

# The Tao of Mysticism Class Outline

Marilynn Hughes

- 1.) "In a pungent mist the gallows are unleashed; without censure or advice, longing to be . . . and yet forced into non-being." Marilynn Hughes - regarding the witnessing of a murder in the mystical states.

SEVERAL TRUTHS BECOME APPARENT (From - The Shining Ocean, By Marilynn Hughes)

And as we did so, it began to *quicken* within each one of us.

In so doing, several truths became apparent to us.

- 1.) God is able in His primordial substance to bring good from evil and to allow evil to come from good.
- 2.) Out-of-Body Travelers, although aware of that which is good and evil within the spectrum of knowledge, should hold back their discomfort with certain states of spirit and soul because the only manner in which we can be of use is by the ability to be *present* with all states and tending towards its good.
- 3.) The secrets of scripture are not hidden from man, but rather, from the profane. Once the soul has retrieved the proper vibration of interpretation, the meaning of scripture lays atop the words, rather than beneath them. It is overt to the mystic, but unclear to another. Therefore, the full meaning is concealed in plain view, but not hidden.
- 4.) Primordial substance consists of many aspects of seeing and knowing which have manifested throughout the ages and aeons of time from the mystery religions, to the philosophers to the great religions of yesterday and today. These ideas are the genesis, but not the fruition of truth. The history of primordial substance as it has moved and swayed through the mind of mankind is legitimate, but the conclusions are not necessarily always accurate. For that fruition came with Christ.
- 5.) And as such, the ability to discern God from God's creation becomes a quintessential element of knowledge; in that, they are *not* one in the same.
- 6.) (Marilynn's Vision) One emanates from the other. God outbreathes Himself into creation which continually inbreathes God into itself. This primordial substance, then, must continually inbreathe and outbreathe the mechanism of life which originates from within the Creator in constant cycle in order for the evolution, regeneration and transmutation to occur within the world of substantial being.

- 1.) Primordial substance would be that inexhaustible font or substantial energy which has existed from time immemorial, before time and as timelessness itself. In this manner and form, it would be the energy known as the One Mind, the energy many religions refer to as God.
- 2.) Primordial substance, according to its obsolete usage in the Middle Ages, would have referred to it as the Spirit from which all matter, life and form were created. In this manner, it would be more like a condensed state of matter from which subatomic particle would formulate in order to create life as we know it.

*From the Epistle of St. Paul*

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often (and now tell you weeping) that they are enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their things. But *our* conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour our Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowliness, made like to the body of his glory, according to the operation whereby also he is able to subdue all things unto himself.”

*The Holy Bible, New Testament, Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians, Chapter 3*

*From St. Charles Borromeo*

“Would you like me to teach you how to grow from virtue to virtue and how, if you are already recollected at prayer, you can be even more attentive next time, and so give God more pleasing worship? Listen, and I will tell you. If a tiny spark of God’s love already burns within you, do not expose it to the wind, for it may get blown out. Keep the stove tightly shut so that it will not lose its heat and grow cold. In other words, avoid distractions as well as you can. Stay quiet with God. Do not spend your time in useless chatter . . .

My brothers, you must realize that for us . . . nothing is more necessary than meditation. We must meditate before, during and after everything that we do. The prophet says: *I will pray, and then I will understand.*”

*St. Charles Borromeo*

II. THE GOSPEL. As the Law contains the declaration of the divine will, promising a reward to him who keeps it, and threatening punishment to him who violates it, so the Gospel, in distinction from the Law, contains the doctrine of the gracious pardon of sins, which we receive as a gratuity for Christ’s sake through faith. [15] Thus, in the preaching of the Gospel, the means are pointed out to men by which they may escape the condemnation which the Law suspends over them. And when men are brought to a

knowledge of sin through the Law, the Gospel enters, holds forth the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and all the benefits therewith associated; [16] and aims at producing faith in them, by which they appropriate to themselves the salvation in Christ.

Different, then, as are the Law and the Gospel in their signification, [17] yet there is no contradiction between them. As they were both alike given by God, so they are both always and equally binding; they both alike have a work to accomplish in all men; they have in view the same final result, namely, the salvation of men, [18] to the attainment of which end each contributes its part. As, by the preaching of the Law, knowledge of sin and repentance are produced, so, by the preaching of the Gospel, faith is effected. The efficacy of the one follows that of the other; but the efficacy of the one does not hence entirely cease where the efficacy of the other begins, for the Law still continues to be a rule for the regenerate, to which he conforms his moral conduct, and it thus works in him a penitence which is renewed daily, inasmuch as it still continually convinces him of his sins. [19]

Especially through the Eucharist His influence is exercised, for the Eucharist is the most perfect of the sacraments, containing not only grace but the Author of grace; and it is a sacrifice of infinite value. This point must be insisted on here in speaking of the bases or the sources of the interior life.

*From the Catechism of the Catholic Church*

"The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life."

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## The Graces of Interior Prayer

Fr. Augustin Poulain, S.J.

(1836 - 1919)

Translated by Lenore L. Yorke Smith,

(? - 1921)

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The motive-power lies, not in his feeble arm, but in the steam; but this latter is always at his disposal. 3.—On the other hand, there are many supernatural phenomena which always evade our endeavours. Strive as I may to make energetic acts of the will in order to prophesy, or to see God or my guardian angel or Satan; and nothing, absolutely nothing, will result unless God intervenes in a special manner. I shall not even, as the above definition says, succeed in a low degree or momentarily. This is what we call a mystic state. Ordinary prayer may be compared to the atmosphere that surrounds our globe. The birds move about in it at will. Thanks to its aid, they can rise above the earth, and they mount higher in proportion to the strength of their wing-beats. But this atmosphere has its limits. Above, lie those vast expanses that stretch away to the stars and beyond. Try as they may, they cannot penetrate thither, even by redoubling their efforts. The eagle is as powerless as the rest. God alone can transport them to this region; were He to do so, they would lie passive in His hand, there would be no further need to use their wings. They would have to discard their former methods of operation and adopt new ones. This upper region, where the wing no longer has any power, is a figure of the mystic state. It resembles it also by its peace, its silence. Far from the turmoil of earth we enter into a space empty of all created things. God dwells there alone. 4.—And so mystic theology becomes defined: it is the science of the study of the mystic states.

The passiveness is so much the greater as the mystic state is higher, because God's part in it is then more accentuated. But the activity is augmented at the same time. So, on the other hand, ordinary prayer is described as acting. 15.—We must not confound mystic with ascetic theology. The last-named has an aim quite different to that of mysticism. It is concerned with the virtues. It points out their nature, their kind, the means for their acquirement, the obstacles, the exaggerations, or the counterfeits to which they are liable, etc. Their point of contact with mysticism is this: that both alike treat of prayer. But ascetic theology confines itself by agreement to the study of the ordinary ways of prayer; that is to say, the prayer that depends, like the virtues, upon man's own exertions.

The word mystic cannot be justified if it is employed in the sense of ascetic. For it supposes a science which contains an element of mystery. Now, there is none in the teaching of abnegation and humility. Is it desired to indicate that it is a question of the mysterious action of grace? But in that case, dogmatic theology should also take the name of mystic.

St. Francis of Sales called it the prayer of simple committal to God.

Analogies. In the natural order we find conditions of soul that are analogous to the prayer of simplicity. The mother watching over her child's cradle thinks of him lovingly for hours together, but with interruptions, and she does this without any arguments. Two friends have not always new ideas to interchange. And yet they can remain in each other's society for long periods of time, enjoying the happiness of being together in tranquillity and silence.

In order to facilitate the practice of affective prayer, it is as well to do as St. Ignatius did, and to take as subjects for prayer, not the abstract virtues, but the historic facts that teach these virtues. When we meditate on any Mystery of Our Lord's life

If we compare it with prayer in which the considerations predominate, we see that it is usually superior; for, all other things being equal, its effect upon the conduct is greater, and it leads more quickly to perfection. 1°. The difficulty arising in the practice of the virtues proceeds, as a rule, less from a want of knowledge than from a lack of faith, hope, or love. The will is weak; we must begin, therefore, by arousing its activity. 2°. And then the virtues are acquired by a repetition of their acts rather than by reflections;

If it is to have its full utility, the person must be instructed with regard to the duties of the spiritual life, habituated to their practice, and in actual dispositions to make use of what he has learned and to sanctify himself. If these conditions are fulfilled, a host of useful memories will come back to the mind during the prayer. The ideas are not really fewer, nor less deep than in meditation; but they present themselves in a simpler, more condensed, more intuitive form, and the need to translate them into words is less felt. It is just as a man, who is well versed in any science, takes in a crowd of facts at one glance. You would not call that an inferiority. This advantage does not accrue if the person is not instructed in the virtues, as happens with beginners. The mind finds nothing to gather up. And, on the other hand, as they make no effort to enter deeply into the subject of the meditation, they learn almost nothing during the time of prayer. We must not expect that God will make up for our deficiencies.

A preparation for mystic prayers . . .

We should then be content to love God without adding any other special acts, such as acts of humility, petitions, etc., and also without making any practical applications or receiving any light upon our conduct.

Let us add that the vitality given to the will by the prayer of simplicity will not, perhaps, be perceived at once. So under the sun's action, a vast work of growth goes on in the meadows and forests; and yet all these hidden sources of life do their part slowly and in silence. All those million molecules of sap circulate like a crowd of workmen engaged in the construction of a house. So with the prayer of simplicity, the soul is a field exposed to the Divine Sun. The growth carried on is a silent one, but it is a real work.

But is the artist whose brush travels silently over the canvas less busy than the blacksmith who deafens us with his activity? We fancy that we are thinking and accomplishing a great deal when we are conscious of a wealth of words and of material images. But if this activity of the inferior order diminishes, as often happens when our prayer becomes higher, it is then more difficult to take note of our thoughts, and so we wrongly conclude that we have almost ceased to think and have sunk into a state of sloth. A certain void is indeed produced, for particular things have diminished; but these are merely the gross auxiliaries of thought, the form that it has borrowed from the senses, and not thought itself. This latter has become more spiritual, but less easy of apprehension. A bottle seems empty when only filled with air; and so does the sky when it is clear and cloudless. And yet air is not nothingness.

All that is necessary is that they should develop general dispositions to generosity. They continue for a long time under their influence, and then, at the proper moment, the general impulse of all their faculties carries them promptly and, as it were, instinctively to action.

When we think of the sea, we always picture to ourselves a succession of waves, which rise, follow one another, and then subside; but this is the surface only. They cover immense depths. But our imagination does not weave its dreams about them, because those things only take hold of it that have well-differentiated parts. It is the same when I observe my soul. The distinct acts are the things that seem of importance in her. But these are, on the contrary, mere surface groupings, visible but transient. Underneath lies the intimate, the permanent, and the great source of action. From what has just been said we must not conclude that definite resolutions are useless, but simply that we ought not to be disturbed when we experience difficulty in producing them.

Do not let us judge of the efficacy of a method by the complication of the means that it employs.

. . . why the way that they are in is good,

If, for instance, their only facility is for a vague and loving attention to God, we must teach them to be content with it. 49. — Another difficulty. Novices, and even some formed Religious, are obliged to give an account of their prayer, either privately to their Superior or director, or sometimes in public. And this, if their prayer is very simple, becomes an anxiety to them. Seeing others indulging in magnificent developments, they are ashamed of their apparent poverty; and instead of passing the hours devoted to prayer in loving God, without very many distinct ideas, they struggle to produce beautiful thoughts. St. Jane Frances de Chantal condemns this conduct; also Boudon (*Le Règne del Dieu en l’Oraison mentale*, Book I, ch. iii). If a description of your prayer takes two sentences only, do not try to say more about it;

. I want to go straight to God. How could I ever resign myself to that string of preludes, compositions of place, colloquies, etc. The paraphernalia is too cumbrous; it weighs the soul down, I have no sympathy with those preachers who give retreats and think themselves obliged to teach us so many learned operations which were never heard of in ancient times.” I reply that all these things are more complicated in theory than in practice; as is the case with all treatises on rhetoric or logic. We find many learned words that really express perfectly simple operations which we are performing every day of our lives without giving any attention to them. But we do them better when we have an explicit knowledge of their meaning and have isolated them by analysis. Preachers and authors are right, therefore, in teaching them,

Courbon mentions a temptation that may assail those who have attained to the prayer of simplicity. This is “to devote little or no time to prayer, on the pretext that they are always at prayer, no matter what their occupations may be.” They even fancy “that they pray better as they come and go about their work.” But these persons must understand “that the loving attention in which their prayer consists needs fortifying, because it is continually diminishing in process of time, just as a spring becomes gradually weakened by use. For this attention is assailed by a multitude of others which it is impossible to avoid while we are in action. It therefore requires to be brought back again and re-established; and this all takes place during the hours which are specially consecrated to prayer”

It seems that the prayer of the old Orders consisted in penetrating the mind with ideas inspired by the Divine Office and Holy Scripture; then in free moments it reverted peacefully to these thoughts without any preconceived plan.

St. Teresa for the reformed Carmelites



“The religious shall be always in their cells, or near them, meditating and occupying their thoughts day and night in the law of God, and watching in prayer, unless otherwise employed in just and reasonable duties, and the recitation of the Divine Office”

secure recollection and reflexion upon divine things

Order of St. Dominic, a Father Provincial has been good enough to give me the following information. In the early traditions of the Order, there is never any question of individual prayers, at specified hours and of fixed durations

“We command that after Compline all Religious, whether lay-brothers, scholastics, or priests, shall apply themselves to mental prayer for the space of half an hour, and that they devote the same time to it after Matins. This exercise will be preceded by a short reading in some spiritual book which shall serve as material for the meditation”

The commentator on the Rule of St. Benedict (Migne edition, Vol. LXVI, col. 414, B), says: “In the old monastic rules we find no definite hour assigned to mental prayer, because in all places and at all times they were thinking upon Heavenly things.” In a word, there was an atmosphere, a continuous life of prayer, which was less the result of one particular exercise than of everything taken as a whole. But for those, on the contrary, who mix much with the world, it is generally necessary to give a more definite form to certain religious exercises or to certain of their elements, such as the preparation and the resolution, in order to bring the mind back to the recollection of divine things. In fact, we find these forms playing an important part in the more modern Congregations of men or women who have suppressed or curtailed the recitation of the Office in common. Finally, the mode of prayer of the ancients is explained by the intellectual life of their time. Possessing very few books, they did not vary their readings as we do. They accustomed themselves to live with very few ideas, just as is the case now in the changeless East and the Convents of the Greek Rite. In old days the soul was less complicated, slower than our own. and their prayer felt the effects of this condition.

M. Letourneau, Curé of St. Sulpice, has pointed out in his book, which is well furnished with facts, references, and authorities: *Methode d’Oraison mentale du séminaire de St. Sulpice*

It was almost wholly an affective prayer, supposing men who were already instructed and who only needed to have their wills aroused. Without seeking to develop a subject,

you “adore Jesus Christ in one of His Mysteries,” and then strive to enter into a “participation” of His sentiments

In our days we have to avoid two opposite exaggerations—one of being the slave of methods, the other of despising them; one of wishing to impose them upon everybody alike, the other of dissuading everyone from them. The truth lies between the two courses letting it be supposed that there is nothing between making acts of reasoning in prayer and being lifted up in an ecstasy.

### **The Various Kinds of Mystical Graces**

Heaven we shall receive two kinds of gifts which will not have the same importance. On the one hand, we shall have the beatific vision, which will put us into possession of God; on the other, we shall behold the saints, the angels, and other creatures. These, in the language of the theologians, constitute relatively the first object and second object of beatitude. 2.—And in the same way, on earth we can distinguish two sorts of mystical graces, according to the nature of the object that is supernaturally offered to our understanding. The characteristic of the states of the first group consists in this, that it is God Himself, and God alone, who manifests Himself. We call them the mystic union, or, again, mystical (or infused) contemplation of the Divinity. In the second group the manifestation has to do with some created object. We shall see Our Lord’s Sacred Humanity, for instance, or the Blessed Virgin or an angel, or some past or future fact, etc. We find here visions (of created things) and revelations; in other words, apparitions and supernatural utterances. To these are added miraculous corporeal phenomena, such as those that are observed in the case of ecstasies. 3.—It is necessary to make a clear distinction between these two categories of graces; first, because we shall have to describe them separately; and secondly, because we must hold them in very different estimation.

union with God are by far the most useful and the most sure.

SEE HIGHLIGHTS - The Shining Ocean, By Marilynn Hughes

. It has been proposed to give the name deific (indéiques) to those graces by means of which we penetrate into the Divinity. The others, which have for their end something that is outside of God, would be termed ex-deific (exdéiques). Nothing so contributes to

clearness of thought as the practice of bestowing very short and sharply contrasting names upon things which we are inclined to confuse. Following Scaramelli, many writers have designated these two groups by the words confused contemplation and distinct contemplation. They thus refer, not to the object of the knowledge, but to the manner of knowing it. This second point of view seems of less importance than the first. And this language also implies that the revelations always consist in very definite knowledge, which is incorrect. 5. — The four stages or degrees of the mystic union. From the following chapter onwards I shall have to allude to them. I take them as St. Teresa described them in her last work, *The Interior Castle*. In her *Life*, written by herself, the differences are perhaps less easily distinguished. We have: 1°. The incomplete mystic union, or the prayer of quiet (from the Latin *quies*, repose, which expresses the impression experienced in this state); 2°. The full or semi-ecstatic union, called also by St. Teresa, the prayer of union; 3°. The ecstatic union or ecstasy; 4°. The transforming or deifying union, or the spiritual marriage of the soul with God.

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8. — Here are the definitions that can be applied to the three degrees below the spiritual marriage. The mystic union will be called: 1°. The prayer of quiet, when the divine action is not strong enough to hinder distractions; or, briefly, when the imagination still preserves its liberty; 2°. Full union, when it possesses the two following characteristics: (a) its strength is so great that the soul is fully occupied with the divine object; not diverted, that is to say, by any other thought; in a word, it has no distractions; (b) on the other hand, the senses continue to act more or less, so that it is possible, by a greater or lesser effort, to put ourselves into relations with the exterior world, by speaking, walking, etc.; it is possible to come out from our prayer; 3°. Ecstasy (and this is the universally accepted definition) is when the divine action has a considerable force, and all outside communications with the senses are interrupted, or almost entirely so. Thus we are no longer capable of any movements, such as are voluntary at least, nor are we able to come out of our prayer at will.

FIRST FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTER - GOD'S PRESENCE FELT

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(1°) The mystic states which have God for their object attract attention at the outset by the impression of recollection and union which they cause us to experience. Hence the name of mystic union. (2°) Their real point of difference from the recollection of ordinary prayer is this: that in the mystic state, God is not satisfied merely to help us to think of Him and to remind us of His presence: He gives us an experimental, intellectual knowledge of this presence. He makes us feel that we really enter into communication with Him. (3°) In the lower degrees, however (prayer of quiet), God only does this in a somewhat obscure manner.

it is sufficient to understand what an abyss separates ordinary prayer from the mystic union. There is a profound difference between thinking of a person and feeling him near us.

St. Teresa are quoted by everybody. The saint here explains how some ignorant directors had maintained to her that God is not present in the soul. She adds that in receiving the prayer of union she had experimental proof to the contrary.

The difference between divine love and the mystic union. We may say that this latter begets divine love, that it is a union with God by love. But if we stopped here, we should not have said everything. We must add that this love is called forth by a known, experimental possession of God.

The beginner says: "I have experienced something extraordinary, and probably supernatural. It is an impression of a special kind, and one of which I have hitherto known nothing, and of which the majority of Christians know nothing either. It contains a religious sentiment and it unites me to God. This is indisputable; but what a strange way to pray!" The delicate point is the daring to admit to ourselves that it is God Himself of whom we were thus conscious, and that we were really in touch with Him. And so we find reasons alternately for either opinion.

The second preconceived idea common to beginners is due to their ignorance of mysticism. It consists in believing that the graces of interior prayer are quite different from those which they are now experiencing. The Lives of the saints have nearly always spoken to them of visions. This is how they also ought to begin, so they think. They ought to see Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and the angels. If they imagine anything else—the manifestation of God Himself, for instance—they picture it in quite another manner. It should be resplendent, showing the three Divine Persons or certain of their attributes. It should also cause a vehement, overflowing love, such as the saints had in their raptures. But this contemplation has quite other characteristics, being obscure, confused, tranquil. It cannot, therefore, be God who is manifesting Himself.

The error diametrically opposed to the above thesis

They only differ by the intensity of certain elements: a more sustained attention, a more clearly felt peace and joy, a deeper understanding of the truths of religion, a more ardent love. Freethinkers are obliged to imagine things in this way to facilitate their purely naturalistic explanations.

What surprises and distresses the soul is the feeling that she is entering a wholly new world. It is this, too, that alarms certain directors who would otherwise have no objections.

### **Second Second Fundamental Character of the Mystic Union: The Interior Possession of God**

The first thesis has told us that in the mystical union we have an experimental knowledge of the presence of God.

she is able to perceive the presence of pure spirits, and the presence of God in particular?

There is a spiritual sight. We know this even without studying mysticism. Faith teaches us that eternal happiness will consist in seeing God. And by this word we mean to signify a mode of knowledge of such a kind that we are instinctively led to compare it with bodily sight. Otherwise the word would have no exact meaning. So in Heaven the angels and the Blessed see one another. A host of comparisons describing Heaven are derived from light, and therefore allude to sight. Even the devils see themselves and are seen. 4. — There is a spiritual hearing. For the saints and the Blessed speak to one another. It is true that for this they have no need to utter sounds, to employ definite language; it is sufficient that they should desire to communicate their thoughts. But this communication may be called speech on the part of the transmitter, and hearing on the part of the receiver. In the same way God has often spoken intellectually to the prophets and to other saintly souls. In Heaven He speaks to the angels when He gives them His direct commands. We shall hear Him also; for love constrains Him to enter into relations with His friends in all possible ways.

But that there should be another way of attaining to God, and that the best means of giving an idea of it should be to compare it to a touch, is a fact which surprises them above measure. But it is this precisely which is a part of the second fundamental truth of mysticism. Those who do not accept it in its entirety will not have a really exact idea of the states of union, and their general conception of these states will consequently suffer.

1° In the states inferior to ecstasy we cannot say that God is seen save in exceptional cases. We are not instinctively led to translate our experiences by the word sight. 2° On the other hand, that which constitutes the common basis of all the various degrees of the mystic union is that the spiritual impression by which God makes known His presence, manifests Him in the manner, as it were, of something interior which penetrates the soul; it is a sensation of imbibition (saturation), of fusion, of immersion. 3° For the sake of greater clearness, we can depict what is felt by describing the sensation by the name of interior touch.

They say that we repose in God, that we are in His arms or on His bosom, that we plunge into Him as into an ocean, that He floods the soul (*illapsus divinus*), etc.. If God unveiled His Face a little, they would not fail to tell us so, for it would be more easy to understand. 10. — This fact also shows us why the majority of those who possess the prayer of quiet find such a difficulty in making themselves understood. If they could say: “I see God,” their language would be perfectly clear. But they realise that this would be inexact.

They are therefore reduced to making use of such vague and perplexed phrases as this: “I feel God in some sort of way.”

the soul feels God as something interior that penetrates her.

1°. All those who have had experience of the prayer of quiet testify to this feeling of interior possession. They are aware of it more especially when the eyes are closed, because they are not then drawn and distracted by outward things. They perceive that the basis of their prayer consists, not in a better comprehension or formulation of some abstract truth, but in plunging into some, I know not what, divine atmosphere.

she describes the soul as a castle in which God occupies the central mansion or room. Hence, under pain of a mixed metaphor, it was necessary to say that, as the faculties of the soul advance from room to room, they draw near to God, and not that they are immersed in Him, which, however, would have been the true representation of the fact. The words near to should be taken here as opposed, not to the interior of the soul, but to the innermost place of this interior. And, further, upon three occasions the saint employs the words near to, even when it is a question of ecstasy, which, however, is a state in which God takes interior possession of the soul. But the foregoing comparison is a constraint upon her, because the soul has not yet arrived at the central mansion. It is clear, then, that the near to must not be taken in a narrow sense. 13. — Many persons to whom the mystic state is familiar, have told me that the following comparison depicts with great exactness both the interior possession of God, which is its basis, and the physiognomy of

the impression by which it makes itself felt. We may say: it is in exactly the same way that we feel the presence of our bodies when we remain motionless and close our eyes.

feeling experienced can be described by giving the sensation the designation of interior touch.

1° is not of one kind only; 2° that, fundamentally, it resembles neither sight nor speech (see the first part): 3° they will say that this fundamental quality belongs to a third species, refraining from stating precisely whether its analogy is to be found amongst the material sensations. They can call it inexpressible.

expression "interior touch" is quite logically led up to by the fact already admitted, that an interior touch is felt. In fact, in the material order we make use of the word touch each time that it is a question of knowing experimentally any object contiguous to us; while if the object is at a distance, we make use of the words see and hear. And then it is not with the object itself that we enter into immediate relations, but the radiations or vibrations which it sends out to us. Now it is a question here of a spiritual object which is not remote; it manifests itself by uniting itself with us, dissolving into us, as it were. And it is the word touch, therefore, that best expresses the analogy.

Many Christians form a very incomplete idea of Heaven. They know that we shall see God, that we shall rejoice in the magnificent revelation of His infinite nature; but this is all. They picture Him as a stern prince, isolated upon His throne, proudly keeping his subjects at a distance, admitting them only in the character of spectators. But God will do much more than this. He wishes to be the fragrant air that we breathe, the wine that will inebriate us, the life of our life, the impassioned Lover of our souls. He will vouchsafe to us the "kiss of His mouth" and will receive ours in return. He will not be content until He is merged into, almost identified with the beloved soul that has given herself to Him. He desires an intimate and mutual penetration. Heaven is not merely the vision of God, it is fusion with Him, in love and in possession. If this fusion did not take place the soul would suffer an insatiable thirst. How could the soul behold the Divine beauty, and not go out towards it with her whole desire? In order that we may catch a glimpse of these wondrous blessings, God grants a foretaste of them to His friends on earth.

### **The Mystic Union: Its Ten Subsidiary Characters.**

3° It does not depend on our own will; 4° The knowledge of God accompanying it is obscure and confused; 5° The mode of communication is partially incomprehensible; 6° The union is produced neither by reasonings, nor by the consideration of creatures, nor by sensible images; 7° It varies incessantly in intensity; 8° It demands less effort than

meditation; 9° It is accompanied by sentiments of love, of repose, of pleasure, and often of suffering; 10° It inclines the soul of itself and very efficaciously to the different virtues; 11° It acts upon the body and is acted upon in return; 12° It impedes to a greater or lesser extent the production of certain interior acts; this is what is called the ligature.

The powerlessness in question shows itself in six ways: 1° As has just been said, we cannot bring about the mystic union in ourselves when God does not give it; anyone can prove to himself that to will it is not sufficient; 2° In the same way its coming cannot be foreseen, whatever preparations we may have tried to make. Beginners are often surprised at the unexpected manner of its arrival. They were not thinking of it, or simply striving to lift up their hearts towards God, perhaps without much success. And all of a sudden a state of recollection of a quite special kind took possession of them without their knowing why. They allow themselves to float with the current, because they saw from the first that was a holy occupation. They postponed the task of examining it more closely to another time. Their part lay in consenting to an unforeseen action; 3° If this union is granted to us, we cannot make it more intense, however much we may desire to do so. We plunge ourselves in God only in the precise measure in which He wills it; 4° And it is in the same as to the kind of mystic union. We shall see that this favor may differ in the matter of its presence. Now, it in no wise depends upon our will to have one kind of union rather than another; consequently we can foresee nothing with regard to it. 5° Those who have this union from time to time only, usually find it ceases abruptly as it came; and this without their participation. 6° We cannot make it cease merely by an interior act of the will. We can influence it by indirect means only, by walking or seeking much external distraction. In this way we can diminish it, or even cause it to cease altogether.

### **The Fourth and Fifth Characters**

divine obscurity divine darkness

reserve them for certain ecstatic visions.

Beginners who have read nothing on the subject of mystic contemplation never suspect that it always remains indistinct. They are even convinced of the contrary;

All the divine communications have this character of manifesting the divine attribute of incomprehensibility. They always contain something that we wish to understand better. With regard to God's other attributes, they nearly all continue hidden in the prayer of quiet; but this one, on the contrary, strikes us from the outset. And it only becomes more



apparent as the soul mounts up to higher modes of knowledge. 5. — Expressions that need interpretation. I have said that these states are in part incomprehensible.

Here is another sufficiently resembling the first. They believe that the mystic states present hardly any element of mystery. Meditation and other inferior states were easy to understand. By analogy they fancy that this condition will continue. They forget that a great change has taken place. Hitherto they performed, in appearance, at least, none but natural acts in their prayer. These acts, therefore, could cause them no surprise. But they are now penetrating into a new world: they are manifestly entering into the supernatural, into the divine. This unknown land is full of mysteries.

### **The Sixth Character of the Mystic Union**

the contemplation of God is not produced by reasonings, or by the consideration of created things, or by interior images of the sensible order. This contemplation has, as we have seen, quite another cause: a direct illumination from God, and, to make this still clearer, a supernatural knowledge of His presence, a spiritual sensation comparable to the sense of touch. The ancient writers convey these various ideas briefly by saying that mystic contemplation takes place without any intermediary (*sine medio*), or that it is immediate.

Ruysbroeck likewise perpetually describes mystic contemplation by saying that it is above images and forms

The last degree, the true centre, that is to say, may be defined by them as the spirit in the enjoyment of the spiritual marriage. This, in other words, is the idea that St. Teresa symbolises by the Mansions of her Interior Castle and their leading up to a central chamber, the Throne-room.

The word summit, or supreme point of the spirit (*apex mentis*), has the same meaning.

The summit is commonly regarded as that which is uppermost, and this, in mystic contemplation, is the mind.

### **The Seventh and Eighth Characters**

states exhibit continual fluctuations

The divine ocean, into which we have penetrated some few steps, has waves that advance and retire, an ebb and a flow. 2.—And this is a source of suffering. For during the ascending. We hope to rise higher than ever before. But it is not to be; and behold! we begin to descend again. During the first phase, God is like the mother, showing a

sweetness to her child and allowing it to come quite near, and then the sweetness is withdrawn. And we may wait in this way for years, just as the paralytic man in the Gospels waited by the pond of Bethesda for the coming of the angel. Throughout this repeated successions of risings and fallings the mean level may continue about the same for a considerable time. 3. — The eighth character consists in this, that the mystic union requires much less effort than meditation; and correspondingly less again as the state is a higher one. There is none at all in ecstasy.

St. Teresa makes use of to depict the successive degrees of prayer in the Book of her Life (ch. xi). She regards the soul as a gardener, watering his garden with ever less and less labour. 4. — In the prayer of quiet an effort is still required. This does not consist in procuring the substance of the prayer for ourselves (God alone can bestow it), but: 1° In driving away distractions: a labour that is never wholly successful. This must be done gently, so that we do not injure the mystic union itself. 2° In producing here and there such additional acts as we have an attraction or facility for. 3° In restraining the weariness which the semi-aridity causes when the prayer of quiet is experienced in a low degree, and in resisting the temptation to discontinue the prayer. 5. — Fatigue. From the moment that labour and renewed effort are required, there is a certain amount of fatigue. We scarcely heed this if the prayer of quiet is intense, and we continue at prayer without difficulty for three or four hours together. But if the prayer of quiet is weak, fatigue is felt after half an hour or an hour.

### **The Ninth Character of the Mystic Union**

1. — The ninth character of the mystic union is that it is accompanied by sentiments of love, of repose, of pleasure, and often of suffering. 2. — Sentiments of love. These are always produced by the mystic union. But it sometimes happens that the love is very calm and even almost imperceptible.

At other times the soul's ardours become very apparent under the influence of the mystic union. They may even be violent

These great transports probably occur only when the soul has attained to the full union. They are often accompanied by a real anguish, an intense desire to see God). 3. — Whatever the strength of this love, we feel that it is produced of itself without our doing anything to bring it about; we even feel that if we wish to strengthen it (and we secretly desire this) it would be labour lost. We are in the passive state. We can barely accept what we receive.

This is so in the case of ecstasy

It is with this grace as with the spiritual embrace: it is experienced at first for a few seconds at a time only, by gusts, as it were. The two graces are now separated, now united. This, doubtless, is the grace that St. Teresa wished to describe when she says that we sometimes inhale, as it were, some delicate perfume. It is important to note that it is then not a mere sweetness, the fragrance produced by the thought of God, but it is a way of tasting God Himself.

The unlearned in mysticism fancy that the soul enjoys continual consolations, and they sometimes go on to say contemptuously: "Personally, I prefer to be led by a more rugged road, that of the Cross." But God, as they should understand, does not dispense His intimate friends from the Cross; quite the contrary. 10. — And, further, the mystic state brings with it sufferings which are peculiar to it and which may be felt even during prayer. I will enumerate them: 11. — 1° There are the sufferings of the beginners who have not been instructed with regard to these things. 12. — 2° One great cause of suffering is the need to possess God more fully. The stronger and more exalted God's communications, the more acute becomes the thirst for a still more complete communication. St. Teresa tells us of the martyrdom that she underwent at certain times, and which she describes in her Hymn: "I die in that I do not die." The soul then arrives at the anguish of love (see Interior Castle, Sixth Mansion, ch. xi, and Second Letter to Fr. Rodrigo Alvarez). Even in the prayer of quiet the suffering is very keen at times. To illustrate the possibility of the statement let us imagine a man who, wishing to hear a magnificent concert, can merely with great difficulty get access to a small crack in a partition, where he would catch fragments only of the harmony. What he hears would obviously cause him pleasure, but, at the same time, all that he misses would be a sorrow to him. It is possible, therefore, to feel both pleasure and grief at the same time, although in proportions that vary according to the circumstances of the particular case. 13. — When the sentiments of pleasure and suffering are of almost equal strength and are both very ardent, the resulting state takes the name of wound of love.

A great sweetness is felt, the lover does not wish to quit the thought of his beloved; he enjoys it. But at the same time he feels his heart torn because of his absence from her, or because of the difficulty in conversing with her freely. There is thus a mingling of joy and of sorrow. So, too, it is possible to have delicious experiences of God and of His love, and to feel at the same time the secret anguish which is nothing other than the thirst for God, kindled by Himself. Sometimes the suffering has another cause: we are conscious of the desire to serve God, and at the same time we feel that we are doing almost nothing for Him.

There are periods of abundance, but also of dearth, in which the mystic state disappears completely at times, even in the case of an ecstatic. See the example of St. Joseph of Cupertino.

### **The Tenth Character of the Mystic Union**

the mystic union is accompanied, and this often in a very visible manner, by an impulsion towards the different virtues. God does not come empty-handed, so to speak, to the soul, and His sanctifying action is so much the stronger and more sensible as the prayer is higher. St. Teresa tells us this constantly. The soul who permeates herself with God in the mystic union feels that she thus, without knowing exactly how, permeates herself with love, humility, and devotion. 2. — To begin with, divine love is the natural effect, as it were, of this kind of prayer, and it would of itself suffice to excite the soul to virtue; provided, that is to say, that she had a certain spiritual grounding. It gives an inclination for solitude, because God is more easily found there. It shows itself by aversion from sin and detachment from all that is not God; and it thus removes all obstacles to perfection. It teaches humility; for we love to make ourselves of no account before those whom we tenderly love and of whose superiority we are conscious. Finally, it impels to generosity and to the spirit of sacrifice. And at the same time God provides occasions for the exercising of these dispositions; He sends trials of all kinds, temptations, sickness, want of success, injustices or contempt. He imposes the most grievous sacrifices. 3. — And the remarkable thing is that certain virtues are sometimes given quite suddenly. St. Teresa refers to these instantaneous changes in the soul, and she symbolises them by the figure of the ugly, crawling worms becomes a beautiful, swift-flying butterfly. Certain faults have always resisted our efforts, our examen of conscience. And then, suddenly, as we passed to more advanced or deeper prayer, we find our faults corrected without any industry of our own. In this way, God wills to show His power to the soul.

### **The Eleventh Character of the Mystic Union**

that the union acts upon the body, which in its turn acts upon it again. 2. — In the case of ecstasy, it is clear that the mystic union acts upon the body. It is from this that the definition of the degree is derived. This action is exercised in four ways: 1° The senses cease to act, or they convey a confused knowledge only. According as the cessation of action on the part of the senses is complete or almost complete, the ecstasy itself is called complete or incomplete. 2° As a general rule, the limbs become immovable, and one can neither speak nor walk nor make any gestures unless God restores this power miraculously. This last state is called mobile ecstasy. Here are some examples of this exception. St. Catherine of Siena, St. Catherine of Ricci, and St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi

spoke during their ecstasies. We thus have accounts of what they saw or heard. St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi spoke so rapidly at times that six secretaries were required to take down her utterances (Vie, by Cepari, ch. vii. Eng. trans., Orat. series, ch. xxviii). She sometimes walked during her ecstasy. On one occasion she even climbed up one of the columns of the church without the aid of a ladder. This occurred frequently with Catherine Emmerich when she was Sacristan and it was necessary to clean or decorate cornices or other places that were, humanly speaking, inaccessible (see M. Ribet, *La mystique divine*, Vol. II, ch. xxxii). St. Frances of Rome heard her Confessor's questions when she was in an ecstasy, but not those of other persons. She composed verses of hymns at these times, which she sang. She moved and made gestures corresponding to the consoling or sorrowful pictures that were passing before her; she took part in these scenes, getting ready the manger, for instance, which seemed to her to be about to receive Our Blessed Lord upon His Nativity. 3° The respiration is almost arrested; sometimes it seems to be completely so. It is the same with the heart-beats, and consequently the pulse. In all these things there are 141 differences of degree, according as the contemplation is more or less deep. Sometimes, at certain moments, there has even been ground for fearing that death has supervened. 4° The vital heat seems to disappear, a coldness sets in at the extremities of the limbs. To sum up, everything seems as if the soul were losing in vital strength and motive power all that it gains from the side of the divine union.

Several persons have told me that they then only saw the objects about them as though they were veiled by a whitish mist. It is like an evenly dispersed fog, or the smoke of incense. This fog has its fluctuations, like the prayer itself. And with the prayer it increases in strength at times, and then diminishes in the same way. If the eyes are closed, the influence of the prayer of quiet is less easily shown. The union then has to be very strong. The eyes feel as if they were being darkened; so much so that at certain moments, when the state is at its deepest, it is as though one were in complete darkness.

They have always instinctively closed their eyes. They are right in doing so, for in this way one is more recollected. And if they did not, the sight might be greatly fatigued, as it would remain riveted to one fixed point. And then, further, in the case of the mist just referred to, the eyes would necessarily make an effort to penetrate it, and there would be a second cause of fatigue.

In the case of ecstasies we meet occasionally with the following phenomena which concern the body: 1° The body rises up into the air. This is what is termed levitation; 2° Or it is enveloped in a luminous aureole; 3° Or it emits a fragrance. These phenomena are not a necessary effect of the mystic union itself, like those that we have just described above (2.) They are superadded to it. When God produces these exceptional phenomena,

it is usually with the object of giving credit to one of His servants whom He has charged with some important mission:

Sometimes the ecstatic develops a considerable strength in his ascents. Thus we read in the Life of St. Joseph of Cupertino that on three occasions he

one of his companions and carried him up with him into the air. He was present one day at a ceremony in which ten men were vainly endeavouring to hold up and fix a heavy Cross. He darts forward, flying as though he were a bird, lifts up the Cross like a feather and fixes it in its place

At other times the ecstatic's body cannot be moved. It is as resistant as a rock

St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi became sometimes so heavy during her ecstasies that they could not move her. They were not even able to stir her arm or her hand. But "when she had recovered the use of her senses, she felt pain in such of her limbs as had been too roughly handled" (Vie, by Ceparì, ch. vii). Generally, with ecstatics, the body is immovable only when lying on the ground. 4° There is no fixed rule with regard to the height to which the body ascends. When St. Francis of Assisi had withdrawn to Mount Alverna, his only companion being Brother Leo, his confessor, this latter saw him lifted up sometimes to a man's height from the ground, sometimes above the highest trees, and at others so high that he was no longer visible

The Ven. Mary of the Incarnation, Ursuline, speaking of the ecstasies that she had while still in the world, adds: "I came out of this state after an hour or two in profound peace and great sweetness of spirit... As to my body, it emerged from this prayer more enfeebled than would have been the case after the most frightful austerities, but, nevertheless, always able to attend to my ordinary occupations" (Histoïrè, by Abbe Chapot, Part I, ch. iv). Another striking example is that of Blessed Mary of the Incarnation, Carmelite (Madame Acarie). At the age of twenty-eight, says her biographer, "God's onslaughts took her with yet greater impetuosity and with such a violent trembling that it made her bones crack, and wrung from her piercing cries as if she were being stabbed to the heart.... She expected that they would cause her death, so much so that she once told M. Fontaine, her confessor at Pontoise, that on several hundred occasions she had gone to bed not expecting to live until the morning" (Vie, by André du Val, Book I, ch. v; see also Book II, ch. xiv). St. John of the Cross, speaking of high raptures, says that they are not "always attended by such terrors and shocks of nature as in the case of those who are entering into the state of illumination and perfection [the mystic union]... and as in this kind of communications, namely, of ecstasies and rapture. For in others [those who have reached the spiritual marriage] they take place with greater sweetness" (Spiritual

Canticle, Stanza XIV, line 5, p. 84) He had previously dealt with the subject at greater length. Speaking of the "Beloved," he says: "The soul, because of its intense longing after the Divine eyes, that is the Godhead, receives interiorly from the Beloved such communications and knowledge of God as compel it to cry out, 'Turn them away, O my Beloved.' Such is the wretchedness of our mortal nature that we cannot endure—even when it is offered to us—but at the cost of our life, that which is the very life of the soul and the object of its earnest desires, namely the knowledge of the Beloved. Thus the soul is compelled to say, with regard to the eyes so earnestly, so anxiously sought for, and in so many ways —when they become visible—'Turn them away' " (ibid., Stanza XIII, line I, pp. 68–9). "So great, at times, is the suffering of the soul during these ecstatic visitations— and there is no other pain which so wrenches the very bones and which so oppresses our natural forces—that, were it not for the special interference of God, death would ensue.... Such graces cannot be perfectly received in the body, because the spirit of man is lifted up to the communion of the Spirit of God, Who visits the soul, and it is therefore of necessity, in some measure, a stranger to the body. Hence it is that the flesh suffers, and consequently the soul in it, by reason of their union in one person" (ibid., stanza 13, line 1, p. 69). Elsewhere he again says that with the more advanced "ecstasies, raptures, and dislocations of the bones occur at times"

Stigmata. Several ecstasies have borne on their feet and hands and side, or upon the brow, the marks of Our Saviour's Passion, accompanied by corresponding and very acute sufferings.

. St. Catherine of Siena's stigmata became at once invisible in response to her request. The pain was usually so intolerable that she said that a miracle alone prevented her dying from it (Bolland., April 30th, No. 195).

The substance of this grace is compassion for Jesus Christ, the participation in His sufferings. There could be no reason for our bearing the symbol without having something of the reality, according to the measure of our moral strength and in conformity with our condition. There would be danger of pride in appearing as though we were honoured with a privilege, and there would not be the merit of a painful ordeal as a compensation. Finally, if the stigmata really comes from God, it is a miracle prolonged for years together; it cannot consist in a mere spectacular effect. The sufferings of the stigmata occur even where there is no hæmorrhage from the wounds. As a rule, other trials are added to these. "The life of those who bear the stigmata," says Dr. Imbert, "is but a long series of pains which lead up to the divine malady of the stigmata, and then form an escort, as it were, continuing with it up to the hour of death"

## **Twelfth Characteristic of the Mystic Union: The Ligature**

the mystic union impedes, to a greater or lesser degree, the production of certain interior acts which could be produced at will in ordinary prayer

ligature of the faculties

suspension of the faculties.

They are seized upon, riveted, by a higher object. The word ligature indicates that the soul is in the condition of a man whose limbs are bound more or less tightly by bands, and who can only therefore move with difficulty. 3.—The existence of the ligature in ecstasy is as obvious as possible. Save in exceptional cases, one thing only can be done: to receive what God gives. We are bound with regard to all beside.

In the prayer of quiet we do not begin to take real notice of this impediment until the day when the mystic grace surprises us during vocal prayer, which it tends to interrupt; or when, not finding sufficient occupation in our prayer, we endeavour to complete it by reflections or vocal prayers. We are then conscious of an obstacle. 5.—True signification. In the prayer of quiet, the ligature does not amount to an absolute impossibility. Thus we can begin to recite a vocal prayer such as the Paternoster, But after two or three words, some unknown and secret force often stops us. We hesitate and stammer. A new effort then enables us to resume, and so it goes on. We should soon be weary if we attempted to continue the struggle. The proper course is to resign ourselves.

If the soul seems idle, God is not so. Let us take another comparison, showing this hidden action. Anæmic subjects often resort to an air-cure as a treatment. They go to the country, or the seaside, or the mountains, and there they simply fill their lungs with pure air. They are apparently idle, but their surroundings exercise a hidden action upon them, which transforms them without their knowing how. And it is the same in the mystic state. We seem sometimes to be doing scarcely anything; but we are plunged in a divine atmosphere, which acts upon us. It is life-giving; and in it the feeble soul recovers her strength. It is warm; and the frozen soul begins to burn with love. It is a treatment that is quite unlike the common way, but none the less good for that.

## **The Two Nights of the Soul, the Borderland of the Mystic State**

St. John of the Cross

Description of the First Night



1° it is a state of aridity, either sweet and tranquil, or, more often, bitter and painful; 2° and the simple gaze is directed almost wholly and uninterruptedly towards God.

This is a memory of God simple, confused, and general, returning with a singular persistence which is independent of the will. It alone escapes the powerlessness caused by aridity, and more than this, it obtrudes itself. At one time it triumphs over distractions, at another it is overcome by them. It is a continual alternation of success and failure.

First it is a contemplation, a simple gaze that recurs frequently. Then, as in the prayer of quiet, the proper object of this gaze is one alone: it is God.

We suffer from an unsatisfied longing, without being able to say exactly what it is that we desire.

We can sum up all this by saying: the night of the senses is 1° a simple gaze; 2° an aridity; 3° with this peculiarity that the soul finds a facility for one single memory only, that of God; 4° it has also one single desire, that of possessing God more fully; finally, 5° this shaping of the soul's course is not due to her own efforts. 16. — Fourth element. It affects our natural tastes. It is a persistent action of grace, designed to detach us from all the things of sense, even such as are lawful, and to imbue us with a distaste for them. Nature opposes itself to this action and suffers from it. In this conflict the soul may incline to one side or the other. When speaking just now of the longing for union with God, I instanced a particular case of the divine action, and I said that we were no longer led to seek this union by way of our former exercises

The mystic state will continue this work later on. St. John of the Cross describes this inner travail at great length. He occupies the whole of Book I of the Ascent of Mount Carmel and the first chapters of the Obscure Night in reviewing all our appetites, which he connects with the seven deadly sins. He declares this conflict to be the sign by which we should judge as to the probability of our being really in the night of the senses. 17. — I have called attention to the fact that the soul may resist this action of grace. This is because God does not sanctify us in spite of ourselves. If He inspires the inclinations, He leaves nature free to act in opposition to them; we may choose for ourselves. St. John of the Cross admits the existence of this resistance, for he says that the work of purification may be very prolonged.

He says also that God ordinarily leads into the second night those who have been called in a marked degree into the first night (Obscure Night, Book I, ch. xiv, p. 371). We can understand this if we admit that the essential part of the mystic grace has already begun

to be received. The seed is sown; it is in the order of nature that it should develop and put forth a stem

1° Tedium. It proceeds from the first element, which is aridity. The faculties are restive at being thus kept without employment. They desire movement, variety; but here they are condemned to an incessant absence of movement and a monotonous occupation! And, unhappily, this state is inevitable. We cannot change our prayer at will. When this trial lasts for several days, even so it is exceedingly wearisome. But it is sometimes prolonged for several years; and it then becomes intolerable, provided, that is to say, that, instead of going in search of outside consolations, we maintain ourselves in recollection. 27. — How may we remedy this suffering to a certain extent? By making use of a book whilst we are at prayer. When the weariness is excessive, it is a solace only to make some little attempts, although we may have satisfied ourselves that they rarely succeed. 28. — 2° There is also the torment of distractions, which is another consequence of aridity. It is more severe than in the prayer of quiet, because there we have a certain compensation — the possession of God.

There is something in it that is analogous to the pain of loss that tortures the holy souls before their entry into Heaven. Those who have never left the ordinary way feel little or nothing of this painful and constantly renewed longing; and they are inclined to be astonished at it. But they ought to admit that God does not give the same attractions to everyone alike. With a loving cruelty He may quite well enkindle a great craving for eternal blessedness, breathing into us a home-sickness for the Divine Essence, that true country of our souls. Some people go farther than astonishment. They condemn this disposition, and say that the distress is fanciful.

Those to whom God sends great trials of this kind often feel overpowered with sadness, and they are astonished and say to themselves that this sadness is causeless. But they are mistaken. There is doubtless no special cause such as a reprimand or sickness. But there is a general cause which they have overlooked. It is this: Other souls have a certain inclination for even the humblest of their habitual occupations; they like to exercise their faculties in this way and to escape the tedium of inaction.

But suppose that God secretly removes this natural pleasure in all earthly things, without, however, giving us a taste for those of heaven, our faculties are then applied incessantly to subjects that are distasteful to them; and a perpetual atmosphere of sadness results.

Nothing hinders our seeking, but it will generally be in vain; we cannot get out of our desert. We must accept this situation generously. This anxiety is due to a narrow idea as to what prayer should be. It consists essentially in a loving converse with God;

if we allow grace to lead us on to generosity.

The Devil often makes the ordeal harder by other sufferings, which, however, are not (as in the case of those that went before) the natural consequences, as it were, of this arid contemplation.

Amidst all these sufferings the superior part of the soul may experience peace and joy. This is only the case with fervent and truly mortified souls: the Cross has become their happiness.

“The soul delights to be alone, waiting lovingly on God, without any particular considerations, in interior peace, quiet, and repose, when the acts and exercises of the intellect, memory, and will, at least discursively – which is the going from one subject to another – have ceased; nothing remains except that knowledge and attention, general and loving, of which I have spoken, without the particular perception of aught else” (Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book II, ch. xiii, p. 102).

“This striving, notwithstanding the abundance of loving interior peace, disturbs him in the consciousness and employment of it” 34

If the night of the senses is present occasionally only, and if during the intervals we revert to ordinary meditation, it seems to him that God is probably merely proposing to purify the soul without intending to lead her higher.

The saint adds: “God does not elevate to perfect contemplation everyone that is tried in the spiritual way, and He alone knoweth why” (Obscure Night, Book I, ch. ix, p. 353).

“This [second] Obscure Night is a certain inflowing of God into the soul... Contemplatives call it infused contemplation or mystical theology”

“God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it in the perfection of love, without efforts on its own part beyond loving attention to God, listening to His voice and admitting the light He sends, without understanding how this is infused contemplation.... So when the divine light of contemplation shines into the soul not yet perfectly enlightened, it causes spiritual darkness, because it not only surpasses its strength, but because it obscures it and deprives it of its natural perceptions. It is for this reason that St. Dionysius and other mystic theologians call infused contemplation a ray of darkness, that is, for the unenlightened and unpurified soul...”. 2° “The way of the spirit... is also called the Illuminative Way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself nourishes and refreshes the soul without the help of any active efforts that itself may make” (Obscure Night, Book I, ch. xiv, p. 370). The saint repeats that this night contains a

contemplation. Now he shows us what it is that is synonymous in his eyes with this last word: "Mystical theology, which is the secret science of God, and which spiritual men call contemplation" (Spiritual Canticle, Stanza XXVII, p. 148). 3° When describing the man who has gone through the night of the senses, the saint adds: "... He must change his garments. This God Himself will do.... He will change them from old into new by infusing into the soul a new understanding of God in God, the human understanding being set aside, and a new love of God in God..." (Ascent of 183 Mount Carmel, Book I, ch. v, p. 21). 4° The soul seems to say: "In poverty, unsupported by any apprehensions, in the obscurity of the intellect, in the conflict of the will, in the affliction and distress of memory ... I went forth out of myself [during the first night], out of my low conceptions and lukewarm love, out of my scanty and poor sense of God... I went forth out of the scanty intercourse and operations of my own to those of God; that is, my intellect went forth out of itself, and from human became Divine ... it understands no more within its former limits and narrow bounds.... My will went forth out of itself transformed into the Divine will ... all the energies and affections of the soul are, in this night and purgation of the old man, renewed into a Divine temper and delight" (Obscure Night, Book II, ch. iv, pp. 379–80). 5° Comparing the two nights, the saint characterises the second as follows: "For this is a certain fire of love in the spirit whereby the soul, in its dark trials, feels itself wounded to the quick by a certain impression and foretaste of God, though it understands nothing distinctly because the intellect is in darkness.... And inasmuch as this love is infused in a special way, the soul corresponds only passively with it, and thus a strong passion of love is begotten within it. This love has in it something of the most perfect union with God [the spiritual marriage], and thus partakes in some measure of its qualities which are chiefly actions of God, in the soul rather than of the soul, which is consenting unto them in simplicity and love" (Obscure Night, Book II, ch. xi, p. 406). 6° The saint says that ecstasies belong to this period, and that they definitely diminish towards its close (Obscure Night, Book II, ch. i, pp. 374–5).

All depends upon the wider or narrower sense in which we interpret the word faith. In the broad sense it signifies all supernatural knowledge of a degree lower than the beatific vision. But between faith, taken in a more restricted sense, and the intuitive vision, there is an intermediary; namely, infused knowledge, which is also described as faith illumined by a gift of the Holy Ghost. Faith, strictly so called, rests solely upon the testimony of another, that is to say, of God. Infused knowledge goes farther; by it we begin to see with more or less clearness. Mystic contemplation is an act of infused knowledge. Now, St. John of the Cross takes the word faith in the first and wide sense, and he can therefore say that mystic contemplation is inside the domain and way of faith. But the usual sense

is the second. It is to be feared, therefore, that readers may interpret in their usual sense things that the saint said in his own.

### **Further Details Regarding the Prayer of Quiet (the First Stage of the Mystic Union)**

Let us recall the definition. It is a mystic union in which the divine action is not yet strong enough to hinder distractions. It is called by St. Teresa "the second manner of drawing the water which the Lord of the vineyard has ordained"

This is the way to avoid false rules of conduct and to co-operate with the divine action. But we must avoid too much selfanalysis. By over introspection we do not arrive at a clearer view of our state; we only disturb ourselves uselessly.

21. — And, to begin with, the Devil cannot imitate the mystic state. Both St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross hold this doctrine. In the first place, there is one character that the Devil would be careful not to imitate, at least, sincerely; and this is the impulse towards virtue. And then the actual foundation of this prayer is beyond his powers; while the contrary holds good with regard to revelations and visions, such, at any rate, as are not purely intellectual. For, according to the teaching of the Schools, neither good nor evil angels can act directly upon the intelligence or upon the will. They operate upon our interior faculties only, the imagination and the feelings, and this by the agency of the body alone. The Devil, like the good angel, may awaken sensible images, as well as pleasure and emotions of the same order. But all mystic writers declare that this disturbance of the lower faculties is powerless to produce the mystical knowledge of God and the union corresponding with it. 22. — In the same way there can be no counterfeit proceeding from our own minds. The true mystic contemplation has an assemblage of characters that we can never reproduce at will.

It is greatly to the Devil's interest that you should act in the contrary manner, that you should consider yourself as being inspired, and even a prophet. You will in this way commit great imprudences which will destroy your credit

so that you will not accomplish the good to which your state of prayer should have led, and you will bring these states into contempt.

evident that the expression, "listening to God," is purely metaphorical. As an instance of these exaggerations let us quote a seventeenth-century writer who, really little in sympathy with mysticism, shows himself over-enthusiastic in this passage: "The conscience of these souls," he says, "is an exact and perfect book..... The Holy Spirit generally says and does everything, while these souls have only to read and look at what

is happening.... The Spirit of God in them is a real teacher who instructs them incessantly." It may, perhaps, be so in the case of certain ecstasies, at certain moments, at least. But it is a wild fantasy to depict the inferior degrees in this fashion. The saints themselves were not content "to read and to look" in the divine book. We see, for example, that certain great founders of religious Orders—St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius, and St. Francis of Sales—groped about, as it were, to a large extent before they found the true form of their Institute or of many characteristic rules. It was not sufficient for them, therefore, to turn over the leaves of the divine book. There is another significant fact: during the great Western Schism the saints were not all of one mind, not even those who had the gift of reading consciences.

I have put souls on their guard against the inspirations or impulses that they believe themselves to receive relating to their conduct. But the contrary attitude should be recommended for things seen suddenly and luminously with the eye of faith, and which give a higher comprehension, not of novelties, but of truths held by the Church. Such illuminations can be accompanied by no drawbacks; they are, on the contrary, very precious graces. 37.—At times the above illusion occurs in a modified form. Here the person does not count on the gift of prophecy, or even on inspirations in cases of difficulty. He merely expects more help than if he had continued in the ordinary way. So far there is nothing that is not quite reasonable. But here is where the illusion begins; he is inclined to say: "I need not exercise such great care over my conduct; God will be responsible for preserving me from all faults and all imprudences. And, further, He exhibits a special friendship towards me; now friendship knows how to turn its eyes away from seeing slight faults." This would be a very unsound argument. Here, again, God has never engaged to preserve you from faults, and still less from blunders. You are tempting Him.

Those who begin to experience supernatural states of prayer should not exaggerate the confidence that they feel in being the object of a special providence on God's part. God has not promised to perform miracles in order to preserve them from false notions and imprudences of conduct. It is for them to be on their guard and to accept serious direction.

### **Details Regarding the Full Union (The Second Stage of the Mystic Union)**

It is a mystic union 1° of such strength that the soul is fully occupied with the divine object; in a word, there are no distractions. But 2° the senses continue to act, or partially so, at any rate. By a greater or less effort, moreover, it is possible fully to re-establish relations with the external world, to move, and thus come out of our prayer. 2.—Where

it differs from the prayer of quiet. The fundamental difference is that the soul is plunged more deeply in God.

Finally, the third is that there is a much greater certainty of God's presence in the soul.

, St. Teresa proceeds to ask herself, in the Way of Perfection, in what the prayer of quiet differs from that of union; the absence of distractions, and the almost total disappearance of effort on the part of the soul.

Anonymous writer - "It is an interior sensation by which the soul is made aware that God is uniting Himself with her and making her participate in His life."

St. Teresa compares the soul in the enjoyment of the full union to the silkworm enveloped in the cocoon that it has spun for itself. And then it comes fresh from this state like "a lovely little white butterfly" (ibid., Fifth Mansion, ch. ii, 5, 6). This comparison seems to imply a transformation, and refers consequently to the spiritual marriage, which is called the transforming union. 6. — Reply. You yourself admit that, according to the saint, the soul does not merit the name of butterfly until she has left this prayer. During the prayer itself, and each time that she falls back into it, she is merely like the silkworm. It is therefore a question of a transformation in behaviour, and not of a new manner of operation during the continuance of the mystic state.

"the faculties of the soul now retain only the power of occupying themselves wholly with God,"

### **Ecstasy (The Third Stage of the Mystic Union)**

Supernatural ecstasy is a state that, not only at the outset, but during its whole existence, contains two essential elements: the first, which is interior and invisible, is a very intense attention to some religious subject; the second, which is corporeal and visible, is the alienation of the sensible faculties. This last expression signifies not only that sensations no longer penetrate to the soul, but that it would be extremely difficult to produce them, either if one wished to do so oneself, or if other persons endeavoured to incite the action of the organs of sense.

4. — Various kinds of ecstasy. It is called: 1° Simple ecstasy, if it comes on gently, little by little, or if it is not of great strength. As a rule, it is then thought not to contain any revelations; 2° Rapture, when it is sudden and violent; 3° Flight of the spirit, when, says St. Teresa, "the soul suddenly feels a rapid sense of motion that appears to hurry it away"

). 2° This violent motion cannot, as a rule, be resisted (*ibid.*, *ibid.*). But in the case of simple ecstasy, resistance is possible, at least, at the outset. 3° The body “continues in the position that it was in when the rapture came upon it” (*Life*, ch. xx, 23). 4° God nearly always reveals secrets of the supernatural order in raptures, and as a rule it is felt that the understanding has been amplified. 5° After a rapture, there may be a difficulty in resuming the ordinary exterior occupations, and this sometimes continues for several days (*Interior Castle, Sixth Mansion*, ch. iv, 18; *Life*, ch. xx, 29; xl, 11). 6° The memory of what has been seen is retained; but the soul does not usually know how to express this exalted knowledge by means of our human language which is so imperfect, and which is obliged to make use of images (see *Benedict XIV, De canon.*, Book III, ch. xlix, No. 12). 7° When the soul comes out of a rapture that has overtaken her in the middle of a conversation or a prayer, it often happens that she continues the phrase where it was broken off.

23. – Intellectual visions of the Divinity. In the preceding degrees God permitted the soul to lose herself in Him more or less deeply. But, ordinarily, He did not allow Himself to be seen. In rapture, the contrary usually happens. Several attributes that have been hidden now begin to manifest themselves.

24. – Blinding contemplation. When God thus allows His attributes to be seen, a certain obscurity always remains. It is a singular thing that the stronger the light, the more dazzled, blinded, does the soul feel. It is in this way that the sun would blind an owl and cause it suffering. An excess of light produces almost the same result as darkness. It is a mingling of knowledge and of ignorance, the ignorance being what strikes us the most. The attribute of incomprehensibility manifests itself more and more. We bury ourselves in the “divine darkness.” 25. – Incommunicable attributes. This effect of blindness is produced not merely by the too great strength of the divine light, but by the nature of certain attributes that have been manifested. Some of these attributes are a thousand times more incomprehensible to us than the others. The terrifying obscurity that they produce is called “the great darkness.” These profounder attributes are those that no creature can possess: those that are incommunicable. For example: infinity, eternity, the creative power, universal knowledge, immutability, a-se-ity (the absence of an external cause), the absence of any real distinction between the attributes and their fusion in an indefinable and higher good that contains all other goods. The divine nature may be compared to the solar sphere. When our eyes contemplate this orb, they at first see the flaming exterior surface only. But through the fissures in this surface astronomers perceive the great semi-obscure central nucleus. So in God there are, as it were, two strata of attributes. Those on the surface can send out their light to creatures and be reflected in



them. We already know these attributes in them. For example: beauty, justice, mercy, and intelligence. But above is the semi-obscurity of the central nucleus of the incommunicable attributes. The creature does not receive their radiance. And because our reason has nowhere encountered them, it stands abashed before this unexpected manifestation. And there results for us a special obscurity; the joy of attaining to a new and a marvellous knowledge is mingled with the uneasiness of feeling that we are not fitted to understand them properly. 26. — Contemplation that is called “by negation.” The greater part of the incommunicable attributes can only be apprehended by our infantine intelligences, or described indirectly, by means of the negation of known things. But they exist in God in the positive state, and it is as positive quantities that infused contemplation attains to them, thus surpassing the reason which confines itself to the negative idea. And so when writers say that the contemplative proceeds by negation, they merely intend to allude to the imperfect and negative language that he is obliged to make use of, in order to describe what is perceived. In the ordinary way of prayer there is an acquired contemplation, which is also called contemplation “by negation.” But this is not a state of prayer. It is rather a way of forming ideas about God, by declaring that such a perfection is not in Him after the same manner as it is in creatures, but that it is present in a higher way. It is a negation followed by an explanatory affirmation. We must not confuse these philosophical mental operations with prayer, and still less with the mystic state. It is true that many of the early writers speak of it as a kind of prayer. This is, I think, due to an over-literal interpretation of Dionysius the Areopagite. If anyone were to try to uphold this interpretation, I should say to him: “Have you really met with contemplatives who can occupy themselves for an hour together with these negations?”

### **The Spiritual Marriage Fourth and Final Union**

The supreme goal of all the mystic unions is called the soul’s spiritual marriage with God, the transforming union, the consummated union, deification. St. Teresa also calls it the seventh mansion of the interior Castle.

2. — The transforming union is a mystic state containing three principal elements. 1° A union that is almost permanent, persisting even amidst exterior occupations, and this in such a manner that the two different operations do not interfere with one another. 2° A transformation of the higher faculties as to their manner of operation (hence the name of transforming union). 3° Generally a permanent intellectual vision of the Blessed Trinity or of some divine attribute. Let us enter more into detail. 3. — First element: an almost permanent union.

When these favours are shown to the soul... in the spirit only, the higher and lower portions of the soul seem to it—it knows not how — to be so far apart that it recognises two divisions in itself, each so distinct from the other, that neither seems to have anything in common with the other, being in appearance so separated and distinct.

“it seemed, according to the Jesuit Fathers, her directors, as if she had two souls, one of which was as much united to God as though she had nothing else to do but to engage in contemplation, and the other as much attached to exterior things as if she had been entirely occupied in them” (Vie by an Ursuline of Nantes, ch. xx).

9. — The union of the spiritual marriage does not of itself bring about the alienation of the sensible faculties; or, since this state is continuous, the person would then always be in ecstasy. But at times it may be accompanied by ecstasies. As a rule, these ecstasies are rarer than in the preceding degrees. St. Teresa observed this fact in herself. “I, too, am astonished at seeing that, when the soul arrives at this state, it does not go into ecstasies, except perhaps on rare occasions; even then they are not like the former trances and the flight of the spirit...” (Interior Castle, Seventh Mansion, ch. iii, 10). This fact might well exhibit a certain number of exceptions. For with several saints, ecstasies have not seemed to diminish at the end of their life, and yet we may admit the probability of their having arrived at the supreme union. 10. — This habitual liberty which is left to the faculties, notwithstanding the interior contemplation, is a foretaste of life in Heaven. The angels and the elect, although plunged in the beatific vision, can converse with one another; and after the resurrection this vision will not be the cause of any alienation of the faculties. So, too, upon earth Our Lord had the full use of His human faculties, although beholding His Father face to face. 11. — Second element. The spiritual marriage may be thus defined: It is a state in which the soul is habitually conscious of the divine co-operation in all her higher operations and in the depths of her being. No union of a more intimate kind can be imagined. This grace can be considered under another aspect, which gives a still higher idea of it: in concurring in our supernatural acts God makes them His own; He renders them divine and shows that He does so. There is therefore a transformation of the higher faculties with regard to their manner of operation. The soul is aware that in the supernatural acts of her intellect, her love or her will, she participates in the divine life, in those analogous acts that are in God. This is the essential part of the spiritual marriage. 12. — To explain the meaning of this sentence, let us remember that in Heaven we shall rejoice in the vision of God, but that we shall further feel that we participate in His nature. And, indeed, all good qualities that exist in the creature deserve to be called a participation in the divine nature. But it is a question here of a supreme degree, carried to such a height that, as far as is possible, man becomes like unto God. He is deified: dii

estis. We get some idea of this transformation by the comparison of iron, which, when plunged into the fire, becomes like it; in a way it has become fire, without, however, losing its own nature. These expressions could not be employed in the case of boiling water. It has a certain participation in the nature of fire, but insufficiently. The natural qualities of the creature bear but this distant resemblance to the divine attributes. When theologians try to make the word participation still clearer, they are obliged to relinquish the attempt, and to declare that this grace is so much above all human conceptions that it must be regarded as a mystery.

14. — The mystics have fallen at times into exaggerations of speech by reason of their inability to describe all the sublimity of this participation. They speak of thinking by the eternal thought of God, loving by His infinite love, willing by His will. They seem to confuse the two natures, the divine and the human. They thus describe what we believe ourselves to feel; like the astronomers, they speak the language of appearances. As a rule, they finish by correcting any such exaggerations of language into which they have fallen. So, too, they sometimes go as far as to say that they not only feel union with God in this state, but that there is oneness with Him. This is only a manner of speaking. St. Alphonsus Liguori sums up this language by saying: "In the spiritual marriage, the soul is transformed into God and becomes one with Him, just as a vessel of water, when poured into the sea, is then one with it" (Homo. apost., Appendix I, No. 18).