deal with the other forms in the Additional Notes at the end of the chapter.

Is infused contemplation necessary *for sanctity or perfection?*—i.e., for heroic sanctity, such as the Church requires for beatification and canonization? Is it necessary for the spiritual perfection possessed by those who have not yet reached heroic sanctity but who are nevertheless in the degree of the perfect, as defined in paragraph 357? Here we shall deal mainly with heroic sanctity, because if infused contemplation is not required for that degree of holiness, much less will it be required for simple perfection.

The necessity we are considering is not a physical necessity. Only a few authors hold, with Arintero, that the Gifts of the Holy Ghost increase to a certain degree where, *by the very fact of that increase*, infused contemplation necessarily follows; if this were so, one could say that infused contemplation is merited *de condigno*, whilst in reality, though God may grant it quickly when the soul possesses the Gifts in a high degree, yet even then it may be merited only *de congruo*. Therefore the question is whether infused contemplation is only *morally* necessary for sanctity. Some hold that it is so *de facto* only, whilst others say that it is so *de iure*; *de iure* insofar as infused contemplation is a means, a help, without which man, weak as he is, cannot reach the heights of sanctity; either *absolutely de iure*, in the sense that it cannot be supplied for by any other means, or *relatively de iure*, insofar as God, by an extraordinary decree of His Providence, may sometimes supply for it by other means, infused contemplation meanwhile remaining the *only normal* and ordinary way to sanctity. Infused contemplation is morally necessary *de facto*, or consequently, if *in fact* God in His Goodness usually gives it to all saints, so that in reality sanctity is not attained by anyone who has not received it (with the exception, perhaps, of some extraordinary cases), although the other aids to holiness can be sufficient *per se* for sanctity.

*Infused contemplation* is here taken in its proper sense, as described in paragraphs 383-384 above; that is to say, it is taken to mean only those contemplative prayers which are acknowledged as strictly infused, prescinding from the various opinions about its real nature. Thus the term includes at least the prayer of union (or even, according to many authors, the prayer of quiet). We are not concerned here with contemplation that is only *per accidens* infused, that is, a prayer which a soul may possess as a result of some special Divine influence but which may, in itself, be possessed without that influence. We shall consider only that prayer which is essentially infused, namely, that which can never be possessed without the special action of God in the soul.

"*Necessary for all*", we inquire only into the *general* necessity of infused contemplation and not the necessity that may arise from a special vocation, e.g. in a contemplative religious order, or from special circumstances, as when a particular person's character or temperament is such that he cannot reach sanctity without the aid of infused contemplation.

## II. *Points Admitted by All*

425 Having thus defined the problem, we can see that there are quite a few points admitted by all, or almost all, modern authors; and therefore we shall only mention these points here:

1. It is certain that, for sanctity, one does not require those extraordinary occurrences (such as visions, revelations, ecstasies or raptures, and the like) which can often accompany infused contemplation, but which should be carefully distinguished from it, as we said in paragraph 385.

2. Infused contemplation strictly so called is given, in itself and primarily, *for the sanctification of the recipient*, and only secondarily in order that others may be incited to love God when they see His wonderful intimacy with His friends. This is clear from the fact that others can know only the smallest part of this intimacy, and even that small part they can know only imperfectly. Therefore, as we said in paragraph 384, infused contemplation is a *gratia gratum faciens* [a grace given for the sanctification of the recipient: Tr.]. Though other authors, e.g. Waffelaert, seem to think otherwise, their disagreement is really due only to a difference in terms and not in doctrine.

3. All, or almost all, teach that God freely grants infused contemplation at the time He wills, and in the manner He wills, and that therefore He may even grant it to beginners, though He usually gives it only to souls that have been purified and have advanced in

perfection. Almost all authors also hold that when God grants infused contemplation He takes account of the soul's temperament, vocation, exterior life, and spiritual formation, to which He more or less accommodates even these special graces. Hence these circumstances can, to a certain extent, help or hinder infused contemplation, though God may show His absolute liberty in dispensing His gifts by granting it in the very circumstances which seem to hinder it most, as in the recent case of Hieronymus Jacgen; cf. his book *The Mystic Life of Grace*.

i.h

4. On the other hand, it is certain and denied by none, that man cannot attain high sanctity unless assisted by many *special* graces, inspirations, and impulses received through the agency of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. Therefore the Gifts must play an increasingly large part in his spiritual life, and the leading of the Holy Ghost must become habitual in the sense we mentioned in paragraphs 135ff. And although these impulses may or may not be consciously perceived, man will not become holy or perfect unless he has experienced these sweet or arid impulses at least sometimes, though this may not hold in some very extraordinary cases. Therefore he cannot become perfect unless he has had some experience of divine things, in this sense at least. In fact, according to what we have said in paragraph 420, man cannot become perfect unless God has purified him by some *internal passive purgation*.

5. Finally, it is certain that *habitual union of mind and heart with God* is necessary for sanctity. This union may be effected by thinking lovingly of God and of divine things even when engaged in other affairs; or by the supernatural spirit and a deep penetration into the truths of faith, or by some other means. It is also certain that the spiritual life becomes, as a consequence, *more simple*, more unified, more profound.

6. If, therefore, the expressions "the mystical way," "the mystical gifts," "the mystical graces," "mystical union with God" and similar phrases are taken to mean those things which we have listed under 4 and 5, then no one denies that sanctity is not possible outside the mystical way and without the mystical gifts. That is why, when stating the problem, we thought it better not to use the word "mystical" but only to treat of infused contemplation properly so called, which, all admit, is found in the prayer of union as described by St. Teresa.

### III. *The General Trend of Opinion*

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We cannot list here all the *various solutions* of the problem. Each author will state the problem differently according to his views

on infused contemplation, and the many different formulae cannot be reduced to a few without distortion. However, we can cite some examples which will serve to indicate the general trend of these opinions. We shall consider only the more recent opinions, so that we may present a clear picture of the present state of the problem; we shall give some of the older viewpoints, too, when dealing with the argument from tradition.

Some say that infused contemplation is an *extraordinary* way, outside of which one may arrive at any degree of sanctity. This is the opinion of Poulain (*The Graces of Interior Prayer*, Ch. 28, n. 7) who, though he readily grants that almost all the canonized saints actually did possess infused contemplation, yet flatly denies that it is necessary for any degree of sanctity. Meynard says that a special vocation is one of the conditions for infused contemplation and, when speaking of the fruitive union, he asserts that many souls are sanctified without ever attaining it (*Vie Intérieure*, ed. 3, 1899, II, 62; cf. the new edition prepared by G. Gérest). Farges (*op. cit.*, pp. 222 and 299ff.) says quite positively that there are two ways to sanctity, and that the way of infused contemplation is not open to all but only to those who are called to it by God. De Maumigny (*op. cit.*, II, Part 5, Chs. 1-2) says that infused contemplation is not the sole means of arriving at Christian perfection and that it requires a special vocation which is not possessed by many souls who engage habitually in mental prayer. Fr. Chrysogonus of the Blessed Sacrament asserts that there are two ways to perfection, the ascetical and the mystical (namely, infused contemplation); he holds that the mystical way is not necessary for the highest sanctity and that it is not open to all but only to those who receive a special vocation from God.

428 Others teach that, generally speaking, *there is only one normal way to perfection—contemplation*, and *infused contemplation* at that. They say that infused contemplation is the normal way to sanctity either because it is a necessary means which is replaced by others only in extraordinary cases, or because *de facto* God usually gives it to all souls that co-operate faithfully with the graces they receive. This is the view held by Saudreau, who admits only infused contemplation and who says that it (or the loving mystical union) is the ordinary form of prayer enjoyed by perfect souls.<sup>1</sup> Lamballe,<sup>2</sup> following him, holds the same. Louismet (*Divine Contemplation for All*) has similar views, and he takes the words “mystical life” and “contemplation” in a wide sense, as including the whole Christian life. Garrigou-Lagrange (*Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 337ff.; cf. p. 383) teaches that all fervent souls are remotely called to mystical contemplation. He says that this contem-

plation is the normal way to perfection, since it is nothing less than the prevalent dominion of the supra-human mode of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost in the interior life, and since it includes the passive purifications without which no one can arrive at perfection. Therefore, he says, unless man's infidelity or some very extraordinary circumstances stand in the way, all souls will arrive sooner or later at mystical contemplation, by virtue of their very progress in the interior life. Joret holds a similar view. Arintero rejects acquired contemplation and asserts that infused contemplation is available to all who wish to prepare themselves for it; thus also Dimmler. M. de la Taille teaches that in spiritual progress there is a point beyond which the soul cannot ascend, at least normally, except with the help of passive graces.

429 Finally, others, by making suitable distinctions, try to form a synthesis of the truths contained in both the foregoing opinions. Waffelaert makes a distinction, apart from acquired contemplation, between infused contemplation in the *wide sense* (or ordinary infused contemplation) in which the intellect, though passively moved by a special grace, still preserves its natural mode of action; and *strictly infused* contemplation (or extraordinary infused contemplation) in which the intellect no longer acts in its natural way. He holds that ordinary infused contemplation does not require a special vocation and that extraordinary infused contemplation is not necessary for sanctity and that it cannot be obtained without a special vocation.

J. Maritain (*De la Vie d'Oraison*, n. iv, pp. 73ff.), as well as de Grandmaison (*op. cit.*, p. 132), Tanquerey (*op. cit.*, n. 1564-1565), and V. Lithard distinguish between the mystical life (in which the Gifts of the Holy Ghost predominate) and *infused contemplation*. They hold that all holy souls live the mystical life but that this life is not constituted in all by that special exercise of the Gifts of Wisdom and Knowledge which is infused contemplation; in many souls the exercise of other gifts predominates, e.g. the Gift of Counsel, of Fortitude, etc.

Bainvel and Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen distinguish between touches or brief communications of that gift which constitutes infused contemplation, and the *state* or way of contemplation in which this contemplation becomes more or less the soul's habitual mode of prayer. Fr. Gabriel ends by asserting that the teaching of St. Teresa and of the Carmelite school in general is that "all souls, who dispose themselves generously, drink at least a little from the fount of living water (strictly mystical graces); but it does not thereby follow that all will go by the path of infused prayers; the double way still remains."

430 Since, as we have said in paragraph 426, there seems to be no real controversy on the point, we shall not discuss the mystical way or life understood in the general sense as meaning the habitual leading of the Holy Ghost and the predominance of His Gifts in the life of the perfect. We shall deal only with infused contemplation itself as described by St. Teresa in her Fourth and following Mansions, and as probably consisting in the direct consciousness of the supernatural gifts, a consciousness made possible by a special infused light. We propose the following thesis as being the more probably correct view:

#### IV. *Our Thesis*

*'The way or state of infused contemplation is not the only normal way to perfect love although, apparently, generous souls do not ordinarily arrive at perfection unless God gives them some touches or brief participations in those graces which constitute strictly infused contemplation. Therefore souls can ascend to any degree of sanctity without habitually walking in the way of infused contemplation.'*

Thus it seems that really generous souls are not ordinarily denied at least some communication of that special grace which constitutes infused contemplation, though the grace they receive may be only transitory and scarcely perceptible. (We cannot definitely assert or deny that there are extraordinary cases in which this does not hold.) The soul itself often cannot distinguish this communication from other consolations or desolations or from other moments of profound recollection. Often, too, if a person has been well formed in the spiritual life and if he knows what is taking place within him, he will not need to seek counsel from his director, or if he does ask for advice he will employ only general terms. This will hold good in the case of many priests and religious. Nor does there follow from this any true transformation of the interior life besides that which is effected by the leading of the Holy Ghost becoming increasingly habitual through ordinary inspirations. But, when the soul is led by God into a more or less habitual way of infused contemplation, its whole interior life is affected by the change, and there is induced in it a form of conscious passivity which it did not have before. Therefore the soul must be directed according to this new form. Though we concede that the way of infused contemplation is in itself a more excellent way, since it begets a greater conscious intimacy between God and man even while he is still on earth, yet we assert that the way of infused contemplation is not the

only way to sanctity, and that it is not universally and in every case the more efficacious way. Hence there is no degree of love, and therefore no degree of perfection, which cannot be attained outside this way. In fact, it can be asserted that not a few of the canonized saints did not follow the path of infused contemplation.

## B. Proof of Thesis

Strictly speaking, there are no documents of the teaching Church concerning this problem. Although Bossuet says that it is a reprehensible and condemned error to hold that extraordinary and passive prayer is necessary for sanctity, yet he does not cite any document. It is true that in the *Articles of Issy* (n. 22) we read that "One can become a great saint and attain Christian perfection ■without these extraordinary prayers (infused contemplation, quiet)." Similarly, in the schema drawn up by Casanata on the true teaching of contemplation, we find the following: "In the same way, they do not dare to assert that those who engage in meditation can never reach any degree of perfection unless they shall have first passed on to the prayer of contemplation." It is worthy of note that the first of these documents was signed by Fénelon himself, and that the second was prepared by Casanata, who was by no means an enemy of the mystics; however, they are not authentic documents of the teaching Church. In support of the opposite opinion some quote the words of Blessed Pius X praising St. Teresa for teaching that "the degrees of prayer which are enumerated are so many steps upward in Christian perfection" (Letter of March 9, 1914). Thus it seems that the degrees of perfection are the same as the degrees of the infused contemplation about which we speak here. However, the context makes it clear that the Pope wished to say only that true infused contemplation must always be accompanied by the exercise of the Christian virtues and that both contemplation and virtue must progress together; he did not touch on our present problem at all.

The problem cannot be solved *a priori* by theological reason. The arguments which are adduced to prove the necessity of infused contemplation for sanctity, or to prove that all are called to it, do not really touch on the controversy.

They prove, for example, that very special and powerful graces are needed for sanctity, graces by which man is placed under the habitual leading of the Holy Ghost. But they do not prove that these graces cannot be anything else except strictly infused contemplation or that the leading of the Holy Ghost must be conscious

and manifest in the souls that possess it. For, as we said in paragraph 130, there is no proof that the action of God in the soul is more powerful, the more perceptible it is to the soul.

It can be proved that when sanctity grows, the Gifts of the Holy Ghost grow too and play a greater part in the spiritual life, especially in mental prayer. And we must concede that the graces which constitute infused contemplation are received in the soul through the agency of the Gifts, especially of the Gifts of Wisdom and Knowledge. But this does not prove that all forms of mental prayer in which the Gifts of the Holy Ghost play the largest part are, by that very fact, infused contemplation, as described above in paragraph 283. This conclusion would be legitimate if we granted that infused contemplation differed only in degree, and not in kind, from the other forms of mental prayer; but we have already rejected that view as being less probable (par. 392).

It is true and denied by no one that our present supernatural life is not only the road to and the preparation for that future glory which we merit here on earth, but that it is also a kind of beginning of that future life. Faith on earth really attains to the Holy Trinity, which will be clearly contemplated in Heaven, and charity, which will remain the same in Heaven as on earth, directly unites us in friendship with God. It is also true that in infused contemplation, and especially in its highest degree, the spiritual marriage, the state of the soul approaches closely to the state of the Blessed in Heaven, inasmuch as some, though not all, of the veils that hide the face of the Beloved are removed, and inasmuch as the purified soul is ready to pass from earth straight to the Beatific Vision without being detained in Purgatory. But it does not necessarily follow therefrom that this great purification is effected only in souls which walk in the way of strictly infused contemplation, though such a purification certainly presupposes signal graces and the special action of God. Nor does it follow that a foretaste of the enlightenment and intimacy of Heaven is given to all who reach a high degree of love. It is easy to understand how God may give it to some souls in order that they may be "witnesses of the loving presence of God among men" (de Grandmaison, *op. cit.*, p. 133) without His being obliged thereby to grant it to all who enjoy the same degree of union with him through essential charity.

433 Many authors have collected texts from tradition to solve the present problem, e.g. Saudreau,<sup>3</sup> Arinterro, Garrigou-Lagrange (*Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 345ff.), all of whom conclude that tradition teaches the universal remote vocation of Christians to infused contemplation. Fr. Pourrat, on the contrary, in his historical work *Christian Spirituality*, says: "Undoubtedly



(here are spiritual writers who taught that the mystical vocation (that is, the vocation to infused contemplation) is universal. But history bears witness that as many, and in fact even more, authors do not admit this universality." Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., ends his examination of the Carmelite school by remarking that, though this school does not regard the way of infused contemplation as something extraordinary, yet it does look on it as a special way which is not followed by all holy souls, although God usually gives some brief share in these graces to all such souls at one time or another. Fr. Joseph of the Holy Ghost sums up the Carmelite doctrine in the same way.

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The present problem, as we have stated it, cannot be summarily solved from spiritual tradition. It was not even explicitly discussed before the sixteenth century because, previous to that time, there was no sufficiently precise notion of infused contemplation, nor was any distinction drawn between it and acquired contemplation. Therefore, before the sixteenth century, the contemplation which was generally proposed as the aim of all spiritual progress involved not only many elements of strictly infused contemplation but also many others, which have a much wider application and which are nowadays included in the term "the mystical life." Therefore many of the texts adduced prove only those points which have already been conceded concerning the habitual leading of the Holy Ghost, deeper recollection and intimate union of the mind with God, without which there is no sanctity. Or they deal only with that vivid realization of spiritual things which God grants at one time or another in all degrees of the spiritual life, but more often and in a more profound and spiritual way to advanced and fervent souls. However, this vivid perception is something quite distinct from infused contemplation as we view it here.

From the sixteenth century on, and largely as a result of the clear descriptions and distinctions of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, the problem has been explicitly posed. But there does not seem to be any clear consensus of opinion as to whether infused contemplation definitely is, or definitely is not, necessary for high perfection. Nor is there any generally accepted interpretation of the Saints' viewpoints. Besides, those who concern themselves especially with the matter do not agree on the concept and the extent of infused contemplation. Furthermore, many do not deal with all fervent souls but only with those who by reason of their vocation (e.g., to the Carmelite order) are called in a special way to contemplation. This is especially true of St. Teresa, who wrote for her spiritual daughters, and of St. John of the Cross, on his own explicit declaration: "Nor is my principal intent to address all, but rather

certain persons of our sacred Order of Mount Carmel of the primitive observance, both friars and nuns, since they have desired me to do so—to whom God is granting the favour of setting them on the road to this Mount" (*Ascent of Mt. Carmel*; Prologue, n. 94; cf. Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, *St. John of the Cross*, p. 14).

Where the problem is posed clearly and in a general way, authors are divided. It will suffice to note the negative opinion of Benedict XIV in his classic and normative work on beatification and canonization (III, Ch. 26, n. 8). He declares, following Brancatus de Laurea, that "many perfect souls are canonized although infused contemplation is not mentioned in the processes (of inquiry into their lives) Hence it is evident that "the lack (of infused contemplation) is not a clear sign that perfection is wanting." We must note, too, that St. Paul of the Cross and St. Alphonsus Liguori (*Praxis Confessarii*, n. 136), both of whom enjoyed a high degree of infused contemplation, also held the negative opinion.

435 We can scarcely use *experience* to confirm any probable conclusion in the matter of the passing *touches* and brief graces which may pertain to infused contemplation. For it can never be proved that these graces were altogether lacking in the life of any servant of God, since, as we have said, they may easily escape being distinguished from other more common graces, and they may not be mentioned to the director. Much less can it be proved that any soul who was perfectly united to God ever lacked them. Therefore, one can only argue from the opinion of saints (e.g., St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross; cf. Fr. Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p. 16) and directors that these brief graces are not ordinarily denied to fervent souls. However, we can conclude with more certainty that *the way or state of infused contemplation* was not the path followed by many souls of highest sanctity and of many canonized saints. For example, the arguments adduced to show that St. John Berchmans enjoyed infused contemplation only prove that he was habitually and closely united to God, and that perhaps he often experienced those "touches" which we have just mentioned. And, on close examination, the testimonies written about him, and his own spiritual notes, seem to leave no doubt that he was not led by God in the way of infused contemplation. But in order to obtain a proper view of this matter, the whole body of the Church should be taken into account, the whole complexus of fervent or perfect souls should be examined, special attention being paid to those who devoted themselves heroically to external works of zeal and charity. On this basis, it does not seem possible that anyone who has had even a little experience in directing such souls can assert that all of them follow the path of infused contemplation. However, any experienced director knows

that among them it is not rare to find souls who enjoy infused contemplation in a high degree.

*Additional Notes*

156 The path of infused contemplation must be called a *normal* way to sanctity inasmuch as infused contemplation is not a privilege which places the soul that enjoys it outside the common laws of the spiritual life, and inasmuch as it is not an exceptional way in which the soul is guided contrary to the usual methods of grace. But it is *not the only normal way* to the perfection of the Christian life, in the sense that a soul would be an exception to the normal ways of grace if it reached perfection outside the path of infused contemplation. In the external life of the Church there is no one sole normal way to sanctity; a man may become a saint whether he lives in the priestly life, the religious state, or the lay state, although it is true that sanctity is attained more easily in the first two than in the last. So also in the interior life there is no one normal way, although one particular way may afford more powerful aids to the perfection of charity than any other. Infused contemplation certainly is a potent aid to sanctification, but, in quite a normal way, it can be supplied for by other helps and the soul can reach an equal degree of sanctity without it.

Therefore we can say that all are called to infused contemplation in much the same way as they are called to the religious life, that is, insofar as no one is excluded *a priori* from that life, which is proposed to all in a general way by Christ and the Church. However, only a few embrace the religious life. There are two reasons for this: first, all are not given the special grace which is necessary if they are to take "this word" and which is properly the grace of vocation; second, even among those who receive this grace there are many who do not answer the call. Similarly there are two reasons why only a few actually ever arrive at infused contemplation: first, because God does not give everyone this special interior vocation and the special aids needed to follow it; second, because many souls do not co-operate faithfully with the graces by which God prepares them to enter this way and receive His gifts. It is certain that there would be many more souls participating in infused contemplation if all those for whom God intended it responded generously to His call. But it is also certain that in many souls the absence of infused contemplation is in no way due to lack of generosity.

Finally, infused contemplation is an *extraordinary* way only in the sense that it is not the only normal way to sanctity. But it is not extraordinary in the sense that it is not part of God's ordinary

supernatural Providence for the sanctification of souls. That is to say, it is not extraordinary in the same way as the sending of an angel to teach the faith to a pagan would be an extraordinary means of supplying for the normal mode of evangelization through the preaching of a missionary. Nor is it extraordinary in the sense that it belongs to the order of the miraculous, as do visions and revelations. We must admit that infused contemplation presupposes a special enlightenment which makes the soul directly conscious of the supernatural gifts and which is not given to all souls in the state of grace. Yet this enlightenment is not beyond the usual order of the supernatural life, just as a religious vocation, although not given to all, is still not something extraordinary and beyond the usual order of the Christian life, as was for example the vocation of St. Joan of Arc, St. Catherine of Siena, or St. Benedict Joseph Labre.

## REFERENCES

1. *The Life of Union with God*, n. 428ff. *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, II, n. 476ff.
2. *Mystical Contemplation*, Ch. 2.
3. *The Life of Union with God*.
4. Cf. Peers' translation, I, p. 15.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Relationship Between Infused Contemplation and Extraordinary Phenomena

437 It is a fact that in the lives of many who were led by God along the path of infused contemplation we find extraordinary phenomena like ecstasies, visions, revelations, stigmata, levitations, etc. It is also a fact that many of these phenomena were at least materially connected with the actual exercise of infused contemplation. Hence the problem: what is the relationship between infused contemplation and these phenomena?

On the nature of these phenomena and the various problems to which they give rise, consult, among others, Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, Chs. 20-23; Zahn; Herbert Thurston, S.J., *Some Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*, a long series of articles in *The Month* (from Vol. 133, 1919 to Vol. 162, 1933); *Levitation*, by O. Leroy. On stigmatics, consult the various accounts collected in *Études Carmélitaines*, October, 1936; and especially Père Debongnie's historical inquiry, which should now be substituted for Imbert-Gourbeyre's *La Stigmatisation* (Paris, 1894), whose criticism of the facts is quite inadequate; also Farges, *Mystical Phenomena*, Part II, 1923.

We shall not concern ourselves here with these problems. Instead, we shall only treat briefly the question posed above, and that only as regards ecstasy and visions, because it is immediately apparent that the rest of the phenomena, like the stigmata and levitations, have no intrinsic connection with infused contemplation.

#### I. Ecstasy and Infused Contemplation

438 In the *wide sense*, ecstasy means a state in which, according to the etymology of the word, a person goes out of himself in some way. Thus, following the celebrated phrase of Pseudo-Dionysius, "Love is ecstatic," spiritual writers speak of the "ecstasy of love" (St. Thomas, *lallae*, q. 28, a. 3; or St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, VII, Chs. 6-7), by which man relinquishes self-love and denies himself for the sake of the beloved.

In a *stricter sense* the word is used of physical, and not moral, ecstasy; that is, it is used to signify the more or less complete suspension of sense activity (in which meaning it is also called rapture, as in St. Thomas, *II-IIae*, q. 175, a. 1-2). Thus ecstasy can be more properly defined as a state in which the spiritual powers of the soul are so deeply and powerfully fixed on some object that it (the soul) is made more or less completely incapable of receiving and feeling the stimuli of external sensible agents; and in this state either the intellectual or the affective powers of the soul may predominate. Hence in ecstasy strictly so called there is a double element, a positive and a negative, the negative element being only a consequence of the positive. Therefore a state in which spiritual concentration is lacking is not an ecstasy properly so called. J. Leuba, for instance, quite erroneously extends the term to denote loss of consciousness through drunkenness or anaesthesia; under ecstasy he would thus include the effects of hypnotism or hysteria. In these latter cases abstraction from the senses is effected by the predomination of some image, but intellectually the consciousness is very weak and is practically empty. The negative element in ecstasy, the suspension of sense-activity, can be more or less complete, either because of the varying intensity of spiritual concentration or even because of the varying weakness of the sense faculties. Thus sometimes even internal sensations may cease, and so there is no fatigue; or, on the contrary, the external sensations may not be wholly removed but may only be made weaker and be perceived with difficulty (as in the phenomenon of the "ligature" of which Poulain speaks in Chapter 11 of his book).

Here we prescind from the question of the possibility and extent of natural ecstasy (cf. Poulain, Ch. 31, par. 3). We deal only with religious ecstasy, in which the spiritual concentration of the soul is effected by a special Divine action, that is, by the gift of infused contemplation. Later on we shall speak of the ecstasy which accompanies visions or revelations.

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From what we have said it is already clear that ecstasy is by no means an essential part or even an integral part of infused contemplation; that it is not a kind of special gift which increases the value of other gifts; that it is only a consequence arising from the weakness of the human organism which cannot bear the force of the Divine action without becoming incapable of performing the lower psychological actions, or without being compelled to perform these actions incompletely and with difficulty. Therefore where ecstasy is present it does not always and necessarily presuppose that the divine action is more intense than where it is lacking; it is dependent on other factors, both psychological and physiological. In

fact, the common opinion is that in the highest degree of infused contemplation, the transforming union, ecstasies either cease altogether or become less frequent and less profound. It seems that this is due to the organism's being indirectly strengthened to bear the weight of the Divine action. (Cf. St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, VII, Ch. 3, n. 12; cf. Poulain, *op. cit.*, Ch. 19, n. 9; Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 257).

440 The question is asked, however, whether ecstasy is a *necessary and universal* consequence of infused contemplation, at least in that degree of contemplation which is called "ecstatic union"?

Poulain (Ch. 18) says that it is, at least ordinarily, and he cites the authority of St. Teresa who, in her *Life* (Chs. 20-21) and her *Interior Castle* (VI, Ch. 47), seems to propose ecstasies or rapture ("*arrobamientos, vuelo del espiritu*") as a characteristic element of this mansion or degree. Lamballe holds a similar view (*op. cit.*, pp. 160ff.). Saudreau (*The Mystical State*, n. 206ff.) denies that ecstasy is a necessary and universal consequence of infused contemplation; he holds that ecstasy, rather than being a consequence of contemplation itself, is a special effect of a Divine action abstracting man from his senses. Therefore, he says, it must be regarded as an extraordinary Divine operation independent of the gift of contemplation, although God often grants it precisely in order that the superior part of the soul may more freely submit to the Divine action. Others, like Joret, distinguish between *subsequent* ecstasy, which is the effect of contemplation, and *antecedent* ecstasy, which seizes the soul abruptly, before it has received the gift of God and which prepares it to receive this gift (a vision or some similar favor).

We hold with Suarez that "granted the grace of perfect contemplation, ecstasy can follow from it naturally or connaturally, at least as regards the suspension of the external senses."<sup>1</sup> We may add that in most of the documents on infused contemplation which treat of its higher degrees, there are at least traces of this suspension at some moments. But it does not seem possible either to\* assert or deny that this suspension always take place; for we have only a few brief documents dealing with infused contemplation as experienced by those souls in whom these extraordinary phenomena rarely occurred.

## IL *Visions and Contemplation*

441 A distinction is made between *corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual* visions. This distinction can also be applied to preternatural locutions. In corporeal visions and locutions there is real

perception by the external senses; the person who is seen or heard may be really present, or (in corporeal visions) the body which appears may be formed in the air, or a change may be effected at the moment the light-rays impinge on the eye, or (in corporeal locations) a real acoustical vibration may be produced in the ear. In *imaginative* visions and locutions there is no perception by the external senses but, rather, a Divine action on the imagination or the internal senses, stirring up and uniting perceptions already received through sight or hearing. In *intellectual* visions and locutions the Divine action directly affects the intellect. God may use intelligible *species* already possessed, and then the intellectual vision or intellectual location is always accompanied by a phantasm. It is precisely according as this phantasm is visual or verbal that an intellectual vision differs from an intellectual location. Or, on the contrary, God may grant new and purely intellectual *species*, which result in a wholly preternatural and angelic mode of knowledge. In this case an intellectual vision can be distinguished from an intellectual location only by some kind of analogy.

442 It is evident from experience that corporeal and imaginative visions and locutions may be received apart from infused contemplation, and that infused contemplation may be possessed even in a high degree without these visions or locutions. However, one may ask whether this is true of *intellectual* visions also, at least of those visions which St. John of the Cross calls “(to speak more properly) . . . knowledge of naked truths” (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, Ch. 26, n. 2),<sup>2</sup> which are visions of God Himself. The Saint himself asserts that “these lofty manifestations of knowledge can only come to the soul that attains to union with God, for they are themselves that union” (*ibid.*),<sup>3</sup> Hence these intellectual visions seem to be inseparable from infused contemplation and can even be identified with its higher degrees. This is in agreement with the experiences of other mystics in whom high contemplation seems to bring with it, almost always, intellectual lights on the Holy Trinity or the Divine attributes.\*

A probable explanation is offered by our analysis of the nature of that contemplation (pars. 40Iff.). In the higher degrees of infused contemplation when the soul has direct consciousness of, or beholds, its own transformation in which it is made like unto God through sanctifying grace, then, as in a mirror, it sees a purely intellectual image of the Triune God. This accords well with what is said about those communications of knowledge that are stripped of all sensible elements and that are never concerned with particular or individual things; in which, “although (God) cannot be experienced manifestly and clearly, as in glory, this touch of



knowledge and delight is nevertheless so sublime and profound that it penetrates the substance of the soul. . . . (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Ch. 26, n. 5) .5

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1. Cf. Maréchal, *op. cit.*, pp. 18ff. for the psychological aspect of the question.
2. Cf. Peers' translation, I, p. 194.
3. Cf. Peers' translation, I, p. 196.
- 4., Cf. re e.g. St. Ignatius, *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* (1938), pp. 114ff.; or, re Ven. Mary of the Incarnation, H. Cuzin, *Du Christ à la Trinité d'après l'Experience Mystique de M. de l'incarnation* (Lyons, 1936), pp. 7111.; and J. Klein, *Itinéraire Mystique de la Ven. M. de l'incarnation* (Paris, 1938) , pp. 65ff.
5. Cf. Peers' translation, I, p. 196.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Practical Conclusions

#### A. The Desire for Infused Contemplation

443 As we have seen, it is certain that infused contemplation is a very efficacious and powerful help to progress in charity and sanctity, and that in itself it is a wonderful gift. Therefore *of itself* it should be sought by every fervent soul eager to promote the glory of God. The mode of speech commonly employed by spiritual writers lends support to this view. (Cf. the opinions collected by Poulain, *op. cit.*, Ch. 25, n. 17-39.) For example, St. Teresa (*Interior Castle*, IV, Ch. 2, n. 8), after she has expounded the benefits derived from infused contemplation, goes on to say: "You will desire, then, my daughters, to strive to attain this way of prayer, and you will be right to do so" (*trans. cit.*, II, p. 238). Similarly Alvarez de Paz first teaches that visions and ecstasies and the like are not to be sought or desired; then he treats of infused contemplation and says: "This is the most efficacious means of attaining perfection. We can be covetous of that which is the end and aim of infused contemplation. Why, then, should we not desire that which is a means to the end? . . . Obviously, it is proper to desire great sanctity. . . . Therefore it is very fitting that one should desire and ask for those means by which souls usually arrive at that sanctity. And one of those means is perfect contemplation, by which the soul travels a long journey in a short space of time and obtains great charity and purity." Actually, the hope of obtaining such a precious intimacy with God will be a great incitement to generosity in the cultivation of prayer, in self-reformation, and in bearing trials sent by God.

444 It is also certain, on the other hand, that the desire for infused contemplation can become, and sometimes actually does become, very harmful for some souls. As we said before (par. 123), even the desire for perfection and sanctity itself can have its own dangers. How much more, then, is the desire for infused contemplation open to abuse! For it is not an end in itself but only a means to the goal of earthly life, to the possession and increase of charity and sanctifying grace. As Suárez says: "Contemplation . . . is not

the end of the perfect life to the extent that it cannot and ought not be a means to acquiring perfection." (Cf. par. 379 above.) But it is not the only means, or at least not always the only means. Most of those who hold that it is necessary for sanctity concede that it is given by God when He wills and that it can be supplied for by other means, at least in extraordinary circumstances. Finally, it is a means which, when seen from afar, may readily appear very delightful and easy. It is certainly a lofty path to follow and it is rightly held in high esteem, since it seems to be the special path of elect souls. As a consequence, souls may desire it not only from purely supernatural motives but also for purely human reasons. Hence there is danger that the desire for infused contemplation may be fostered indiscreetly—the soul may come to despise and leave aside the more humble and laborious means of sanctification which are always at hand; instead of using these means, it may waste time in day-dreaming about the future and so neglect the work that should be done in the present. There is also a danger that the soul may begin to examine itself *anxiously* for signs of infused contemplation. Or this self-examination may also be motivated by self-love, vanity, and snobbery; it would be nice to know that one is no longer following the ordinary way, that one is no longer down among the common crowd. Those are the reasons why some authors do not allow the desire for contemplation except in a restricted form, e.g. Scaramelli (*Dir. Mist.*, III, Ch. 32, n. 281), St. Alphonsus Liguori (*Praxis Confessarii*, Appendix, I, n. 23).

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In practice, one must distinguish between various cases;—a soul may have already received many graces of infused contemplation, so that it is clearly being led by God along that path. Such a soul can and ought to desire to make progress in infused contemplation, with humility and full resignation to the Divine Will, it is true, but also with great fervor. And in reality God often inspires an ardent desire for contemplation in souls of this kind; for, granted the vocation to the way of contemplation, this desire is nothing other than the desire for greater perfection.

There are other souls who have not yet entered on the way of infused contemplation but who give signs which indicate that they will be called to it sooner or later. Such signs are: a very simple prayer with some moments of deeper recollection which may possibly contain the initial graces of contemplation; or aridity coupled with real fervor in the interior life; or the soul may possess a temperament that is naturally inclined to and suited for contemplation, or it may have a vocation to some religious order devoted especially to contemplation, e.g. the Carmelites. Souls of this type are to be encouraged to attain the greatest purity of heart, to

practise a gentle recollection of mind, to achieve simplicity in prayer, to show generous fidelity in accepting whatever graces God may choose to send. Thus they will be made ready to follow God's guidance when He leads them along the way of contemplation. In most cases it will not be necessary or even very advantageous for the director himself to introduce the subject of seeking and desiring contemplation to those who do not even think of it, provided that he directs them properly in accordance with their state. However, if his clients ask about the lawfulness of desiring contemplation, he should answer in the affirmative and exhort them to foster this desire in all humility and resignation, trustfully, with the wish to suffer much for God, and with fidelity to, and love for, their present duties.

- 446 There are other souls who give no special indication of a vocation to this life. In fact their temperament or exterior vocation, their dissipation and fickleness of mind, or their negligence and tepidity seem to argue the contrary. It would be inopportune to awaken this general desire in such souls. Often they do not properly understand wherein lies the true value of infused contemplation; whilst there are many other motives which they can grasp more readily and which will excite them to generosity and love of God. However, there may be a special case and special circumstances in which the desire for contemplation becomes very efficacious even for one of these souls. In such an instance the desire can be awakened with profit. All souls of this type should be directed and formed in love of prayer, in docility under grace, and in full self-abnegation. Thus, if God wishes to call them to infused contemplation, they will be ready to co-operate with the vocation, and they will not impede the work of grace by entertaining wrong ideas about the use of methods or about activity in the service of God.

## B. The Reading of Mystical Works

- 447 "Mystical works" or writings can be understood broadly to mean all books which deal with that part or aspect of the spiritual life which can be called mystical in the sense we mentioned in paragraph 8. Often, however, the term is used in a strict sense to denote only those writings which deal with infused contemplation and the other gifts that are more or less closely connected with it. This is the sense in which we understand it here.

We must note that spiritual authors and directors are not agreed in the counsel they give as regards the reading of books on mysticism. Some think that this reading should not be recommended or even permitted to all souls indiscriminately.<sup>2</sup> Others hold that, in

general, this reading is very profitable, since it is a very strong incentive to generosity.

448 First we must remember that we are dealing only with a particular part of the broad subject of spiritual reading, namely, the reading of books which deal with high spiritual perfection. We must also realize that a spiritual book may have been written by a holy man and may contain pure doctrine and prudent counsels, yet this fact alone does not imply that it will be suitable and beneficial even for every fervent and pious soul. Pure doctrine can be wrongly understood by a mind that is not sufficiently instructed. Counsels may be very suitable for the particular circumstances envisaged by the author, but they may be useless or even harmful in other settings. The whole spiritual doctrine and attitude of mind proposed by a spiritual book may presuppose a more-than-average progress in self-abnegation and the supernatural spirit; if these are lacking, the reader will not escape unharmed if he tries to make his own that for which he is not yet prepared. This is confirmed by the Church's attitude towards the reading of the Sacred Scriptures, the author of which is the Holy Ghost Himself. She does not permit these sacred books to be put indiscriminately into the hands of all without explanation or caution. But the reasons adduced to show the wisdom of this Church ruling having even greater cogency when applied to the reading of mystical books. For these mystical writings, like our inspired books, were often written for men who lived in times and places very far-removed from the period and culture of the modern reader.

449 There are different kinds of books dealing with infused contemplation, and there are different kinds of readers.

There are books which deal with the lives of Saints and Servants of God, or with some particular part of spiritual teaching and which, among many other things, refer to or treat of infused contemplation as the occasion arises. Nothing special need be said here about books of this kind; the ordinary rules for reading spiritual books in general are sufficient guide. But there are other books which deal almost solely with the gifts of infused contemplation and similar Divine favors. To this class belong accounts of mystical experiences, the diaries and the lives of the contemplatives, e.g. of St. Catherine of Genoa, BL Angela of Foligno. Finally there are books which deal scientifically with the theological and psychological aspects of infused contemplation.

There are different types of readers, too; there are some who already enjoy infused contemplation, or who seem to have a proximate call thereto; there are others who have neither a proximate disposition nor show any sign of having a vocation to

contemplation; and there are others who are spiritual directors (confessors, ecclesiastical and religious superiors). As far as character goes, readers may be calm, prudent and level-headed, skilled in the affairs of the spiritual life, of sound culture, and humble; or, on the contrary, they may be hot-headed and undisciplined, lacking in experience, with vivid imaginations, curious about extraordinary things, not at all humble, too anxious about and preoccupied with self. Particular note should be taken of any tendency to spiritual "imitationism," which leads certain souls to imitate more or less unconsciously the interior states or phenomena they have seen described in books. (St. Francis de Sales cites a notable example of this in his *Spiritual Conferences*, IX.)

450 The study of books which deal with the theological and psychological aspects of infused contemplation is very useful and often necessary for directors of souls. For they should be able to recognize the infused gifts in souls, and they should also be able to understand these souls when they try to describe their experiences. This is all the more necessary since souls often cannot even begin to describe, or can describe only very haltingly, the favors they have received from God. Directors should be familiar with the theology and psychology of infused contemplation also in order that they may not believe too readily or be overawed by what they hear; in order that they may not impede the work of grace by ill-considered advice; in order that they may know how to direct contemplative souls and provide them with the assistance their state requires.

A study of infused contemplation is of great benefit to students of theology or philosophy and to educated men in general, since it enables them to see and admire the works of God in His children. As regards souls who have already received some of the graces of infused contemplation, it would seem that a study of mystical works would enable them to understand better and to describe more accurately their experiences, especially when they are undergoing the nights of purification.<sup>3</sup> It is true that souls who are troubled about their spiritual state are often greatly consoled when they learn from their reading that they have nothing to fear. Nevertheless, the necessary instruction and reassurance is usually more safely and efficaciously given in individual oral direction, which can be adapted to suit each case. The director should also tell souls of this type to read the actual writings of the contemplatives rather than speculative and systematic theological treatises on contemplation. For, in reading these treatises there is a danger that those who are called by God to contemplation may allow their simple docility under the Divine action to become tainted with a too-human anxiety about the nature of this action and about disputed the-

ological questions. Therefore it seems imprudent, and even irreverent towards the "secrets of the King," to ask simple nuns, for example, to use their mystical experiences to solve theological controversies, as is sometimes done. This would easily give rise to excessive self-analysis and introspection, vain self-complacency, auto-suggestion, and the "imitationism" we mentioned above.

451 The general rules governing the choice of spiritual reading apply also to reading the lives of contemplatives. But special attention should be paid to the way in which the author deals with his subject. Sometimes writers treat of practically nothing else except the delights of the contemplative life, whilst they pay little or no attention to the self-abnegation and the trials of the mystics. Sometimes, too, they lay more stress on visions, revelations, and other extraordinary phenomena than on union with God. In fact they often attribute nearly everything in the life of a mystic to supernatural interventions, and even invoke the supernatural to explain quite fortuitous events which do not warrant anything of the kind. Therefore those who are too much inclined to believe such things, or who are not sufficiently prudent and level-headed, should not be allowed to read books of this type, because they may not be able to discern and correct the errors and false emphasis. Provided that these precautions are taken, the reading of the lives of the contemplatives will be, very beneficial for many souls. It will spur them on to cultivate magnanimity, abnegation, and purity of heart, and it will give them a higher concept of the love of God and of His intimacy with His elect.

## C. Notes on the Direction of Contemplatives

### I. *The Different Types of Soul*

452 In relation to contemplation there are several different types of soul:

those who are on the path of infused contemplation strictly so called and who frequently, or even habitually, enjoy infused contemplation, be it arid or sweet;

those who have already experienced some, perhaps even many, touches of infused contemplation, but always transitorily and for brief moments only;

those who do not really possess infused contemplation but who think they do;

those who give signs of a proximate vocation to infused contemplation, or who are just starting to enter the way of contemplation.

## II. Classification

453 The first problem to be solved is, *How are we to ascertain the class to which any one soul belongs?*

A soul belongs to the last type mentioned above (those who are just beginning or are proximately called to infused contemplation) if it shows the three signs given by St. John of the Cross in his *Dark Night*, I, Ch. 9. (The three signs which he sets down in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, Chs. 13-14, follow the aim of the book and rather indicate when the soul may prudently pass, on its own initiative, from meditation to a contemplative form of prayer; whereas in the *Dark Night* the signs indicate strictly that the soul is being passively introduced into the way of infused contemplation.) The signs that concern us here are (1) aridity in regard to divine things coupled with disgust for all earthly things; (2) anxiety to serve God better, and fortitude in faithfully persevering in prayer; (3) continued and increasing inability to meditate. AH the more attention should be paid to these signs because, in the beginning of infused contemplation, the soul itself scarcely perceives the grace which is being infused into it by God, intermingled as this grace is with elements of acquired contemplation. Hence it can easily happen that, fearful lest the aridity be due to its own fault, the soul may try to return to meditation and so impede the Divine operation in it. It commonly happens that infused transitory "touches" cannot be easily distinguished from moments of deep recollection or intense consolation; for the most part, though, it is not necessary to distinguish between them. Such graces should rather be gratefully accepted as powerful aids to the service of God. The soul should try to draw all possible spiritual benefit from them but should not inquire curiously into their nature or degree.

454 Souls which are already on the path of infused contemplation can be discerned in accordance with the experimental characteristics of contemplation as briefly set forth above (par. 383; cf. Poulain, *op. cit.*, Chs. 5-14 for a more detailed account). These souls may adopt either of two attitudes—they may not ask, or even think, about infused contemplation, but simply give their director an account of their method of praying; or they may inquire into the nature of their prayer and may wish to know specifically whether or not it is mystical contemplation. In the first case, no advantage will be gained, ordinarily, by the director's bringing up the subject of infused contemplation. Instead, after he has ascertained the souls' state by prudent questioning, he should reassure them, since often they are more or less worried about their interior life. They should



be exhorted to confidence, conformity to the Will of God, docility under inspirations and impulses, gratitude and great esteem for the grace they have received. The director should also recommend suitable reading-matter. It is often hard to judge whether or not souls belong to the second class (those who have had some transitory experiences of infused contemplation), especially if they are very much taken up with contemplation and have read a lot about it. For, all unknown to them, their reading will affect the answers they give to the director's questions, and it may even influence their very experiences in prayer. Hence they should be interrogated indirectly only, and their prayer should be judged principally on its fruits. They should be exhorted to use faithfully the grace they have received, whether it be acquired or infused, of higher or lower degree. They should also be advised not to inquire anxiously about their state so long as they know God's Will concerning them.

Sometimes a person genuinely thinks that he has been granted infused contemplation, whereas in reality he is obviously laboring under an illusion—if, for example, his own descriptions of his state seem to indicate that he is in the higher stages of infused union, whilst his life is undoubtedly very mediocre and shows no signs of notable progress. In this case, if the director judges that the illusion is curable, he should treat the person kindly and gain his confidence. Then he should gradually reveal the truth of the situation to him, all the time encouraging and comforting him. If the illusion seems incurable, as can easily be the case where there are psychopathological elements, then the director should help the soul to sanctify itself as far as is possible in this state. Of course, he should not confirm the soul in its error, but, when dealing with it, he should prescind as far as he can from its idea that its graces are real, and he should try to use the false virtues as incentives to the true.

### III. *The Direction of Contemplatives*

- 455 When there is moral certainty or at least the greatest probability that a soul is in the path of infused contemplation, then it is the function of the director, here more than in any other state, to follow and not to outstrip the workings of grace; for God Himself undertakes the direction of the soul. But the director should (1) reassure the soul that it is on the right road\*\*and encourage it in the vicissitudes of the contemplative way; (2) solve the practical doubts which contemplative souls encounter; thus he can help the soul to avoid the illusions which occur even at this state of the spiritual life; (3) exhort it to the highest fidelity and purity of

heart, to full generosity and self-abnegation, to firm confidence in God and humble distrust of self.

456 The following points deserve special attention:

The director should not ask more questions than are necessary or useful for good direction. His attitude towards a contemplative soul should not be that of a doctor confronted with an interesting clinical case. A contemplative should not be regarded as a subject for examination and study. The director should always reverence the Divine secret which has been imparted to the soul. Of course, in his studies he can use the knowledge he derives from directing contemplative souls, so long as there is no danger of violating the seal of confession or of revealing a natural or committed secret. But, as a director, he may not inquire into the actual state of any particular soul just for the sake of adding to his knowledge.

In asking for *written accounts*, even more than in oral interrogation, the director should have in mind only the requirements of good direction. Contemplative souls often can reveal their spiritual state more easily and more clearly in writing than by word of mouth. Furthermore, the director can give closer attention to a written account than to a *viva voce* description; he can peruse it at his leisure and, if necessary, he can go over it again and again. He will also have time to formulate questions that will complete or clarify the description. Thus, written accounts are often very useful for good direction; but they should be short and confined to truly profitable matters. Contemplatives, like others, will derive spiritual benefit from noting the "lights" they receive from God, their spiritual thoughts or dispositions. But scarcely ever can the director prudently advise a soul to write long accounts of all the lights it has received or of visions or locutions, with a view to preserving them for the edification of the neighbor. If God wants to preserve the memory of these favors, He Himself will provide the appropriate means. A request for such an account has many disadvantages and dangers; the director cannot ask for it without showing wonder in one way or another, a thing he should always avoid.

457 Ordinarily it is not the duty of the director to *test* contemplative souls with harsh reprimands, contempt, humiliations, and the like. But he should not immediately grant them their requests as regards penances and prayers; instead, he may, and often must, command them to wait. To keep them humble he may seize the occasions that offer, e.g. when they admit some light fault. However, it is not usually fitting for the director to take on himself the duty of positively humbling and testing them; this should be left to God, and the director should merely assist in the Divine operation. There is

all the more reason for this since we cannot be sure that God will give souls the grace to bear these trials, and especially since our human hands are unable to perform aright the intimate and delicate work of purification.

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