

# The Light of Christ



## Trinity Prayer

Love of Jesus... Fill us.  
Holy Spirit... Guide us.  
Will of the Father... Be done.

**THE SPIRITUAL LIFE**  
**A TREATISE ON ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY**

by  
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**CONTEMPLATION** p.606

Infused or passive contemplation is a free gift from God in which the acts of the mind and of the will have become simplified under the influence of a special grace which takes hold of us and causes us to receive **lights** and affections which God produces in us with our consent. Infused contemplation may be at times of very short duration.

**EXCELLENCE OF THE GIFTS** p.612

Now, the gifts place us under the direct action of the Holy Spirit Who, living in our soul, enlightens our mind with his lights, points out clearly what we must do, enkindles our heart and strengthens our will to make us accomplish the good suggested. The moral and intellectual virtues precede the gifts.

**CLASSIFICATION OF THE GIFTS** p. 616

**Intellectual Gifts** strengthen the mind: knowledge, understanding, wisdom and counsel.

**Affective Gifts** strengthen the will: piety, strength and fear of the Lord.

**GIFTS AND THE VIRTUES** p.616

If we examine the gifts in relation to the special virtues they perfect:

- ❖ the gift of counsel perfects the virtue of prudence;
- ❖ the gift of piety perfects the virtue of religion as related to the virtue of justice;
- ❖ the gift of strength perfects the virtue of fortitude;
- ❖ the gift of fear perfects the virtue of temperance;
- ❖ the gifts of knowledge and understanding perfect the virtue of faith;
- ❖ the gift of fear is connected with the virtue of hope;
- ❖ and the gift of wisdom with that of charity.

## THE GIFT OF COUNSEL

The **light of the Holy Spirit** then shows us what must be done at the time, at the place, and in the circumstances in which we are, and, if we are charged with the direction of others, what advice we must give to them.

## MEANS OF CULTIVATING THE GIFT OF COUNSEL p.618

Further, we must accustom ourselves to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, **to judge all things by His light** without allowing ourselves to be influenced by human considerations, and to follow the least of His inspirations. Then, finding our soul open and docile, He will speak to the heart still more frequently.

## THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE p.p.624,625

With the gift of knowledge we come to treat of the three intellectual gifts which bear more directly upon contemplation; the gift of knowledge, which makes us form a sound judgment of creatures in their relation to God; the gift of understanding, which discloses to us the intimate relations which exist among revealed truths; the gift of wisdom which makes us appreciate, prize and relish these truths. The three possess this in common, that they furnish us with experimental or quasi-experimental knowledge; for, they acquaint us with things divine, not through any process of reasoning, but by means of a **higher light** which make us grasp them as though we had actual experience of them. This **light communicated to us by the Holy Spirit** is, no doubt, **the light of faith**, but it is now more active, more illuminating than it ordinarily is, and gives us a sort of intuition of these truths, similar to that which we have of first principles.

## THE NATURE OF THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE p.p. 625-626

The knowledge here is the *Science of the Saints*, whereby we rightly judge of creatures in their relation to God. Hence, we may define the gift of science as a gift which, by the illuminating action of the Holy Spirit, perfects the virtue of faith, and thereby gives us a knowledge of created things in their relation to God. The object of this gift of knowledge is therefore created things, inasmuch as they lead us to God. This gift of knowledge likewise enables us to perceive quickly and rightly what concerns our own sanctification and the sanctification of others.

Thus it enlightens us as to the state of our soul, as to its secret motions their source, their motives, and the effects that may result therefrom. It teaches us how to deal with others in view of their salvation. By it the preacher knows what he must say to his hearers in order to do them good; the spiritual director, how he must lead souls according to their particular spiritual needs and the attractions of grace, and this, in virtue of a **light that enables him to see into the depths of the heart**. This is the infused gift of discernment of spirits. Thus it was that some Saints, enlightened by Him who searches the hearts and reins, knew before the telling the most secret thoughts of their penitents.

## **THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE** p.p.624,625

Perception of the visible signs of the perfections of God in creation is restored through Jesus Christ to only those pure souls to whom faith reveals God's majesty wherever it appears... **This light of faith is properly called the Science of the Saints.** Without the instrumentality of the senses, without the aid of reason, it makes known to the soul the dependence of each creature upon God. This knowledge is acquired instantly and without labour. At a glance one discerns the cause of all things, and in each of these one finds food for prayer and for perpetual contemplation.

The gift of knowledge lifts us up from creatures unto God in order to unite us to Him: p. 633

1. It is accompanied by **an infused light** whereby we see clearly the nothingness of all that the world prizes, honours, riches, pleasures; the value of suffering and of humiliations as means of reaching God and of glorifying Him; the reflection of the divine perfections hidden in God's creatures.
2. This **light** is attended by a grace that acts upon the will in order to detach it from creatures and to aid it in using them solely as steps by which to attain God.

## **CULTIVATION OF THE GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING** p.p.628,629

The main disposition to obtain this gift is a lively and simple faith which humbly implores **divine light**, the better to lay hold of revealed truth: "Give me understanding, and I will learn thy commandments."

The gift of understanding shows us the hidden harmony that exists between our soul and God, between revealed truths and our deepest aspirations, as well as the relations existing among those truths themselves; it centres our hearts and our minds upon God's intimate life, upon His immanent operations, upon the mysteries of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, of grace, and makes us contemplate them in themselves and in their mutual relations in such a way that it is hard to turn our hearts and minds from them.

## **THE NATURE OF THE GIFT OF WISDOM** p. 629

Wisdom is a gift which perfects the virtue of charity, and which resides at once in the intellect and in the will, since **it infuses light and love** into the soul. Hence, it is rightly considered as the most perfect of all the gifts, the one which embodies all the others, just as charity embodies all the virtues.

**St. Bernard** calls this gift the knowledge which relishes things divine. The gift of wisdom therefore contains a twofold element:

1. **a light** which illumines the mind, and enables it to judge aright of God and of created things by relating them to their first principle and last end; and
2. a supernatural taste which acts upon the will and enables it to relish divine things as by a sort of natural attraction. It is like the sunbeam, **a ray of light illuminating and delighting the eyes of the soul, and a ray that warms the heart, inflames it with love, and fills it with joy.**

Wisdom may be defined as a gift which perfects the virtue of charity by enabling us to discern God and divine things in their ultimate principles, and by giving us a relish for them. Wisdom perfects all the other virtues. Wisdom is an experience undergone by the heart. Understanding comes from **light** and wisdom comes from love, for God is love.

**When light and love combine there is wisdom.** Wisdom refers all to God. Truths are seen to begin and end in God. Learn to relish divine things for God is Infinite Beauty and Infinite Goodness.

With wisdom, the mind contemplates the unfathomable depths of things in their relationship to God. Enlightened reason knows full well that the things considered, the incomprehensible delights contemplated, must ever escape its knowledge; for the consideration of them is made by the aid of a created **light**, while its joys know no bounds. **This is why reason fails in this consideration; but the intellect, which is transformed by this marvellous light, contemplates and finds the incomprehensible bliss of beatitude.**

#### **THE FIVE SPIRITUAL SENSES** p. 635

Thus, the spiritual senses of sight and of hearing refer to the gift of understanding, which makes us see God and things divine, and hear God speaking to our heart. The other three senses refer to the gift of wisdom which causes us to relish God, to breathe the fragrance of his perfections, and to enter into contact with him by a sort of spiritual embrace which is nothing else than an experimental love of God.

#### **THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** p.p. 635, 636

The actual graces inspire acts of virtue first imperfectly and then more perfectly and with greater relish, so that the heart is filled with holy joy. Thus, the fruits of the Holy Spirit may be defined as the acts of virtue which reach a degree of perfection and fill the soul with holy joy. St. Paul enumerates nine such fruits: charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, faith, mildness and temperance. The fruits are any virtuous

deeds in which one delights. The cultivation of the virtues and the gifts eventuate in the attainment of the fruits of the Spirit and through these the beatitudes, which are a prelude to eternal bliss.

### **THE BEATITUDES** p. 636

The beatitudes are fruits of the Spirit of such mature perfection that they seem to flow from the gifts rather than the virtues and provide a foretaste of heavenly happiness.

On the Sermon on the Mount Our Lord reduces them to eight:

poverty of spirit (humility),

meekness,

tears,

hunger and thirst for justice,

mercy,

purity of heart,

and patience in the midst of persecution. These beatitudes do not connote perfect bliss but rather effective means of reaching eternal happiness. One follows in the footsteps of Our Lord in carrying our cross through suffering and making the self obedient to the will of God. This leads to union in God through the imitation of His divine perfections. The beatitudes impart to our soul that docility, that enables the Holy Spirit to take possession of it and to act there in with perfect freedom.

### **THE PRAYER OF SIMPLICITY**

The Carmelites call this *acquired contemplation* to distinguish it from infused contemplation.

**Bossuet:** Now, the prayer of simplicity consists in a simple view, regard, or loving thought, directed towards some divine object.

This prayer has two aspects— **contemplation and love**. Fix the eyes upon the host in the monstrance. Affirm:

“Come Lord Jesus” or “Maranatha”

or “Jesus, fill my heart”

or “I love you, Jesus”

or “Come Holy Spirit.”

**Bossuet:** One must accustom oneself to nourish the soul by a simple, loving gaze on God and on Jesus Christ; to attain this result one must gently free the soul from reasonings, from arguments and from the multitude of affections, in order to keep it simple, respectful and attentive and thus have it draw closer and closer to God, its first principle and last end.

The fervent soul fixes its gaze upon God, remains in His presence, yields itself to His action, and through a simple and unreasoned faith, gazes upon God and loves Him. When the vision of God appears, often in the form of light or inner locution in one's awareness, the simple affirmation is no longer needed. That is, the **Prayer of Simplicity** leads one to infused contemplation.

You realize your self to be the temple of the all loving God. The soul beholds the Triune Godhead with the keenest joy and delights in the bliss of God's presence and the soul finds unspeakable rest, seeing all longings fulfilled in so far as they can be upon this earth; for what greater thing can the soul long and hope for than the possession of God?

The process of simplification soon extends to our whole life. Study and works of zeal are done in the spirit of prayer, under the eye of God, with the ardent wish of glorifying Him: "To the greater glory of God." Each act then becomes a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to the will of God.

#### **ADVANTAGES TO THE PRAYER OF SIMPLICITY** p. 640

Our whole life has a unity of purpose making it more and more like unto God's own life for the greater glory of God and for the spiritual welfare of the soul. God is glorified during the entire day. Our soul becomes sanctified by loving God more intensely. Detachment becomes easier as all things urge us to rise to the Source of all good. Humility also becomes easier: by the divine light, we clearly see our nothingness and our sins, and we rejoice at being able, by the humble avowal of our faults, to give glory to Him Who alone is worthy of all honour and glory. Instead of preferring ourselves to others, we consider ourselves as the worst of sinners, ready to suffer out of love all kinds of trials and humiliations.

**St. Teresa of Avila:** In reality the soul does not remain idle: it reasons no longer, but it gazes on God, loves and praises Him, and gives itself to Him, and if it remains silent for a moment, it is in order to listen to Him; if God ceases to speak, it takes at once to its own pious affections, and so is never idle.

#### **THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PRAYER OF SIMPLICITY & INFUSED CONTEMPLATION & SPIRITUAL REST** p. 646

The prayer of simplicity disposes the soul for infused contemplation, that it disposes the soul docile to the action of the Holy Spirit. The Divine Goodness then may take possession of the soul in order to produce a still deeper state of recollection, a simpler insight, a more intense love. This is the state of spiritual rest, a passive state wherein God becomes the sole Master of our inner life and wherein He operates more particularly and the soul receives during it wonderful graces. **The Holy Spirit sheds a powerful light upon the mind and inflames the will with love.** It is a simple, loving, protracted gaze on God and things divine, under the influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and of a special actual grace which takes possession of us and cause us to act in a passive rather than in an active manner.

**St. Teresa of Avila p.650:** “Our Lord is pleased to make the soul mount higher and higher towards Him; then he catches this little dove and places it in and, there to repose.”

**Venerable Louis de Blois p.p.652, 653:** The soul goes out of itself in order to pass wholly into God and be lost in the abyss of eternal love. The soul divests itself of all that is human to order to be clothed by God, to be changed and transformed by God. Heretofore there was but coldness in this soul, from now on it is all aflame; from darkness it has passed into the most radiant brightness; once insensible, it is now all tenderness... All consumed by the flame of divine love and wholly melted thereby, it passes into God by uniting it's left to him without any intermediary; it forms but one spirit with Him, just as gold and brass fuse to form one metal. Those that are thus ravished and lost in God reach different heights, for each one penetrates further into the divine depths in proportion as he turns towards God with greater sincerity, earnestness and love, and as he foregoes more completely in this quest all personal interest. Only divine favour enables the soul to reach such high states even though all are called to contemplation.

### **INFUSED CONTEMPLATION p. 655**

In contemplation there is a mixture of joy and sadness: unspeakable joy in relishing the Presence of the Divine Host, sadness at not having complete possession of Him.

One experiences an intense love for God which one experiences but knows not how to describe. p. 656

The soul is led, acted upon, moved, directed by the Holy Spirit and does not lead itself, move itself, or direct itself, though it preserves its freedom and activity. p. 658

By causing us to experience the infinite transcendence of God, infused contemplation abases our whole being before His majesty, causes us to praise and bless Him. This Divine Grandeur holds us in awe, in ravished astonishment, in admiration and worship before it in each moment of our life. p. 658

Each attribute of God experienced is God Himself and as God is infinite light, and infinite divine fire, it follows that **each attribute gives light and burns as God Himself.** p. 659

The soul loves God through Him, that is, upon the receipt of God's love the soul is enabled to love with God's gift of love. The soul loves God within His love. Love urges on their mind to the ever more attentive contemplation of the beloved beauty, and the sight impels the heart to love it evermore ardently.

**This love is attended by the moral virtues of humility, conformity to God's will, purity of heart, purity of mind, purity of intention, piety, lively faith, religious silence, mental affective prayer, detachment from things leading to sin, of holy filial abandonment in God's will, an ardent and generous love**— thereby producing joy and peace of spirit even in the very midst of the trials, terrible at times, which mystics undergo. p. 660

The soul is made thereby much more holy. **Contemplation produces so much light, so much love, and so much virtue that it is rightly called a royal road to perfection.** It enables us to know God in an effable and highly sanctifying way. p. 659

**St. John Of The Cross:** The purer and more radiant is **spiritual light**, the less it is perceived, so much so that the soul believes it finds itself in darkness; if on the contrary it be charged with some intelligible forms, it is more easily discerned, and the soul thinks itself better enlightened. p. 665

### **TO WHOM DOES GOD GRANT CONTEMPLATION?** p.p. 662, 663

God grants contemplation to whom He wills, when He wills, and in the way He wills. Usually however, He bestows it only upon souls well prepared for it by:

- ❖ above all humility  
(unworthy, awe in God's glory)
- ❖ desiring detachment from the things of this world
- ❖ practice of the virtues
- ❖ affective mental prayer
- ❖ great purity of the heart  
(avoidance of sin)
- ❖ great purity of the mind  
(loving gaze on God)
- ❖ purity of intention  
(good of all souls & holy filial abandonment to the will of God)
- ❖ lively faith

(continued...)

- ❖ religious silence  
(prayerful)
- ❖ ardent and generous love  
(self-immolation and joyous acceptance of all trials)

It is well to note that discursive meditation is imperative as long as the soul has not acquired the habit of contemplation. Contemplation demands schooling for a long time in the virtues. Besides, one must fully realize that if contemplation procures unspeakable joys, it is also attended by terrible trials which only strong souls can withstand, God's grace helping.

### **THE PHASES OF CONTEMPLATION** p.666

The various degrees of mystic union are marked by a greater and greater hold of God on the soul.

1. When He takes possession of the subtle point of the soul, letting the lower faculties and the senses free to exercise their natural activity, we have the *prayer of quiet*.
2. When He seizes all the interior faculties, leaving merely the exterior senses to their own activity, we have the *full union*.
3. If He takes possession at the same time of the interior faculties and of the exterior senses, we have *ecstatic union* (spiritual espousals).
4. Lastly, once He extends His hold over all the internal and external faculties and this, no longer in a transitory manner, but in a stable and permanent fashion, we have the *spiritual marriage*.

Thus,

1. **Quietude: arid form / sweet form**
2. **Full Union**
3. **Ecstatic Union: sweet form / crucifying form**
4. **Transforming Union or Spiritual Marriage**

## **ARID QUIETUDE OR DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL: ARIDITIES OR PASSIVE TRIALS SENT BY GOD**

p.p. 667- 673

- ❖ faint light of contemplation
- ❖ decreased discursive reasoning
- ❖ longs for solitude and quiet without the power of reflecting distinctly, on anything or ever desiring to do so
- ❖ soul senses its unworthiness and its loathsomeness
- ❖ find no comfort in the things of God or created things
- ❖ the soul feels it is not serving God because it feels no sweetness in the things of God
- ❖ inability to meditate or make reflections
- ❖ painful, persistent longing for a more intimate union with God
- ❖ temptations against faith; feeling nothing, it imagines that it believes nothing
- ❖ temptations against hope; deprived of consolations, the soul believes itself abandoned, and is tempted to weariness and discouragement
- ❖ temptations against chastity; to some is sent the tool of Satan, the spirit of impurity to buffet them with horrible and violent temptations of the flesh, to trouble their minds with filthy thoughts, and their imaginations with representations of sin most vividly depicted; at times becomes an affliction more grievous than death.
- ❖ temptations against patience; amidst all this weariness, the soul is tempted to complain of others or of self; blasphemous thoughts present themselves to the imagination in such a vivid manner that the tongue seems to utter them
- ❖ temptations against peace of soul; obsessed by a thousand scruples and perplexities, the soul becomes so enmeshed in its own ideas that it can follow no advice nor yield to any reasoning; this is source of the most intense pain.
- ❖ one suffers from the repeated and varied prosecutions of unbelievers and at times by friends and superiors who do not understand one's failures
- ❖ one becomes prey to strange ailments
- ❖ one cannot succeed as one did before because of the helplessness one finds oneself within or because of interior sufferings
- ❖ temporal losses occur which brings about a precarious situation
- ❖ one feels stupid and others become aware of it

These aridities are recognized by their suddenness, by their keenness and by the good effects they produce in the soul.

## **ADVANTAGES OF THIS ARID PURIFICATION** p.p.671-673

To be introduced into passive contemplation, even though it is dark and painful, is already a great benefit.

1. The experimental knowledge of self and one's miseries: "The soul counts itself for nothing, having no satisfaction in itself, because it sees of itself it does and can do nothing. ... The soul learns to commune with God with more respect and reverence, always necessary in converse with the Most High.
2. The knowledge of God becomes purer and truer, and the love for Him more independent of feeling. The soul no longer seeks for consolation: it wants but to please God: .... Herein consists that holy fear by which virtues are preserved and grow.
3. The soul is thereby cured of the capital sins in their more refined form.

**3.1** The soul now practices humility, not only towards God, but also towards the neighbour:...

**3.2** It practices spiritual sobriety: since it can no longer feed upon sensible consolations, it gradually detaches itself from them, as well as from all created things, in order to concern itself solely with eternal goods; this is the beginning of spiritual peace which before was disturbed by consolations and attachment to creatures. In the midst of this peace the soul exercises itself in fortitude, patience and longanimity, by persevering in practices which offer neither consolation nor attraction.

**3.3** With regard to spiritual vices, such as envy, anger, sloth, the soul rids itself of them and acquires the contrary virtues: having become docile and humble under the influence of aridities and temptations, it becomes more tolerant with itself and with others; charity displaces envy because humility causes the soul to admire the qualities of others; and the better it sees its own faults, the more it feels constrained to labour and exert itself in order to correct them.

4. Lastly, God seasons these aridities with a certain amount of spiritual consolation. When the soul least expects it, He gives it vivid intellectual lights and a pure love.

To sum up, these aridities make the soul advance in the pure love of God: it no longer acts under the influence of consolations, and its only wish is to please God. No more the presumption and vain complacency of former days of sensible fervour; no longer those impetuous actions, those over-ardent and natural aspirations! Spiritual peace has already begun to reign in the heart.

Jesus said, ***"My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."***

(Matthew

26:39, Luke 22:43)

***Be content to keep a loving and peaceful gaze on God.***

## **SWEET QUIETUDE** p. 675

It is here for the first time the presence of God is felt by a kind of spiritual delight wherein the soul ceases to reason.

The *Prayer of Silence* has as it were three distinct phases:

- 1. passive recollection;**
- 2. quietude properly so called;**
- 3. the sleep of the faculties,** which completes it and prepares it for the full union of the faculties.

### **1. PASSIVE RECOLLECTION**

Passive recollection is gained... by a direct action of divine grace upon our faculties. .... In this state the senses and faculties are not suspended; they remain in the soul's possession, but they so remain in order to be applied to God. Passive recollection may therefore be defined as a gentle and affectionate absorption of the mind and the heart in God, produced by a special grace of the Holy Spirit. ...Let the soul enjoy it without the interference of its own efforts, limiting itself to the utterance of some few words of love.

When His Divine Majesty wishes the understanding to leave off discoursing, he employs it in another way, and gives it a light and knowledge so far above what we can arrive at, that He makes it to remain absorbed. p.676, 677

### **2. QUIETUDE PROPERLY SO CALLED** p. 677

In this prayer the higher faculties of the soul, the intellect and the will, are seized by God and made to enjoy a very gentle repose and a very keen joy at His Presence; but the understanding, the memory and the imagination remain free and are at times a source of distraction. ... They are so inebriated and absorbed with the delight and satisfaction contained therein, that they remember not that there is anything more to desire; ... The will alone is held captive but the imagination and understanding may roam. ... The divine delights experienced come directly from the action of God. Whereas the joys or consolations of active prayer come from our activity aided by grace.

The divine delights of sweet quietude are caused to flow by God from our inmost soul, with great peace and calm and gentleness... such that the soul loses all craving for the things of earth. The principle cause of this joy felt is the presence of God felt. This dilation of the heart produces excellent virtuous dispositions, particularly a fear of offending God (which replaces the fear of hell), love of penance and of crosses, humility, contempt for worldly joysp.678;

From this description one may conclude that quietude is a supernatural state of prayer, not wholly passive, which is produced in the superior part of the soul and causes the latter to feel and relish God present within it. p. 679

## **ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF QUIETUDE** p.p. 679, 680

Generally speaking, this form of prayer is granted to souls that are already accustomed to meditation for a notable period of time, and have passed through the night of the senses. Still, it is sometimes preceded by the latter, especially in the case of children or innocent souls who have no need of a special purification.

As long as the purification of the soul is not completed, quietude may occur alternately in its sweet or in its arid form. A time comes when quietude becomes habitual: then one enters into it from the moment one begins to pray. At times one is even seized by it unawares, even in the midst of the most common place occupations. It also tends to become stronger and more conscious, and if the soul corresponds with grace, it develops into the full union and ecstasy. But if the soul is not faithful, it may fail and fall back into discursive meditation, or even suffer the loss of grace.

## **FORMS OR VARIETIES OF QUIETUDE** p.680

There are three principal forms: silent, praying and active quietude.

**In silent quietude**, the soul contemplates God in the midst of a loving stillness, admiration so to speak stifling every utterance. The will immersed in God and burning with love for Him, rests joyfully in Him through a union that is calm, tranquil and sweet.

At times the soul unable to contain its love, pours itself forth in ardent prayer. This is **praying quietude**: now it gives vent to sweet colloquies, now it abandons itself to the effusions of its tenderness and calls upon all creatures to praise God: .... Sometimes God responds to such outbursts of love with affectionate caresses, which produce a species of spiritual inebriation,.... an heavenly intoxication “renders us more alive to spiritual things by alienating the corporal senses; it does not reduce us to a level with brute creation, but renders us participators of the angelic, and even of the divine nature; it transports us out of ourselves to elevate us above ourselves.” – *St. Teresa of Avila*

There are cases when the quietude becomes active. When the quietude is profound and prolonged, says **St. Teresa of Avila**, (since the will alone is held captive), the other faculties are free to attend to things relating to God’s service; and this they do with far greater energy. Then, while the soul is engaged in exterior works, it continues to love God ardently: this is the union of action and contemplation, of the service of Martha and the love of Mary.

### **3. THE SLEEP OF THE FACULTIES** p. 681

This third phase of quietude is a still higher form of prayer which prepares for the full union of the interior faculties with God.

**St. Teresa of Avila:** ... Almighty God is very often pleased to bestow this favour upon me in such a manner, that He makes my will and also my understanding recollected; and then it no longer discourses, but is occupied in the enjoyment of God, as one who is looking on, and who sees so much, and so also seems to be the imagination: and when it sees itself alone one cannot conceive what a war it (the imagination) makes upon the will and the understanding, and how it endeavours to put everything in confusion. .... To overcome such wanderings of the imagination, she notes, "To consider the memory no better than a madman, and to leave it alone with its madness, for God can check its extravagances." As one can see, this is a prayer of quiet, in which the understanding itself is seized by God, but in which the imagination continues to wander. It is a preparation for the full union.

### **THE COURSE TO FOLLOW DURING THE PRAYER OF QUIET** p.p.681,682

The general disposition to be fostered in this state is that of humble abandonment into the hands of God from the very beginning to the end and throughout all the phases of this prayer. ....

As soon as one is aware of the divine action, one must adapt oneself to it as perfectly as possible, giving up reflection and following the motions of grace with great docility. ....

If we are called to the state of loving silence, let us contemplate and love uttering not a word, or at the most a few tender words, in order to rekindle the flame of love, but without making any violent efforts that might extinguish it. ....

If the understanding and the imagination wander, let us not be disturbed; let us not go in pursuit of them; let the will remain in the enjoyment of the favour which has been granted it.

## **THE PRAYER OF FULL UNION** p. 682

This prayer is simple union or full union of the interior faculties, because in it the soul is united to God, not only through the will, but also through all the interior faculties.

## **NATURE OF THE PRAYER OF UNION** p.682

Its essential characteristics are two: the suspension of all the faculties, and the absolute certitude that God is present in the soul.

**St. Teresa of Avila:** .... “In other words, not only the will, but the understanding, the imagination, and the memory are suspended in their functions. God so fixes Himself in the interior of this soul, that when she comes to herself, she cannot but believe she was in God and that God was in her. This truth is so deeply rooted in her, that though many years may pass away before God bestows the like favour upon her,, she never forgets it or doubts it.”

There is: p. 683

1. The absence of distractions, since the whole soul is entirely absorbed in God.
2. The absence of fatigue: personal effort is reduced to very little; to abandon oneself to the good pleasure of God suffices.
3. An extraordinary abundance of joy. In this degree one feels nothing, one but enjoys, though yet without understanding what is enjoyed. All the senses are occupied with this joy in such a manner that they cannot apply themselves to anything else, either interiorly or exteriorly....”
4. There is the absence of the sense of time.

We may define it as a most intimate union of the soul with God, accompanied by the suspension of all the interior faculties, and of the certitude of God’s presence within the soul.

## **EFFECTS OF THE PRAYER OF UNION** p.p. 683,684

The principal effect is a marvellous transformation of the soul which, according to St. Teresa of Avila, can be compared to the metamorphosis of the silkworm. .... This soul which before feared the Cross, now feels full of generosity, and is ready to make the most painful sacrifices for God’s sake.

**St. Teresa of Avila:**

- † ardent zeal which spurs the soul on to glorify God to make Him known and loved by all;
- † the detachment from creatures; whereby the soul goes so far as to desire to quit this world where God is offended so often;
- † the perfect submission to the will of God, whereby the soul offers no more resistance to grace than does soft wax to the seal impressed upon it;
- † the great charity towards the neighbour, which is manifested by deeds, and which causes the soul to rejoice at the praises conferred upon others.

**St. Teresa of Avila** urges those in this state to make progress in the way of detachment and love.

## **ECSTATIC UNION (SPIRITUAL ESPOUSAL) p.684**

This union presents itself in two forms; **the sweet and the bitter.**

### **SWEET ECSTATIC UNION**

There is the suspension of the activity of the exterior senses.

### **NATURE OF THE ECSTATIC UNION p.p.684,685**

There are two elements which constitutes this union: the absorption of the soul in God and the suspension of the activity of the senses.

#### **St. Francis de Sales: ...**

Moreover, admiration grows through love, and love through admiration.

The predominate features of this kind of rapture are not knowledge, sublime visions, admiration and speculative science, but affection, sensible consolation and enjoyment.

It is not surprising that a soul thus given to the contemplation and the love of God, is as it were out of itself, ravished and borne towards Him. If one who lets himself be carried away by the passion of human love goes so far as to abandon all in order to yield himself to the object of his love, is there any cause for wonder if divine love, impressed upon a soul by God Himself, so absorbs it that it comes to forget all else in order to behold and to love Him alone? p.685

### **THE SUSPENSION OF SENSES p.685**

An insensitivity more or less sets together with a slowing down of the physical life, of breathing, and as a consequence of the natural body heat– with a gentleness and delight that are unspeakable. A sort of immobility ensues which causes the body to preserve the attitude in which it was when seized by the ecstasy; the eyes remain fixed upon some invisible object. As one awakens there is fatigue followed by a recrudescence of vigour. At times, the suspension of the senses is complete; at other times, it remains incomplete and permits a narration of the revelation received, as can be seen in the life of St. Catherine of Siena. The interior senses are completely suspended. Free will still remains. The duration of the ecstasy varies greatly. Complete ecstasy can last but a few moments, but incomplete ecstasy can last several days. Return to normal sensing is accompanied with a kind of anguish as though one were returning from another world. The verbal command of a superior will awaken the individual, but a mental command may not.

## **THE THREE PHASES OF ECSTATIC UNION** p. 686

There are three principal phases in ecstasy: *simple ecstasy, rapture and the flight of the spirit.*

**Simple ecstasy** is kind of fainting spell in which the soul is delightfully wounded, but she neither knows how, nor by whom. In this phase supernatural utterances and revelations occur. p.686

**Rapture** takes hold of the soul with an impetuosity and a violence that are irresistible. Once the rapture is over, the will remains as it were inebriated, and can no longer occupy itself save with God; disgusted with the things of earth, it has an insatiable desire to do penance, so much so that it complains in the absence of suffering. p.687

**Flight of the spirit** is so impetuous that it seems to sever the soul from the body, and resistance appears impossible. p. 687

## **PRINCIPLE EFFECTS OF ECSTATIC UNION** p. 687

The one effect which includes all others is a great holiness of life, even to the point of heroism.

The principal virtues produced by the ecstatic union are:

1. a perfect detachment from creatures;
2. an immense sorrow for sins committed: what pains it most is not the fear of hell, but that of offending God
3. frequent and tender vision of Our Lord's Sacred Humanity and of the Most Blessed Virgin; imaginative and intellectual visions become more numerous and complete the work of detaching the soul from creatures and of burying it in humility
4. a marvellous patience to withstand courageously the new passive trials which Almighty God sends, and which are called the purification of love.

Burning with the desire to see God, the soul feels as if it were pierced through and through by a fiery dart, and cries out in anguish at seeing itself separated from the sole Object of its love. This is the beginning of a veritable martyrdom, a martyrdom of soul and body, accompanied by an ardent desire to die so as never to be separated from the Well-Beloved, a martyrdom relieved at times by inebriating delights.

## **THE NIGHT OF THE SOUL** p.688

To be united to God in a manner so intimate and lasting as one is in the transforming union or spiritual marriage, one must necessarily be free from the last remaining imperfections. These are habitual and actual imperfections.

## **HABITUAL IMPERFECTIONS** p.p. 688,689

imperfect affections and habits... friendships a bit too ardent; a certain dullness of mind which makes one subject to distractions from within and to attractions from without

## **ACTUAL IMPERFECTIONS** p. 689

1. a certain pride, a vain self-complacency resulting from the abundance of spiritual consolations received
2. over-boldness towards God causing one to lose that reverential fear of Him which is the safeguard of all virtue

## **TRIALS OF THE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT** p. 689

In order to purify and reform the soul, God leaves the mind in darkness, the will in aridity, the memory in forgetfulness, and the affections immersed in pain and anguish. This purification says **St. John of the Cross**, through the light of infused contemplation, a light bright in itself, but dim and painful to the soul on account of the latter's ignorance and impurity.... This light shows on one hand the greatness and the holiness of God, and on the other the nothingness and the misery of man. The soul sees itself deprived of all joy, and becomes convinced that this state will last forever. The soul imagines itself to be not loved by God and to be justly forsaken by Him. This is the anguish of spiritual dereliction. In this state prayer is quite impossible, or it is amidst such aridity that it seems that God does not give ear. This state is a sort of hell by reason of the torture experienced; it is sort of purgatory by reason of the purification effected.

## HAPPY RESULTS OF THE PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL p.690

### St. John of the Cross:

1. An ardent love for God; God makes the soul aware of its love and then it is ready to dare all things in order to please Him.
2. A piercing **light**: at first this **light** revealed to the soul only its miseries and thus inflicted pain; but once imperfections have been eliminated through sorrow, it reveals the riches to be gained and thus becomes a source of consolation.
3. A great sense of security; for this **light** preserves the soul from pride, the great obstacle to salvation. It shows the soul that it is God Himself Who leads it, and that the suffering He sends is more profitable than joy would be. Lastly this **light** places in the will the firm determination to do nothing that might offend God, to neglect nothing God redounds to His glory.
4. A marvellous strength to strive towards attaining divine love.

## THE TRANSFORMING UNION OR SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE p.691

The soul reaches the calm and abiding transforming union which seems to be the final goal of the mystic union, the immediate preparation for the **Beatific Vision**.

## NATURE OF THE TRANSFORMING UNION p. 691

**St. John of the Cross:** Its chief characteristics are intimacy, serenity, and indissolubility.

### 1 INTIMACY

Because this union is more intimate than the others it is called spiritual marriage. There is a blending of God and the soul

### 2. SERENITY

There are no more ecstasies or raptures, or at least very few; these have now disappeared almost completely in order to make room for such peace and quiet rest as are enjoyed by married persons who are sure of each other's love.

### 3. INDISSOLUBILITY

The other unions were but transitory; the present one by its very nature is permanent, just as is the bond of Christian marriage.

Does this indissolubility imply impeccability? On this point **St. John of the Cross** and **St. Teresa of Avila** differ. .... **St. Teresa** says, "... the soul is secure as long as the Divine Majesty holds her (the soul) in His hand, and she does not offend Him.....

It seems to us that **St. Teresa's** language is more in harmony with that of theology, which teaches that the grace of final perseverance cannot be merited; in order to be assured of salvation therefore, one would need a special revelation bearing not only on the actual state of grace, but also on perseverance in this state until death.

## THE BEATIFIC VISION

The description given by St. Teresa includes two apparitions, one of Our Lord and the other of the Blessed Trinity. p. 692

### A. THE VISION OF OUR LORD

It is Jesus who introduces the soul into this last mansion by a twofold vision: one imaginative, the other intellectual. It is Jesus who introduces the soul into this last mansion by a twofold vision: one imaginative, the other intellectual.

In an **imaginative vision** which took place after Holy Communion, He appeared to the Saint “in a figure of great splendour, beauty and majesty, just as he was after His resurrection.”

**St. Teresa of Avila:** *“He said to her that now was the time she should consider His affairs as hers, and that he would take care of hers... From henceforth you shall guard my honour, not only because I am your Creator, your King and your God, but yet because you are my true spouse. My honour is your honour and your honour mine!”*

Then follows the **intellectual vision:**

**St. Teresa of Avila:** *“That which God here communicates to the soul in an instant is so great a secret, and so sublime a grace, and what she feels such an excessive delight, that I know nothing to compare it to, except that Our Lord is pleased at that moment to manifest to her the glory which is in heaven; and this He does in a more sublime way than by any vision or spiritual delight. More cannot be said (as far as can be understood) than that this soul becomes one with God.”*

### B. THE VISION OF THE BLESSED TRINITY

**St. Teresa of Avila:** Once the soul has been introduced into this mansion, the Three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity manifest themselves to it in an intellectual vision, and they come directly upon it as in a cloud of extraordinary brightness. The Three Divine Persons manifest themselves as distinct, and by a wonderful communication of knowledge, the soul sees with absolute certitude that all Three Persons are but one substance, one power, one knowledge, one God.

## **THE VISION OF THE BLESSED TRINITY** (continued)

“Hence what we behold with faith, the soul here (as one may say) understands by sight, though this sight is not with the eyes of the body, because it is not an imaginative vision. All the Three Persons here communicate themselves to her, and speak to her, and make her understand those words mentioned in the Gospel, where Our Lord said that He, and the Father, and the Holy Spirit would come and dwell with the soul that loves him and keeps his commandments! *O my Lord! What a different thing is the hearing and believing of these words from understanding in this way how true they are!* Such a soul is every day more astonished, because these words never seem to depart from her; but she clearly sees (in the manner above mentioned) that they are in the deepest recesses of the soul (how it is, she cannot express, since she is not learned) and she perceives this divine company in herself.”

## **EFFECTS OF THE TRANSFORMING UNION** p. 693

The soul is so transformed that it forgets self and thinks only of God and His glory.

Whence follows:

1. **A holy abandonment into the hands of God** in virtue of which the soul is supremely indifferent to all that is not of God. ....
2. **An insatiable thirst for suffering**, but devoid of anxiety and in perfect conformity with the will of God: If He wishes them to suffer they are content; if not, they do not torment themselves about it, as they used to do at other times.  
.....
3. **The absence of desire and of interior sufferings...**
4. **The absence of raptures.....** In this Temple of God, for this mansion is His, He and the soul sweetly enjoy each other in the most profound silence. There is peace and perfect serenity.
5. **An ardent, yet discreet zeal for the sanctification of souls.** The soul has such great mortification, humility, service, a great charity for all, a great love for Our Lord that this fire inflames every one, and you are continually exciting them by the practice of your other virtues. Such little works must be inspired by love.

*Our Lord  
does not pay so much regard  
to the greatness of the works, as to the love  
whereby they are performed.*