

## Chapter 12

### Grades of Prayer

**We are indebted to St. Teresa of Avila for the clearest and best classification of the grades of prayer.** Her concept that the intensity of one's life of prayer coincides with the intensity of one's charity is based on solid theology and was confirmed by St. Pius X, who stated that the grades of prayer taught by St. Teresa represent so many grades of elevation and ascent toward Christian perfection.[\(1\)](#)

**These grades are (1) vocal prayer, (2) meditation, (3) affective prayer, (4) prayer of simplicity, (5) infused contemplation, (6) prayer of quiet, (7) prayer of union, (8) prayer of conforming union, and (9) prayer of transforming union. The first four grades of prayer belong to the predominantly ascetical stage of the spiritual life; the remaining five grades are infused prayer and belong to the mystical phase of the spiritual life.**

#### Vocal Prayer

Although we classify the grades of prayer under the headings of ascetical and mystical, there may be mystical prayer in the early stages of the spiritual life, and there may be a return to ascetical activity on the part of souls who are well advanced in mystical ways. Hence **what is meant by ascetical and mystical signifies that which is predominant and not that which is exclusive.** Little remains to be said concerning vocal prayer, since much of what we have already written concerning the prayer of petition applies to the first grade of prayer.

By vocal prayer we mean any form of prayer expressed in words, whether written or spoken. This kind of prayer is the form used in public or liturgical prayer, but it is also much used by private individuals. **St. Thomas gives three reasons why vocal prayer is suitable: (1) it arouses interior devotion; (2) it gives homage to God with our body as well as our mind and heart; and (3) it gives expression to the spiritual sentiments that flood the soul in prayer.**[\(2\)](#)

We should observe that vocal prayer is not restricted to prayer of petition (although petition would surely be included); it likewise includes adoration, thanksgiving, contrition, and all the other sentiments an individual experiences in relation to God. We want to emphasize especially the use of vocal prayer as a means of arousing one's devotion or of giving expression to one's love of God, because this **leads to the higher forms of prayer: discursive meditation and affective prayer.**

It should also be noted that vocal prayer as the public liturgical prayer of the people of God gives greater glory to God than does private prayer and has a greater efficacy because it is the prayer of the Christian community. Yet, considering the one who prays, the Christian most perfect in love is the one who prays most perfectly.

**The two requirements for vocal prayer are attention and devotion.** What we have said concerning the attention required for prayer of petition applies here also; we would merely add

that attention may be actual or virtual. Actual attention is present when those who pray have complete awareness of what they are doing here and now; virtual attention is that which is had at the beginning of prayer and extends throughout the prayer without being retracted, although there may be involuntary distractions. St. Teresa says:

That prayer which does not attend to the one it is addressing and what it asks and who it is that asks and of whom it asks, such I do not call prayer at all, however much one may move the lips. For although it is true that sometimes it will be true prayer even if one does not take heed of these things, it is more truly prayer on those occasions when one does.<sup>(3)</sup>

***The second requirement -- devotion -- is complementary to that of attention. By attention we apply our intellect to the practice of prayer; by devotion we direct our will to God.*** Devotion, therefore, involves several virtues: charity, confidence, humility, reverence, and perseverance. Devotion is so important for vocal prayer that it would be better to recite one Our Father devoutly than to say many prayers in a routine and mechanical fashion, unless it is a question of prayers that must be recited by reason of some obligation.

Devotion should also be the measure for the duration of one's personal vocal prayers, for ***it is futile to attempt to pray well when one is fatigued.*** By the same token, public prayers should be arranged in such a way that they arouse the devotion of the faithful and do not cause tedium. "In your prayers do not babble as the pagans do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:7-9).

It is not possible to give any fixed rule or detailed directions for the formulas to be used in vocal prayer. Perhaps the best principle to follow is that given for the selection of books for one's spiritual reading, namely, to use that which is beneficial. The words by which we express ourselves in vocal prayer will vary with our needs and our spiritual sentiments. Moreover, some persons find it difficult to express themselves, and therefore they make use of the prayers composed by others. Objectively, the best prayers are the Our Father, which was taught us by Christ himself, the prayers from the pages of Scripture (the Hail Mary, Gloria, Psalms) and the prayers in the liturgy. Unfortunately, their constant repetition readily degenerates into a purely mechanical recitation.

The necessity of fervent recitation of vocal prayer cannot be emphasized too much, because vocal prayer is one type of prayer that can never be omitted completely, even when one arrives at the height of sanctity. The time comes in the practice of mental prayer when the inferior grades yield to the superior grades as one progresses in union with God, but this never occurs with vocal prayer. It is always beneficial, either to arouse devotion or to give expression to the intensity and fervor of one's love to God. ***Any attacks on the practice of vocal prayer must, therefore, be interpreted as the sign of an evil spirit, and this spirit has been manifested by many deluded souls and false mystics in the history of spirituality.***

## Meditation

***Discursive meditation can be defined as a reasoned application of the mind to some supernatural truth in order to penetrate its meaning, love it, and carry it into practice with the assistance of grace.*** The distinguishing note of meditation is that it is a discursive type of prayer, and therefore attention is absolutely indispensable.

***As soon as we cease to reason or discourse, we cease to meditate.*** We may have given way to distraction, deliberately turned our mind to something else, or passed on to affective prayer or contemplation, but ***without discursus there is no meditation.***

### *Nature of Meditation*

How, then, is meditation distinguished from simple study or speculation on a supernatural truth? Unlike the latter activities, meditation is a form of prayer, and it is such by reason of its purpose or finality. Actually, meditation has a double finality, one intellectual and the other affective and practical. The intellectual purpose is to arrive at firm convictions concerning some supernatural truth; hence the importance of the intellect in meditation.

But one could acquire firm convictions by speculative study, and therefore this cannot be the principal finality of meditation nor that which makes meditation true prayer. ***The most important element in meditation is the act of love aroused in the will on the presentation of some supernatural truth by the intellect.*** As St. Teresa points out, meditation consists not so much in thinking a great deal but in loving a great deal.<sup>(4)</sup> When the will bursts forth with acts of love, an intimate contact is established between the soul and God, and then it is that the soul can truly be said to be praying. Discursus is merely a preparation for the arousal of love.

But a meditation is not completed by arousing love for the supernatural truth on which one has speculated. Any meditation that is properly made should terminate in a practical resolution for the future. Love cannot be idle; by its very nature it urges us to action. When the meditation has passed through the steps of discursus and acts of love, charity impels us to put love into action.

Failure to make efficacious resolutions is the reason why many souls who practice daily meditation get little or no practical benefit from this exercise of prayer. They insist too much on that which is merely a preparation for prayer. They pass the time in spiritual reading or speculation, but they do not make acts of love, nor do they make any practical resolutions.

Another element of the definition of meditation requires explanation: that of the subject matter. We have stated that meditation is the reasoned discursus on some supernatural truth, meaning any truth related to God and the spiritual life. By reason of the subject matter, some authors have made a further division of meditation into imaginative meditation, dogmatic meditation, liturgical meditation, moral meditation. One can meditate on a variety of subjects; e.g., some scene or mystery from the life of Christ, the life and virtues of Mary or the saints, a particular virtue to be acquired or vice to be uprooted, a truth from dogmatic theology, such as the attributes of God or the indwelling of the Trinity, the prayers and actions of the sacraments, the Mass, and the liturgy.

The guiding principle for subject matter is to select what is needed at a particular time and will be beneficial according to one's capacities. Consequently, it is important to insist upon prudence in the selection of the material for meditation. Not all subject matters are suited for all souls, not even for a given soul in varying circumstances. In general, young people or beginners in the practice of meditation will do well to utilize what has been called imaginative meditation (scenes from the life of Christ, Mary, and the saints), liturgical meditations, or moral meditations (which help one to uproot vices and cultivate virtue).

### *Methods of Meditation*

***In selecting a method of meditation, two extremes should be avoided: excessive rigidity and inconstancy.*** At the beginning of the practice of prayer it is generally necessary to adhere to some method or other, because as yet the soul does not know how to proceed in the life of prayer. In these early stages it is important that the soul should not only follow a method, but that it should also select the most beneficial method, for the needs of souls are not identical.

As the soul progresses in the practice of prayer, however, and is more at ease in conversing with God, the method becomes less and less important and eventually may even become an obstacle to further progress. It should also be noted that, since we are not usually the best judge of our own needs, a prudent and wise spiritual director is of great help in leading the soul from one grade of prayer to another, so long as the director is not slavishly addicted to one method exclusively.

Although ancient writers such as St. John Cassian and St. Bernard spoke about methods of prayer, it was not until the sixteenth century that spiritual writers began to offer detailed methods of discursive prayer. Since that time, methods of prayer have been compiled or adapted by such writers as Louis of Granada, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. John Baptist de la Salle, and Cardinal Bérulle. We shall content ourselves with offering two outlines of methods of prayer and leave the others to the personal research of the reader.<sup>(5)</sup>

#### ***Method of St. Ignatius Loyola:*** <sup>(6)</sup>

##### Preparation

- acts of faith and reverence in the presence of God
- general preparatory prayer to ask the grace of making a good meditation
- composition of place (exercise of the imagination)
- petition for the special grace sought in the meditation

##### Body of the meditation

- exercise of the memory to recall the material to be meditated upon
- exercise of the intellect by reflection and consideration of the material of the meditation and practical applications and conclusions to be drawn from it
- exercise of the will by arousing devout feelings and affections and by making practical, particular resolutions

## Conclusion

colloquy or conversation with God  
vocal prayer, such as Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.

## **Carmelite Method**

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### Introduction

preparation  
reading

### Meditation

imaginative representation of material  
reflection or meditation properly so called  
affective colloquy or conversation with God

### Conclusion

thanksgiving  
oblation  
petition

**Regardless of method, all meditation can be reduced ultimately to a basic framework containing all the essential parts of meditation: consideration of some supernatural truth, application of that truth to one's life, and the resolution to do something about it.** These three steps, we believe, are absolutely essential for true meditation; the other details may or may not be used according to the needs of individual souls.

## ***Practice of Meditation***

What time of day is best for meditation? It is better by far to select the most opportune time of the day and then observe the same time each day. **Regularity in prayer is of extreme importance, for it is easy to alter the schedule, then change the time for any pretext whatever, and ultimately abandon the practice of prayer.**

It should be noted that not all times are equally satisfactory. As a general rule it is more difficult to meditate after a heavy meal, immediately after recreation, or when the mind is distracted or fatigued by many occupations. **Most writers on the spiritual life state that the best times for meditation are early in the morning, the late afternoon before the evening meal, or late at night when one has finished all the duties and occupations of the day.** But even this cannot be given as a hard and fast rule, and **perhaps the best norm to be followed is to meditate when one's mind is most alert and one can be recollected.**

The duration of meditation cannot be the same for all individuals or for all states of life. It should, so far as possible, be adjusted to the needs of each. Religious are usually obliged by their Constitutions to devote a definite period of time to mental prayer. Although there are various opinions concerning the length of time to be spent in meditation, it is reasonable to state that, if the time spent in meditation is too brief, most of the period is used in getting ready to pray and not in actual prayer; but if the time is too long, devotion is stifled and the period assigned for prayer becomes a period of penance.

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that prayer should last as long as the soul is in a state of fervor and devotion, and that it should terminate when it can no longer be prolonged without tedium and continual distractions.<sup>(7)</sup> ***Whatever the length of time given to meditation, its influence should be felt throughout the whole day.*** In this way, as St. Thomas suggests, prayer can be constant. ***The use of fervent ejaculatory prayers will preserve the fire of devotion throughout the day.*** The important thing is that one lead a life of prayer; without it, one can hope to gain little from the particular times set aside for meditation.

We have already spoken of the place for prayer when we treated of vocal prayer, but something further needs to be said concerning meditation. The church is the most fitting place for meditation because of the sanctity of the place, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the solitude and recollection usually found there. Yet, meditation can be made in any place in which a person can be recollected and can concentrate on the material of the meditation. It is a question of particular dispositions, and the best rule of conduct is the one based on personal experience.

***Posture during meditation is important because of the necessity of recollection and attention in discursive prayer.*** Some persons may find it most effective to meditate while kneeling, but for others the discomfort may prove a cause of distraction. But whether we are kneeling, seated, or standing, two extremes should be avoided: excessive comfort and excessive mortification. If we are too comfortable, we may find it difficult to keep our mind on the material of meditation, or we may even fall asleep. If we are too uncomfortable, the position may be a cause of distraction and will soon kill devotion.

From what has been stated, it should be evident that the practice of meditation is a great spiritual help. Numerous persons who live habitually in sin continue in that condition simply because they never reflect seriously upon the state of their souls. Some of them do not have malicious hearts, nor do they hate the things of God or their own salvation; they have simply given themselves entirely to purely natural activities and have neglected the things that are of importance to their soul.

One of the greatest proofs that their sad condition is due not so much to malice as to the lack of reflection is the fact that when they return to the practice of their religion, or attend a retreat or mission, they may experience a complete conversion of life. With good reason does St. Teresa maintain that the practice of mental prayer is necessarily connected with growth in virtue. It is, therefore, a great help for salvation to cultivate the practice of daily meditation.

***Those who aspire to sanctity by giving themselves completely to the active life while neglecting the life of prayer may just as well forget about Christian perfection. Experience proves that there is absolutely nothing that can supply for the life of prayer, not even the daily reception of the Eucharist. There are many persons who receive Communion every day, yet their spiritual life is mediocre and lukewarm.*** The reason is none other than the lack of mental prayer, either because they omit it entirely or they practice it in a mechanical and routine fashion. We repeat that without prayer it is impossible to attain Christian perfection, no matter what our state of life or the occupation to which we dedicate ourselves.

## Affective Prayer

***Although St. Teresa of Avila does not use the expression affective prayer in any of her writings, she does refer to this grade of prayer,(8) and it has been accepted by all the schools of spirituality.***

Affective prayer may be defined as a type of prayer in which the operations of the will predominate over discursus of the intellect. ***There is no specific difference between affective prayer and meditation***, as there is between meditation and contemplation; ***it is merely a simplified meditation in which love predominates***. For this reason the transition to affective prayer is usually gradual and more or less easy, although this will vary with individuals.

Some persons are by nature so affectionate and responsive that they very easily rise from intellectual discursus to the movement of the will. Others, on the contrary, are so cold and rigid by nature that their prayer is almost entirely discursive, and they seldom give expression to affections of the will. Such individuals need more time and experience to arrive at the practice of affective prayer. The method of St. Ignatius is not as conducive to affective prayer as is the simpler method used by the Carmelites and the Franciscans.

When should we expect to make the transition from discursive meditation to affective prayer? ***Two extremes must be avoided: to leave meditation too quickly or too late***. In practice, however, these extremes can easily be avoided if we take care to simplify discursive meditation gradually, without trying to force ourselves. ***It is almost certain that if we practice daily meditation we will from time to time experience affections that have been stimulated by some point in meditation***. When this occurs, we should give ourselves gently to the movements of love, and as these moments become more and more frequent, we shall make the transition from discursive meditation to affective prayer.

### *Practice of Affective Prayer*

Discursive meditation should lead to the practice of affective prayer, but it is impossible to practice affective prayer exclusively because the will is a blind faculty that needs direction and enlightenment before it can love and desire the good. For that reason ***discursive meditation and spiritual reading play an important part in the practice of affective prayer; they supply the material that stimulates the activity of the will***.

Hence we must be careful not to terminate discursive meditation before the affections have been stimulated. This would be a waste of time and could also be the source of illusion. ***Neither should we force the affections; when they do not come forth spontaneously, or when they have run their course, we should return to discursive or vocal prayer and not try to prolong the affection by our own efforts***.

Neither should we be anxious to pass from one affection to another. Rather, we should attempt gradually to simplify the movements of the will. The operations of the will should be reduced to unity, and the affections should be deep-seated rather than numerous. The practice of affective prayer is best guaranteed by the use of a discursive meditation that considers the material point

by point and pauses at any moment in which the affections of the will have been stimulated. ***We should yield to this affection until it has run its course, and then return to the next point in the meditation.*** This is likewise a commendable method to be followed in spiritual reading or in the use of a manual of prayer. ***As soon as some thought has stimulated and aroused a movement of the will, we should stop reading and allow the will to perform its operation.***

If properly used, affective prayer confers many benefits on the soul. Psychologically, it provides a delightful respite from the dry labor of discursive meditation. ***It also prevents us from becoming excessively introspective or relying too greatly upon our own efforts,*** as could happen easily if we were to devote ourselves exclusively to discursive meditation and never allow the will to break forth in acts of love.

Because affective prayer is essentially an operation of the will, it serves to deepen the union of the soul with God by acts of love. And since all the infused virtues are increased with the increase of charity, affective prayer is a powerful means for growth in virtue. It is likewise a great stimulus for the practice of the Christian virtues because of the sweetness and consolation it gives. It is, lastly, an excellent disposition and preparation for the prayer of simplicity.

### ***Dangers in Affective Prayer***

But certain dangers and abuses must be avoided in the practice of affective prayer. First of all, we should never use force in order to produce the affections and movements of the will. It is of no avail to clench the fist, to distort the face, and to groan or sigh in an effort to produce an intense act of the love of God. The act of love must be aroused spontaneously, and this is best done by supernaturalizing one's motives and striving in all things simply and solely to give glory to God out of pure love.

Another possible danger in the practice of affective prayer lies in the fact that it often fills the heart with sensible consolation. Those who are easily stimulated to movements of affection may erroneously judge themselves to be more advanced in perfection than they really are because they feel at times as if they are going into ecstasy. Unfortunately, many of these persons see no contradiction in the fact that in their daily life they are constantly falling into imperfections and venial sins. ***True progress in the spiritual life consists in the ever more perfect practice of the Christian virtues and not in the sweetness one experiences in prayer.*** Moreover, persons who place great value on sensible consolations are in danger of practicing prayer primarily for the delight it gives them. This is the ***spiritual gluttony*** that St. John of the Cross criticizes with severity.<sup>(9)</sup>

Lastly, there is the danger that persons who have tasted the delight and consolation of affective prayer may fall into slothfulness, which will prevent them from returning to the discursive meditation they had formerly practiced. ***It is a serious mistake to think that once the soul has enjoyed habitual affective prayer it need never return to the practice of meditation. St. Teresa asserts that sometimes it is necessary to return to the lower grades of prayer even after having experienced mystical contemplation.***<sup>(10)</sup>

## *Fruits of Affective Prayer*

***There is an infallible rule for judging the value of any kind of prayer: examine the fruits it produces.*** This is the supreme norm for the discernment of spirits, as given by Christ himself (cf. Matt. 7:16). The value of affective prayer cannot be measured by the intensity or the frequency of the sensible consolations that are experienced; it must be judged by the increasing perfection in the life of the individual. This means that the fruits of affective prayer should be a more intense practice of the Christian virtues, an increasing purity of intention, a spirit of self-denial and detachment, an increase in charity, and the faithful and exact fulfillment of the duties of one's state in life. ***Affective prayer, in spite of the consolations it gives, is not the goal or terminus of the life of prayer; it is only a step along the way to the perfection of prayer in the mystical state.***

## **Prayer of Simplicity**

***It seems that Jacques Bossuet (1627-1704) was the first author to use this expression,(11) but this type of prayer was recognized by St. Teresa as the prayer of acquired recollection, to distinguish it from infused recollection, the first grade of mystical prayer.(12)*** Other authors call this prayer the prayer of simple gaze, of the presence of God or of the simple vision of faith.

In the seventeenth century some writers began to call this prayer acquired contemplation. St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila never used that expression, and although there is no objection to the use of the term (it is simply the prayer of acquired recollection, according to St. Teresa, or the prayer of simplicity, according to Bossuet), many authors now restrict the word *contemplation* to the mystical grades of prayer. This is more faithful to the language of St. John of the Cross.

The prayer of simplicity was defined by Bossuet, as a simple loving gaze upon some divine object, whether on God himself or one of his perfections, on Christ or on one of his mysteries, or on some other Christian truth. ***It is a form of ascetical prayer that is extremely simplified.*** The discursus formerly used in meditation has now been transformed into a simple intellectual gaze; the affections that were experienced in affective prayer have been unified into a simple loving attention to God. ***The prayer is ascetical, meaning that the soul is able to attain to this type of prayer by its own efforts with the help of ordinary grace, but often it is the transition point to mystical prayer.***

The prayer of simplicity is thus the bridge between ascetical and mystical prayer. It is, as it were, the final disposition before the Holy Spirit begins to operate in the soul by means of his gifts. For that reason, one may frequently experience a blending of acquired and infused elements in the practice of the prayer of simplicity. ***If the soul is faithful, the infused elements will gradually be increased until they dominate the practice of prayer entirely.*** Thus, without any shock and almost insensibly, the soul proceeds gently from the ascetical practice of prayer to mystical contemplation. This is an indication of the unity of the spiritual life and of the fact that there is only one road to perfection.

### *Practice of the Prayer of Simplicity*

Because of its simplicity, there is no particular method for this type of prayer. It is simply a question of gazing and loving. It is useful, however, to keep in mind certain counsels. Before we actually enter upon the prayer of simplicity, **we must take great care not to try to hasten the entrance into this type of prayer. So long as we are able to meditate and to practice affective prayer, we should continue with those types of prayer.**

The contrary extreme should likewise be avoided. We should not continue the practice of meditation or even of affective prayer if we perceive clearly that we can remain before God in loving attention without any particular discursus or affective movement. St. John of the Cross severely criticizes spiritual directors who try to restrict souls to the practice of meditation when they have advanced far enough to enter the prayer of simplicity.<sup>(13)</sup>

It is fitting that the soul should dispose itself for this prayer by means of some material, as was done in the use of meditation, but it should abandon it immediately if the attraction of grace so inclines. The preparation should be very brief and should not be concerned with many details. The prayer of simplicity requires that the powers of the soul be intimately united in a loving gaze, and this requires that the object of attention should be simple and unified.

During the practice of the prayer of simplicity, the soul should strive to preserve the loving attention that is fixed on God, but without forcing itself. It must avoid distractions and slothfulness; but if it exerts too much effort it will destroy the simplicity of the prayer. **Psychologically it is difficult for us to remain attentive over a long period of time, and therefore we should not expect, especially in the beginning, to be able to practice the prayer of simplicity for long periods of time.** As soon as the loving attention begins to waver, we should turn to the use of affective prayer or simple meditation. All must be done gently and without violence. Nor should the soul be upset if periods of dryness occur. **The prayer of simplicity is not always a sweet and consoling type of prayer; it is also a transition from ascetical to mystical prayer, and therefore the soul may experience the aridity that normally accompanies transitional states.**

### *Fruits of the Prayer of Simplicity*

The fruits of the prayer of simplicity should be manifested in a general improvement and progress in the Christian life. Our entire life and conduct should benefit from the practice of this prayer. And since grace tends more and more to simplify our conduct until it is reduced to unity in love, we should foster this tendency by avoiding every kind of affectation and multiplicity in our relations with God and our neighbor. **This simplification of life should characterize those who have entered the prayer of simplicity. It should be especially manifested in a deep and continuous recollection in God.**

Even when occupied with the ordinary duties of daily life, the soul should be interiorly gazing upon God and loving him. The presence of God should be especially felt during liturgical prayer and in the recitation of vocal prayer. The examination of conscience should be so implicit that a rapid glance reveals the faults and imperfections of the day: All external works should be

performed with the spirit of prayer and with the ardent desire of giving glory to God, and even the most commonplace tasks should be permeated with the spirit of faith and love.

All the advantages of affective prayer over simple meditation are found as well in the prayer of simplicity, but noticeably increased. ***As affective prayer is an excellent preparation for the prayer of simplicity***, so the latter is a disposition for infused contemplation. With much less effort than before, the soul achieves magnificent results in the practice of prayer. Thus, ***each new grade of prayer represents a new advance in the Christian life***.

Strictly speaking, it is not possible to make a complete separation between ascetical and mystical prayer as manifested in any particular soul because persons in the ascetical state are capable of receiving certain mystical influences through the operations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and mystics will act in a purely ascetical fashion when the gifts are not actually operating. What is certain is that ***in the ascetical state there will be a predominance of ascetical activity, and in the mystical state the operations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit will be predominant***. Consequently, it is not surprising that the gifts of the Holy Spirit should sometimes begin to operate while the soul is in the highest grade of ascetical prayer, namely, the prayer of simplicity.

### Contemplative Prayer

***The word contemplation signifies knowledge accompanied by delight, and the object of the knowledge is usually of such a type that it arouses admiration and captivates the soul***. Since contemplation is an operation of the cognitive powers, there is such a thing as a purely natural and acquired contemplation in the natural order.

But ***contemplation is a distinctive type of knowledge***. It is an experimental knowledge in the sense that it calls into play the affective powers of the individual. Contemplation is, therefore, an operation in which one experiences the happy blending of the cognitive and the affective powers in an activity providing great delight. The knowledge involved is not discursive but intuitive; the movement of love is not toward the possession of the object loved but one of surrender to the object loved. Perhaps the best example of natural contemplation is found in the aesthetic experience of the beautiful.

### Supernatural Contemplation

Supernatural or infused contemplation has been defined by various formulas, but the essential note that all definitions have in common is that ***supernatural contemplation is an experimental knowledge of God***. Moreover, as a supernatural activity, infused contemplation requires the operation of faculties that are likewise supernatural, both in their substance and in their mode of operation. Consequently when we speak of contemplation as a grade of mystical prayer, we restrict the word to signify the loving knowledge of God that is experienced through the operation of the gifts of wisdom and understanding, presupposing, of course, faith informed by charity. ***St. Teresa calls this prayer infused recollection***.

For the sake of clarity and conciseness, we can summarize the theology of infused contemplation in the following statements, some of which apply likewise to the higher grades of mystical prayer and the mystical experience in general:

1. ***Infused contemplation is not a charism or "gratia gratis data" but a grade of prayer made possible by the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, given to all souls with sanctifying grace.*** Charisms or *gratiae gratis datae* are given for the good of others and do not sanctify the one who receives them, nor do they prove the sanctity of one who receives them. Infused contemplation, on the other hand, ***is ordained to the spiritual good of the one who receives it,*** and it is also meritorious and sanctifying. And since all souls in grace possess the gifts of the Holy Spirit, their operation in mystical contemplation does not constitute a charism, *gratia gratis data*, or an extraordinary phenomenon of the spiritual life.
2. ***Infused contemplation necessarily requires sanctifying grace.*** Infused contemplation is never given without the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and these are inseparable from grace. Moreover, contemplation is one of the effects of an intense love of God, which presupposes sanctifying grace and the virtue of charity.
3. ***Contemplation requires the impulse of actual grace.*** The reason for this is that contemplation is a supernatural act, and therefore it requires a previous movement of actual grace to reduce the supernatural powers from potency to act.
4. *The infused virtues of the affective order are not the immediate, formal, and eliciting principles of the act of contemplation, although they may serve as antecedent dispositions or consequent effects.* ***The affective moral virtues remotely prepare for contemplation by controlling the lower appetites;*** the virtue of charity has a direct influence on the act of contemplation by uniting the soul with God and then producing in the will the joy that is the delight of contemplation.
5. ***The immediate eliciting principles of contemplation are the gifts of wisdom and understanding perfecting the act of faith informed by charity.*** Since the faculty in which contemplation takes place is the speculative intellect, the power by which contemplation is produced must be one that perfects the speculative intellect. Therefore, ***contemplation requires the operation of the virtue of faith and the gifts of wisdom and understanding.***

One and the same action, however, cannot proceed in exactly the same way from specifically distinct habits. Faith provides the substance of the act of contemplation by formally establishing contact with God as First Truth, but without giving a vision of the truth because the knowledge of faith is obscure.

The virtue of charity plays its part in contemplation as a proximate disposition whereby the object of faith is made present to the subject in a connatural manner. ***It is, therefore, indispensable that faith be informed by charity.***

The intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit provide the supernatural mode by which contemplation becomes an experimental knowledge.

The gift of understanding provides the formal mystical knowledge by making the object present as something known. The gift of wisdom perfects the virtue of faith by giving a knowledge of God that is not discursive but intuitive; it perfects the virtue of charity by giving a savory experience of God and supernatural mysteries.

### *Characteristics of Infused Contemplation*

Having considered the nature of contemplation from a theological point of view, we shall now describe the characteristics by which infused contemplation can be recognized and distinguished from other manifestations of the spiritual life.

1. ***An experience of the presence of God.*** Many authors of mystical theology place great emphasis on this characteristic and consider ***it the essential note of infused contemplation.*** God gives to the soul an experimental, intellectual knowledge of his presence. This characteristic is essential for mystical contemplation but not for mystical experience in general because the soul may lack the experience of the presence of God when it is undergoing the passive purification of the soul, which St. John of the Cross describes as a "purgative" contemplation.[\(14\)](#)

2. ***The invasion of the soul by the supernatural.*** The soul feels in an unmistakable manner that it is permeated with something it cannot describe with precision, but feels clearly is something supernatural. ***It is, in fact, an effect of the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which inundate the soul with supernatural life.***

3. ***Impossibility of producing the mystical experience by one's efforts.*** The soul is fully aware of the fact that the experience it is enjoying has not been produced by its own efforts and that it will not last a second longer than is desired by the Holy Spirit, who causes it. The soul is a passive subject of a sublime experience it could not produce of itself. The reason is that contemplation is produced through the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and individual souls are unable by their own efforts to activate the gifts. The gifts are directly under the control of the Holy Spirit and they operate when he desires and only so long as he desires.

God works in the soul according to his own good pleasure. Sometimes the mystical experience begins, is intensified, and then gradually diminishes until it disappears entirely, and this is what happens most frequently. But at other times the mystical experience may appear and disappear suddenly. And since this is God's activity, it would be most imprudent for a spiritual director to command a particular soul to discontinue mystical prayer in order to return to ordinary prayer.

4. ***In contemplation the soul is more passive than active.*** We have already stated that the soul cannot contemplate whenever it wishes, but only when the Holy Spirit desires and in the measure and degree he desires. Under the action of the gifts, the soul reacts in a vital manner and cooperates with all its efforts in the divine movement, but it is an activity that is received, so to speak. This is the famous ***patiens divina*** that is experienced by all mystics. St. Thomas says that in the operations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit the human soul does not act as mover, but rather as the thing moved.[\(15\)](#)

5. ***The experimental knowledge of God enjoyed during contemplation is not clear and distinct but obscure and confused.*** St. John of the Cross explains this characteristic of infused contemplation in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. The theological reason for this confused and obscure knowledge is that the contemplative light of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is cast upon the act of faith to illumine it extrinsically and subjectively, but not intrinsically and objectively, since faith is of things not seen. ***Only the light of glory (lumen gloriae) will give us a clear and distinct contemplation of God and his mysteries, and this occurs in the beatific vision.*** In this life, however, so long as we live by faith, the knowledge of the contemplative must necessarily be obscure and confused.

Nevertheless, it is possible that certain extraordinary phenomena that are clear and distinct may occur during the mystical experience. There are certain ***gratiae gratis datae***, such as visions and locutions, that present new infused species but are the result of a special divine action that is gratuitous and extraordinary. The extraordinary phenomena are not the normal activity of infused contemplation.

6. ***Infused contemplation gives full security and assurance to the soul that it is under the action of God.*** According to the testimony of mystics, so long as the contemplative activity continues, the soul cannot have the slightest doubt that God is acting upon it. ***Once the prayer is finished, the soul may doubt the experience, but during the mystical prayer it is impossible for the soul to have any doubts.*** It is true that this assurance admits of different degrees, just as there are different degrees of mystical prayer. The reason for this assurance and confidence is that the Holy Spirit gives the soul a certitude so firm that it would sooner doubt its own existence than the divine reality it is experiencing. As St. Paul says: "The Spirit himself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16).

7. ***Infused contemplation gives the soul moral certitude that it is in the state of grace.*** This is a natural consequence of the previous characteristics, but it is necessary to understand it properly in order to avoid erroneous notions. It is of faith and so defined by the Council of Trent that, without a special revelation from God, ***we cannot be certain that we belong to the number of the predestined.*** that we will not sin again, that we will be converted again after sin, or that we will receive the gift of final perseverance. Neither can we know with certainty whether we are in the state of grace.<sup>(16)</sup>

Those who enjoy mystical contemplation have a moral certitude of being in the state of grace, and this certitude is far superior to that possessed by ordinary Christians in the ascetical state. Mystical contemplation is produced by the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and these gifts necessarily presuppose the state of grace. But we repeat that this certitude is not absolute and infallible because this is never, given in this life except by a special divine revelation.

8. ***The mystical experience is indescribable.*** The mystics are unable to express clearly what they experience in their mystical activities. It is only by means of examples, comparisons and metaphors, or circumlocution that they are able to give some notion of what transpires during these operations. Unless a person has had the same experience, the descriptions given by mystics may seem to be exaggerated or open to misinterpretation. The reason is that the activity of the

gifts transcends the discursive power of human reason. ***Mystical experiences are intuitive, and as such they can be experienced, but they cannot be expressed in human language.***

9. ***The mystical union admits of variations and fluctuations.*** St. Teresa states that the mystical union may last for a long time, or it may sometimes be of short duration, according to the desires of God, who communicates this experience.(17) ***Sometimes the mystical experience is so brief that it seems to be nothing more than a divine touch, and as a rule it does not remain in the same degree of intensity for a long time.*** During the period of intensification the soul yearns for the crisis that is to come, but as soon as that point is reached, the experience immediately begins to diminish.

10. ***Mystical experience frequently causes reactions in the body.*** Sometimes the intense spiritual delight experienced by the soul causes startling phenomena in the sensitive order. St. John of the Cross teaches, however, that this occurs only in beginners in the mystical life and that they should ignore these reactions and continue the practice of prayer. When contemplation is very intense, the organism may be changed visibly. The eyes become clouded and dull; respiration is weak and intermittent, with an occasional deep breathing as if trying to absorb the necessary quantity of air; the limbs are partly paralyzed; the heat of the body decreases, especially in the extremities. All these phenomena have been manifested time and again in mystical souls, and St. Teresa speaks of them in her works.(18)

The reason for the phenomena that accompany the mystical experience is that the human organism can react in only a certain number of ways, and when the spirit is absorbed in an intense activity, the body is necessarily affected. On the other hand, ***if we give ourselves completely and energetically to corporal things, the faculties of the soul are weakened for spiritual things. For that reason St. Paul warns that the carnal person cannot understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14).***

11. ***Mystical prayer often produces, a suspension or binding of the faculties.*** Mystical contemplation may be so intense that it results in an ecstatic trance. When this occurs, it is inevitable that there should be a suspension of the sense faculties. Even if the contemplative activity does not produce this effect, however, it is frequently difficult and even impossible for the mystic to give attention to any other prayers or activities because of the absorption in God. ***Mystical activity tends to exclude everything that is alien to it, especially the operations that proceed from the effort of the subject.*** The practical advice to be followed during mystical activity is simply to submit to the action of God within the soul and to let ourselves be carried by the divine impulses. Only in the case of prayers or external works that are obligatory should we make every effort to fulfill our duties.

12. ***Infused contemplation causes a great impulse for the practice of virtue.*** This is one of the surest signs of true contemplation. The soul that does not leave its prayer with a great impulse toward solid virtue can be sure that it has not enjoyed truly contemplative prayer.(19) ***One of the marvelous facts of mystical experience is that a contemplative soul sometimes finds that it instantaneously possesses a degree of perfection in a certain virtue it has not been able to attain over a long period of time in spite of its efforts.***

Yet it is necessary to avoid exaggeration in this matter. In the early stages of contemplative prayer, the transformation is not so profound that the soul is freed from its defects. For that reason spiritual directors would be greatly mistaken if they were to judge a person to be deluded if, after having experienced mystical contemplation, he or she is still subject to certain defects. Such defects are often caused more by weakness than by one's deliberate will. **Mystical contemplation greatly aids the sanctification of a soul, but it does not instantaneously or necessarily produce a saint.**

In the soul's progress through the ascetical phase of the spiritual life, the purgation and perfection of the various faculties have proceeded from the inferior to the superior powers, and this has likewise been the path followed by the soul in its progress through the ascetical grades of prayer. But in the mystical grades of prayer, where God is the primary mover through the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the divine activity begins with the highest faculty and progresses through the inferior faculties until the entire person is transformed in God. .

### ***Practical Directives***

Spiritual directors should take great care to guide the soul that begins to receive the first lights of contemplative prayer. They must be especially careful not to place any obstacles to their advance in prayer. The following are the principal counsels to be given in this particular grade of prayer:

1. **Not to cease discursive meditation until one clearly perceives the call to a higher grade of prayer.** In the practice of prayer, as in the exercises of the spiritual life in general, souls should always be prepared to do as much as they can with the assistance of ordinary grace. It would be a source of great harm if they were to attempt to enter upon a mystical grade of prayer when the Lord has not yet called them to such a high degree of prayer. St. Teresa warned that, so long as the soul is not sure that God is drawing it to a mystical grade of prayer, it should not attempt to remain passive and inactive because that would produce nothing but aridity, and the individual would soon grow restless because of its inactivity.(20)

2. **Immediately to terminate all discursive prayer as soon as one feels the impulse of grace toward infused prayer.** This is a consequence of the foregoing counsel. It would be foolish to anticipate mystical prayer, but it would be tantamount to obstructing the action of God in the soul if souls were to attempt to proceed by their own efforts when grace impels them to the passivity of contemplation. The teaching of St. Teresa on this particular point should be read with great attention.(21)

Spiritual directors will usually have to exert great effort to convince the soul that it should immediately abandon itself to the action of God as soon as this is felt. Some souls become disobedient and stubborn at this point of their development. Accustomed as they are to certain vocal prayers and discursive meditations, it seems to them that it would be a waste of time to remain in a passive state, and they may have scruples about neglecting their customary private devotions. **They do not realize that it is of much more value for a soul to experience even the slightest touch of the Holy Spirit than to practice all manner of spiritual exercises on their own initiative.**

3. ***To give themselves completely to the interior life.*** Souls that receive the first mystical communications can usually suspect that God has predestined them for great things in the spiritual life. If they do not resist God, they can arrive at the summit of perfection. Fully convinced of the necessity of a conscientious correspondence with grace, they must definitively break with all the attachments that still keep them bound to earth, and must give themselves completely and with all their strength to the practice of virtue.

The director must especially insist upon the practice of habitual recollection, interior and exterior silence, the mortification of the senses, complete detachment from earthly things, profound humility, and, above all, an ardent love of God that will inform and vivify everything that they do. They must therefore give themselves fully to the practice of prayer and remain attentive to the voice of God, which will call them frequently to the sweet and holy repose of contemplation. Nevertheless, they must take great care not to use violence on themselves, because God will come in his own time, and until he does, they should try to do all things gently and without violence under the assistance of ordinary grace.

### **Prayer of Quiet**

***The prayer of quiet is a type of mystical prayer in which the intimate awareness of God's presence captivates the will and fills the soul arid body with ineffable sweetness and delight.***

The fundamental difference between the prayer of quiet and that of infused recollection, apart from the greater intensity of contemplative light and more intense consolations, is that the prayer of quiet gives the soul an actual possession and joyful fruition of the sovereign Good.

#### ***Nature of the Prayer of Quiet***

***Infused contemplation principally affects the intellect, which is withdrawn from the other faculties, but the prayer of quiet especially affects the will.*** Although the intellect and the memory are now tranquil, they still remain free to realize what is occurring, but the will is completely captivated and absorbed in God. For that reason, the prayer of quiet, as its name indicates, tends to contemplative silence and repose. Since the other faculties remain free, however, they can be occupied with the work of the active life, and they may do so with great intensity. The will does not lose its sweet quietude, but the activities of Martha and Mary begin to merge in a beautiful manner, as St. Teresa points out.<sup>(22)</sup> Yet the perfect blending of the active and contemplative life will not be achieved until the soul has reached the state of union with God.

St. Teresa describes the prayer of quiet in the following way: "From this recollection there sometimes proceeds an interior quiet and peace that are full of happiness because the soul is in such a state that it does not seem to lack anything, and even speaking (I refer to vocal prayer and meditation) wearies it; it wishes to do nothing but love. This state may, last for some time and even for long periods of time."<sup>(23)</sup>

## *Effects of the Prayer of Quiet*

***The sanctifying effects produced in the soul by the prayer of quiet are enumerated by St. Teresa in the Fourth Mansions of her Interior Castle: (1) great liberty of spirit; (2) filial fear of God and great care not to offend him; (3) profound confidence in God; (4) love of mortification and suffering; (5) deep humility; (6) disdain for worldly pleasures; and (7) growth in all the virtues.***

## *Concomitant Phenomena*

***The concomitant phenomena that usually accompany the prayer of quiet are sleep of the faculties and inebriation of love.*** In her autobiography St. Teresa listed the sleep of the faculties as a distinct grade of mystical prayer superior to the prayer of quiet, but in her later works she changed her opinion and considered the sleep of the faculties as an effect of the prayer of quiet in its highest degree of intensity.[\(24\)](#)

According to St. Teresa, the sleep of the faculties is a phenomenon in which the faculties are not completely captivated, and yet they do not understand how they work. The sweetness and delight they experience are beyond anything they have known previously. The soul seems to be unable to advance or to turn back; it wishes only to enjoy this great delight. It is as if the soul were almost completely dead to the things of this world and enjoying God alone. It is a heavenly foolishness in which the soul learns true wisdom.[\(25\)](#)

***Sometimes the intense delight produced by the sleep of the faculties causes a kind of divine inebriation, which is manifested externally in a kind of foolishness of love.*** Sometimes there are cries of love or even bodily movements such as leaps of joy or the singing of spiritual hymns. ***The love of God is so intense that it cannot be contained but must burst forth into external acts.***[\(26\)](#)

## *Norms of Conduct*

The general rule of conduct for the soul in any of the states of contemplative prayer is to cooperate completely with the working of grace and to cultivate an increasingly profound humility. ***For the prayer of quiet in particular, the following rules should be carefully followed:***

1. ***Never attempt to force oneself into this grade of prayer.*** It would indeed be futile, because mystical prayer cannot be attained by one's own efforts.
2. ***Cooperate with the divine movement as soon as it is experienced.*** One should not delay for a single instant under any pretext but should follow the divine movement with all docility and humility.
3. ***Do not disturb the quiet of the will by attending to the activities of the lower faculties.*** The memory and the imagination, since they are still free for their own operations, could easily become a distraction in the prayer of quiet. St. Teresa advises the soul not to pay any attention to

these operations, but to ignore them until such time as God will bind them and captivate them [.\(27\)](#)

4. ***Scrupulously avoid any occasion of offending God.*** St. Teresa warns that ***the devil frequently provides temptations and occasions of sin to souls who are in this degree of prayer,*** and she emphasizes the great damage that is done even by little acts of infidelity to grace.[\(28\)](#)

5. ***Never abandon the practice of prayer in spite of any difficulty or obstacle.*** St. Teresa places stress on this particular rule, and she repeats it again and again throughout her writings. She states ***that if a soul in this grade of prayer should fall into sin through weakness or malice, it can always recapture the good it had lost, but if it does not return to the practice of prayer, it will go from bad to worse.***[\(29\)](#)

She also asserts that the soul should not abandon itself excessively to the sleep of the faculties. She states that some persons have such a weak constitution that as soon as they experience any spiritual consolation they mistakenly think it is a true spiritual sleep. The more they abandon themselves to this experience, the weaker they become physically, with the result that they think they are in a state of rapture. Actually, all they are doing is wasting their time and ruining their health. She makes it very clear that when there is a truly spiritual sleep of the faculties, there is no weakness or languor in the soul; rather the soul is filled with a great joy.

Moreover, the experience does not last for a long time, although the soul may return to this sleep of faculties. Nor is there any exterior sensation or rapture when this experience is truly from God. St. Teresa advises that persons of a weak constitution should sleep and eat well until they have regained their physical strength, and if their constitution still remains weak, they can take this as 'a sign that God is not calling them to the mystical degrees of prayer.'[\(30\)](#)

***The inebriation of love should not be confused with a natural effervescence and sentimentality, which are often found in enthusiastic and impressionable individuals.*** And even if it is a question of a true phenomenon, the soul should not let itself be carried away by this experience, but should strive to control and moderate it.

Above all, one should not take this phenomenon as a sign that it is far advanced in the spiritual life, but should humble itself before God and never seek to practice prayer in order to obtain consolations from God. Spiritual directors should always insist on the necessity of the practice of virtue, and they should attach little importance to these phenomena, especially if they perceive that the soul is itself attaching great importance to them or is beginning to manifest a certain degree of vanity. In fact, ***when these phenomena are truly from God, the soul is usually submerged in true humility. Thus humility is the great touchstone for distinguishing true gold from dross.***

## Prayer of Union

***The prayer of union is that grade of mystical prayer in which all the internal faculties are gradually captivated and occupied with God.*** In the prayer of quiet only the will was captivated; in the sleep of the faculties the intellect was also captivated, although the memory and the

imagination remained free. In the prayer of union all the interior faculties, including the memory and the imagination, are captivated. Only the external bodily senses are now free, but they too will be captivated in the following grade of prayer.

### *Nature of the Prayer of Union*

***The intensity of the mystical experience caused by the prayer of union is indescribable.*** It is superior beyond compare to that of the preceding grade, to the point that the body itself is affected by the working of God in the soul. Without being entirely captivated, the external senses become almost helpless and inoperative. ***The soul experiences divine reality with such intensity that it could easily fall into ecstasy.*** At the beginning, this sublime absorption of the faculties in God lasts but a short time (a half hour at most), but as the intensity increases, it may be prolonged for several hours.

The following excerpt from the writings of St. Teresa describes the prayer of union:

It seems to me that this kind of prayer is very definitely a union of the entire soul with God, although it seems that his Majesty desires to give permission to the faculties to understand and enjoy the great things that he is effecting there. It sometimes happens, and indeed very often, that when the will is in union, the soul understands that the will is captive and enjoying fruition and that the will alone is experiencing much quiet, while the intellect and the memory are so free that they can attend to other matters and be engaged in works of charity. This, although it may seem to be the same, is actually different from the prayer of quiet of which I have already spoken, partly because, in that prayer, the soul would not wish to be occupied in anything else, or to be active, since it is enjoying the holy repose of Mary; but in this prayer it can also be Martha, so that it is, as it were, occupied in both the active and the contemplative life, performing works of charity and the duties of its state, and reading, although souls in this state are not masters of themselves and they realize that the better part of the soul is occupied elsewhere. It is as if we were speaking to one person while another person is speaking to us, with the result that we cannot be fully attentive to the one or the other.[\(31\)](#)

### *Signs of the Prayer of Union*

The essential characteristics of the prayer of union and the signs by which it can be recognized and distinguished from other grades of prayer are the following:

1. ***Absence of distractions.*** The reason for this is that the memory and imagination, which are the faculties that usually cause distraction, are now fixed on God and held captive. There may be a return to lower grades of prayer from time to time, and then distractions may again disturb the soul, but ***during the prayer of union distractions are psychologically impossible.***
2. ***Certitude of being intimately united with God.*** The soul cannot doubt that it experiences God during the prayer of union. On leaving the lower grades of prayer, the soul may experience certain doubts or fears that it was not truly united with God, or that it was deceived by the devil, but in the prayer of union the certitude of experiencing God is so absolute that St. Teresa

maintains that, if the soul does not experience this certitude, it did not have the true prayer of union. (32)

3. ***Absence of weariness and tedium***. The soul absorbed in God never wearies of its union with the Beloved. It is overwhelmed with delight, and however long the prayer of union may last, the soul never experiences any fatigue. For that reason, St. Teresa says that this grade of prayer can never do any harm to the individual, no matter how long it may last.(33)

St. Teresa lists the principal effects of the prayer of union in the Fifth Mansions of her *Interior Castle*. The soul is so anxious to praise God that it would gladly die a thousand deaths for his sake. It has an intense longing to suffer great trials, and experiences vehement desires for penance and solitude. It wishes that all souls would know God, and it is greatly saddened when it sees that God is offended. The soul is dissatisfied with everything that it sees on earth, since God has given it wings so that it can fly to him. And whatever it does for God seems very little by comparison with what it desires to do. Its weakness has been turned into strength, and it is no longer bound by any ties of relationship or friendship or worldly possessions. ***It is grieved at having to be concerned with the things of earth, lest these things should cause it to sin against God. Everything wearies it because it can find no true rest in any created thing.***

### ***Concomitant Phenomena***

The prayer of union is usually accompanied by certain concomitant phenomena distinct from *gratiae gratis datae*. Although these phenomena do not occur at any definite moment and are transitory graces that God grants according to his good pleasure, they are usually experienced when the soul reaches this degree of prayer. ***There are four principal concomitant phenomena: mystical touches, flights of the spirit, fiery darts of love, and wounds of love.*** St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila give detailed descriptions of these phenomena.(34)

***The mystical touches are a kind of instantaneous supernatural impression that gives the soul a sensation of having been touched by God himself.*** This divine contact imparts to the soul an ineffable delight that defies description. The soul sometimes utters a cry or falls into ecstasy. The touches themselves admit of varying degrees of intensity; the most sublime are those that St. John of the Cross describes as "substantial touches." The expression designates that ***the soul senses the mystical touches as if they had been experienced in the very center or substance of the soul, although in reality they are experienced in the spiritual faculties of intellect and will.*** St. John of the Cross warns souls that they should not attempt to experience these mystical touches by their own efforts but should remain humble and resigned before God and passively receive whatever he deigns to send them.(35)

***Flights of the spirit***, as the name indicates, are strong and unexpected impulses of love of God that leave the soul with a consuming thirst for God. The soul feels that it could never satiate its thirst for love, even if all creation were permeated with divine love. Sometimes the mere mention of God causes the soul to react with such a violent impetus that the body is overwhelmed by an ecstatic trance. A remarkable note in regard to these violent impulses is that they never cause any physical or mental harm to the individual, although any similar impulse in the purely natural order could be seriously harmful. St. Teresa wisely cautions individuals to make a careful

distinction between those impulses of love that flow from some natural cause, and must therefore be controlled by reason, and the truly mystical touches that are passively received by the soul from God.(36)

***According to St. John of the Cross, the fiery darts of love are certain hidden touches that, like a fiery arrow, burn and pierce the soul and leave it completely cauterized by the fire of love.(37) St. Teresa describes this phenomenon as a wounding of the soul, as if an arrow pierced the soul.*** It causes great affliction, and at the same time it is very delectable. The wound is not a physical one, but it is felt deep within the soul and seems to spring from the soul's inmost depths. It arouses profound desires for God and a kind of hatred of the body, which seems at that time to be an obstacle to the soul's fruition of God.

***The wounds of love are similar to the preceding phenomenon, but they are more profound and more lasting.(38) St. John of the Cross remarks that the fiery darts of love are usually caused by the knowledge of God that the soul receives through created things, while the wounds of love are caused by the knowledge of the works of the Incarnation and the mysteries of faith.*** The effects of these wounds are similar to the effects of the fiery darts, but they are more profound. The soul lovingly complains to God at not being able to leave this life and to enjoy the intimate union with him in heaven. ***One of the best commentaries on this phenomenon is to be found in The Spiritual Canticle, Stanzas 9-11.***

### Prayer of Conforming Union

***The prayer of union, as we have seen, unites the soul intimately with God and is, in a sense, the last grade of mystical prayer, although it admits of degrees of intensity.*** St. Teresa treats of the prayer of union in the last three mansions of *The Interior Castle* and assigns the types of this prayer as follows: fifth mansions, the prayer of union; sixth mansions, spiritual betrothal; seventh mansions, spiritual marriage. But she likewise explains ***that these three are generically the same prayer; the difference lies in the degree to which God unites the soul to himself.(39)***

Some authors, wishing to use St. Teresa's terminology, call this degree of union the spiritual betrothal or espousal; others call it the prayer of ecstatic union, taking the name from the predominant external phenomenon of this prayer. ***We prefer, however, to use the expressions conforming and transforming union for these last two degrees of mystical prayer;*** first, because some persons find the betrothal and marriage symbols distasteful, and secondly because the term *ecstatic union* stresses a concomitant phenomenon rather than the union between the soul and God.

### Nature of Conforming Union

In the prayer of simple union all the interior faculties of the soul are centered on God alone; only the external senses are still free. But in the prayer of conforming union God captivates even the external senses, with the result that the soul is totally divinized, so to speak, and prepared by God to move to the full and final commitment of the transforming union. This means that ***the conforming union is closely connected with the prayer of simple union and is indeed its***

**expansion**. St. Teresa says as much when she remarks that what there is in the fifth and sixth mansions is the same, **but the effects are different** (40)

In the prayer of conforming union, therefore, the soul loses the use of its external senses, either partially or totally, because all the interior faculties are absorbed in God and the senses are alienated from their proper natural functioning. It is with difficulty that the soul turns its attention to external activity, though it knows that sometimes it must "leave God for God" in performing its duties or services of charity for others. But **the predominant sentiment of these souls is the longing for full and perfect union with God, accompanied by a longing for death**. The soul now echoes the yearning of St. Paul to be dissolved and to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23) and the statement of St. Teresa as a child: "I want to see God, but to see God we must die."

St. Teresa has given us a clear and detailed description of the prayer of conforming union in *The Life* and in the sixth mansions of *The Interior Castle*.(41) St. John of the Cross treats of this grade of prayer in *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame*, but he says that although this would be a place to discuss the different kinds of rapture and ecstasy experienced by spiritual persons, "I pass over the subject because the blessed Teresa of Jesus, our mother, left notes admirably written upon these things of the spirit."(42) We shall, therefore, follow closely the teaching of St. Teresa in describing the conforming union, which she calls **spiritual betrothal**.

And now you are going to see what His Majesty does to confirm this betrothal, for this, as I understand it, is what happens when he bestows raptures which carry the soul out of its senses; for if, while still in possession of its senses, the soul saw that it was so near to such great majesty, it might perhaps be unable to remain alive ....

The position, in this case, as I understand it, is that **the soul has never before been so fully awake to the things of God or had such light or such knowledge of His Majesty**. This may seem impossible because, if the faculties are so completely absorbed that we might describe them as dead, and the senses are so as well, how can the soul be said to understand this secret? I cannot say, nor perhaps can any creature.(43)

St. John of the Cross speaks of the prayer of conforming union in similar terms:

That we may the better understand what flight this is, it is to be noted that, as we have said, in that visitation of the divine Spirit the spirit of the soul is enraptured with great force, to commune with the Spirit, and abandons the body, and ceases to experience feelings and to have its actions in the body, since it has them in God. For this cause said St. Paul, with respect to that rapture of his, that he knew .not if his soul was receiving it in the body, or out of the body.(44)

In the ecstatic experience of the conforming union, the soul not only has contact with God in the very center of its soul, but also it seems to peer into the very essence of God and discover divine secrets. **St. Teresa emphasizes also that ecstatic prayer is characterized by a new and great light, unlike any the soul has ever known before, so much so that the soul feels as if it has been in another world.**

## *Mystical Ecstasy*

***Ecstasy enters into the very nature and definition of the prayer of conforming union, and that is why some authors prefer to use the name ecstatic prayer.*** The soul experiences that it is in God and God is in the soul, and the concentration is so complete that all the faculties are absorbed in this union. It is, in a sense, the experienced fulfillment of the first precept of charity: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your . soul, and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5; cf. Matt. 22:37).

***Mystical ecstasy is therefore a concomitant or normal phenomenon of the prayer of conforming union.*** Unlike prophetic ecstasy, which is a *gratia gratis data*, mystical ecstasy is both sanctifying and meritorious. The essential element in this prayer, however, is the absorption of the soul in God; the ecstasy is a secondary but concomitant element. Both of these elements are necessary for true mystical ecstasy. Without the union with God in infused contemplative prayer, the ecstasy would be a natural ecstasy or trance, a falsification of mystical ecstasy caused by an evil spirit, or the *gratia gratis data* of prophetic ecstasy.(45)

The ***efficient cause*** of mystical ecstasy is the Holy Spirit working through his gifts. Operating through the gifts of wisdom and understanding, he uses the latter to illuminate faith and the former to stimulate charity to a most vehement love that causes the alienation of the senses.

The ***formal cause*** of ecstasy is an intense degree of infused contemplation, although not the maximum degree. A less intense form of contemplation would not cause the suspension of the faculties; the highest degrees of mystical prayer do not cause any ecstasy. When the individual is accustomed to the divine illumination and is strengthened sufficiently to withstand it, as occurs ***in the highest degrees of the mystical life, all ecstasy will disappear.***

***The principal forms of ecstasy are the gentle and delightful ecstasy and the violent and painful ecstasy.*** In the first, it seems that the soul is no longer in the body, and the body itself has the experience of losing its natural warmth. Nevertheless, this is accompanied by great sweetness and delight. This form of ecstasy is in no way harmful to health; rather, it often improves the individual's health.

***In its violent and painful form, the bodily suffering is so intense that the individual can hardly bear it.*** It seems sometimes as if the entire body has been dislocated. St. John of the Cross states that it seems as if all the bones have dried up and that the body has lost all its strength. Sometimes the body becomes completely cold and appears as if dead.(46) ***The sweet and delightful form of ecstasy is simply ecstasy; the painful form is called transport, flight of the spirit, or rapture.***(47)

Ecstasy sometimes produces noticeable effects on the body and soul of the ecstatic. The ecstatic has no sensation of any material thing, and there is no awareness through vision of any objects in the vicinity, as can be proved by passing some object, even a bright light, in front of the opened eyes of the ecstatic. The vital functions seem to be interrupted: there is no evident sign of respiration, of circulation of the blood, or any movement of the lips. The sweet and gentle ecstasy is never harmful to bodily health, but often restores or improves it; after the violent

ecstasy, on the other hand, the body sometimes remains exhausted and painful over a period of days.(48)

Perhaps only those who have experienced the ecstatic states of the prayer of conforming union can describe them properly and distinguish between ecstasy and transport of the spirit or rapture. But even St. Teresa found difficulty in doing so.

I should like, with the help of God, to be able to describe the difference between union and rapture, or elevation, or what they call flight of the spirit, or transport - it is all one. I mean that these different names all refer to the same thing, which is also called ecstasy. It is much more beneficial than union: the effects it produces are far more important, and it has a great many more operations, for union gives the impression of being just the same at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, and it all happens interiorly. But the ends of these raptures are both interior and exterior.(49)

### *Effects of Ecstatic Prayer*

It is possible to study ecstasy under three different aspects: the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual. It would be very difficult to differentiate truly mystical ecstasy from natural or diabolical ecstasy by using the physical or psychological aspects exclusively. In fact, the physical and psychological manifestations of ecstasy are usually identical, whether the ecstasy has a natural, a divine, or a diabolical cause. Consequently, it is necessary to study the effects of ecstasy in order to judge whether it is truly mystical and of supernatural origin. "By their fruits you shall know them."

***St. Teresa lists five different types of ecstasy*** in *The Spiritual Relations*, and she also provides us with the various phenomena that sometimes accompany each type., Some of these phenomena are extraordinary phenomena, while others are what we could call concomitant to the ecstatic prayer of the conforming union. Nor should one understand that a mystic will necessarily experience all five types of ecstasy; St. Teresa makes no such assertion, nor does she attempt to present the types as a series of ecstatic steps by which the soul reaches the transforming union.

***The first kind of ecstasy comes on gradually and reaches the point at which the soul loses contact with its surroundings and is drawn to God alone.*** The soul is conscious of what is going on around it, but as if at a great distance; the impression of the union with, God is so vivid that it may take the soul several days to adjust to its normal life and surroundings. This type of ecstasy results in a profound knowledge of God that causes the soul to have a great, disdain for all created things. At the same time it is made aware of its own misery, the extent of its failures to serve God, and its great indebtedness to God. As a result, the soul grows in humility, feels an ardent love for God and a consuming desire to serve him as perfectly as possible. Gladly would the soul accept martyrdom for the love of God.

***The second type of ecstasy, called rapture, "comes through a sudden light shed by His Majesty in the very depth of the soul, with a swiftness of movement that seems to carry away the higher part of it and to separate the soul from the body."***(50) The soul needs the courage to submit itself totally to God and to let him lead it where he will. If the soul is quite determined to die for

him, the virtues will be all the stronger because of this and, with its deeper knowledge, there will also be an increase in the fear and love of God. At the same time, the soul experiences profound sorrow at ever having offended God and so desires that no one will ever offend him. "This, I think," says St. Teresa, "must be the source of its intense desires for the salvation of souls and its longing that it may itself have a part in this and that God may be praised as he deserves." [\(51\)](#)

***In the third kind of ecstasy, flight of the spirit, "there seems to come out of (the soul) something swift and subtle which rises to its higher part and goes whither the Lord wills.*** More than this it is impossible to explain; it is like a flight, and I know nothing else with which to compare it." [\(52\)](#) The soul is better able now to occupy itself with the work given it by the Lord, and it enjoys great certitude and security. ***Three things in particular are bestowed on the soul in the flight of the spirit: knowledge of the greatness of God, selfknowledge and humility, and a supreme contempt for earthly things.*** Some' mystics at this stage also receive extraordinary phenomena: imaginative or intellectual visions, bodily levitation, or revelations.

***The fourth type of ecstasy is caused by a spiritual impulse or transport resulting from the sudden remembrance, when the soul is not engaged in prayer, of its absence from God or something to that effect.*** It is a distressing type of ecstasy because nothing created can give comfort to the soul or satisfy its desires, but at the same time it cannot possess God as it desires. "It feels itself to be in a state of deep loneliness and total abandonment, such as cannot be described, for the world and all worldly things cause it distress, and no created thing can provide it with companionship; it seeks nothing but the Creator, yet sees that without dying it is impossible for it to have him . ... It sees itself suspended between heaven and earth and has no idea what to do .... It leaves the limbs so disjointed and the bones so racked that the hands have not power enough to write; it also produces grievous pains. Nothing of this is felt until that impulse has passed away." [\(53\)](#)

This, according to some authors, constitutes the passive purgation of the spirit, which is necessary before the soul can proceed to the transforming union, and according to St. Teresa, the only comparison of these pains is the suffering in purgatory. Visions are often associated with this type of ecstasy, and St. Teresa states that she experienced ecstatic impulses only after she had experienced the other types of ecstasy.

***Lastly, St. Teresa speaks of the wound of love, which closely resembles the ecstatic impulse.*** It is not a question of physical pain, although it may result in severe bodily pain after the experience has passed. The interior sensation is like that of a fiery arrow shot into the soul, and the sudden impact may make the individual cry out when it happens. Yet the wound is one of such sweet delight that the soul would like it to continue. The experience itself may be of brief duration, or it may last several hours. The faculties of the soul are inactive as long as it lasts, and there is the usual drop in body temperature and slowness of pulse, but no bodily rigidity or suspended animation, though frequently the experience terminates in a true trance or a vision.

The effects of the wound of love are described by St. Teresa as follows: "These effects are desires for God, so quick and subtle as to be indescribable. As the soul finds itself tied and bound so. that it cannot have fruition of God as it would wish, it conceives a great hatred for the body .... It then sees how great was the evil that came to us through the sin of Adam." [\(54\)](#) The soul

loses all fear of any trials and sufferings that may come to it; it has far more contempt for the world than previously; it is much more detached from created things; and it has a holy horror of ever offending God.

***The spiritual betrothal or covenant between God and the soul occurs during an ecstatic union with God.*** In this ecstasy, says St. Teresa, "the soul has never before been so fully awake to the things of God or had such light or such knowledge of His Majesty."[\(55\)](#) The spiritual betrothal, as its name indicates, is essentially a promise of marriage, an espousal. It may be accompanied by a vision of Christ; the bestowal of a symbolic ring, the exchange of hearts, or a locution in which Christ formally espouses himself to the soul. ***The spiritual betrothal is the high point of the prayer of conforming union and at the same time the transition to mystical marriage.*** Father Marie Eugene states that in the three periods or phases that precede mystical marriage the first is one of preliminary mortifications, the second is the passive purgation of the spirit, and the third is the divine touches or visits in which occurs the spiritual betrothal.[\(56\)](#) Thus, ***the spiritual betrothal is a passage from the passive purgation of the spirit to the perfect union of the mystical marriage.***

### Prayer of Transforming Union

***The last grade of prayer is the transforming union, identified by many mystics as the spiritual marriage. It constitutes the seventh mansions of The Interior Castle of St. Teresa and is the highest degree of perfection that one can attain in this life.*** It is, therefore, a prelude to the beatific life of glory. This state is nothing less than a transformation into God, and St. John of the Cross does not hesitate to use such expressions as "transformed into God by love," "God of God by participation," and "more divine than human."[\(57\)](#) Such expressions may seem daring and even excessive when applied to the spiritual life of the soul, but they are fully justified by a usage that goes back to St. John, St. Paul, and the Fathers of the Church, especially the Eastern Church. St. John of the Cross says of this grade of prayer:

There is as great a difference between these states as there is between betrothal and marriage. For in betrothal there is only a consent by agreement, and a unity of will between the two parties, and the jewels and the adornment of the bride-to-be, given her graciously by the bridegroom. But in marriage there is likewise communication between the persons, and union.[\(58\)](#)

St. Teresa says practically the same thing:

There is the same difference between the spiritual betrothal and the spiritual marriage as there is between two betrothed persons, and two who are united so that they cannot be separated anymore.[\(59\)](#)

***In this grade of prayer there is a total transformation of the soul into the Beloved.*** The soul has entered into its very center, so to speak, which is the throne room of the interior castle where the Trinity dwells through grace. There God and the soul give themselves to each other in the consummation of divine love, so far as is possible in the present life. There is no more ecstasy, for the soul has now been strengthened to receive the full power of love, but in the brightness of an intellectual vision the soul experiences the Trinity with vivid awareness.

It sees these three Persons individually and yet, by a wonderful kind of knowledge which is given to it, the soul realizes that most certainly and truly all these three Persons are one substance

and one power and one knowledge and one God alone; so that what we hold by faith the soul may be said here to grasp by sight, although nothing is seen by the eyes, either of the body or the soul, for it is no imaginative vision. Here all three Persons communicate themselves to the soul and speak to the soul and explain to it those words which the Gospel attributes to the Lord, namely, that he and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul which loves him and keeps his commandments.(60)

***We can distinguish three elements in this loftiest degree of the prayer of union: transformation in God, mutual surrender, and the permanent union of love.*** As St. John of the Cross states:

The soul becomes brilliant and transformed in God, and God communicates to the soul his supernatural being to such an extent that the soul appears to be God and to have all that God has. Such a union is effected when God grants to the soul this supernatural mercy; as a result of which all the things of God and the soul are one in a participated transformation. The soul seems to be more God than soul and is truly God by participation, although it is true that its being, so distinct by nature, is possessed by the soul as something distinct from the being of God, as it was formerly, even though transformed, just as the window is distinct from the ray of light which illumines it.(61)

As to the mutual surrender, it is a natural consequence of the transforming union just described. Between God and the soul there are a perfect communication and the mutual gift of self, for which reason the prayer of transforming union is called a spiritual marriage. Lastly, St. Teresa teaches that in this grade of prayer, unlike the grades that preceded it, ***there is a permanency of union and love.***

Concomitant with the permanent union of love is the soul's *confirmation in grace*. St. John of the Cross maintains that the transforming union never falters and the soul is confirmed in grace,(62) but St. Teresa warns that as long as we are in this world we must walk with caution, lest we offend God.(63) However, the apparent contradiction is readily resolved when we say that confirmation in grace does not mean intrinsic impeccability, for the Church teaches that it is an impossibility in this life. Nor is it a question of avoiding all venial sins in this life, for that would require a special privilege of grace as was bestowed on the Virgin Mary. Consequently, ***confirmation in grace must be understood as the special grace and assistance from God to avoid all mortal sins and thus have moral certitude of salvation.***

### ***Effects of Transforming Union***

Perhaps no one has described as clearly as St. Teresa the marvelous effects produced in the soul by the transforming union or mystical marriage. We shall summarize her description of these effects as given in her *Interior Castle*, Seventh Mansions, Chapter 3:

1. ***A forgetfulness of self so complete that it seems as if the soul no longer existed.*** There is no longer any knowledge or remembrance of heaven or life or honor as regards the soul, so completely is it absorbed in seeking the honor of God. The soul lives in a state of forgetfulness so that it has no desire whatever in regard to self, but desires only to do what it can do to promote the glory of God, and for this it would gladly lay down its life.

2. ***A great desire to suffer***, but now the desire does not disturb the soul as it did previously. So great is the soul's longing that the will of God be done in it that it accepts whatever God wills as the best for it. If he sends suffering, well and good; if not, the soul does not worry or fret about it as it did previously.

3. ***Joy in persecution***. When the soul is persecuted, it experiences great interior joy and much more peace than formerly. It bears no enmity toward those who treat it badly or desire to do so. Rather, it conceives a special love for such persons, and if it were to see them in some affliction it would be deeply grieved and would do all in its power to relieve them. It loves to commend such persons to God, and would rejoice at relinquishing some of the favors it receives from God if it could bestow them on its enemies, and thus perhaps prevent them from offending God.

4. ***Desire to serve God***. Whereas the soul formerly suffered because of its longing to die and to be with God, it now experiences a strong desire to serve God and to help any soul that it can. Indeed, it now desires not to die but to live for many years and to suffer the most severe trials if in this way it can be a means whereby God is praised. Its conception of glory is now connected in some way with helping Christ, especially when it sees how often people offend him and how few there are who are truly concerned about his honor.

5. ***Detachment from everything created***. The desires of the soul are no longer for consolations because the soul realizes that now the Lord himself dwells within it. As a result, the soul experiences a marked detachment from everything, and a desire to be alone or to be occupied with something that will be beneficial to the soul. There is no more aridity or interior trial, but only a constant recollection in God and a tender love for him. There is no fear that this period of tranquillity may be caused by the devil, because the soul has an unwavering certitude that it comes from God. ***This experience takes place in the very center of the soul and in the highest faculty, into which the devil cannot enter.***

6. ***Absence of ecstasies***. Upon reaching this state, the soul has no more raptures, or very seldom. The great weakness that formerly was the occasion for raptures has now given place to a great strength granted by God. Nevertheless, the soul walks with great care and still does all in its power to strengthen itself with the help of God's grace. Indeed, the more it is favored by God, the more cautious it becomes and the more aware of its own littleness and humility.

### ***Ideal of Christian Perfection***

Such is the bittersweet path that leads to the heights of contemplative prayer and the transforming union. It is the sublime ideal of Christian perfection, and it is offered to all souls in grace. When Jesus pronounced the precept: "You must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48), he was speaking to all souls without exception. The Christian life, if it is developed according to the supernatural powers that are inherent in it, will lead to the transforming union of charity, which is in turn the prelude to the beatific vision.

***The highest perfection consists not in interior favors or in great raptures or in visions or in the spirit of prophecy, but in the bringing of our wills so closely into conformity with the will of***

***God that, as soon as we realize he wills anything, we desire it ourselves with all our might, and take the bitter with the sweet, knowing that to be His Majesty's will.*** (64)

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## CHAPTER NOTES

1. Letter of March 7, 1914, cited by J. de Guibert, S. J., *Documenta ecclesiastica christiana perfectfonis studium spectantia* (Rome: Gregorianum, 1931), n. 636.
2. *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 83, a. 12.
3. St. Teresa, *The Interior Castle*, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946), First Mansions, Book I, Chap. 7. St. Thomas teaches the same doctrine in more technical language in *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 83, a. 13.
4. *Ibid.*, Fourth Mansions, Book I, Chap. 7.
5. For detailed explanations, Cf. *Methods of Mental Prayer by Cardinal Lercaro* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957).
6. St. Ignatius composed at least six methods of meditation, as can be seen in his *Spiritual Exercises*.
7. *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 83, a. 14.
8. See *The Life*, Chaps. 13-14.
9. Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957), Book I, Chap. 6.
10. *The Interior Castle*, Seventh Mansions, Chap. 4.
11. Cf. P. Pourrat, S. S., *Christian Spirituality* trans. W. Mitchell and S. Jacques (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1953), IV, 129.
12. Cf. *The Way of Perfection*, Chaps. 28-29; *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions, Chap. 3.
13. Cf. *The Living Flame of Love*, Chap. 3.
14. *The Dark Night*, Book II, Chap. 6, n. 1.
15. *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 52, a. 2, ad 1.
16. Cf. Denz.-Schön. 1533; 1540; 1563; 1565-46; 1573.
17. *The Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansions, Chap. 2, n. 4.
18. Cf. *The Life*, Chaps. 18-20.
19. St. Teresa speaks emphatically on this point; Cf. *The Way of Perfection*, Chap. 36; *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions, Chap. 3.
20. Cf. *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions, Chap. 3.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Cf. *The Way of Perfection*, Chap. 31, n. 5.
23. *Spiritual Relations*, V; Cf. *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions, Chap. 2, and *The Way of Perfection*, Chap. 31.
24. Cf. *The Life*, Chap. 16; *The Foundations*, Chap. 6; *Spiritual Relations*, V; *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions. Since *The Interior Castle* is the most mature work of St. Teresa, we consider that it contains her definitive teaching.
25. Cf. *The Life*, Chap. 16.
26. *Ibid.*, Chap. 16.
27. Cf. *Ibid.*, Chap. 17; *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions, Chap. 1.
28. Cf. *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions, Chap. 3.

29. Cf. *The Life*, Chap. 15.
30. Cf. *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions, Chap. 3.
31. *The Life*, Chap. 17; d. also *The Interior Castle*, Fifth Mansions, Chap. 1.
32. Cf. *The Interior Castle*, Fifth Mansions, Chap. 1.
33. Cf. *The Life*, Chap. 18.
34. Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Chap. 32; *The Dark Night*, Book II, Chap. 23; *The Living Flame of Love*, Chap. 2; *Spiritual Canticle* Stanzas 1, 7; St. Teresa of Avila, Chap. 29; *Spiritual Relations*, V.
35. Cf. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Chap. 32.
36. Cf. *The Life*, Chap. 29.
37. Cf. *The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 1.
38. For the distinction between these two phenomena, Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 7, and *The Living Flame of Love*, Chap. 2.
39. St. Teresa states in *The Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansions, Chap. 4: "This (sixth mansion) and the last (seventh mansion) might be fused in one; there is no closed door to separate the one from the other." Again, in Seventh Mansions, Chap. 2, she says that there is no need of a door by which to pass on to spiritual marriage from betrothal.
40. *The Interior Castle*, Fifth Mansions, Chap. 2.
41. St. Teresa's description of the prayer of conforming union is the longest section eleven chapters of *The Interior Castle*. It is also in that section that she discusses the extraordinary mystical phenomena that sometimes accompany the last two grades of mystical prayer.
42. *The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 12, n. 69; Cf. *The Living Flame*, Stanza 3.
43. *The Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansions, Chap. 4.
44. *The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 12.
45. Natural ecstasy can be divided into four types: fainting, somnambulism, hypnotic trance, and hysterical seizure. Diabolical ecstasy is a form of diabolical obsession.
46. See *The Dark Night*, Book II, Chaps. 1 and 2; *The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanzas 13 and 14.
47. Some authors classify ecstasy as a concomitant phenomenon of the mystical life and rapture or flight of the spirit as an extraordinary phenomenon. Following the teaching of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, we prefer to classify rapture as a more intense and vehement type of ecstasy.
48. Cf. *The Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansions, where St. Teresa describes in great detail the effects of ecstasy and rapture.
49. *The Life*, Chap. 20; Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanzas 12 and 13. St. Teresa also states in *The Spiritual Relations*, 5: "Raptures and suspensions of the faculties, in my opinion, are one and the same thing; I generally describe them as suspension, so as not to use the word rapture, which frightens people."
50. *The Spiritual Relations*, V.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*; Cf. *The Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansions, Chap. 4; *The Life*, Chap. 20.
54. *The Spiritual Relations*, V.

55. *Ibid.*, Chap. 4.
  56. Marie-Eugene, *I am a Daughter of the Church*, trans. M. Verda Clare (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides, 1955), p. 536.
  57. Cf. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Stanza 2; *The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 39; *The Dark Night*, Stanza 2.
  58. *The Living Flame*, Stanza 3.
  59. *The Interior Castle*, Seventh Mansions, Chap. 2.
  60. St. Teresa, *op. cit.*, Seventh Mansions, Chap. 1. This does not mean that an intellectual vision of the Trinity is a concomitant phenomenon of the transforming union and that every soul attaining this state would receive such a vision. St. Teresa is describing her own experience, though other mystics had the same experience.
  61. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Chap. 5.
  62. Cf. *The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 22.
  63. See *The Interior Castle*, Seventh Mansions, Chaps. 2 and 4.
  64. St. Teresa, *Book of Foundations*, Chap. 5.
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