

THE INFLUENCE OF ST. THOMAS ON THE MYSTICISM OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND ST. TERESA

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Rigans montes de superioribus suis (Ps. 103, 13).

The powerful influence exercised by the Angelic Doctor upon the great speculative mystics who succeeded him can be seen merely by reading a little of Tauler, Denis the Carthusian, Alvarez de Paz, or La Puente. To begin with, in nearly all the Carmelites it is scarcely less than in Vallgornera, who could truthfully entitle his famous work: *Mystica Theologia Divi Thomae*. There is thus no need to insist upon the point, for it is plain to see.

What is not so well known is the influence exercised upon the practical mystics, upon those Masters in whom experience predominates over speculation and theory. Yet it is no less real for that, especially in the most accredited of them, such as St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa. In the former he exercised it in part directly and in part perhaps through the medium of Tauler, in whom the great Carmelite Doctor manifestly appears to have found inspiration on not a few occasions; and in her, doubtless indirectly, through the reading of more or less Thomistic authors, and through her dealings with so many Dominican confessors and directors.

Upon those most lofty mountains of sanctity and of light, so radiant with divine splendors, it would seem that he watered them and made them more pleasant with the most elevated and choice portions of his doctrine, so that they might afterward, with sureness and certainty, fully satisfy the earth of so many thirsting hearts. All the great mystics, however many their own lights and however lofty the infused notices they received in their intimate converse with God, felt, as St. John of the Cross himself observes, the need to secure themselves with the authority of some master; and none like the great Doctor of Aquino for all those who know full well that whoever follows him walks most securely, and that those who depart from him render themselves more or less suspect, as a Sovereign Pontiff declared.

Thus we see how much courage and how much confidence the mystical Doctor[ess] gained each time she consulted the great Dominican theologians, through whose mouths St. Thomas spoke to her: whence it follows that she is always seen to be, at bottom, so deeply inspired by him, although without being aware of it herself, and for that very reason scarcely resembling him at all in form, which is always so characteristically her own and original.

But St. John of the Cross, while being also in a certain sense most original, resembles him in everything, both in substance and even very frequently in the very form or expressions of the loftiest teachings which most characterize and accredit him, as Fr. José de Jesús María Quiroga, O.C.D., has already undertaken to show at great length.¹ And it is not because he is fond of

¹“The mystical theologians who have most studied St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross, such as Philip of the

mentioning him without necessity, for the great mystical Doctor never makes a display of erudition save in Sacred Scripture; St. Thomas he cites expressly only some three or four times: once to declare the nature of contemplation and to show that, if it is true and not of mere name, such as the fictitious one they call *acquired*, which certain authors today so greatly extol and which he himself never knew, it always arises from and terminates in the love of God (II-II, q. 180, a. 7, ad 1); another to describe the degrees of that same love; and yet another, in fine, to explain the visions... But without citing him, since he had so thoroughly assimilated him in the schools of Salamanca, in everything he seems inspired by him or to lean upon him. Thus in all his many excursions into “philosophizing” or theologizing, scholastically, we see him expounding the purest Thomistic doctrine... And not only there, but even when he rises highest, almost to the point of losing himself from view, on the wings of the gift of understanding, with which he so greatly shone, or seems to melt in the sweetnesses of divine love, or to be fused and transformed with the ardors of charity well ordered by the gift of wisdom, we shall hear him express himself, as we are presently about to see, with expressions taken in great part from the lips of the Angelic Doctor, although afterward marvelously amplified and illustrated by him with the eloquence that is born of a heart full of God.

Thus in everything we shall always find him in agreement with him, and very particularly in making known the true progressive phases of the spiritual way and the corresponding states of soul, and, above all, in declaring wherein the properly spiritual life consists, wherein true sanctity and the full Christian perfection consist, and in showing how all this is at bottom one and the same thing, which consists in being fully possessed and directed by the sanctifying Spirit Who makes us to be true children of God, spiritual and perfect in Christ, who already enjoy the full exercise of the mystical spiritual senses and feel the things of the spirit and taste how sweet God is, and thus already admirably understand the language of the divine Wisdom and can run and fly along the paths of justice, attaining already, as if by a certain manner of taste or spiritual smell, to know what in each case the will of God may be, so as to fulfill it faithfully in all things, as the perfect succeed in fulfilling it; and thus they also perceive those most lofty touches of love which “taste of eternal life” and awaken most elevated divine notices, by which the soul that is purified and renewed and lifted above all that is earthly becomes ever more apt to penetrate with the gift of understanding even into the intimate mysteries of God. In this way it is as though our darkneses are illumined, our ignorances dispelled, all our works purified no less than our intentions and virtues and potencies, and the whole transformed into splendors of divine life within our poor mortality.

Whence it follows that this life is unique, as being that of Christ Jesus Himself living in us

Most Holy Trinity, Antonio del Espíritu Santo, Vallgornera, and José del Espíritu Santo,” observes Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange (*Perfect. chrét. et contempl.*, p. 576), “hold that there is perfect harmony between the principles of these two great masters. It is true that St. John of the Cross, like Tauler and Ruysbroeck before him, adds many precisions, but these were contained virtually in the principles of the Angelic Doctor, and it is these principles which allow one to understand them well and to walk with security in these difficult questions.”

by a most full communication of His Spirit; and that one is the way which leads to it, which is the perfect imitation of that same Savior, Whom, following faithfully, we shall at last come to be intimately *united* to Him, in the measure that we are being illuminated by His *light of life*, and transformed by the living splendors of His truth.

And He calls all to the divine Master so that from Him they may receive that fullness of life (John 1:12, 16; 3:16; 6:58; 7:37; 10:10), to all the thirsty He offers these mystical waters, to all who truly imitate Him even to the heroism of the virtues He promises for this very life the inestimable treasures of the beatitudes, which stand at the summit of perfection to which every good Christian ought to tend.

While the beginner goes as it were counting his steps and looking and looking again where he sets his foot, and calculating the difficulties and the means of overcoming them, and making his plans and meditating and reflecting carefully upon what he does and what he ought to do, as if the business of his advancement in the spiritual life, though a work of grace, depended in everything upon his own industry and efforts (on account of which he must proceed in a very lowly and earthbound manner, that is, in the human mode, according to the norms and initiatives of his own reason, more or less enlightened by faith); the perfect Christian and even in great part the one who draws near to perfection, that is, the proficient, already proceeds in a supernatural and divine mode, *quasi deus factus*, by being possessed of the Divine Spirit and as deified, or rather as moved, directed, and inspired by that same Sanctifying Spirit.

This is what makes a man truly *spiritual*, holy and perfect Christian, one to whom nothing is wanting for the full expansion of his baptismal graces, so that he deserves the name of consummate in virtue and justice, and thus be a true man of God, apt for every good work, however great it may be.

In the purgative way, proper to beginners, says St. Thomas (II-II, q. 24, a. 9), although one must always tend toward union with God by acts of love and the practice of good, the effort to turn away from evil and preserve oneself from it predominates; in the illuminative, proper to the proficient or advanced, although one must continue the purification and increase the union, the illumination of the soul predominates, together with the splendor of the truth contemplated and the faithful practice of every virtue, with which it runs eagerly along the paths of justice; and in the unitive, where at once the purification is consummated and one attains the full illumination, firm adhesion to God and the fruition of the Supreme Good predominate.

The three must, then, always go well united, although one of them predominates; and thus there are not in reality three separate ways, but one single ascending way with three principal phases, characterized by what predominates in each of them. But all these three things: purification of sins and defects, illumination with works proper to children of the light, and adhesion to God with acts of love and of joy in Him, are realized very imperfectly while the soul, though aided by grace, must do it in its lowly human mode and by its own industry, as happens in the ascetical

life, that is, in the practice which they call ordinary virtue. And it will necessarily be so until this virtue be completed and perfected by the exercise of the gifts, which give it the maturity of the fruits of the Holy Ghost and of the beatitudes, and by means of which the soul is enabled to feel the most gentle touches, to hear the holy inspirations, and to follow the delicate motions of the Divine Guest, under Whose sovereign influence, proceeding now in a superhuman mode, it will at last purify all that is needful in order to be able to begin to be truly illuminated and perfected in everything; so that it may show itself to be indeed a faithful daughter of God, as truly possessed and directed by the Sanctifying Spirit (Rom. 8:14), Who little by little will transform it from glory to glory until it is configured with the Divine Model (II Cor. 3: 18).

And in this consists the full perfection to which every Christian ought to aspire, and that which is most characteristic of the mystical life.

Thus the gift of wisdom, which in this life makes one feel so vividly the ineffable sweetnesses of God, at once and in advance both illuminates and purifies, so as to make them felt ever better, and to facilitate the exercise of the gift of understanding; which, according to St. Thomas (3 Sent. d. 34, q. 1, a. 4; d. 35, q. 1, a. 2), purifies in its turn from the phantasms of the imagination and even from the forms and representations of our poor understanding, in order that afterward the soul may soar to the most lofty heights and penetrate into the most profound mysteries of the Divinity.

St. John of the Cross, as a mystical Doctor who showed himself such in all things, never wrote deliberately about purely ascetical matters, or about things proper to beginners and their modes of discursive prayer, nor about the other exercises of the purgative life. Of what he may have taught beginners about this, we have only some references and conjectures. In all his books, even in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* itself, notwithstanding a certain ascetical aspect it presents, he does not teach what must be done in our own way to leave the paths of evil and take up the paths of the good, directing ourselves toward the holy Mount: he does not address himself to all, but only to certain blessed souls who, as they were trying to climb after their own fashion up the slopes of that lofty Mount of the Lord, were already granted the favor of being rendered more or less incapable of discoursing and praying in the human mode, by being placed in the mystical darkness of the *night of the senses*, which there begins to be treated. For this reason, in that book what is taught is not what is suitable to begin to do in the human mode, but rather what one must seek to do in order to leave behind all [human] mode and all human proceeding, in order to become ever more empty of all and to let oneself be possessed and moved without any resistance by the divine Spirit, so that thus, with the eyes of the heart well purified, they may go on being ever more illuminated by the splendors of the Sun of justice which they will go on perceiving in mystical contemplation, as they go on thereby awakening their spiritual senses.

Thus the Holy One begins in the very Prologue, saying that he is going to treat of ineffable things, which cannot be well known except by experience; and that, being such, what moved him

to declare them as far as possible was the great need of certain souls which, “Our Lord desiring to place them in this *Dark Night*, that through it they might pass to the divine union, they do not advance... because they do not... let themselves enter into it...” And thus, that one might know how to *let oneself be carried by God*, when His Majesty should wish to lead one forward, “... we shall give doctrine and counsels... Because it shall come to pass that God may lead a soul by a most lofty path of dark contemplation, in which it seems to her that she goes lost...”

And in the *Dark Night of the Senses* (ch. I) he begins thus: “In this dark night souls begin to enter when God is drawing them out of the state of *beginners*, which is that of those who *meditate* on the spiritual way, and begins to set them in the state of the *proficient*, which is already that of *contemplatives*, so that, passing through here, they may arrive at the state of the *perfect*, which is that of the divine *union*.”

According to this, a Christian will be found to be so much more advanced and closer to his fullness of life, the more he goes forth from the human mode and passes to the superhuman; and the more spiritual and perfect he will be, the more he has renounced and emptied himself, and let himself be filled and possessed by the divine Spirit.

And when he already deserves the name of *spiritual*, he will feel the things of the spirit, and will judge with sureness the mysteries of the supernatural life, concerning which nothing or scarcely anything can be understood, much less rightly judged, by the *carnal* man, that is, the “natural man” or *little one in Christ*: which comes to be, according to the Apostle, everyone who still judges and proceeds in the human mode, content with the lights of simple faith alone and with the practice of *ordinary virtue*, incapable of understanding the language of the mystical wisdom that is spoken among the perfect, and of discerning well in different cases what may be the good pleasure of God (Rom. 8:5; I Cor. 2:6-15; 3:1-3; Eph. 5:10).

This is not possible until the spiritual senses awaken and function well, in whose full exercise, according to the same Apostle and as St. Thomas declares (*in Hebr.* 5:14), the true Christian perfection consists, that is, the adult age and mature stature of the perfect man (Eph. 4:13). Then, reformed in the newness of his sense, he will know and verify by spiritual taste “what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God,” and will succeed in faithfully fulfilling it while ceasing to “be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2), that is, to human modes and judgments and proceedings: and in this precisely consists perfect charity, which is the bond of perfection of every virtue (Col. 3:14).

That divine motion and inspiration which draw the soul from the human mode to the superhuman make themselves felt not when we wish, but when the divine Spirit, Who breathes where He wills, deigns to work in us or inspire us. But although we know not when He wills to do it, He does will to do it in all, and He will do it sooner or later provided they do not resist Him or become deaf to Him, but, opening wide to Him the door of their hearts with fervent desires and prayers and with the faithful practice of all their duties and of ordinary virtue, endeavor to

empty themselves more and more of themselves and let themselves be influenced and possessed and governed by Him.²

Instinctus actualis Spiritus Sancti in manu nostra non est, observes John of St. Thomas (in I-II, q. 68, Disp. 18, a. 2, n. 31); *sed est in manu nostra habere cor semper paratum ad obediendum et ut facile mobiles simus a Spiritu Sancto*.

The Angelic Doctor repeatedly says that the first part of the beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit... the meek... those who mourn,” etc., deserves in all rigor the second: “theirs is the kingdom, they shall possess the earth, they shall be comforted... they shall see God, etc.”: which is verified fully in glory, and here below in an incipient manner, tasting a beginning of it, through the divine contemplation, as happens in the saints or perfect Christians, in whom the fruits of the Holy Ghost are already so mature that from this exile they begin to enjoy an anticipated heaven (I-II, q. 68, a. 2). Thus in the beatitudes is contained all the perfection of the virtues, not only that which they can have of themselves, that is, exercised in the human mode, but also that which they can receive in a superhuman mode under the influence of the gifts; to which they are attributed principally on account of the great perfection they imply (I-II, q. 70, a. 3). But all the beatitudes, since they presuppose the good exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost and of the consequent spiritual senses, and since in them is found the true perfection of the virtues, are necessary for full Christian perfection. Thus those who think that perfection can exist without the mystical life are greatly mistaken, for the mystical life is characterized by the predominance of the gifts, which is necessary in the beatitudes: *Cum beatitudo sit actus virtutis perfectae, omnes beatitudines ad perfectionem spiritualis vitae pertinent* (S. Th. II-II, q. 19, a. 12, ad 1).

And yet through them the evangelical preaching begins, directed to all, and in them the whole of the Christian life is summed up: *Christus in doctrina sua primo praemisit istas beatitudines, ad quas omnia alia reducuntur* (S. Th. *in Mt.* 5). And since toward the attainment of the beatitudes we draw near through the exercise of the gifts even more than through that of the virtues (I-II, q. 69, a. 1), from this it follows that only when one truly begins to profit in the acts of virtues and gifts, is there well-founded hope of arriving at perfection: *Cum aliquis incipit proficere in actibus virtutum et donorum, potest sperari de eo, quod perveniat ad perfectionem vitae* (S. Th. I-II, q. 69, a. 2).

It is not enough, then, for any ordinary manner of progress in the virtues for one to be truly held perfect: if one has not yet left the methods and procedures of the ascetical life, if those virtues are not accompanied by the gifts which are to give them the solid perfection that reaches a habitual heroism, causing the soul to rise above itself and above all that is earthly, it will still be far from meriting the name of perfect and spiritual, and will not even merit, according to St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross, the name of proficient or *advanced*; for it will still proceed in all things as a beginner or carnal man; and for that reason, as St. Teresa says (*Way of Perfection*,

²Eph. 4:22-30; Apoc. 3:20.

ch. 19), more or less “bemired.”

He is perfect, teaches the Angelic Doctor (*in I Cor.* 2:6), explaining the words *sapientiam loquimur inter perfectos*, who has his understanding elevated above all that is carnal and sensible, and can in this way already perceive the spiritual things, and whose will, elevated above all that is temporal, adheres to God alone. Thus he will go on growing ever more like the blessed, who in all things are actually united to God. And in this approximation to the consummate perfection of the fatherland is found the true perfection that is possible in this life: *Ut in similitudinem perfectionis illius, quantum possibile est, nos trahamus; et in hoc perfectio hujus vitae consistit* (S. Th. Opusc. 18: *De Perfect. vitae spir.*, ch. 6).³

These truly yearn to go to see Our Lord, and “their chief intent is to cleave to God and to enjoy Him” (II-II, q. 24, a. 9).

And those who thus hunger and taste and feel the things of heaven, these are the ones whom the Apostle calls adults, risen with Christ, spiritual, perfect, who no longer judge according to the flesh, nor proceed in the human mode, but as animated and possessed by the divine Spirit;⁴ Who, by the communication of Himself, of His gifts, of His ardors, and of His divine properties, at once makes men perfect and spiritual, so that they no longer move by their own judgment nor judge by human opinions, but are moved and instructed by Him Who is already their absolute Master, their “Lord and Life-giver.”

In viro spirituali, says St. Thomas (*In Joan.* 3), *sunt proprietates Spiritus Sancti*, sicut in carbone succenso sunt proprietates ignis.

Homo spiritualis, he adds (*in Rom.* 8:14), *non quasi ex motu propriae voluntatis, sed ex instinctu Spiritus Sancti inclinatur ad aliquid agendum...: non solum instruitur a Spiritu Sancto quid agere debeat, sed etiam cor ejus a Spiritu Sancto movetur.*

And in another place (*in I Cor.* 2, lect. 3) he observes that the Apostle calls *spiritual* the very same ones he had called *perfect*: *Eosdem hic nominat spirituales quos supra perfectos, quia per Spiritum Sanctum homines perficiuntur in virtute...* Dupliciter autem dicitur homo spiritualis: Uno modo ex parte intellectus Spiritu Dei illustrante. Et secundum hoc in Glosa dicitur quod homo spiritualis est qui Spiritui Dei subjectus certissime ac fideliter spiritualia cognoscit. Alio modo ex parte voluntatis, Spiritu Dei inflammante; et hoc modo dicitur in Glosa quod *spiritualis vita est, qua Spiritum Dei habens rectorem, animam regit.*

Thus the spiritual man is truly *possessed and governed* by the Holy Ghost, by Whose gifts he is *perfected* in virtue (3 p. q. 62, a. 2, ad 1), knows the spiritual things with certainty and, unlike the non-spiritual man, judges everything rightly, for the very reason that his understanding is divinely illuminated and his affections rightly ordered and inflamed. Thus it is that the spiritual

³“Itaque,” exhorts Pius XI (Enc. *Studiorum Ducem*, June 19, 1923), *praeceptum de amore Dei quam late pateat, caritas eique adjuncta dona Sancti Spiritus quomodo crescant... haec et talia asceticae mysticaeque theologiae capita si quis pernosse volet, is Angelicum in primis Doctorem adeat oportebit.*

⁴I Cor. 2:13-15; II Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:5, 13-14; 12:2; Gal. 5:25; Phil. 2:5; Col. 3:1-3; Hebr. 5:12-14.

man cannot be judged by the non-spiritual man, as the waking man cannot be judged by one who is asleep. *Apostolus*, he continues, *hic dicit quod spiritualis iudicat omnia*, quia scilicet homo habens intellectum illustratum et affectum ordinatum per Spiritum S. de singulis quae pertinent ad salutem, rectum iudicium habet. Ille autem qui non est spiritualis habet etiam intellectum obscuratum et affectum inordinatum circa spiritualia bona; et ideo *ab homine non spirituali spiritualis homo iudicari non potest*, sicut nec vigilans a dormiente. And this spirituality is given by the gift of wisdom in which the spiritual senses are included. And thus he adds: *Nos autem*, sc. spirituales viri, *sensum Christi habemus*, id est, recipimus in nobis sapientiam Christi ad iudicandum.

Hence it is that those who do not strive to be, above all, truly *spiritual men* and to have their mystical senses well exercised cannot be good directors and masters of spirit, in order thus to be able to illumine others in the measure in which they themselves burn (cf. S. Thom. *in Joan.* V, lect. 6; St. John of the Cross, *Sayings*, 192).

Accordingly, St. Teresa teaches that to set about judging things “of the spirit *without possessing it*” is a very great temerity, and that thus many err to the very grave harm of souls (cf. *Life*, ch. 13, n. 14; ch. 34, n. 11).

And St. John of the Cross insists upon this repeatedly, showing how much those are deceived in everything and how, in their turn, they come to take what is not of God for being of God and what is low for high, and vice versa, the very ones who, though already more or less advanced in virtue, are not yet sufficiently spiritual to rightly discern those things, nor for that reason perfect Christians and men of God, well possessed by the Spirit of the Divine Master.

Then we shall be *perfect and men of God*, when, instructed, inflamed, and enabled by the same divine Spirit, we fulfill with true perfection all the commandments and principally the commandment of divine love; and thus grow in divine science and prosper and flourish in every kind of virtue and good works, and very particularly in the interior ones, which are those which most please God and most sanctify us and perfect us, and therefore in perfect prayer and contemplation (cf. Col. 1:9-10).

Non potest homo esse perfectus, says St. Thomas (*in II Tim.* 3:17), nisi sit *homo Dei*. Perfectum enim est *cui nihil deest*. Tunc ergo homo est perfectus quando est instructus, id est, paratus ad omne opus bonum, non solum ad ea quae sunt de necessitate salutis, sed etiam ad ea quae sunt supererogationis.

And among these good works which it is fitting for him to practice, he adds (*in Rom.* 12, lect. 1), the principal ones are the interior ones: *Nam bonum hominis et iustitia ejus principaliter in interioribus actibus consistit, quibus sc. credit, sperat et diligit... Unde dicitur* (Lc. 17): *Regnum Dei intra vos est...* Interiores actus se habent per modum finis, qui secundum se quaeritur, exteriores vero... sicut ea quae sunt ad finem... Homo in fide et spe et charitate nullam mensuram debet adhibere, sed quanto plus credit, sperat et diligit, *tanto melius est...* Sed in exterioribus

actibus est adhibenda discretionis mensura per comparationem ad charitatem.

“Let those, then, who are very active take note,” says in his turn St. John of the Cross (Note on Canticle 29), “that they would do much more profit for the Church and be much more pleasing to God... if they were to spend at least half of that time in being with God in prayer... Certainly then they would accomplish more and with less labor, and with one work as much as with a thousand.” Cf. St. Teresa, *Life*, ch. 20 and 21.

The Apostle desires that we cease to be children in our senses (I Cor. 14:20), and reproves the Hebrews (ch. V), who still conducted themselves as such, needing to be nourished with milk, which is the consolations, considerations, images, and sensible representations that beginners need, incapable of tasting and digesting more solid nourishment, because they did not yet understand the language of perfect justice; whereas the perfect man, detached from what is earthly and transitory, from the views and miseries of human life, already feels well the things of the high and has his spiritual senses sufficiently exercised to know in each case what is most fitting, that is, what is most pleasing to God; and thus he needs to be nourished with far loftier doctrines.

Omnis qui indiget nutriri lacte, writes St. Thomas on this (*In Hebr.* 5, lect. 2), *expers est, id est, non potest habere partem in sermonibus perfectae justitiae intelligendis...* Hujusmodi non sunt participes pueri. (Is. 28): *Quem docebit scientiam, aut quem intelligere faciet auditum? Ablactatos a lacte, avulsos ab uberibus...* Quando (homo) pervenit ad perfectionem spiritualem, debet ei exponi doctrina solidior (and the ascetical life is not enough) ... *Loquenda sunt igitur alta mysteria perfectis...* Apostolus volens ostendere qui sint perfecti quibus sit tradendus iste solidus cibus, dicit quod sunt isti qui pro sua consuetudine habent sensus exercitatos. Unde in ista perfectione quatuor sunt attendenda: sc. ipsa perfectio in se in quo consistat, et quantum ad hoc dicit: *Qui habent sensus exercitatos...* Qui ergo sentit quae Dei sunt, perfectus est. Secundo attendenda est dispositio ejus in quo est, quia debet esse exercitatus... *Qui enim non est exercitatus non potest habere rectum iudicium*, quod ad hoc requiritur... Tertio, causa hujus exercitationis est consuetudo.... Et ideo dicit: Pro consuetudine... Quarto, finis hujus exercitii, quia sc. ad discretionem boni et mali.

Without this good exercise of the spiritual or mystical senses, it is impossible to proceed as perfect or to know how to discern what is precious from what is vile, and to give to each thing the value it deserves.

To judge the things of God as they are, one must be very spiritualized, very detached from the things and manners and human and carnal appraisals, which are still more or less influenced by what does not ordinarily proceed from the superhuman mode, proper to one who acts under the influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

The Angelic Doctor observes very well that the Apostle identifies the concepts of being *carnal* and of *proceeding in the human mode, secundum hominem*; because while the soul is not elevated to the superhuman mode, it will allow itself to be carried, more or less, as a little one, by carnal

affections: *Affectus rationis humanae secundum ea quae sunt carnis movetur, nisi spiritus hominis per Spiritum Dei supra hominem elevetur. (In I Cor. 3:1-4).*

For this reason he affirms energetically in another place (*in Gal. 5*, lect. 4-7), that for a soul not to waver and to be able to proceed rightly in all things, it needs to be governed by the Holy Ghost; and that thus *we must seek to be in all things moved by Him: Nam spiritus humanus... nisi regatur aliunde, fluctuat hac atque illac...* Non ergo perfecte stare potest ratio humana, nisi secundum quod est recta a Spiritu divino. Et ideo dicit Apostolus: Spiritu ambulate, id est, per Spiritum regentem et ducentem, quem sequi debemus...

Si ergo spiritu vivimus, debemus in omnibus ab ipso agi. Sicut enim in vita corporali corpus non movetur nisi per animam, per quam vivit, ita *in vita spirituali, omnis motus noster debet esse a Spiritu Sancto.*

Without living thus by the same divine Spirit, it is impossible, no matter what is said today to the contrary, to arrive at the true and full perfection of the *spiritual* life.

But for this, a complete denial of ourselves is necessary, renouncing in all things our tastes and opinions and the suggestions of the human spirit, in order to attend only to the Divine with the perfect exercise of the gifts and the spiritual senses. And for these to function well, a most perfect purification is needed, both active and passive, not only of sins and defects or voluntary imperfections, but even of every kind of images and sensible phantasms, leaving the soul as empty and darkened of all human discursive modes, so that in it the gift of understanding may work in such a way that it can soar in lofty contemplation.

The gift of understanding, observes the same Holy Doctor (3 Sent. d. 34, q. 1, a. 4), requires a purity such that it be *non solum a passionum illecebris... sed etiam ab erroribus et phantasmatis et spiritualibus formis, a quibus omnibus docet discedere Dionysius... tendentes in divinam contemplationem.*

Thus it is that, once well purified, leaving off being conformed to this world in anything, not even in the modes and manners that formerly served for seeking God, the soul will go “reforming itself in the newness of the sense to the point of being able to prove in each case what the divine will may be”; and thus, emptied of itself, begin to possess the mystical kingdom, and enjoy the incipient reward of the beatitudes, tasting with the gift of wisdom how sweet God is, and beholding itself by some mode with the gift of understanding.

The Apostle (Rom. 12:2) says to all: *Nolite conformari huic saeculo; sed reformamini in novitate sensus vestri, ut probetis quae sit voluntas Dei...* Which the Angelic Doctor comments, saying: *Ut probetis, id est, experimento cognoscatis* (Ps. 45: *Gustate et videte*)... Talem ergo experiuntur Dei voluntatem qui non conformantur huic saeculo, sed reformantur in novitate sensus sui.

In this way it is that this same life begins to be realized in perfect souls: *in viris perfectis... aliqua inchoatio beatitudinis...*, a beginning or foretaste of the full happiness which they are forever

to enjoy. *Omnia illa praemia perfecte quidem consummabuntur in vita futura, sed interim etiam in hac vita quodammodo inchoantur. Nam regnum coelorum potest intelligi perfectae sapientiae initium, secundum quod incipit in eis Spiritus regnare... In hac etiam vita, purgato oculo per donum intellectus, Deus quodammodo videri potest* (S. Th. I-II, q. 69, a. 2, c. et ad 3).

And this will surely come to pass, according to St. John of the Cross, when the soul arrives at the mystical Espousal, and above all at the Spiritual Marriage, when it must be entirely reformed, transformed, spiritualized, and deified, made like a living flame of love that burns with the sovereign fires which the Holy Ghost is continually communicating to it.

To arrive at this blessed state, the Mystic Doctor declares to us in his *First Spiritual Cantic* (cantic 27, p. 577 of the critical edition, vol. 2), to which we shall here refer, as also to the 1st *Living Flame*, believing these texts to be the most authentic, the soul “first exercised itself in the labors and bitterness of mortification and in meditation... Afterward it passed through the sorrows and straits of love... And... afterward it tells of having received great communications and many visits from its Beloved, in which it has been gradually perfecting and growing in love with Him, so that, passing beyond all things and beyond itself, it surrendered itself to Him in a union of love in a spiritual Espousal, in which, as one already espoused, it has received from the Spouse great gifts and jewels...”, with this it disposes itself to arrive at the spiritual Marriage, “which is much more than the Espousal; because it is a total transformation in the Beloved, in which the two parties surrender themselves each to the other, with a consummate union of love, such as can be in this life, in which the soul is made divine and God by participation...”... and thus is the highest state to which one can attain in this life; and thus I believe that this state never comes to be without the *confirmation in grace*.

Only with this is achieved the fulfillment of all our desires and the realization of the divine plan. “Because,” he adds, “all the desire and *end of the soul and of God* in all the works of it is the *consummation and perfection of this state*, on account of which the soul never rests until it arrives at it.”

Hence it is that God calls all to these summits of the beatitudes, to all the thirsty, to slake their thirst at the fountains of living waters, as St. Thomas taught (*in John* 7:37), and St. Teresa repeated (*Way of Perfection*, ch. 19-20).

“Of this such soul,” continues St. John of the Cross (p. 578), “is understood what St. Paul says...: I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me (Gal. 2:20). Therefore, the soul living a life so happy and so glorious, which is the life of God, let each one consider, if he can, what manner of life shall this be for the soul, in which, even as God cannot feel any distaste, neither does it feel any, but rather enjoys and feels the delight and glory of God in the substance of the soul now transformed in Him.”

In this way it will be able to practice all virtues with those divine refinements that befit those most perfect ones who have their souls purified and have already attained the divine likeness, so

that their justice *cum divina mente perpetuo foedere societur* (I-II, q. 61, a. 5), as *confirmed in grace*, whereby they find themselves lifted above all human passions and covetousness.

“Because,” adds St. John of the Cross, “the grandeur and stability of the soul in this state is so great, that if before there reached the soul the waters of pain of any sort whatsoever... they cause it neither pain nor feeling, and compassion, that is, the sentiment of it, it does not have, although it has the works and perfection of it; because here the soul lacks what it was weak in among the virtues, and what remains is what is strong, constant, and perfect in them; because after the manner of the angels, who perfectly esteem the things of pain without feeling pain..., it happens to the soul in this transformation of love; although at times and in some things God dispenses with this, dealing with it, giving it to feel and allowing it to suffer, because it may merit the more, as He did with the Virgin Mother; but the state of itself does not carry this. In the desires of hope there is also no pain..., for it sees and feels itself full of the riches of God, and thus in living and in dying it is conformed, adjusted to the will of God. And thus the desire it has of seeing God is without pain.”

And how shall it feel it, if it already sees Him in some way and is enjoying, as the Angelic Doctor says, a foretaste of the Glory, feeling Him reign as absolute Master in its own heart, as happens to those who have merited the incipient reward of the first beatitude?

“Because,” observes the mystical Doctor (Canticle 32, p. 589), “it is no longer content with knowledge and communication of God through His back, as He did with Moses, which is to know Him by His effects and works, but rather by the face of God, which is essential communication of the Divinity, without any intermediary, in the soul, by a certain contact of it in the Divinity; which is something foreign to all sense and accidental.” For “what can fall in sense is not God essentially.” And to feel it thus in a mode so superhuman and divine, it understands that it goes “by modes and ways strange and foreign to all the senses, and to the common natural knowledge.”

In that state of elevation so far above human proceedings, exclaims St. John of the Cross (*Spiritual Canticle*, canticle 34, p. 393), “in solitude it lived, and in solitude it has now placed its nest, and in solitude its Beloved guides it, alone.” Because, “in that solitude which the soul has from all things, in which it is alone with God, He guides it and moves it, and raises it to divine things; namely, its understanding to divine intelligences, because it is now alone and stripped of other foreign intelligences, and its will moves freely to the love of God, because it is now alone and free of other affections, and its memory is filled with divine notices; because it too is now alone and emptied of other imaginations and fancies; because *once the soul clears these potencies away* and empties them of all that is inferior, and of the property of what is superior, leaving them alone without it, *immediately God employs them in what is invisible and divine*, and it is God Who guides it in this solitude, which is what St. Paul says of *the perfect* (Rom. 8, 14): *...They are moved by the Spirit of God.*

In this manner, he adds (Canticle 37, pp. 603-6), “the soul loves God with the will of God,

which is also its own... in the same love with which He loves it, which is the Holy Ghost, Who has been given to the soul, as the Apostle says (Rom. 5:5)... And thus it loves God in the Holy Ghost together with the Holy Ghost, not as an instrument, but jointly with Him, by reason of the transformation, which supplies what is lacking in it." "Thus it teaches it to love as He loves Himself; because, God, loving us first, teaches us to love purely and entirely, as He loves us. And because in this transformation God shows Himself to the soul, communicating to it a total love generous and pure, with which most lovingly He communicates Himself entirely to it, transforming it into Himself: in which He gives it His own love, as we were saying, with which it loves Him, it is properly to show it how to love, and to give it the instrument into its hands, and to tell it how to do it, and to go doing it with it, and thus here the soul loves God as much as it is loved by Him, for it is a love which is of both of them: whence it follows that not only is the soul taught to love, but it is even made a teacher of loving with the same Master, united, and by consequence *satisfied*; because until it comes to this it is not satisfied; which is to love God fully with the same love with which He loves it; but this cannot be fully in this life, although in this *state of perfection, which is that of the Spiritual Marriage*,... in some manner it can." And from this manner of perfect love it follows at once in the soul an intimate and substantial jubilation toward God, which appears, and so it is, that the whole substance of the soul bathed in glory magnifies God: and it feels by way of intimate fruition a gentleness which causes it to break forth in praising, reverencing, esteeming, and magnifying God; with joy so great, all wrapped in love; and this does not happen without God's having given to the soul in the aforesaid state of transformation great purity, such as was that of the state of innocence, or baptismal purity."

Behold, then, the happy condition of souls truly *perfect*, and of heart and mind well purified, who in all things are now illuminated and led by the divine Spirit (John 6:45; Rom. 8:14), and whose principal office is *Deo adhaerere et frui*, as the Angelic Doctor says; and thus they rival in a certain manner the blessed, leading now a life more celestial and divine than earthly and human. For, united so intimately to God, they are made *one spirit with Him*, and therefore truly *spiritual* and divine.

In this manner, as the mystical Doctor continues (cantic 38, p. 607), they will feel "the breathing of the air... with a flame that consumes and gives no pain." "This breathing of the air is a capacity of the Holy Ghost which the soul here asks in order to love God perfectly... It is a most delicate touch and feeling of love which ordinarily in this state is caused in the soul by the communication of the Holy Ghost; which after the manner of breathing, with that its divine aspiration, most loftily lifts it and informs it, that it may breathe in God the same aspiration of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father, which is the Holy Ghost, Who in the said transformation breathes in it in the soul... And this for the soul is so high a glory and so deep and exquisite a delight, that it cannot be told by mortal tongue nor by human understanding, insofar as such, can anything of it be attained. But the soul, united and transformed in God,

breathes in God the same divine aspiration that God, being in it, breathes in Himself to it... In the perfect this is in the manner described... It is done as God by participation... Hence the souls of these same goods possess by participation what He possesses by nature: for which reason they are truly gods by participation...”

“O souls created for these grandeurs and for them called!, in what do you occupy yourselves?... O wretched blindness,... in that as you seek grandeurs and glories you remain wretched and low, made of so many goods ignorant and unworthy... In this union the soul jubilates and praises God with God Himself... it is perfect praise; because, the soul being in perfection, it makes perfect works,” as Tauler used to say.

Thus the transformed soul finds itself made into another thing so incomparably superior to what it was, that it does not recognize itself, and everything good that before seemed to it quite good now seems to it very low and most imperfect for what it now desires and is able to do.

“She holds as nothing,” said St. Teresa (*Mansions* 5, ch. 2), “the works she used to do while she was a worm... Wings have been born to her. How shall she be content, being able to fly, to go step by step? Everything she can do for God seems little to her, according to her desires. She does not think much of what the Saints underwent, knowing already by experience how the Lord helps and transforms a soul, which no longer looks like itself nor its figure.”

And in another place (*Life*, ch. 23), describing the change which she herself had experienced, she says: “It is another new book from here on, I mean, another new life. The one up to here was mine; the one I have lived since I began to expound these things of prayer, is one that God lived in me.”

Meanwhile, however perfect certain souls may appear, living in the human mode, according to what can be lived in the purely *ascetical* life, however much one may desire to behave well, one still finds oneself, without hardly noticing it, enveloped in thousands of imperfections and human miseries, which seem to it indifferent things, and which, nevertheless, oppose the perfection asked of us in the very first commandment: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul*, etc.: which it is impossible to fulfill well without going out of oneself, remaining in the dark from all modes of acting and knowing, in a mysterious night that transforms one from human to divine.

“*This night*,” adds St. John of the Cross (p. 610), *is contemplation*, because contemplation is dark, for which reason they also call it by another name *Mystic theology* (the only one he and the whole tradition knew and taught), which means hidden and secret wisdom of God, in which without noise of words... in the dark from all that is sensitive and natural, God teaches most hiddenly and most secretly to the soul, without its knowing how: which some spiritual authors call understanding without understanding; because this is not done by the active understanding, which they call that of the philosophers, which works in forms and phantasies and apprehensions of things; but it is done in the understanding insofar as it is possible and passive, which does

not receive such forms, etc., but rather passively receives substantial intelligence, which is given without any active effort of its own... Thus this night of contemplation is for the sight of the understanding bare and stripped of all clouds of forms and fantasies and particular notices that can enter through the senses.“

In this manner it is that there comes to be produced in the soul a “flame that consumes and gives no pain”; which flame is understood here to be the love of God already perfect in the soul; because to be perfect, these two properties must belong to it, namely: that it consume and transform the soul in God, and that the inflammation and transformation of this flame in the soul cause no pain.

And in the *Living Flame of Love*, which treats “of the most perfect degree of perfection to which one can attain in this life, which is the transformation in God” (p. 620), he observes (canticle 1, p. 622): “This flame of love is... the Holy Ghost, which the soul *now feels within itself*, not only as fire that has consumed and transformed it in sweet love, but as fire which, besides that, burns in it and throws forth flame; and that flame bathes the soul in glory and refreshes it in the temper of divine life. And this is the operation of the Holy Ghost in the soul transformed in love, that the acts which it makes interiorly are to flame, which are inflamed movements of love, in which, united, the soul of the soul loves most loftily, made a love with that flame. And thus these acts of love of the soul are most precious, and a single one merits more than *all that it will have done in its whole life* without this transformation, *however much that were.*”

Truly here the soul, as St. Thomas said, has now communicated to it the very properties of the Holy Ghost, and thus its works have a prodigious value, incomparably superior to that which the works of the best ascetics can have, however much those who, not knowing these mysteries of divine love, think that there can be in the purely ascetical way true saints, and as great or greater than the mystics; as if to be so they would not need to be well possessed and directed by that Flame of love, which is the Holy Ghost, and as if we should not, as St. Thomas affirmed together with the Apostle, seek to be in all things moved and led by Him.

“In this state,” continues St. John of the Cross, “the soul cannot make acts (of itself), but the Holy Ghost moves it to them, and for that reason all the acts of it are divine; for they are made... by God: whence it seems to the soul that each time that this flame calls, making it love with savor and divine temper, it is giving it eternal life, for it raises it to the operation of God in God. And this is the language and words which God speaks in souls that are *purged and clean.*”

And thus it is that these arrive to see God, as St. Thomas explains that He promised us in the 6th beatitude. And those who do not arrive at that and never perceive that language in which God speaks to the clean, it is a sign that they are not yet enough to be able to perceive the divine whisper, and to act in a divine manner, and to enjoy that inchoate glory which manifests itself in some way in those who already proceed as children of God (Rom. 8:14-21; cf. Apoc. 2:7, 11, 17,

etc.).⁵

“Thus” continues St. John of the Cross in his *Living Flame of Love*, “so much the more is the delight and the joy of the soul, and of the spirit, because God is the worker of it all...; inasmuch as by itself it can do nothing of its own, save through the bodily sense aided by it, from which in this case it is very free and very far: its business is now only to receive from God...; and thus all the movements of such a soul are divine, and although they are His, they are also hers, because God makes them in her with her, who gives her will and consent.”

This is the same thing that St. Thomas taught in saying (II-II, q. 52, a. 2, ad 1): *In donis Spiritus Sancti mens humana non se habet ut movens, sed magis ut mota*. Hence the work thus accomplished is in a certain manner divine, since the mode of operation is so superhuman: *Si ea quae hominis sunt, supra humanum modum quis exequatur, erit operatio non humana simpliciter, sed quodammodo divina... Dona a virtutibus distinguuntur in hoc quod virtutes perficiunt ad actus modo humano, sed dona ultra humanum modum* (St. Th. In 3 Sent. d. 34, q. 1, a. 1).

And because the operation of the gifts is superhuman and divine, by means of which the Holy Ghost takes possession of faithful souls and goes making them spiritual, as He goes renewing and transforming them in the flames of His love, hence, adds the Holy Doctor (ib. a. 3), the operations thus accomplished transcend infinitely the rules and norms of ordinary prudence, and cannot and ought not be appraised according to it. Thus: *oportet quod operationes donorum mensurentur ex altera regula quam sit regula humanae virtutis, quae est ipsa Divinitas ab homine participata suo modo, ut jam non humanitas, sed quasi Deus factus participatione operetur*.

And as God is a fire that consumes all that is opposed to Him, this flame of the Holy Ghost, once it has purified the soul and healed it entirely, causes it delights of glory, giving it eternal life; but first, in order to purify it and heal it well, since it has to consume and destroy in it so many earthly things, it cannot but cause pain and affliction, though truly gentle and very painful. Thus adds St. John of the Cross (p. 627): “This flame, when the soul was in the state of *spiritual purgation*, which is when it is *entering into contemplation*, was not so pleasant and gentle as... in this state of union.”

In this manner, this mystical wisdom, as the Venerable Bartolomé de los Mártires says in agreement with St. Thomas (*Comp. myst. doctr.*, ch. 13), *purgat, illuminat, ac perficit animam*.

And only with it, the soul inebriated with love, does it go on being ordered by charity (Cant. 2, 6), so as to well keep the first commandment; in this way is it purified enough to be able

⁵ *Ad visionem Dei creatura rationalis elevari non potest, nisi totaliter fuerit depurata... Unde dicitur de Sapientia quod nihil inquinatum in eam incurrit*. S. Thom. *C. Gent.* l. IV, c. 91. “What the understanding receives by way of seeing, because it can *see* spiritual things, even as the eyes see corporal things, we call *vision*; what it receives by apprehending and understanding new things, we call *revelation*; and what it receives by way of hearing, we call *locution*; what it receives by way of the other senses, such as the intelligence of sweet *spiritual odor*, and of *spiritual savor and spiritual delight* which the soul can *taste supernaturally*, we call *spiritual sentiments*. From all of which it draws *spiritual intelligence or vision*, without any apprehension of form, image, or figure of natural imagination or fantasy from which to draw it, but rather these things are communicated to the soul immediately by supernatural work and by supernatural means.” St. John of the Cross, *Ascent*, II, ch. 21.

to enter fully into the illuminative way, proper to the proficient, for already, the mystical wings growing which God offers to those who trust in Him (Is. 40:31), they can, with His help, even before taking lofty flights, run without wearying along the paths of virtue, as befits the *proficient* or *advanced*.

“The proficient,” says St. John of the Cross (*Ascent*, II, ch. 13), are those to whom *God begins to place in this supernatural knowledge of contemplation...*

...In these beginnings, when they realize that the soul is not employed in that quietness or knowledge, they will need to avail themselves of discourse *until they come to acquire the habit...* in some manner perfectly, which will be when every time they wish to meditate, they straightway find themselves in this knowledge and peace without being able to meditate or having any desire to do so..., because until they arrive at this time, which is that of the *proficient* in this, there is now some of the one, now some of the other...

But “once the soul has finished purifying and emptying of all forms and images apprehensible, it shall remain in pure and simple light, being transformed in it into the state of perfection. Because *this light never fails the soul*; but through the forms and veils of creatures with which the soul is veiled and encumbered, it is not infused into it: if these impediments and veils should be entirely removed, the soul remaining in pure nakedness and poverty of spirit, *then the soul, now simple and pure, would be transformed* into the simple and pure Divine Wisdom, which is the Son of God. Because, the natural failing in the soul now enamored, *straightway what is divine is infused, both naturally and supernaturally.*”⁶

Thus then, continues the Mystic Doctor (*Flame*, p. 629): “God, wishing to draw the soul out of the ordinary common state and way of operation, and from *meditation* to *contemplation, which is a more celestial state than earthly, in which He Himself communicates* by union of love, beginning Himself at once to communicate to the spirit, which is still impure, with bad habits, each one suffers according to the mode of his imperfection, and sometimes it is so severe for him, in a certain manner, this purgation which disposes him to receive it here below, through perfect union, as that of purgatory.”⁷

But blessed is the soul that is thus purified in the fire of love, growing at once inexpressibly in charity and grace!... Because, once well refined by that divine cautery, it is left so spiritualized

⁶Here one can see how mistaken are those who think or imagine that this treatise of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* is ascetical and the contemplation taught in it *acquired* and not *infused*, being as it is evidently altogether identical with that of the *Dark Night* and of the *Spiritual Canticle*. The Holy Doctor never speaks of two kinds of contemplations, but only of the one which he and St. Teresa knew, with the whole tradition: of “*the contemplation,*” without further qualifiers, only those of being *dark and loving knowledge communicated by God to the soul* when He goes putting it in silence of the potencies and with reluctance and difficulty to meditate...

⁷So that souls may be encouraged to suffer this painful purgation, he begins to treat of the *Dark Night* (l. 1, ch. 1-7), making a marvelous analysis of the multiple imperfections which beginners are wont to incur, whether those which still proceed in the human mode, or by way of discourse, in order that they may thus clearly see the need they have of asking God to place them in that *night*, without which it will be impossible for them to be purified enough to be able to pass to the *illuminative way*, and much less to the *unitive*. Thus the dark contemplation in which they are therein placed is that which truly purifies them and at the same time infuses in them wisdom and love.

and so divine, that, as the same Holy One adds (Canticle 2, p. 635), “it knows everything, it tastes everything, it does everything it wishes and prospers, and no one prevails against it, nor touches it; because this is she of whom the Apostle says (I Cor. 15): *The spiritual man judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man.* Et iterum (ib. 10): *The spiritual man searcheth all things, even the deep things of God.* Oh, great glory of the souls that *deserve to arrive at this supreme fire*, in which, since there is infinite power to consume you and annihilate you, consuming you not, immensely it consumes you in glory!

“Therefore,” continues (p. 637), “he who wishes to lean much upon the bodily sense will not be very spiritual. This I say because of those who think that by sheer force of operation of the sense (exercises of meditation and other things proper to the ascetical life), which is low, they can come to arrive at the powers and the height of the spirit, to which one does not arrive save with the bodily sense remaining outside...”

“Through these labors which God puts upon the soul and the senses,” he adds (p. 640), “it goes gaining virtues and strength and perfection with bitterness (II Cor. 12, 9), because virtue is made perfect in weakness.”

Without these labors and trials and obscurities and aridity and other penalties proper to the *passive purgation*, the soul will never be able to leave the stage of beginner, and thus will be far from arriving at the true perfection of the supernatural life, which will not be found except in the heights of the mystical life.⁸

And whoever does not arrive at it and remains always as if confined to the ascetical life, let him not blame the fault on the lack of divine calls, because Our Lord says that He is insistently calling even at the door of the lukewarm heart (Apoc. 3, 20), but rather on resisting grace and making oneself deaf to the divine inspirations, and not accepting as is fitting the trials that are necessary.

“Here”, adds the same St. John of the Cross, “we are moved to remark: why are there so few who arrive at this high state? In which it is well to know that it is not because God wishes there to be few of these spirits raised up; rather He would wish that all were so, but He finds few vessels in whom to work so high and exalted a work: that since He tests them in small things and finds them weak..., He goes no further in purifying them and lifting them from the dust of the earth, for which greater fortitude and constancy were needful.”

“I hold for myself,” St. Teresa had said in agreement with this (*Way of Perfection*, ch. 31), “that for this reason there are not many more spiritual persons, because, since they do not correspond to the services..., Our Lord goes away to seek elsewhere, wherever He may wish to give more.”

⁸“Here one will see how, according to the tradition preserved by St. John of the Cross,” observes Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange (*Perfect. chr. et contempl.*, p. 565), “the perfect purgative way requires the passive purifications of the mystical order; the illuminative is for that reason called the *way of infused contemplation* (*Night*, I, ch. 14), and why, finally, the unitive is not normally completed except by the transforming union, a prelude to heaven. These three ways are often trivialized by being content to describe them from the outside; St. John of the Cross, who viewed them from very high, went straight to the heart of the matter.”

“The perfect spiritual life,” says again St. John of the Cross (p. 643)..., “is attained by the mortification of all vices and appetites. And until this is done, one cannot arrive at the perfection of this spiritual life of union with God... In which the soul cannot live perfectly if it has not also died perfectly to the old man.”

But “when it has arrived at perfection of union with God... all the appetites of the soul and its potencies... are transformed into divine: and... having its operations in God, by the union it has with God, the soul lives the life of God, and has exchanged its death for life. For the understanding... is now moved and informed by another principle of supernatural light of God, and has been changed into divine... And the will, which before loved basely... has now been changed into a life of divine love, moved by the divine affection of the Holy Ghost, in which it now lives... And the memory, which was of its own perception only of the forms and figures of creatures, is now changed to have in mind the eternal years which David says (Ps. 76:6). And the appetite, which formerly tasted only the food of creatures... is changed into the taste and savor of divine food... And finally, all the movements and operations that the soul formerly had, of the principle of its natural life, are now in this union changed into movements of God. Because the soul in all things, as a true daughter of God, is moved by the Spirit of God, as St. Paul says (Rom. 8, 14)... So that the understanding of the soul is now the understanding of God; and the will is the will of God; and the memory is the memory of God; and the delight is the delight of God; and the substance of the soul, although it is not the substance of God, because it cannot be converted into Him, but being united to Him, and absorbed in Him, it is God by participation: which occurs in this perfect state of spiritual life, although not so perfectly as in the other.”⁹

So true is it what the Angelic Doctor said, that “in the spiritual life, to be perfect, all our movements must be produced by the Holy Ghost, of Whose divine properties the holy soul partakes...!”

Later the great mystical Doctor, explaining the *extraordinary refinements, heat and light side by side with his Beloved*, adds: “Thus are God and the soul actually in a reciprocal love..., in that the goods of both of them, which are the Divine Essence..., both of them possess together in the voluntary surrender of the one to the other, each saying what the Son of God said to the Father

⁹“Once there is a *habit of union*, which is already a *supernatural state*,” observes in another place the same St. John of the Cross (*Ascent*, l. 3, ch. 1), “the memory entirely ceases, and the other potencies as well, in their natural operations, and they pass from their natural term to that of God, which is supernatural. And thus, the memory being transformed in God, forms and notices of things cannot be imprinted upon it: because the operations of the memory and of the other potencies in this state are all divine; because, God already possessing them as their whole Lord, by the transformation of them in Himself, He Himself is the one who moves and commands them divinely, according to His Divine Spirit and will; and then the operations are not distinct, but those which the soul works are of God. And they are divine operations, inasmuch as *he who is united to God becomes one spirit with Him* (I Cor. 6:17). And hence the operations of the soul united are of the Divine Spirit, and they are divine. And from this it follows that the works of such souls alone are those that are fitting and reasonable, and not those that are not fitting; because the Spirit of God makes them know what they must know, and to *ignore what is fitting to ignore, and to remember what is fitting to remember*... And thus all the first movements of the potencies of such souls are divine; and there is nothing to marvel at that the movements and operations of these potencies should be divine, for they are transformed into the divine.”

(John 17, 10): 'All my things are thine, and thy things are mine, and I am glorified in them.' Which in the other life comes to pass without interruption, in perfect fruition. But in this state of union it happens whenever God exercises in the soul the act of this transformation."

Thus he had been saying before (p. 645): "The soul feels God here so solicitous to make it gifts, and with such precious and delicate and endearing words magnifying it and granting it one favor and other favors, that it seems to it that there is no one else in the world for Him to make gifts to, nor any other things in which to employ Himself, but that He is entirely for it alone."

And this God of Love even comes to the point of submitting Himself to that happy soul and to serve it and make it gifts as if she were His lady and He her slave...!

Nam Deus omnipotens, says St. Thomas (*Opusc. 63 de Beat.*, ch. 2), *singulis angelis sanctisque animabus in tantum se subjicit, quasi sit servus emptitius singulorum, quilibet ipsorum sit Deus suus. Ad hoc innuendum, transiens ministrabit illis* (Lc. 12), *dicens in Psalmo: Ego dixi: Dii estis.*

Accordingly, repeating almost the same phrase, St. John of the Cross affirms (*Spiritual Canticle*, 2nd Redaction, annot. to canticle 27): "Such is the tenderness and truth of the love with which that immense Father lavishes and ennobles this humble and loving soul, O marvelous thing and worthy of all awe and wonder! that He truly subjects Himself to it in order to magnify it, *as if He were her servant and she his lady.* And He is so solicitous to make her gifts, as if He were her slave."

This is what drove St. Teresa mad with love, causing her to exclaim:

"This divine union / of the love with which I live / makes God my captive / and *frees* my heart; / but it causes in me such a passion / to see God my prisoner, / that I die because I do not die."

Hence there is nothing strange in that those souls should go feeling indescribable longings for God in proportion as their potencies are emptied of earthly attachments that blinded and incapacitated them. For, "it is a wonderful thing," adds the mystical Doctor (*Flame*, canticle 3, p. 652), "that with being capable of infinite goods, the least of them is enough to embarrass them in such a way that they cannot receive them until they have been entirely emptied... But when they are empty and clean, the thirst and hunger and longing of the spiritual sense is intolerable... and that great feeling commonly occurs toward the end of the illumination and purification of the soul, before it arrives at the union, where it is now satisfied. Because, since the spiritual appetite is empty and purged of every creature and of every affection for it, and the natural temper is lost and has been tempered to the divine, and it already has the empty space prepared, and since the divine is not yet communicated to it in union with God, the anguish of this emptiness and thirst comes to be more than death."

This burning thirst for the divine, without any doubt all Christians could come to feel it if we truly endeavored to empty ourselves of all else and to be faithful to grace; for God would desire

nothing else.

“The desire of God in all the favors He grants it,” continues (p. 655), “is to dispose it for other more exquisite and delicate ointments... until it come to so delicate and pure a disposition that it may merit the union of God and the substantial transformation of all its potencies.”

Which St. Thomas well indicated, in saying that those who have “hunger and thirst for justice” deserve to begin to enjoy, even here below, that divine satisfaction.

But many bad directors and counselors, without realizing it, oppose the achievement of this end, who wish to quench that mystical thirst with things that do not satisfy.

“Advising, then, the soul,” continues St. John of the Cross, “that in this business God is the principal agent and He... Who must guide it by the hand to where it could not go by itself, namely, to the supernatural things, which neither its understanding nor will nor memory can know as they are; its whole principal care must be to see that it does not place an obstacle to the guide, which is the Holy Ghost...; and this impediment can come to it if it lets itself be guided by another blind man... And for this way, at least for the most exalted part of it, and even for the middling, one will scarcely find an adequate guide... Because for guiding the spirit, although the foundation is knowledge and discretion, if there is no experience of the most exalted, they will not succeed in directing the soul to it, when God gives it; and they could do it much harm, because not understanding the way of the spirit, many times they cause souls to lose the unction of these delicate ointments with which the Holy Ghost is preparing them for Himself, governing them by other *crude ways* they have read about here and there, which serve only for *beginners*; since they know nothing more than for beginners..., they do not wish to let souls pass, although God wishes to carry them to more, beyond those first principles and discursive and imaginative modes..., with which they can make *very little progress*.”

Thus St. Teresa affirmed repeatedly that in brief moments of supernatural prayer, however lowly it may be, one advances more in everything than with years of “little considerations.”

And it is because that prayer is made under the influence of the gifts, which, as St. Thomas said (*De Charit.*, q. un., a. 2, ad 17), “perfect the virtues, elevating them from our poor human and lowly modes, to a superhuman mode of acting,” as is that of those who now let themselves be guided by the Holy Ghost, and have thus left the stage of beginners.

“The state of beginners,” continues St. John of the Cross, “is to meditate and make discursive acts. In this state it is necessary for the soul to be given matter for it to discourse and to make interior acts on its own..., because thus it is fitting for it to accustom the senses and appetites to good things... But when this is in some manner accomplished, *straightway God begins to place them in the state of contemplation*, which is usually very soon, especially in religious persons; because, the sooner the things of the world are denied, they accommodate to God the senses and the appetite; and then there is nothing to do but pass from meditation to contemplation.”

Which is very much in accord with what St. Thomas taught concerning the 6th beatitude: that

once the hearts are well purified, one *sees* God contemplating Him with the gift of understanding.

“The interior goods which this silent contemplation leaves imprinted in the soul without its being aware of them,” adds St. John of the Cross (pp. 658-60), “are inestimable, because in the end they are most secret and most delicate anointings of the Holy Ghost, with which He secretly fills the soul with riches and gifts and graces; because in the end, being God, He acts as God. These goods, then, and these great riches... which on account of their fineness and subtle purity, neither the soul nor he who deals with it understands them..., no more than a tiny thing the soul may wish to do, to want to apply to it some sense or taste or appetite, they are disturbed and impeded: which is *grave harm* and great pain and sorrow... It is then greater the harm and the wrong and the stain, and the disturbing and ruining of many souls of others not in that high station. Nevertheless, unfortunately, ”this harm being so great, more than can be exaggerated, it is so common that scarcely a spiritual director will be found who does not commit it in the souls that in this manner God begins to gather into contemplation; because how many times is God anointing the soul with some very delicate unction of loving knowledge, peaceful, solitary, and very alien from the senses, and from what can be thought, not being able to meditate, because God has it occupied in that unction... and there comes one who knows nothing but to hammer and pound like a blacksmith, and because all he teaches is more than that, he will say: come, leave all that, it is a waste of time and idleness; but meditate and make acts... And thus, not understanding these degrees of prayer, nor the ways of the spirit, they cannot see that... that walking with discourse is already done...”

“Let such as these take note and consider that the Holy Ghost is the principal agent and mover of souls; that He never loses care of them, and that they are not the agents, but only instruments to guide souls by the rule of faith and the law of God, according to the spirit that God goes giving to each one. And so let all their care be not to accommodate the soul to their own way and condition, but rather to see whether they know the way by which God leads them; and if they do not know it, *let them leave them alone and not disturb them.*”

“Not understanding, then, these [directors], the souls that go by quiet and solitary contemplation,” he goes on to say (p. 662), “because they themselves perhaps have not passed, nor even arrived at, an ordinary manner of discourse and acts, thinking, as I have said, that they are idle, because the natural man, that is, he who does not pass beyond the senses... does not perceive the things of God,” says St. Paul (I Cor. 2:14), “they disturb the peace of contemplation... and make them meditate and discourse and make acts, not without great reluctance and repugnance and dryness and distraction of those same souls... They do not know what a thing of the spirit is, and they do a great injury and disrespect to God, thrusting in their coarse hand where God is at work; because it has cost God much to bring these souls to this point, and He prizes greatly having brought them to this solitude and emptiness of their potencies and operations, in order to be able to speak to their heart, which is what He always desires... He being the one Who in the

soul reigns with abundance of peace and quietness, causing the natural acts of the potencies to fail, with which, laboring all the night, it accomplished nothing; pasturing now the spirit without operation of the senses; because *sense* and its work *is not capable of the spirit*.”

“O, who could express,” he insists (p. 669), “how impossible it is for the soul that has appetites to judge the things of God as they are... Infallibly it will come to hold the things of God as not of God, and what is not of God as of God. Because... it sees no more than that cataract, which lies upon the senses, and God does not fall within the senses... Therefore all who are not so spiritual that they are purged of appetites and tastes... will believe that the low things of the spirit, which are those that are closest to the senses in which they still live, are great things, and those that are acts of the spirit, which are those that most depart from the senses, they will hold as of little worth, and will not esteem them, and they will even hold them as folly, as St. Paul says: The natural man perceiveth not the things of God; they are as foolishness to him and he cannot understand (I Cor. 2:14). And natural man is he who still lives by appetites and tastes of his nature.”

“Greatly is the soul hindered from coming to this high state of union with God,” he observes in another place (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, l. 2, ch. 3), “when it clings to some understanding, or feeling, or imagining, or opinion, or desire, or its own way, or any other thing or work of its own, not knowing how to detach and strip itself of everything. Because what it goes to is above all this... and thus, above all, everything must be passed into not-knowing. Therefore on this road, *its leaving its road is entering the road*; or better said: *to pass to the term and to leave its own mode*, is to enter the term that has no mode, which is God... Therefore, transposing itself to all that can spiritually and naturally be known and understood, the soul must desire to come with all its desire to that which in this life it cannot know nor fall in its heart... On this road, blinding itself in its potencies, it is to see light according to what Christ Our Lord says...: I have come into this world for judgment; so that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind (John 9:39). Which, just as it sounds, is to be understood of this spiritual way, and thus... the soul that is in darkness in all its own and natural lights, *will see supernaturally*; and that which should wish to lean upon any of its own lights, will all the more become blind and will stop on the way of union.”

Whereby it is seen very clearly how, as St. Thomas taught with the words of the Apostle, a soul can never be truly perfect so long as its *spiritual senses* do not function well in such a way that it can in reality *feel the divine things*.

“Although these *visions* of spiritual substances,” observes St. John of the Cross (ibid., ch. 22), “cannot ordinarily be nakedly and clearly *seen* in this life with the understanding, they can nevertheless be *felt* in the substance of the soul with the sweetest touches and unions, by means of a loving *notice* with most gentle *touches* and unions, which pertains to the *spiritual sentiments*.”

These *notices* of naked truths, he adds (ch. 24), can be about the Creator or about creatures.

“And although the ones and the others are very savory for the soul, but the delight which they cause in it, those which are of God, there is nothing to which to compare it, nor words nor terms with which to express it; because they are *notices of the very God* and delights of the very God, which, as David says (Ps. 39: 6): *There is none like unto Thee*. Because these notices happen *directly concerning God, deeply feeling some attribute.....* And these high notices cannot be had except by the soul that arrives at union with God, because *they themselves are the union*; because having them consists in a certain *touch that is made of the soul in the Divinity, and thus it is the very God Who is there felt and tasted*; and although not manifestly and clearly as in glory, the touch of knowledge and savor is nonetheless so exalted and deep, that it penetrates the substance of the soul... Those notices *taste of the Divine Essence* and eternal life, and the devil cannot feign such a thing.”

Which is the same as what St. Thomas taught: that by the gift of understanding one can in some way already see God, and by that of wisdom taste a foretaste of glory, and that the knowledge of God which the gifts give is an intermediate between that of wayfarers and that of comprehensors. Hence the inestimable value they have and the fruit that works from them.

“There are some notices and touches,” continues the mystical Doctor, “of those which God produces in the substance of the soul, which so enrich it, that not only does one of them suffice to remove from the soul at once all the imperfections that it had not been able to remove in all its life, but it leaves it full of goods and virtues of God. And they are so savory and so intimately delightful, these touches, to the soul, that with one of them it would consider itself well paid for all the labors that in its life it may have suffered, though they were innumerable; and it is left so animated and with such courage to suffer many things for God, that it is a particular passion for it to see that it does not suffer much... One of these remembrances and touches of God to the soul is worth more than many other notices and considerations.”

But “these favors are not made to the soul on its own account, because they are made with very particular love of God, which He has for that soul, because the soul also has Him very much dispossessed. Because *this is what Our Lord wished to say when He said: He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him* (John 14, 21). In which are included the *notices and touches... which God manifests to the soul that truly loves Him* (*Ascent*, II, ch. 24).

And in effect, the gifts of understanding and wisdom with which God communicates those admirable notices and produces those touches and motions, are all, as the Angelic Doctor teaches, rooted in charity and with it they grow and are perfected, without doubt so as to produce their fruits of life and sanctification and not to remain idle. For as the same St. John of the Cross adds (ib., ch. 27): “the purer and more refined this soul is in perfection of living faith, the more it has of infused charity; and the more charity it has, *the more the Holy Ghost illuminates it and communicates to it His gifts*, in such wise that charity is the cause and the means by which He

communicates them to it.”

Of the *substantial locutions* the great mystical Doctor says (*Ascent*, II, ch. 29), that “they are of such moment and worth, that they are to the soul life and virtue and an incomparable good; because such a time *a single word of these does it more good than all that the soul has done in its whole life...*” And thus these substantial words serve greatly for the union of the soul with God... Happy the soul to whom God speaks them. Speak, Lord, that thy servant heareth (I Kings 3: 10).

And surely the Lord will speak to all who are already well prepared, that is, detached from everything and placed in the mystical solitude to which He deigned to call us (Osea 2:14).

“When the soul,” observes the same St. John of the Cross (ib., ch. 4), “has removed from itself entirely everything that is repugnant and not in conformity with the divine will, it shall be transformed in God by love... For this reason the soul must be stripped of every creature, of its actions and abilities and dispositions; namely, of its understanding, tasting, and feeling, so that, having cast aside everything that is unlike and unconformed to God, it may come to receive the likeness of God, there remaining in it nothing that is not the will of God, and thus it is transformed in God... Whence that soul communicates to God more which is more advanced in love; which is to have its will more conformed with that of God. And that which totally has it conformed and like, is totally united and transformed in God supernaturally... There cannot be perfect transformation if there is no perfect purity; and... *according to the purity, so shall the illumination, and union of the soul with God be...* That which never attains a purity competent with its capacity, never arrives at true peace and satisfaction; for it never arrives at the nakedness and emptiness of its potencies as is required for the simple union with God.”

All of which the Angelic Doctor had summed up in these brief words: *In anima vero, antequam ad istam uniformitatem perveniat, exigitur quod duplex ejus deformitas amoveatur. Primo quidem illa quae est ex diversitate exteriorum rerum... et secundo quae est ex discursu rationis* (S. Thom. II-II, q. 180, a. 6, ad 2).

Such is, in summary, the spiritual doctrine of the Angelic Doctor, marvelously developed and expounded by his most faithful disciple St. John of the Cross.

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