

Chapter 14

Discernment of Spirits

It is indispensable for the direction of souls and for the study of extraordinary mystical phenomena to be able to distinguish the various spirits under which an individual may act or be acted upon. As used here, ***the word spirit refers to two different types of motivating factors or powers. The spirit of an individual refers to the internal inclination to good or evil***, and it manifests itself with such regularity that it must be considered a personal trait. Thus, if a person has a propensity to prayer, he or she is said to possess the spirit of prayer; if there is a tendency to arguments and altercations, he or she is said to possess a spirit of contradiction, etc. Understood in this sense, ***the spirit of a person is usually the result of both temperament and character***.

But it is also possible for an individual to come under the influence of a spirit that is ***extrinsic to the personality***, whether from *God* or the *devil*. For that reason it is the function of the discernment of spirits to judge whether a given act or repetition of acts flows from the spirit of God, the diabolical spirit, or the spirit of the individual.

There are two types of discernment of spirit: acquired and infused. Acquired discernment of spirits is complementary to ordinary spiritual direction and can be cultivated by all who use the proper means. ***Infused discernment of spirits is a charismatic gift or gratia gratis data, which is granted by God to certain individuals. It is extremely rare***, even among the saints, but when it occurs it is infallible because it is the result of an interior movement or inspiration received from the Holy Spirit, who cannot err.

Acquired discernment is absolutely necessary for a spiritual director. St. John of the Cross places great stress on the importance of discernment, pointing out that the priest who presumes to take charge of the direction of souls without such knowledge is guilty of temerity. ***(1) It is therefore important to examine the various means by which one can acquire the art of discernment of spirits***.

1. ***Prayer***. This is the most important and fundamental means, Although we are speaking of an acquired art, personal effort would avail nothing without the special assistance of the Holy Spirit through the virtue of prudence and the gift of counsel. Hence it is not only a question of the constant practice of prayer, but the particular petition by which the director requests of God the prudence necessary for the direction of souls and the light to be able to discern the will of God for some particular soul at a given time. It does not suffice to possess a theoretical knowledge of the spiritual life and the ways to perfection; one needs to know the practical and concrete application of these principles in particular cases. It is certain that God will answer these prayers with special graces that he gives to all rightly disposed souls so that they may fulfill their duties.

2. ***Study***. The spiritual director likewise needs a vast amount of knowledge acquired through study. He should be familiar with the general principles of spiritual theology contained in Sacred Scripture, speculative theology, the masters of the spiritual life, and the lives of the saints. ***He***

should be especially careful not to restrict himself to a particular "school" or method of spirituality, but should have a broad and sympathetic understanding of the variety of schools and methods of the spiritual life.

3. ***Personal experience.*** Self-knowledge is a basic requirement for any kind of direction of others. While it is true that each person has unique traits and characteristics, there is also a common pattern possessed by all and, unless one understands oneself, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to understand others. Under this same heading we may include that sympathy or rapport that enables the director to place himself in the position and circumstances in which others find themselves, according to the statement of St. Paul: "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Moreover, if the spiritual director himself has not attained some degree of virtue and self-mastery, it is not likely that he will be able to understand their condition, especially when they enter upon the higher stages of the spiritual life. ***Holiness of life is of inestimable value in acquiring the art of discernment of spirits.***

4. ***Removal of obstacles.*** Under this heading we may place all the defective qualities that are an impediment to the understanding and direction of souls. One of the greatest obstacles is the spirit of self-sufficiency, which prevents the director from seeking the advice of those who are more learned or more experienced than himself. Secondly, the director must avoid at all costs an excessive attachment to the one he is directing, for this attachment will cloud his judgment and cause him to be too sympathetic. He must strive to be as objective as possible and avoid the inclination to judge according to purely human standards. He will never be precipitous in his decisions but will subject them to mature reflection.

Types of Spirits

Spirits can be summarized under three headings: the divine spirit, the diabolical spirit, and the human spirit. God always inclines us to the good, working either directly or through secondary causes; the devil always inclines us to evil, working by his own power or through the allurements of the things of the world; the human spirit may be inclined to evil or to good, depending upon whether the individual follows right reason or selfish desires.

Due to the basic indifference of many purely natural inclinations, it is evident that they may be used for good and for evil, and while grace does not destroy nature but perfects and supernaturalizes it, the devil utilizes human weakness and the effects of original sin to further his evil aims. Moreover, ***it may happen that, in one and the same inclination or action, various spirits are intermingled,*** making it difficult to discern which spirit has the predominance at a given time. The spirit of God and the spirit of the devil cannot be operating at the same time, since they tend to opposite goals, but God can direct or intensify a naturally good inclination, or the devil may divert those inclinations to evil. And even when the divine spirit predominates in a given action, it does not follow that all the antecedent or consequent movements and inclinations are likewise divine and supernatural. ***It frequently happens that purely human and natural movements introduce themselves, consciously or unconsciously, and cause the action to lose some of its supernatural purity.*** This is one of the factors making it almost impossible for the director or theologian to discern clearly the divine element in extraordinary mystical phenomena.

Moreover, it is not at all unusual in the lives of mystics that their mystical and truly supernatural operations are interrupted by purely natural activities or that, with God's permission, a diabolical influence is introduced. It is not easy to determine when the action of God terminates and when the natural or diabolical movement begins. If the director is familiar with the signs of the various spirits, however, he will have sufficient grounds for making a prudent judgment in each case. It will not always be a situation in which one spirit is operating exclusively, but ***even if there is a mixture of several spirits, one or another will always predominate.***

The Divine Spirit

The following characteristics are general signs of the divine spirit.

1. ***Truth.*** God is truth and cannot inspire anything but truth in a soul. If a person believed to be inspired by God, therefore, maintains opinions that are manifestly against revealed truth, the infallible teaching of the Church, or proven theology or philosophy or science, it must be concluded that the individual is deluded by the devil or is the victim of excessive imagination or faulty reasoning.
2. ***Gravity.*** God is never the cause of things that are useless, futile, frivolous, or impertinent. ***When his spirit moves a soul it is always for something serious and beneficial.***
3. ***Enlightenment.*** Although one may not always understand the meaning of an inspiration from God, ***the effect of any divine movement or impulse is always enlightenment and certitude rather than darkness and confusion.*** This is true both for the effects on the individual who receives the inspiration and its effects on others.
4. ***Docility.*** Souls that are moved by the spirit of God accept cheerfully the advice and counsel of their directors or others who have authority over them. This spirit of obedience, docility, and submission is one of the clearest signs that a particular inspiration or movement is from God. This is especially true in the case of the educated, who have a greater tendency to be attached to their own opinions.
5. ***Discretion.*** The spirit of God makes the soul discreet, prudent, and thoughtful in all its actions. There is nothing of precipitation, lightness, exaggeration, or impetuosity; all is well balanced, edifying, serious, and full of calmness and peace.
6. ***Humility.*** The Holy Spirit always fills the soul with sentiments of humility and self-effacement. The loftier the communications from on high, the more profoundly the soul inclines to the abyss of its own nothingness. Mary said, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say" (Luke 1:38).
7. ***Peace.*** St. Paul speaks frequently of the peace that comes from God (Rom. 15:33, Phil. 4:9), and Jesus mentions peace as one of the manifestations of his spirit (John 14:27). This is a quality that always accompanies communications from God; the soul experiences a profound and stable serenity in the depths of its spirit.

8. **Confidence in God.** This is a counterpart and necessary consequence of true humility. Recognizing that of itself it can do nothing, as St. Paul says, the soul throws itself on the power and mercy of God with a childlike trust. Then it learns that it can do all things in him (Phil. 4:13).

9. **Flexibility of will.** This sign consists primarily in a certain promptness of the will to subject itself to the inspirations and invitations of God. Secondarily it consists in a facility in following the advice and counsel of others, especially if they are superiors, confessors, or spiritual directors. It is opposed to the rigid and unyielding will that is characteristic of those who are filled with self-love.

10. **Purity of intention.** The soul seeks only the glory of God in all that it does and the perfect fulfillment of the will of God, without human interest or motivation out of self-love.

11. **Patience in suffering. Suffering is frequently the best touchstone for revealing the true worth of an individual.** No matter what the source of the suffering, or whether it is justly received or not, the soul bears it with patience and equanimity and uses it as a means of further perfection.

12. **Self-abnegation.** The words of Christ himself are sufficient evidence that this is a sign of the spirit of God: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

13. **Simplicity.** Together with veracity and sincerity, this characteristic is never lacking in those who are truly motivated by the spirit of God. **Any duplicity, arrogance, hypocrisy, or vanity must be attributed rather to the spirit of the devil, the father of lies.**

14. **Liberty of spirit.** First of all, there is no attachment to any created thing, not even to, the gifts received from God. Second, all is accepted from the hands of God with gratitude and humility, whether it be a question of consolation or trial. Third, while all duties and spiritual exercises are performed with promptness and punctuality, the soul is ready to leave even the most consoling and profitable exercise as soon as the charity of God calls it elsewhere. **Liberty of spirit enables the soul to live in a state of constant joy and eagerness for the things of God.**

15. **Desire to imitate Christ.** St. Paul says that it is impossible to have the spirit of God without having the spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9). For that reason St. John of the Cross states that the soul that aspires to perfection must have a desire to imitate Christ in all things by conforming its life as much as possible to his.

16. **Disinterested love.** We mean by this kind of love all the characteristics St. Paul attributes to true charity (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

The Diabolical Spirit

Normally diabolical influence on the individual Christian is restricted to simple temptation, although it is not likely that the majority of temptations proceed from the immediate and direct

intervention of the devil. ***At other times, with God's permission, the devil may concentrate his power on an individual by means of diabolical obsession or diabolical possession.***

Diabolical Obsession. Obsession occurs whenever the devil torments a person from without and in a manner that is so intense that there can be no doubt about his presence and his action. In simple temptation the diabolical action is not so evident; absolutely speaking, it could be due to other causes. But ***in true and authentic obsession, the presence and activity of Satan are so clear and unequivocal that neither the soul nor the director can have the least doubt of it.*** The soul is aware of its own vital activity and government of its faculties, but it is at the same time clearly aware of the external activity of Satan, who tries to exert violence on the individual.

Obsession can affect the interior faculties, especially the imagination, or the external senses in various manners and degrees. The attack on the imagination differs from ordinary temptation only by reason of its violence and duration. Although it is difficult to determine exactly where simple temptation ends and true obsession begins, we can say that when the disturbance of the soul is so profound and the tendency to evil is so violent that the only possible explanation lies in some external force (even when there is nothing evident externally), it is certainly a case of diabolical obsession. It can take many different forms.

Sometimes it is manifested as a fixed idea that absorbs all the energies of the soul; at other times the images and representations are so vivid that the subject feels that he or she is dealing with concrete reality. Again, it may refer to one's duties and obligations, toward which one feels an almost insuperable repugnance, or it may be manifested by a vehement desire for something one is obliged to avoid.

This seizure has repercussions in the emotional life because of the intimate relation between the emotions and the cognitive faculties. The soul, even in spite of itself, finds itself filled with obsessive images that arouse doubt, resentment, anger, antipathy, hatred, despair, or dangerous tenderness and an inclination to sensuality. ***The best remedy against such assaults is prayer,*** accompanied by true humility, self-disdain, confidence in God, the protection of Mary, the use of the sacramentals, and obedience to one's director, from whom none of these things should be hidden.

Bodily obsession is usually more spectacular, but in reality it is less dangerous than internal obsession, although the two normally occur together. External obsession can affect any of the external senses, and there are numerous examples of this in the lives of the saints. The eye is filled with diabolical apparitions. Sometimes they are very pleasant, as when ***Satan transforms himself into an angel of light*** to deceive the soul and fill it with sentiments of vanity, selfcomplacence, etc. By these and similar effects the soul will recognize the presence of the enemy. ***At other times Satan may appear in horrible and frightening forms*** in order to terrify the servants of God and to withdraw them from the practice of virtue, as one can discover in the lives of numerous saints. ***Or the devil may present himself in a voluptuous form*** in order to tempt souls to evil.

Other senses besides sight are also affected. The ear is tormented with frightful sounds and shouts, with blasphemy and obscenities, or with voluptuous songs and music to arouse

sensuality. The sense of smell sometimes perceives the most pleasant odors or an unbearable stench. The sense of taste is affected in various ways. Sometimes the devil arouses feelings of gluttony by producing a sensation of the most delicious food or most exquisite liquors the individual has never actually tasted. But usually he arouses a most bitter taste in the food that is taken, or he mixes repulsive objects with the food so that it would be dangerous or impossible to swallow or to digest.

Finally, the sense of touch, which is diffused throughout the whole body, can be subjected in countless ways to the influence of the devil. Sometimes there are terrible blows upon the body; at other times there are sensations of voluptuous embraces or caresses; or God may permit that his servant be tested by extreme experiences of sensuality, without any consent on the part of the one who suffers these things. ***Obsession may be due to any one of the following causes:***

1. ***The permission of God***, who wishes thereby to test the virtue of a soul and to increase its merits. In this sense it is equivalent to a passive trial or a mystical night of the soul.
2. ***The envy and pride of the devil***, who cannot bear the sight of a soul that is trying to sanctify itself and to glorify God to the best of its ability, thereby leading a great number of other souls to salvation or perfection.
3. ***The natural predisposition of the person obsessed***, which gives the devil an occasion to attack the individual at his weakest point. This reason is of no value in regard to external obsession, which has; nothing to do with the temperament or natural predispositions of the obsessed, but it is valid for internal obsession, which finds a fertile soil in a melancholy temperament or in one inclined to scruples, anxiety, or sadness. ***Nevertheless, however violent the obsession, it never deprives the subject of liberty, and with the grace of God he or she can always overcome it and even derive benefit from it. It is only for this reason that God permits it.***

One needs much discretion and perspicacity to distinguish true obsession from the various kinds of nervous illnesses and mental unbalances that are very similar to it. It would be foolish to deny the reality of diabolical action in the world, especially sine it is expressly mentioned in the sources of revelation and has been proved countless times by the experiences of many saints. In modern times there has been a tendency to exaggerate the purely natural causes of all phenomena, and ***perhaps the greatest victory of the devil is that he has succeeded in destroying the belief in his terrible power***. On the other hand, many apparently diabolical phenomena are due to natural causes, and ***it is a fundamental principle advocated by the Church that one may not attribute to the preternatural order anything that can probably be explained by purely natural causes***.

The director will proceed prudently by bearing in mind the following observations and guidelines:

1. ***Obsession usually occurs only in souls that are far advanced in virtue***. As regards ordinary souls, the devil is content to persecute them with simple temptations. Therefore, the director

should first investigate the type of soul with which he is dealing, and in this way he will be able to conjecture as to the diabolical or purely natural origin of the apparent obsession.

2. It is important to investigate carefully whether one is dealing with a soul that is normal, balanced, of sound judgment, and an enemy of any kind of exaggeration or sentimentality; or whether, on the contrary, one is dealing with a disquieted, unbalanced, weak spirit, with a history of hysteria, tormented by scruples, or depressed by reason of an inferiority complex. This rule is of exceptional importance, and very often it is the decisive rule for making a judgment. ***It will be very difficult to differentiate between the manifestations of diabolical influence and those that follow from a nervous disorder, but-it is possible to do so.*** The director should not yield to the temptation of oversimplifying the matter by attributing everything to one cause or the other. He should give to the patient the moral counsels and rules that pertain to his office as a director of souls and then refer the individual to a trustworthy psychiatrist, who can treat the other manifestations that proceed from a mental disorder.

3. ***The authentic manifestations of true diabolical obsession will be sufficiently clear if they are revealed by visible signs such as the moving of an object by an invisible hand, the marks of bruises or wounds that proceed from an invisible attack.*** These effects cannot be attributed to any purely natural cause, and when the person who suffers them gives all the signs of equanimity, self-possession, sincerity, and true virtue, the director can be certain that he is dealing with a case of obsession. We have already said that the devil does not usually obsess the ordinary soul; nevertheless, God sometimes permits diabolical obsession in these souls or even in hardened sinners, as a salutary expiation for their sins or to give them a vivid idea of the horrors of hell and the necessity of abandoning sin to be freed from the slavery of the devil. ***But ordinarily only souls of advanced virtue suffer the obsessive attacks of the devil.***

4. Once it has been proved that one is dealing with a case of diabolical obsession, the director should proceed with the greatest possible patience and tenderness. The tormented soul needs the assistance and advice of someone to whom it can give its complete confidence and one who will in turn speak to the soul in the name of God. The director's principal concern should be to encourage the soul and make it understand that the attacks of hell are futile so long as the soul places all its confidence in God and does not lose its interior serenity. He will remind the soul that God is with it and will help it conquer: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

Also, at the side of the suffering soul is Mary, our tender Mother, as well as the guardian angel, whose power is greater than that of the devil. ***The director will advise the soul never to lose its tranquillity, to hold the devil in utter disdain, to fortify himself or herself with the sign of the cross and with other sacramentals, especially holy water, which has great efficacy against the attacks of the devil.*** Above all, he will warn the soul never to do anything that the devil suggests, even if it appears good and reasonable. He will demand a detailed account of everything that happens and will never permit the soul to conceal anything, however difficult and painful it may be to reveal it. Finally, he will try to make the soul understand that God can use the devil as an instrument for purifying the soul and that the best way of cooperating with the divine plan is to abandon oneself entirely to God's holy will, ready to accept anything that God may decree, and asking the grace of never yielding to the violence of the temptations.

5. In more serious and persistent cases, the exorcisms prescribed in the Roman Ritual are used, or other formulas approved by the Church are put into effect. But the director will always do this in private and even without advising the penitent that he is going to exorcise him or her, especially if he fears that this knowledge would cause a great disturbance to the soul. For a solemn exorcism it is necessary to obtain express permission from the local ordinary and to follow the prescribed precautions.

Diabolical Possession. Diabolical possession is a phenomenon in which the devil invades the body of a living person and moves the faculties and organs as if he were manipulating a body of his own. The devil truly resides within the body of the unfortunate victim, and he operates in it and treats it as his own property. Those who suffer this despotic invasion are said to be possessed.

However it may be manifested, **the presence of the devil is restricted exclusively to the body. The soul remains free,** even if the exercise of conscious life is suspended. Only God has the privilege of penetrating into the essence of the soul. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of the violence of the devil is to disturb the soul and to draw it to sin. But the soul always remains master of itself, and if it is faithful to the grace of God, it will find an inviolable sanctuary in its free will.

Two periods can be distinguished in diabolical possession: the period of crisis and the period of calm. The periods of crisis are manifested by the violent onslaught of evil, and its very violence prevents it from being continual or even very prolonged. It is the moment in which the devil openly reveals himself by acts, words, convulsions, seizures of anger or impiety, obscenity, or blasphemy. **In the majority of cases, the victims lose consciousness of what is happening to them during this seizure,** as happens in the great crises of certain mental disorders. When they regain consciousness they have no recollection of what they have said or done or, rather, of what the devil has said or done in them. Sometimes they perceive something of the diabolical spirit at the beginning of the seizure when he begins to use their faculties or organs. In certain cases the spirit of the possessed remains free and conscious during the crisis and witnesses with astonishment and horror the despotic usurpation of its body by the devil.

In the periods of calm there is nothing to manifest the presence of the devil in the body of the possessed. One would think that the devil had gone. Nevertheless, his presence is often manifested by some strange chronic illness that exceeds the categories of pathological disorders known to medical science and resists every form of therapeutic remedy. Moreover, **diabolical possession is not always continuous, and the devil may leave for a time and then return later to continue his possession.** The devil can come and go as he pleases, so long as he has God's permission to take possession of the person.

Lest we expose ourselves to derision, it is necessary to be extremely cautious and prudent in making pronouncements concerning diabolical possession. There are countless nervous disorders presenting external symptoms very similar to those of possession, and there are also some poor unbalanced souls or perverse spirits that have a remarkable facility for simulating the horrors of possession. Fortunately, the Church has given us wise rules for discerning fraud and for making judgments that are certain. The first thing to be recognized is that authentic cases of possession

are very rare, and it is much better to make a mistake on the side of incredulity than to be too anxious to admit diabolical possession. ***The extreme agitation of the victim, the blasphemies that are uttered, the horror manifested for holy things-none of these are of themselves sufficient proof.*** These symptoms give nothing more than a conjecture of the possibility of diabolical possession, but they are never infallible signs because they could proceed from malice or from some natural cause.

Remedies for Possession. The *Roman Ritual*, after recommending prudence and discretion before making a judgment, indicates certain signs that allow for a diagnosis to ascertain the authenticity of diabolical possession: speaking in a, strange and unknown language or understanding perfectly one who speaks in an unknown language; perceiving hidden or distant things; manifesting strength beyond one's age and condition. There are other similar symptoms, and ***the more numerous they are the greater proof they offer of a true diabolical possession.***

Ordinarily, possession occurs only in sinners and precisely as a punishment for sin. There are exceptions, however, when diabolical possession is used by God as a means of purification.

Whatever will weaken the power of the devil over a person can be utilized as a remedy against diabolical possession, but the Roman Ritual specifies certain principal remedies:

Sacramental confession. Since the usual purpose of diabolical possession is punishment for sin, it is necessary above all to remove the cause of possession by a humble and sincere confession, ***It will have a special efficacy if it is a general confession of one's whole life, because of the humiliation and renewal of soul it presupposes.***

Holy Communion. The *Roman Ritual* recommends frequent Communion under the direction and advice of a priest. Holy Communion, however, ***should not be given to a possessed person except in moments of calm,*** and one must also take great care to avoid any danger of irreverence or profanation, as the *Ritual* prescribes.

Fasting and prayer. A certain type of devil cannot be cast out except through fasting and prayer (Matt. 17:20). Humble, and persevering prayer, accompanied by fasting and mortification,, obtains from heaven the grace of a cure. This particular remedy should, never be omitted, even when all the others are used.

The sacramentals. Objects blessed by the prayers of the ,Church have a special power against the devil. ***Holy water*** has particular efficacy, as has been verified on countless occasions.

The cross. The *Ritual* prescribes that the exorcist should have a crucifix in his hand or before his eyes. It has been verified many times that the devil will flee merely at the sight of a crucifix. ***The sign of the cross has always been used by Christians as a safeguard against the devil,*** and the Church makes special use of it in the rite of exorcism.

Relics of the saints. The *Roman Ritual* also recommends the use of relics in the rite of exorcism. The most precious and venerated of all relics, and those that inspire the greatest horror in the

demons, are the **particles of the true Cross** because they remind the demons of the definitive victory that Christ won over them on Calvary.

The holy names of Jesus and Mary. The name of Jesus has a sovereign power to put the devil to flight. He himself promised in the Gospel: "They will use my name to expel demons" (Mark 16:17). The apostles used the Holy Name in this respect: " 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you, come out of her!' Then and there the spirit left her" (Acts 16:18).

The name of Mary is also terrifying to the devils. The examples of its salutary efficacy are innumerable and fully justify the practice of Christian piety that sees in the invocation of the name of Mary a powerful remedy against the attacks of the devil.

In addition to these remedies, which any Christian can use against the power of the devil, the Church has instituted other official means whose use is reserved to her ministers. These are the various exorcisms.

In private any priest may use the rite of exorcism, but for solemn exorcism it is necessary to verify with certainty the reality of diabolical possession and then obtain the express permission of the bishop for the exorcism. In addition, the exorcist should prepare himself carefully by means of sacramental confession, fasting, and prayer, and then perform the rite in a church or chapel (and only in exceptional circumstances in a private home), in the company of serious and pious witnesses (but only a few), and with sufficient assistants who will be able to control the patient in moments of crisis. The interrogations should be made with authority, but they should be few in number, as is indicated in the *Roman Ritual*. The witnesses will observe silence and remain in prayer but should never interrogate the devil. The sessions should be repeated as often as is necessary until the devil is cast out. Once this has taken place and the liberation of the patient is verified, the exorcist should petition God to command the devil never again to enter the body he has just left. The exorcist should give thanks to God and exhort the liberated patient to bless God and carefully to avoid sin lest he or she fall again under the domination of the devil.

A person may also come under the power of the devil by reason of the habitual practice of evil or the uncontrolled desire to experience extraordinary mystical phenomena or receive charismatic graces. In the first case a confessor may, unknown to the penitent, apply an abbreviated form of exorcism when giving absolution to habitual sinners. In the second case it is necessary to exercise discernment of spirits when the person claims to have received some special grace or favor from God.

Signs of the Diabolical Spirit. We have already enumerated the signs of the divine spirit, but since the devil may disguise himself as a good spirit and even cause what appears to be authentic mystical phenomena, it is helpful to mention briefly the various signs of the diabolical spirit.

1. **Spirit of falsity.** The devil is the father of lies, but he cleverly conceals his deceit by half-truths and pseudo-mystical phenomena.
2. **Morbid curiosity.** This is characteristic of those who eagerly seek out the esoteric aspects of mystical phenomena or have a fascination for the occult or preternatural.
3. **Confusion, anxiety, and deep depression.**

4. ***Obstinacy***. One of the surest signs of a diabolical spirit.
5. ***Constant indiscretion and a restless spirit***. Those who constantly go to extremes, as in penitential exercises or apostolic activity; or neglect their primary obligations to do some personally chosen work.
6. ***Spirit of pride and vanity***. Very anxious to publicize their gifts of grace and mystical experiences.
7. ***False humility***. This is the disguise for their pride and self-love.
8. ***Despair, lack of confidence, and discouragement***. A chronic characteristic that alternates with presumption, vain security, and un-'founded optimism.
9. ***Disobedience and hardness of heart***.
10. ***Impatience in suffering and stubborn resentment***.
11. ***Uncontrolled passions and strong inclination to sensuality***, usually under the guise of mystical union.
12. ***Hypocrisy, simulation, and duplicity***.
13. ***Excessive attachment to sensible consolations***, particularly in their practice of prayer.
14. ***Lack of deep devotion to Jesus and Mary***.
15. ***Scrupulous adherence to the letter of the law and fanatical zeal in promoting a cause***. This characteristic readily opens the door to diabolical influence in reformers and demagogues.

Once the spiritual director is certain that a person is acting under the influence of a diabolical spirit, he should: (1) make the individual realize that he or she is a toy of the devil and must resist his influence; (2) encourage the individual to pray to God for the grace to overcome the devil; (3) advise the person to act quickly and with disdain for the devil as soon as the influence is perceived, performing the opposite from what is suggested or felt.

The Human Spirit

The signs of a purely human spirit have been described by Thomas à Kempis in Book 3, Chapter 54 of The Imitation of Christ. His words should be pondered carefully, for he explains the struggle between grace and the human spirit, wounded by sin and strongly inclined to self-love.

The human spirit is always inclined to its own satisfactions; it is a friend of pleasure and an enemy of suffering of any kind. It readily inclines to anything that is compatible with its own temperament, its personal tastes and caprices, or the satisfaction of self-love. It will not hear of humiliations, penance, renunciation, or mortification. If any director or confessor goes against its inclinations, he is immediately branded as inept and incompetent. It seeks success, honors, applause, and pastimes. It is always a great promoter of anything that will arouse admiration or notoriety. In a word, ***the human spirit neither understands nor cares for anything except its own egoism.***

It is sometimes difficult in practice to judge whether given manifestations proceed from the devil or from a purely human and egoistic spirit, but it is always relatively easy to distinguish between these two and the spirit of God. It will be possible in most cases, therefore, to determine that a given spirit could not possibly be from God and that it must be combatted, even if one is not sure whether it is in fact from the devil or the human, ego.

The following contrasts may serve as general rules for distinguishing between the diabolical and the human spirit. Natural impulses and inclinations are **spontaneous**; they can usually be traced to some natural cause or disposition; **the stimulation of the senses** acts upon, the interior powers, and they often persist in spite of prayer. Diabolical impulse or suggestion, on the other hand, is usually violent and difficult to prevent; it arises unexpectedly or with the slightest provocation; a mental suggestion excites the senses and disappears as a rule with prayer. **Self-denial and rectitude of intention are excellent remedies against the spirit of egoism.**

In this respect the spiritual director and confessor will do well to keep in mind the general rule for discernment of spirits: if there is a possible natural or diabolical explanation for a given phenomenon, it cannot be presumed that it is supernatural in origin. **The following are the principal doubtful reasons or situations:**

1. **To aspire to some other state in life after having made a prudent and deliberate selection for the existing state.**
2. **To be attracted to rare phenomena or to singular exercises not proper to one's state in life.** When God desires such things he will give unmistakable proof of his will; the test is obedience and humility.
3. **An inclination to practice extreme corporal penances.** God has demanded them of some souls, but this practice is not in the workings of ordinary providence.
4. **A desire for sensible consolations** in the practice of prayer or the exercise of the virtues.
5. **The "gift of tears"** or the strong inclination to concentrate on the sorrowful and penitential aspects of religion.
6. **Exclusive devotion to some particular mystery or pious exercise,** which easily leads to a distortion of orthodox theology.
7. **Extraordinary favors, such as revelations, visions, stigmata, when they occur in a person of little sanctity.** The extraordinary graces do not necessarily presuppose sanctity or even the state of grace, but God does not ordinarily grant these gifts except to his servants and friends.

By way of conclusion, we again warn directors and confessors to proceed with great caution in making judgments in matters involving the discernment of spirits. It is easy to make a mistake. In cases of extraordinary phenomena, it should be noted that, as a rule, when these things proceed from God, the soul first experiences great fear and humility and then peace and consolation. If these things come from the devil they often begin with feelings of sensible consolation and satisfaction, but later they cause confusion, anxiety, and restlessness.

Lastly, apropos of the inclination some persons experience to change their state of life (and usually to go to a higher and stricter form of life), the director will bear in mind that **it is quite possible that a grace is given by God but without God's wanting the person actually to change one's state in life.**

For example, a priest who is actively engaged in the apostolate may experience a strong desire to spend more time in prayer and solitude. In trying to understand the reason for this strong inclination, he may erroneously judge that it is God's will that he enter the Carthusians or the Trappists. Such is not necessarily the case, however, for it may be that the only thing that God is asking of the priest is that he be less involved in the whirlpool of activity and that he dedicate more time each day to prayer and recollection.

We would state the following as a general rule for the solution of such cases: if an individual has prayerfully and seriously selected the state of life in which he or she is, then he or she must present a serious positive cause for changing this state of life. Otherwise, the will of God is the present state of life. Another practical test is to see whether the individual is performing the duties of the present state in life with all fidelity; if not, the person should not even think of changing to another state.

Psychosomatic Phenomena

The foregoing discussion on the divine spirit, the diabolical spirit, and the human spirit serves as a logical introduction to the study of extraordinary phenomena. ***Any phenomenon of religious experience must be attributed to one of those three causes - God, the devil, or some natural power. There is no other possible explanation.***

Natural Causes of Extraordinary Phenomena

The naturally caused phenomena comprise all those mysterious and paranormal happenings for which we do not as yet have a complete scientific explanation, but there is substantial evidence that they lie within the power of nature (e.g., telepathy, extrasensory perception, and certain phenomena of spiritualism). This subject belongs to the field of parapsychology.

However, in mystical theology we also have to deal with phenomena that have all the appearances of authentic mystical phenomena but are really natural in origin or blended somehow with the supernatural. We do not know with certainty all that nature is capable of producing, but we can know what nature could never possibly do. In other words, we have as our basic norm the principle of contradiction, which often leaves us with nothing more certain by way of conclusion than mere possibility or evident impossibility. In any event, ***the following rule must be followed most strictly: one may not definitely attribute to a supernatural cause that which could possibly have a natural (or diabolical) explanation.*** Thus two extremes will be avoided, namely, to see the supernatural or miraculous in every unusual phenomenon or to refuse to recognize anything but the natural in any kind of phenomenon.

The natural causes may be grouped under the following general headings: physiological or constitutional factors, imagination, depressive states, and illnesses, especially mental and nervous disorders.

We should recall the teaching of psychology concerning the intimate relationship and mutual interaction between the soul and the body. Ideas, judgments, volitions can cause profound transformations in a person's somatic structure, for good or evil; the health or sickness of the

body can in turn facilitate or obstruct the operations of the spiritual faculties. Moreover, the somatic structure, since it is organic, is so necessitated in its functions that it can react in only a limited number of ways. That is the basic reason why it is *so* difficult to determine whether a particular unusual phenomenon is supernatural or natural in origin (we might say, natural but paranormal). It is also the reason why the theologian, doctor, psychiatrist, or spiritual director must in each instance make a careful and exact examination of the constitutional factors of the individual.

The following physiological elements are of special importance in this examination:

1. ***Temperament.*** Of the four basic temperaments, ***the melancholic temperament is most prone to illusion in mystical matters.*** By nature such persons tend to extreme introversion and extravagances of the imagination. Their excessive detachment from their surroundings could easily lead to something similar to ecstasy, and their vivid imaginations could produce what would appear to be supernatural revelations and visions.

The choleric temperament, which ***is extremely impressionable,*** may give rise to the same illusions. A sudden and intense stimulation will sometimes cause a kind of hysteria in which the imagination runs riot, and the sense of judgment is completely unbalanced.

Since persons of ***sanguine temperament are inclined to sensate pleasure and bodily satisfactions,*** they will more readily be deceived regarding mystical phenomena of the affective order. It is not, difficult to see how such persons would be prone to imagine that they are experiencing mystical touches, divine caresses, or consoling visions and revelations when in a state of religious fervor.

But we must beware of exaggeration in the judgment of such individuals, for although the director will be cautious in dealing with these temperaments, he would be mistaken to conclude that no person of these temperaments could ever experience truly mystical phenomena.

2. ***Sexual differences.*** ***Women in general are more easily subject to illusion in mystical matters because their psychological structure pre-disposes them to a greater interest in religion,*** the practice of piety, and ardent love. Their somatic structure makes them more passive than active and more sensitive to psychic love and tender feelings. They go to God more easily, but at the same time they can be inconstant, highly imaginative, and sentimental. St. Teresa of Avila has some sound advice on this point. (2)

On the other hand, it must be admitted that in the history of spirituality the women have far outnumbered the men in the reception of extraordinary mystical phenomena, and we would have to admit that the weaker sex is also the more devout sex, because women generally are vastly superior to men in their abnegation and generosity in the service of God.

The imagination is one of our most beneficial faculties, and it can also be one of the most harmful. It has the power of evoking past phantasms, of creating new images, of exerting a tremendous influence *on* the intellect and the will. If it escapes from the control of the will, it can be as capricious as the pages of a book that are left to the mercy of the wind.

It is evident that the imagination is often the source of many illusions in the spiritual life. It is not that the imagination as such is in error, for in performing its function of recalling or creating phantasms it does not of itself have the power to say whether the particular phantasms truly exist in the order of reality or are purely fictitious and artificial. The error comes from the judgment of the individual who takes as true that which is merely a phantasy.

In order that spiritual directors may have a handy guide for discernment, they would do well to bear in mind the following principles:

1. ***The imagination does not create images in the proper sense of the word. It is limited to the recall or arrangement of phantasms already received, and it can contain nothing that was not received from the exterior world of reality.*** Thus if we encounter a person who spontaneously speaks or reads or writes a language with which he has never had any contact whatever, this feat could not possibly be the result of imagination. We are in the presence of a phenomenon surpassing the natural powers of the imagination; the cause, therefore, must be either supernatural or preternatural.
2. ***The imagination cannot surpass the laws of nature.*** Instantaneous cures of organic lesions, fractures, and mutilations cannot in any way be attributed to the imagination. If the cure cannot possibly be explained by the laws of nature, there must be a superior cause at work.

The generic title, depressive states, covers a number of natural causes that may lead to illusion in the spiritual life. Sadness is one of the greatest enemies of the human spirit, both in the natural and the supernatural orders. It makes the individual excessively introspective, self-centered, and anxious. This may easily lead to all sorts of illusions, regarding either mystical phenomena or one's associations with others. Since we are concerned only with mystical phenomena, we shall enumerate the ***three chief causes of depressive states of spirit*** in this connection:

1. ***Excessive intellectual labor*** sometimes causes such a detachment from exterior things that a kind of alienation of spirit results. The remarkable detachment and absorption of scientists, artists, and professors are the result of their intense concentration on the matter at hand. If the suspension of the external powers or the alienation from one's surroundings can be explained naturally, therefore, it may never be identified as a case of mystical alienation or rapture.
2. ***Badly regulated mental prayer*** may also produce certain effects similar to those experienced by the great contemplative mystics. If the mental prayer is intense and prolonged, the truths of meditation may become so vivid that one takes them for realities of the sensible order, celestial visions, diabolical manifestations. Likewise, intense and exclusive meditation on the Passion could cause sympathetic pains.
3. ***Excessive austerities***, which lead to exhaustion of the body and a weakening of the sensitive faculties, may produce all kinds of illusions that are mistakenly attributed to a supernatural cause. Long periods of fasting or corporal penances carried to extremes will so sharpen the activity of the imagination and the memory that the individual readily reaches a point at which the world of dreams and illusions is taken for reality. Moderate fasting is a boon to the functioning of the imagination and memory and the activity of the intellect, but once the body

and its organic powers have been weakened, the sense faculties of cognition escape from the control of reason and cast the individual into the world of dream images.

Illnesses of certain kinds are also predispositions to illusion in mystical matters, and it is often an area of dispute between doctors and theologians when what has been taken as a truly mystical phenomenon is declared to be the consequence of some bodily or mental illness. ***Both doctors and theologians should remember that, whereas the external manifestations of nervous and mental illnesses and those of true mystical phenomena may be identical, the causes are utterly distinct, although sometime there may be a strange and perplexing admixture of the two.*** Consequently, the most that can be relied upon as a rule of discernment in many cases is to judge by the fruits or effects.

Admittedly, it is no easy matter to say whether some of the saints at any time in their lives manifested the symptoms of some kind of illness. ***Neither is it derogatory of the sanctity of an individual to admit that some of the manifestations of neurosis, psychosis, or diabolism cannot be distinguished from extraordinary mystical phenomena.*** But the similarity of the external manifestations does not suffice as a basis for concluding that the manifestations in question proceed from the same cause, no more than the external act of virtue authorizes us to conclude that the person in question truly possesses the virtue.

The theologian, physician, and psychiatrist, therefore, will do well to proceed with all caution in these matters and to assist one another with information from their respective fields. ***It is just as unfounded for the theologian to think that his theological knowledge alone will enable him to discern spirits as it is for the physician or psychiatrist to deny the possibility of supernatural influence in human affairs.***

Diabolical Causes of Extraordinary Phenomena

The study of the preternatural is so vast and complicated that a thorough treatment of the subject would take us far beyond the scope of the present work. We shall content ourselves with an enumeration of the main points of theological doctrine concerning diabolical influence.

1. ***It is de fide that devils exist***, that is, a number of angels who were created good by God became evil through their own sin.
2. ***With God's permission the devils can exercise an evil influence over us***, even to the extent of invading and tormenting us in a bodily manner.
3. ***In the midst of the assaults of the devil, the human will always remains free*** because the will can be moved only in two ways: by the individual or by God. The most that any other extrinsic power can do is to persuade, and this is what the devils do.
4. ***The angels and devils can act upon the imagination and other internal and external senses because these are all organic powers, and the devil has power to exercise his influence on anything material.***

5. ***The devils cannot work true miracles because by definition a miracle surpasses the power of all created nature.*** But since the angelic powers far surpass human powers, the devils can perform prodigious feats that arouse our admiration.

By reason of some contradiction involved or because they surpass the power of an angelic being, ***the devils cannot do the following:***

1. ***Produce any kind of truly supernatural phenomenon*** because the supernatural by definition exceeds all natural created powers.
2. ***Create a substance*** because creation requires an infinite power, and no creature of any kind can be used even as an instrument of creation.
3. ***Raise a dead person to life***, although they could produce the illusion of doing so.
4. ***Instantaneously cure wounds***, fractures, lesions, etc., because this is something only the Creator can do.
5. ***Make truly prophetic predictions***, since the devil does not by his own powers of intelligence know future contingencies, although he knows so many things in their causes that it may appear to human beings that what was predicted was a true prophecy.
6. ***Know the secrets of a person's mind and heart***, since the devil does not by his own power have access to the human intellect and will. Because of his superior intelligence, however, he can conjecture much more easily and can know the temperament and character of individuals as well as the numerous circumstances of their life.
7. ***Produce in human beings extraordinary phenomena of the purely intellectual or volitional type*** because he does not have free access to the human intellect and will.

These are the principal things the devils are unable to do, and they should be kept in mind when evaluating mystical phenomena involving the miraculous, or the activity of the human intellect and will. The following mystical phenomena, however, can be falsified by the devil.

With God's permission the devil can do any of the following:

1. ***Produce corporeal or imaginative visions*** (but not intellectual visions).
2. ***Falsify ecstasy.***
3. ***Produce rays of light in the body and sensible heat.*** (There have been examples of "diabolical incandescence.")
4. ***Cause sensible consolations and tenderness.***
5. ***Instantaneously cure sicknesses that have been caused by diabolical influence.***

6. **Produce the stigmata** and all other kinds of bodily extraordinary phenomena, and any phenomena dealing with physical objects, such as crowns, rings, etc.
7. **Simulate miracles and the phenomena of levitation, bilocation, and compenetration of bodies.**
8. **Cause persons or objects to disappear from sight** by placing an obstacle in the line of vision or acting directly on the sense of sight; simulate locutions by means of sound waves or immediate action on the sense of hearing; cause a person to speak in tongues.
9. **Produce bodily incombustibility** by interposing some medium between the fire and the body of the individual.

To summarize: all phenomena resulting from the activity of any natural power or physical law, even if the human being is unable to produce them, can be produced by diabolical power, with God's permission. Whatever the activity of diabolical powers, however, it can never be essentially supernatural.

God as the Cause of Extraordinary Phenomena

Since the mystical state is essentially constituted by the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and since God is the primary mover in the operation of the gifts, it follows that **all truly mystical phenomena must be attributed to God**. But the identification of such extraordinary mystical phenomena becomes exceedingly difficult when we consider that the human organism may present identically the same external manifestations as a result of natural or diabolical causes. The reason for this, as we have already stated, is that the psychosomatic structure can react in only a set number of ways, and for that reason the phenomena themselves are not always sure indications of their origin. **The most general principle that can be used is that any phenomenon that does not violate any moral law or involve a contradiction could possibly have God as its cause**. It frequently happens, therefore, that the most that can be concluded about a given phenomenon is the mere possibility of a truly supernatural cause, and if one arrives only at a possibility, one cannot conclude with certainty that the phenomenon is to be attributed to God.

The phenomena of the spiritual life comprise (1) those internal and external manifestations of religious experience that proceed from an authentic mystical experience (concomitant phenomena) and (2) those extraordinary graces, usually graces gratis datae, that are not essentially related to the mystical state and Christian holiness (charismatic graces, epiphenomena, or simply extraordinary graces).

Graces "Gratis Datae." In his first letter to the Corinthians (12:4-6), St. Paul states that there are diverse gifts of God, but that God is one in himself. All that we have received in both the natural and the supernatural order we have received from God, so that we could speak of all these things as graces gratis datae. But **theologians reserve the term graces gratis datae for a special type of graces called charisms. Unlike the grace gratum faciens (habitual or actual graces) a grace gratis data has as its immediate purpose not the sanctification of the one who receives it, but the spiritual benefit of others. It is called gratis data not only because it is above the natural**

power of man but also because it is something outside the realm of personal merit. With this distinction in mind, we may list the following conclusions regarding the graces gratis datae:

1. The graces *gratis datae* do not form part of the supernatural organism of the Christian life as do sanctifying grace and the infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, nor can they be classified under actual grace.
 2. They are what we may call "epiphenomenon" of the life of grace and may even be granted to one who lacks sanctifying grace.
 3. They are not and cannot be the object of merit, but are strictly gratuitous.
 4. Since they do not form part of the supernatural organism, they are not contained in the virtualities of sanctifying grace, and hence the normal development of the life of grace could never produce or demand them.
 5. The graces *gratis datae* require in each instance the direct intervention of God.
- <\blockquote>From these conclusions concerning the nature of the graces gratis datae we can formulate the following norms to serve as a guide for the spiritual director:

1. It would be temerarious in the normal course of events to desire or to ask God for graces *gratis datae* or charisms. **They are not necessary for salvation nor for sanctification, and they require the direct intervention of God. Far more precious is an act of love than a charismatic gift.**
2. In the event that God does grant a grace *gratis datae*, **it is not a proof that a person is in the state of grace**; much less can the gratuitous grace be taken as a sign that the individual is holy.
3. **The graces gratis datae do not sanctify those who receive them.** And if anyone in mortal sin were to receive one of these graces, he or she could possibly remain in a sinful state even after the gratuitous gift of charism had been received.
4. **These graces are not given primarily for the benefit of the individual who receives them but for the good of others and for the edification of the Church.**
5. Since the graces *gratis datae* are something independent of sanctity, **it is not necessary that all the saints should have received them.** St. Augustine gives the reason for this when he says that they were not given to all the saints lest weak souls should be deceived into thinking that such extraordinary gifts were more important than the good works that are meritorious of eternal life.(3)

But one should not exaggerate this doctrine. The graces *gratis datae* may indirectly or by redundancy be beneficial to the one who receives them; it depends upon the spirit with which such gifts are accepted. These graces do not necessarily require or prove the state of sanctifying grace in the person who receives them, but it seems that God would not normally bestow such graces on persons in mortal sin.

Most of the ancient theologians accepted the names and classification of the graces gratis datae as they were given by St. Paul, but modern theologians and exegetes generally maintain that St. Paul did not intend to give a complete and definitive list, but was referring especially to the charisms God bestows on those who are engaged in the apostolate and ministry of the Church. ***There are other charisms not enumerated by St. Paul.***

Concomitant Mystical Phenomena.

The concomitant phenomena vary with the degree of intensity of mystical activity and serve as an indication of the soul's progress in the mystical life, although each soul does not necessarily experience all the concomitant phenomena or even all the phenomena proper to a given stage, for mystical activity is the work of God, who can lead souls as he will. Moreover, ***mystical activity is possible in the life of a person who is not in the mystical state.*** Theologians commonly agree that mystical activity is essentially an experience of God, passively received and more or less intensely felt through the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And since the gifts of the Holy Spirit pertain to the supernatural organism of the spiritual life, whatever proceeds from the activity of the gifts should be classified as concomitant, ordinary mystical phenomena.

The division of concomitant mystical phenomena given by St. Teresa of Avila (4) has been adopted by most theologians since her time. She lists the mystical phenomena in connection with the various grades of mystical prayer, and the same approach is used by St. John of the Cross (5) and St. Francis de Sales.(6) We described these phenomena when treating the grades of mystical prayer in Chapter 12.

The following are the principal and concomitant mystical phenomena, from the beginning to the end of the mystical state:

1. ***An intuition of God or divine things,*** as distinct from discursive knowledge, with a profound penetration of divine mysteries.
2. ***An experimental knowledge of God or divine things,*** usually accompanied by spiritual joy, interior absorption in God, disdain for worldly pleasures, and a desire for greater perfection.
3. ***Passive purification of the senses,*** which presupposes the active purgations of senses and spirit.
4. ***Continued awareness of the presence of God,*** accompanied -by "sleep" or suspension of the faculties, filial fear of God, love of suffering, divine touches, spiritual sensations, flights of the spirit leading to ecstasy, wounds of love, and interior communications.
5. ***Passive purgation of the spirit.***
6. ***Total death to self,*** heroism in the practice of virtue, joy in persecution, zeal for the salvation of souls, and relative confirmation in grace.

Extraordinary Mystical Phenomena

This term refers to those extraordinary psychosomatic manifestations that sometimes occur in authentic mystics but do not fall within the normal manifestations of the mystical state. They proceed from a supernatural cause distinct from sanctifying grace, the virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Therefore they are classified as, epiphenomena or paranormal manifestations. Like the graces gratis datae, they could be given for the good of others or they could be interpreted as a divine witness to the sanctity of the individual for the edification of the Church.

The following are the principal extraordinary phenomena observed in the lives of saints and mystics.⁽⁷⁾

Visions

A vision is the supernatural perception of an object naturally invisible to man. We say "supernatural" to distinguish true visions from the illusions or hallucinations that proceed from natural causes or the fraudulent visions produced by diabolical power. ***St. Augustine is the author of the classical division of visions into corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual.***

1. ***A corporeal vision in one in which the bodily eyes perceive an object normally invisible. It is also called an apparition.*** The object of a corporeal vision need not be a concrete object or a true human body; it suffices that it be perceived by the sense of sight. Thus a corporeal vision of the Blessed Virgin does not necessarily mean that Mary herself has appeared in her own body, but it could be a representation of Mary by means of light rays or some vaporous substance.

The apparition may be caused in two ways: (a) by an image impressed on the retina of the eye, thus causing the sensation of vision; (b) by an external object actually present to the perceiver.

2. ***The imaginative vision is the representation of an image supernaturally produced in the imagination.*** It can be produced in three ways: (a) by the ***recall*** of sense impressions already received through the external sense; (b) by a ***new arrangement*** of phantasms already acquired and conserved in the imagination; (c) by ***entirely new phantasms*** impressed upon the imagination by a supernatural power. ***This type of vision is usually accompanied by an alienation of the external senses*** so that the visionary does not confuse the vision with that which is perceived through the external senses.

3. ***The intellectual vision is a simple intuitive knowledge super, naturally effected without the aid of any sensible image or impressed species in the internal or external senses.*** As a rule, the object of the intellectual vision is something that surpasses the natural powers of the intellect, although this is not necessarily the case. The impression may last for hours or days or even months, whereas the lower types of vision are usually of short duration. It produces marvelous effects in the soul, such as great light, peace, a desire for heavenly things. It may occur during sleep, during ecstasy or when a person is awake, ***but only God can cause it. One of the outstanding characteristics of the intellectual vision is the certitude it imparts to be visionary.***

The object of a supernatural vision may be anything at all that exists: God, Christ, Mary, the blessed, angels, devils, the souls in purgatory -- any living being, or even an inanimate object. **According to the teaching of St. Thomas and of theologians generally, the apparitions of Christ and Mary are not produced by their bodily presence but are merely representative visions.** The apparitions representing the divinity should usually be considered to be, as St. Teresa states, "some kind of representation."⁽⁸⁾ They are not to be presumed, therefore, to be intuitive visions of the divine essence, for this is reserved for the state of glory.

There is no great difficulty in explaining the apparitions of angels or demons. These are pure spirits, and a spirit is where it acts.. Moreover, a spirit has the power, with God's permission, of assuming some material substance with which to represent itself even to the bodily eye, whether that substance is a body or light rays or some kind of cloud or vapor. If the souls of the dead (whether blessed, in purgatory, or in hell) were to appear in bodily form, the explanation would be the same as that given for angelic apparitions, since the separated souls are pure spirits, and the bodies they once possessed are now reduced to dust. As to the apparition of persons still living on earth or of inanimate objects, we are faced with an apparent bilocation, and therefore we shall treat of the matter under that heading. But a living person could also be represented by means of an angelic or diabolical power.

As for the discernment of judgment of visions, the intellectual vision is the easiest to detect, although the spiritual director has nothing more for a basis of judgment than the certitude and conviction experienced by the visionary that the vision was from God. **Since the intellect cannot be acted upon immediately by the devil, an intellectual vision could never be caused by diabolical power.** The greatest difficulty lies in the discernment and verification of the imaginative and corporeal visions. Here there is always the possibility of diabolical influence or one's own imagination, and sometimes the only criterion is to judge by the fruits or effects caused by the visions in the visionary. **At first the visions that come from God cause fear in the soul, and this later gives place to love, humility, and peace.** The soul's energies are increased, and it gives itself more generously to the practices of virtue. **Visions that are diabolical in origin begin with sweetness and peace but soon fill the soul with turbulence, presumption, and pride, Visions caused by one's own imagination lead to vanity, curiosity, superficial virtue, and contradiction in the descriptive account of the experience.**

Locutions

Although it frequently happens that visions are accompanied by locutions, it is possible for either to occur without the other. A locution is an affirmation or statement supernaturally effected. Like visions, it admits of three types: auricular, imaginative, and intellectual.

1. **Auricular locutions are words perceived by the bodily sense of hearing by reason of acoustical vibrations.** In themselves they may be produced by God, by angels, or by demons. They may also be produced by natural causes, whether physical or psychic. They sometimes seem to proceed from a bodily vision, the Blessed Sacrament, a religious image such as a crucifix, or some other article that is used as an instrument.

2. Imaginative locutions are words perceived in the imagination and may occur either during sleep or in waking hours. They may proceed from God, the devil, or natural causes. The best rule of discernment is the effects produced in the soul. If they are from God, they cause humility, fervor, desire for self-immolation, obedience, desire to perform perfectly one's duties of state. If they proceed from the devil, they cause dryness, inquietude, insubordination, etc. The ones that proceed from the individual do not usually produce any noteworthy effects.

3. Intellectual locutions are words perceived directly by the intellect, and the activity is similar to that by which angels would communicate ideas to each other. Two elements concur in this type of locution: the preexisting or infused intelligible species and the supernatural light that illumines and clarifies them. It is beyond the power of the devil to produce a truly intellectual locution, for he cannot operate on the human intellect directly. St. John of the Cross divides the intellectual locutions into three types: successive, formal, and substantial.(9)

(a) At first glance the successive locutions would seem to be a human dialogue because, as St. John of the Cross points out, the individual seems to be formulating ideas and reasoning things out. But in reality they come from the Holy Spirit who aids the soul to produce and form its concepts; thus **it is an activity in which both the soul and the Holy Spirit play a part.** These locutions are called successive because they are not the result of an instantaneous and intuitive enlightenment. On the contrary, God instructs the soul through successive reasonings. Because it is an intellectual locution, there cannot be any error in substance or principle; if there is error, it is the result of the operation of the human intellect. There may be, however, certain illusions or deceptions as a result of the activity of the imagination.

(b) **The formal locutions are perceived by the intellect as evidently coming from another.** The human intellect contributes nothing of itself; ' therefore, they may come upon the soul whether it is recollected or distracted or engaged in some other occupation. The soul cannot help receiving these locutions, and it always understands them clearly. If the locutions pertain to future events, they are always fulfilled, although the individual should be cautious and fearful of deception by the devil. The devil cannot act directly on the human intellect, but he may act on the imagination and thereby attempt to deceive or mislead the soul.

(c) **The substantial locutions are basically the same as the formal locutions but with this difference: that which is stated in the locution is effected immediately.** For example, if God says to the soul, "Be humble," it at once feels the inclination to prostrate itself before his Divine Majesty; if he says, "Peace be with you," the soul is immediately calm and tranquil. **There is no room for error or deception in the substantial locutions because they are similar to the creative words of God, such as "Let there be light."** The effects so far surpass human and diabolical power that there can be no doubt as to their supernatural origin. The soul at this point needs only to leave itself in the hands of God, whose words are works, as St. Teresa says.

Revelations

Revelation is the supernatural manifestation of a hidden truth or divine secret for the general good of the Church or the benefit of some individual. The veil that hides the secret of hidden truth may be removed supernaturally by means of a vision, a locution, or a prophetic instinct. **All**

divine revelation presupposes the gift of prophecy, and its interpretation requires the discernment of spirits.

It is commonly taught in theology that public revelation ended with the death of the last apostle. All revelations made since that time are classed as private revelations, even if they pertain to matters that are spiritually beneficial to the Church in general.

Authors of spiritual theology usually divide private revelations into absolute, conditioned, and denunciatory revelations, depending upon whether the revelation is a simple statement of a truth or mystery, a conditioned statement, or a threat of punishment. The denunciatory revelation may also be conditioned, as in the case of the prophecy of Jonas concerning the destruction of Nineveh. If revelations refer to the future they are ordinarily called *prophecy*, although prophecy as such abstracts from time and place.

There have always been persons gifted with prophecy, as is testified by Scripture and the processes of canonization of the servants of God. Nevertheless, **private revelations do not pertain to the deposit of faith, which consists of the truths contained in Scripture and Tradition under the vigilance of the Church.** Yet if, after a prudent judgment, it is determined that a given revelation is authentic, the one who has received the revelation should accept it in the spirit of faith. It is disputed among the theologians whether this act of faith is an act of divine faith; it seems to us that it is.

Moreover, if a private revelation contains a message for others and it has been accepted as an authentic revelation, those persons also have an obligation to accept the truth of the revelation and act upon it. For all others, however, nothing more is required than a pious belief, even when the Church has given her negative approval to a revelation by stating that there is nothing contained in it that is contrary to faith and morals. In approving a private revelation the Church does not intend to guarantee the authenticity of the revelation; she simply examines the content of the revelation and states whether or not the faithful may accept it without danger to faith or morals. It would be reprehensible, nevertheless, if one were to contradict or ridicule a private revelation after the Church had given this negative approbation.

It sometimes happens that an individual who has received an authentic revelation does not report the revelation accurately, and this may be due to several reasons. If the revelation is extended to other matters closely related but not actually revealed, the revelation has been falsified. **It may also happen that, if an individual has been preoccupied with some theological question or already has an extensive knowledge of the matter in the revelation, he or she may unwittingly add to or alter the revelation. When there is a mixture of the human and the divine, it becomes extremely difficult to discern one from the other.** At other times the alteration of the revelation may be due to scribes, editors, translators. Another difficulty lies in the interpretation of private revelations, even when they have been transmitted accurately. Moreover, when it falls to others to interpret revelations and they themselves are not the recipients, God does not necessarily give the required light to these persons, or he may deliberately let them fall into error as a punishment.

The following norms are offered as guides for the spiritual director in the discernment of spirits so far as they pertain to revelations and prophecies:

1. **Any revelation contrary to dogma or morals must be rejected as false. God does not contradict himself.**
2. **Any revelation contrary to the common teaching of theologians or purporting to settle an argument among the schools of theology is gravely suspect.**
3. **If some detail or other in a revelation is false, it is not necessary to reject the entire revelation; the remainder may be authentic.**
4. **The fact that a prophecy is fulfilled is not of itself a conclusive proof that the revelation was from God;** it could have been the mere unfolding of natural causes or the result of a superior natural knowledge on the part of the seer.
5. **Revelations concerning merely curious or useless matters** should be rejected as not divine. The same is to be said of those that are detailed, lengthy, and filled with a superfluity of proofs and reasons. Divine revelations are generally brief, clear, and precise.
6. **The person who receives the revelation should be examined carefully,** especially as to temperament and character. If the person is humble, well balanced, discreet, evidently advanced in virtue, and enjoys good mental and physical health, there is good reason to proceed further and to examine the revelation itself. But if the individual is exhausted with excessive mortifications, suffers nervous affliction, is subject to periods of great exhaustion or great depression, or is eager to divulge the revelation, there is cause for serious doubt.

Reading of Hearts

This phenomenon consists in a knowledge of the secrets of hearts, supernaturally communicated by God. The grace is given not only for the good of others but also sometimes for the spiritual benefit of the recipient. It has nothing to do with the natural dispositions of the individual nor the grade of holiness attained by the individual.

The certain and infallible knowledge of the secrets of hearts is completely supernatural and cannot in any way be attained by human nature or the devil. The reason for this is that the human intellect and will are not accessible to any other human being or any angelic power; **God and the individual alone have free access to the secrets of one's own heart.** It is not at all impossible, however, to possess a conjectural knowledge concerning the secrets of hearts, but this would not surpass the powers of created nature. Thus certain gifted persons of experience are able to observe and rightly interpret the facial expressions, gestures, and attitudes of others to such an extent that they seem to possess a clear and certain knowledge of matters that would normally be beyond the power of the average human being.

If this sort of insight is possible to humans, with all the more reason would it be possible to devils or angels, whose intellects are far superior to our own. But this type of knowledge, however astounding, is not to be considered as a true reading of hearts.

Hierognosis

This phenomenon refers to the ability to recognize immediately any person, place, or thing that is holy, blessed or consecrated, and to distinguish it from those things that are not.

Hierognosis transcends the powers of nature and cannot be explained naturally or preternaturally. There is no way in which one could distinguish a blessed or consecrated article from those that are not holy objects. But it should be noted that, whereas many mystics have manifested an almost magnetic attraction for holy objects, **the devil or those under his power have manifested the greatest revulsion or horror when any blessed article is brought near them.**

Flames of Love

This phenomenon is usually regarded as a manifestation of the mystic's intense love of God. It consists of a burning sensation in the body or even the scorching of the clothing, especially in the vicinity of the heart. It admits of three grades or degrees: (1) **simple interior heat** -- an extraordinary heat perceived in the area of the heart and sometimes spreading throughout the entire body; (2) **intense ardors** the heat reaches such an intensity that cold applications must be used to assuage the burning sensation; (3) **material burning** -- the heat reaches such a point of intensity that, the mystic's clothing is scorched.

There is no doubt that the explanation of this phenomenon offers difficulties, and yet **it should be understood that the first and second degree could result from natural causes, and that all three degrees, with God's permission, could be caused by diabolical power.**

Stigmata

The stigmata is the spontaneous appearance in the body of wounds resembling the wounds of Christ crucified. They usually appear in the hands, feet, and side, though sometimes there are also wounds in the head, as from a crown of thorns, and wounds over the entire surface of the body, resembling the wounds of the scourging. **The wounds may be visible or invisible, permanent or periodic, and transitory, simultaneous, or successive.** It almost always occurs in ecstasies and is often preceded by physical and moral suffering. Tanqueray states that the absence of such suffering would be an unfavorable symptom because in **a true mystic the stigmata is a sign of union with the crucified Christ and a participation in his sufferings.**(10) The first ecstatic to be recognized as such in the history of spirituality is St. Francis of Assisi, who received the stigmata on Mount Alverno on September 17, 1224. It is possible that there were other stigmatics before the time of St. Francis, and it is certain that there have been many since his time.

The question arises as to whether or not St. Paul suffered the stigmata, because of his statement in his Epistle to the Galatians (6:17) that he bore the stigmata of Christ. According to Père

Lagrange, the word stigmata, as used by St. Paul, signifies that he bore the marks of the sufferings that he had endured for the sake of Christ. Hence ***all the authors begin the list of stigmatics with the name of St. Francis and omit St. Paul entirely.***(11)

Two extremes must be avoided in attempting to evaluate the stigmata: to assign too readily a supernatural cause for every such visible manifestation, and to see every such phenomenon as a purely psychosomatic disorder. The Church has accepted relatively few cases of stigmatization as authentic and has always demanded more proof than the mere appearance of visible signs in the body. There is historical evidence that certain Muslims, yogis, and Brahmanists have produced marks on the body by autosuggestion. There is also clinical proof that a German by the name of Arthur Otto Mook, a non-practicing Protestant, bore all the wounds of the stigmata. His condition was kept secret for several years but was finally made public in 1949.

Modern psychiatrists would surely admit that the human imagination is powerful enough to produce pains and wounds in the body. After World War II there were many examples of men who suffered from physical wounds that were not inflicted in battle but were the result of their own imagination and powers of concentration; men who willed not to be cured' so that they would not have to return to battle; men who suffered the sympathetic pains of wounds they had witnessed in their comrades. It would seem, therefore, that, if a person willed to suffer the passion of Christ and had a vivid imagination and strong powers of concentration, he or she could produce bodily wounds by autosuggestion or self-hypnosis.

But we find in the history of authentic stigmatics that they were often taken by surprise by .the stigmata, that they sought to conceal it, and they asked God to remove the visible signs. The true stigmatization in a mystic must proceed from a supernatural cause.

Granted the difficulty in discerning the true cause of a stigmata, ***the following norms may serve as a guide for distinguishing between true and apparent mystical stigmatization:***

1. ***The marks of the true stigmata are usually located in the places in which tradition places the five wounds suffered by Christ;*** pathological wounds are not uniformly localized.
2. Usually the wounds of the true stigmata ***bleed on the days or at times when the passion of Christ is commemorated;*** not so with the pathological.
3. The true stigmata ***never suppurates,*** and the blood is always clean and pure; nor can the wounds be healed by natural medication.
4. ***The flow of blood is so great at times that it cannot be explained naturally.***
5. The stigmata is ***usually found in persons who practice the virtues to a heroic degree*** and have a tender love of Christ in his passion, and it usually occurs during periods of ecstasy or prayer.
6. The appearance of the true stigmata is ***usually instantaneous,*** whereas in pathological cases it often appears gradually.

But is it not possible that the stigmata could be caused by the devil? The devil, with God's permission, could produce the marks of the stigmata, for he can act upon man's body and external senses. He could also be responsible for the stigmata produced by the imagination, for he can have access to that faculty if God allows. He could also prompt an individual to simulate the stigmata. Here, as in all the phenomena, we repeat again the basic norm for spiritual directors: if a person claims to have received the stigmata from God and even shows the signs of the wounds in hands and feet and side, and if at the same time that person does not give evidence of a high degree of virtue in the performance of the duties of state in life, then that person is to be judged a fraud or the victim of illusion.

Tears of Blood and Bloody Sweat

As the names imply, these two phenomena consist in an effusion of blood from the pores of the skin, especially on the face and forehead, or a bloody effusion from the eyes after the manner of tears.

There are cases in medical history of the bloody sweat, called in medicine hematidrosis. Many theories have been proposed in the attempt to give a medical explanation, ranging from hemophilia to the imagination and the organic effects of fear and courage. Whatever the medical explanation, it must be admitted that the bloody sweat can be caused by natural or diabolical powers. It would seem prudent to work on the presumption that these phenomena of the blood have a natural explanation in a particular case.

Exchange of Hearts

From all appearances this phenomenon consists in the extraction of the heart of the mystic and the substitution of another, presumably the heart of Christ. After the phenomenon occurs, the mystic often bears a wound and then a scar over the place in which the substitution of hearts was made.

How can this phenomenon be explained? It can hardly be doubted to have occurred, granted the testimony that is given in the lives of so many of the saints. The only plausible explanation is that **it is strictly miraculous**. The difficulty revolves around the apparent substitution of the heart of Christ for the heart of a human being. Pope Benedict XIV gave the most plausible theological explanation when he stated in his eulogy on St. Michael de los Santos that the exchange of hearts was a mystical and spiritual exchange.

Inedia

This phenomenon consists in the total abstinence from nourishment for a length of time beyond the natural powers. It is medically certain that the human body cannot exist beyond a certain period without nourishment. Although there are some cases in medical history in which individuals have existed for almost eighty days without any solid food, but only liquids, the point would be reached at which no human being could survive. How, then, can one explain the phenomenon in the lives of some saints who lived for months or entire years without food? Not

only did they not lose weight, but they also manifested great energy, mental balance, and astounding activity.

It should be noted that the Church has never used inedia as a sole rule for the canonization of a saint. There is always the possibility here of diabolical intervention or the action of some unknown power and law of nature. But if it can ever be sufficiently verified that the inedia is of supernatural origin, it must be considered a suspension of the natural law and a presage, as it were, of the glorified body.

Prolonged Absence of Sleep

It is recorded of some saints that they had no sleep for long periods of time, or that they lived on scarcely any sleep at all. This phenomenon surpasses the natural order, for sleep is one of the body needs without which the individual cannot survive. The organism must repair its strength if life is to be preserved. One may reduce oneself to an absolute minimum in this regard, but one cannot exclude rest entirely. The rest may be obtained by actual sleep, or by relaxation and inactivity of the body, or even during a mystical ecstasy in which all the faculties are suspended.

Hence while it may be admitted that in some cases of absence of sleep there may have been a miracle involved, it is also possible that sufficient rest was gained in certain periods so that the body was able to survive. We do not intend to assume a purely rationalistic attitude in this matter, but merely to avoid multiplying miracles without sufficient reason.

Agility

This phenomenon consists in the apparently instantaneous transfer or movement of a material body without seeming to pass through the intervening space. Many instances are recorded in the lives of the saints. So far as is known at the present time, the phenomenon surpasses the powers of nature and would have to be attributed to a supernatural or preternatural cause. If it were caused by the devil, it would be only apparently instantaneous, for although he has the agility of a spirit, if he were to transport a physical body, it would have to pass through the intervening space, even if the speed of the movement were faster than the human eye could detect.

If the agility were the result of a supernatural power, it would either be through the instrumentality of an angel (and then the same explanation would prevail as in the case of a diabolical power), or else God could give to the individual person the power to move with the rapidity of light or electricity. In the latter case the phenomenon would be something of an anticipated agility of the glorified body. As such it would be strictly miraculous.

Bilocation

This is one of the most stupendous of all the extraordinary mystical phenomena, and one of the most difficult to explain. ***It consists in the apparently simultaneous presence of a physical body in two distinct places at the same time.*** It is philosophically repugnant that a material body should be in two distinct places at the same time by a circumscriptive presence. Although this

statement is denied by some philosophers and theologians, we maintain that the circumscriptive presence of a material body in two distinct places is a contradiction in terms. Hence it could not even be effected by a miracle.

If, therefore, it appears that a body is in two distinct places at the same time, the true and physical body is present in one of the places, and in the other place it is only apparently present by means of a representation of some kind. Such a representation could be produced supernaturally, preternaturally, or naturally.

In case of a bilocation supernaturally caused, the person is physically present in one place and miraculously represented by a sensible representation in the other term of the bilocation. The representation could be effected in any of the ways in which a vision or an apparition could be effected, e.g., a true physical body in the likeness of St. Martin assumed by an angel, or a spiritual apparition after the manner of an intellectual, imaginative, or corporeal vision. In the latter case the phenomenon of bilocation would be reduced to the phenomenon of a vision.

If the phenomenon of apparent bilocation is effected through diabolical power, with God's permission, it is merely a case of the devil using light rays, vapor, or a material substance to simulate the physical body of the person involved. There is no difficulty in affirming this, since the devil has power to make use of material substances.

Is it at all possible that by some natural power as yet unknown a given person could project, as it were, a phantasm or representation of himself to another place? Or is it possible that through some type of telepathy certain persons could see an individual in a distant place while the person remains in another location? We must confess that as yet there is nothing scientifically certain, but we should not close the door on a possible natural explanation, especially in view of the great strides that have been made in recent years in parapsychology.

Levitation

As its name indicates, this phenomenon refers to the suspension of a material body in the air without any visible support, in opposition to the law of gravity. There are numerous examples of this phenomenon in the lives of the saints. **Generally the levitation occurs during ecstasy, which admits of various types: if the elevation is slight, ascensional ecstasy; if the elevation is great, ecstatic flight; if there is a rapid movement or gliding above the earth, ecstatic march.** In the case of Venerable Mary of Agreda, her body seemed to lose all weight during levitation, so that if one breathed on it, it moved like a feather in the breeze.

When truly supernatural, levitation is a kind of anticipated participation in the agility of a glorified body. Nevertheless, this phenomenon can easily be falsified, as we suspect has often occurred in spiritualistic seances. There are also authentic case histories in pathology in which there has been an apparent levitation, as in certain instances of hysterical seizures. Although the devil cannot work a true miracle, it is possible for him, with God's permission, to make use of invisible powers in order to suspend a material body in the air or to cause it to levitate and move above the earth. Lastly, there are those who claim they have been able to levitate by their own power.

Penetration of Bodies

The phenomenon whereby one material body apparently passes through another material body is recorded of Christ after his Resurrection (John 19:20-26) and of some saints.

Theologians commonly state that compenetration of bodies is effected miraculously by God as an anticipated participation in the subtlety of a glorified body. And since this phenomenon involves a miracle, it could never be produced naturally or preternaturally. As in the case of bilocation, however, it would be more prudent to suspend judgment in the light of modern scientific investigations concerning the nature and properties of the quantity and dimensions of physical bodies.

Mystical Aureoles

This phenomenon consists in the resplendent light that irradiates at times from the bodies of mystics, especially during contemplation or ecstasy. There are countless cases recorded. It is considered by some authors to be an anticipation of the radiant splendor of the glorified body.

Illumination and phosphorescence have been witnessed in certain plants, and insects and minerals as well as in the bodies of persons during spiritualistic seances. **One of the noteworthy differences between the truly mystical aureole and the luminosity of the spiritualists is that the former seems to radiate from the body of the mystic, whereas the latter appears above or around the body.** It is also possible for the devil to produce such rays of light, since it is something that is basically material.

Sweet Odor

This is a phenomenon in which the body or tomb of a saint emits a sweet odor. Frequently it is an odor that cannot be compared to any known perfume.

Pope Benedict XIV declared that, whereas it may happen that a given body may not smell bad, it is not likely that a human body will smell sweet, and especially when it is dead, whether corrupt or not. **Hence any sweet perfume that proceeds from it would have to be produced by supernatural powers and be classified as miraculous.** But it could be caused by diabolical power, since the devil has power to act upon the external senses.

Incombustibility

It has been recorded of numerous saints that their bodies or some material object connected with them would not burn when placed in or over the flames of a fire. In general, the incombustibility of bodies may be truly supernatural, preternatural, or due perhaps to some unknown power of nature possessed by certain individuals. Cases of spiritualism abound in which persons were able to hold in their hands red-hot coals and even put them on the top of their heads or on those of others without being burned or the hair being singed. While it is true that many of the incidents in the lives of holy persons are obviously miraculous and must

therefore be attributed to the direct intervention of God, the question in general must remain open.

Bodily Elongation

This phenomenon has been witnessed not only in the lives of a few saints but also in certain spiritualists. Although in the latter case one must suspect trickery or diabolical intervention, if it occurs in the life of a mystic there is always a question as to its purpose. The fact remains that in these cases the body or limb of the individual has visibly elongated to proportions far beyond the normal. It is another strange phenomenon we prefer to leave as an open question until more detailed studies have been made.

Other Phenomena

Other phenomena are well attested in the history of the saints. ***Incorruptibility of the body*** is a relatively common phenomenon in hagiography. The bodies of these persons were found to be either temporarily or permanently incorrupt.

The absence of rigor mortis has been verified in some instances. Medical authorities have stated that rigor mortis is absolutely certain to set in sooner or later, although there may be a variation of a few hours one way or the other. In view of this, the phenomenon of the complete absence of any rigidity in the bodies of the deceased saints offers a curious problem. It could be from a supernatural or a preternatural cause, and perhaps in some instances there may possibly be a natural explanation. ***But the phenomenon itself is not sufficient as proof of sanctity.***

Many of the accounts of corpses shedding blood are of ancient origin. The blood prodigy of St. Januarius is a special case and is known to all.

What is to be said about these various prodigies relating to corpses? The truth of the matter is that very little can be said definitively.

Granted that any one of them could possibly be supernatural in origin because of a divine intervention, or that any of them could, with God's permission, be the work of the devil, it is much more scientific and prudent to withhold judgment in most instances. Possibly in some future day scientists will be able to give a natural explanation for many of these strange occurrences, which in many cases seem to have no purpose from a spiritual point of view.

In discussing the extraordinary phenomena in particular, we have tried to avoid any premature judgments but have attempted to hold fast to the principle that no phenomenon should be attributed to a superior cause if it can be explained by an inferior one. We have not listed each and every phenomenon; for that we refer the reader to the more detailed studies in books that treat specifically of occult phenomena. Neither have we given a definitive judgment in each instance, for we believe it much wiser to leave a question open when there is still room for doubt or hope of a natural explanation at some future date. Nevertheless, ***there are more than sufficient extraordinary and truly miraculous phenomena on record to show us that God is truly glorified in his saints.***

CHAPTER NOTES

1. Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957), Stanza 3.
 2. *The Book of Foundations*, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946), Chap. 8.
 3. Cf. St. Augustine, *De divers. quaest.*, 83, q. 79.
 4. Cf. *The Interior Castle*, Mansions 4 to 7.
 5. Cf. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Chaps. 10-31.
 6. See *Treatise on the Love of God*, trans. B. Mackey (New York: Doubleday, 1942), Chaps. 6-7.
 7. For further study, see Herbert Thurston, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism* (New York: Hawthorn, 1952); Zolt Aradi, *The Book of Miracles* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1956); Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: Meridian, 1960); Alois Wiesinger, *Occult Phenomena* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957); J. Maréchal, *Studies in the Psychology of Mysticism* (New York: Benziger, 1928); A. Farges, *Mystical Phenomena Compared with their Human and Diabolical Counterparts* (London: Bums, Oates & Washbourne, 1926).
 8. Cf. *The Interior Castle*, Seventh Mansions, Chap. 1.
 9. Cf. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Chaps. 28-31.
 10. Cf. A. Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life*, trans. H. Brandeis (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1948), p. 714.
 11. Cf. M. J. Lagrange, *Epitre aux Galates*, c. 6, v. 17.
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