

Draft Translation of the
COMPENDIO DE ASCÉTICO Y MÍSTICA

Third edition

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First Part — Principles of the Supernatural Life

CHAPTER ONE

The Nature and Organism of the Supernatural Life

Four things may be distinguished in a living being: the subject, the formal principle of life, its potencies, and its operations.

The supernatural order is a life which possesses an organism similar to that of the natural life: the subject is the soul; the principle, sanctifying grace; the potencies are the supernatural virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost; and the operations are the acts of those gifts and of those virtues.

Article I — The Principle of the Supernatural Life

The principle of all supernatural life is *sanctifying grace*, a supernatural quality, reductively pertaining to the species of substantive habit, infused in the substance of the soul and inherent to it, by which the soul is made a consort of the divine nature and ordered to the vision of God.

As a quality, an accidental and complete form, grace is in the soul according to the condition of the soul itself; and to be according to the condition of the soul is nothing other than to accommodate itself to the soul's natural *mode* of being and of operating.¹

This identity of the *mode* of grace and of the soul implies:

First, the *imperceptibility* of grace on the part of the subject who possesses it and, consequently, imperceptibility also of the lack or absence of the same grace. For human consciousness does not perceive *being*, but rather fact; and that which in being responds to fact is the *mode* of standing and of operating the being in the subject. For this reason, since the mode of grace and that of the soul are identified, consciousness cannot perceive grace as distinct from the soul, inasmuch as it does not have a distinct mode. And since it does not perceive grace as something other than the soul, it can perceive neither its presence nor its absence.²

¹St. Thomas, III, q. 63, a. 5, *ad Sum.*: *Gratia est in anima sicut quaedam forma habens esse completum in ea; forma autem completa est in subjecto secundum conditionem subjecti.*

²St. Thomas uses another argument to prove that we cannot know with certainty whether we are in grace: I-II, q. 112, a. 5.

Second, it implies the *impossibility of discerning the supernatural operations from the natural ones*, for the same reason. It matters not that the nature of some be essentially distinct from that of the others; since the *mode* of all of them is identical, as indeed it is, consciousness, which does not perceive the difference between beings except by the diversity of modes, will be unable to distinguish them.

Experience itself confirms these reasons by fact. No one feels grace appear or depart from the soul; no one perceives the supernaturality of an act of divine virtue.

This is confirmed, finally, by the Council of Trent, which defined that no man can know, except by special revelation, whether his soul is justified or not.³

Third, it implies the possibility of the *perfect development* of grace without departing from the natural or human *mode*. For it is a universal law that every vital principle can arrive at its perfect development without departing from its own *mode* of being and of operating. If, then, grace is and operates in the soul after the mode of the soul, that is, in a *natural and human mode*, it is evident that it will be able to achieve its perfect development without departing from this human and natural mode. Everything that departs from this mode may be more or less convenient, insofar as it facilitates the development of grace, but it is never absolutely necessary.

By *connatural or human mode* we understand that which corresponds to the being and to the actions of man as such; for example, understanding by means of the exterior and interior senses. *Superhuman or supernatural mode* (which, although of themselves not identified, because the angelic mode is superhuman and is not of itself supernatural, in our case are inseparable) is that which transcends the human, as understanding by intuition.

For this reason, when a man understands by intuition a truth *which did not enter through the senses*, he performs an act of a superhuman or supernatural mode, because this mode of understanding is not his own, but proper to God and to the angels. The terminology is consecrated by St. Thomas: "*Proceditur (modo humano) ex sensu in memoriam,*" etc.⁴

But one must not confuse absolute necessity with moral and subjective necessity. We deny the absolute necessity of superhuman modes for grace to attain its perfect development. We do not deny all moral necessity in particular cases. By conditions and very special circumstances there can exist in some soul a certain necessity of extraordinary operations, so that grace may reach its perfection. But this would be a particular necessity born of accidental conditions of a subject and which would have to be demonstrated in each case. The absolute and universal necessity, which would have to be grounded in the very nature of grace, does not exist, because the natural or human mode of grace cannot require a superhuman mode for its development.

As a *formal participation of the divine nature*, grace can be no more than one specifically; because there is no other divine nature of which it might partake, nor is there any mode of

³Council of Trent, Sess. 6, cap. 12. Denzinger, *Enchir. Symb.*, nn. 805 and 826.

⁴*In III Sent.*, dist. XXXIV, q. 1, a. 2. — *Ibid.*, q. 2, a. 2, solut. 1 ad 1um. Amor Ruibal, *Los principios fundamentales de la Filosofía y del Dogma*, t. II, pp. 1-60 and t. III *passim*.

participation which, without ceasing to be accidental, is more perfect than the formal mode.⁵

Grace, therefore, is none other than one specifically in Christ, in the angels, and in men.

From this it is deduced: *first*, that the supernatural life is in all souls essentially identical, although individually distinct, because the substantial principle of it is one and the same in all subjects; *second*, that the supernatural life in its term or state of perfection is substantially the same as in its beginnings or state of imperfection, there being between the two states no difference of nature, but only of degree; and *third*, that if in the supernatural life a specific distinction be affirmed, this cannot be grounded in grace, which must be identically present in the two differences that are indicated: one must have recourse to another element posterior to and added to sanctifying grace.⁶

As *infused in the substance of the soul*, grace is a remote principle of operation, and as such can neither operate nor develop by itself. But grace, by its very nature as a remote principle, demands and in a certain manner causes the immediate principles of operation, which it needs in order to develop and to be perfected.

These principles are the supernatural virtues.

Article II — The Virtues

The supernatural virtues are operative habits, infused by God in the potencies of the soul, to dispose them to operate according to the dictamen of reason illuminated by faith.

Really distinct from grace, the virtues are ordered to it, just as the potencies of the soul bear a necessary relation to the substance.

It pleases St. Thomas to repeat many times the comparison of the order and relation of the substance of the soul and its potencies to sanctifying grace and the virtues: *Sicut ab essentia animae effluunt ejus potentiae, quae sunt operum principia, ita etiam ab ipsa gratia effluunt virtutes in potentias animae per quas potentiae moventur ad actus.*⁷ It is a comparison that sheds much light, but which must not be carried too far. The union of the theological virtues with grace is not so intimate as that of the potencies with the essence of the soul. It suffices to recall that faith and hope often exist without sanctifying grace.

Twofold is the reason for the being [*ratio essendi*] of the supernatural virtues: one, that they serve as the *immediate principle of operation* in that order; the other, that they *facilitate the operation of the potency* in relation to the proper object of the virtue.

The first arises from the demands of sanctifying grace. For grace, even though it is an accident, fulfills the role of substance in the supernatural order; it needs, as every substance does, certain potencies which, elevating the faculties of the soul to the same order to which grace elevates the

⁵ *In III Sent.*, dist. XXXIV, q. 1, a. 2. — *Ibid.*, q. 2, a. 2, solut. 1 ad 1um.

⁶ Salmanticenses, *tract. de gratia*, disp. IV, dub. VIII, § II, p. 599 (ed. Palmé): *Dicendum est repugnare aliam gratiam sanctificantem essentialiter diversam a gratia sanctificante quae nunc datur.*

⁷ I-II, q. 110, a. 4, ad 1um. Cf. Salmanticenses, *tract. XIV*, disp. IV, dub. VI.

substance, may be in the same order the immediate principle of operation. Such is the office of the virtues. Sanctifying grace alone would not suffice, because, were the substance of the soul elevated by it to the supernatural order while the potencies remained in the natural order, the operations would consequently be natural, however supernaturalized the substance might be, which, were it to come about without the virtues, would be impossible. The virtues, therefore, are necessary so that the operations may become supernatural, and consequently so that the supernatural life may attain its progress and development.

The second office of the infused virtues is to *facilitate* the operation in relation to the *proper object* of the virtue.

Two things can be distinguished in any virtuous act: its physical entity and its morality. The virtue influences efficiently, together with the potency, upon the totality of the act, because it is a form perfecting the potency, and every form that perfects a potency is for this purpose the principle of operation. Wherefore, the virtuous act, insofar as it pertains to the potency, pertains to the virtue insofar as it is morally upright, and becomes like unto it. This likeness consists in the morality and in the facility which the operation receives formally from the habit, which is the virtue.

It matters not, then, that the virtue is not the formal cause of the physical act; for it adapts the potency for the same insofar as it is the foundation of morality, and consequently facilitates the act itself.⁸

This explains how the acts of supernatural virtue not only perfect the habit of the virtue, but seem to leave in the potency a disposition and facility even for its natural acts.

This ordering of the potencies and the diverse objects to which they are referred is the foundation of the division of the virtues.

The *division* of the infused virtues corresponds to that of the natural habits. Some order the potencies to the *end*; others dispose them in relation to the *means*. The first specifies the *theological virtues*; the second, the *moral* virtues. The first correspond in the order of grace to what, in the order of nature, are the natural *principles* which order man to his end; the second correspond to the acquired virtues, which perfect him in relation to the means.

Theological virtues are those which have the spiritual potencies as their *subject*, and God as their immediate *object* and supernatural end of man.

Faith offers Him to us as absolute and universal truth, which will satisfy our intellect;

hope, as the power which desires our happiness and helps us to attain it;

charity, as infinite good, communicating Himself to created beings to make them blessed with His love.

The *ratio* of virtue is not the same in faith, hope, and charity. Charity always has by its very nature the perfect *ratio* of virtue; faith and hope, on the other hand, separated from charity,

⁸Salmanticenses, tract. XII, disp. I, dub. 1, 2, 3.

lack it; for it does not suffice for the perfect *ratio* of virtue that it dispose one to operate the good, but it is also required that it prepare one to operate the good well.⁹

As born immediately from grace, the theological virtues are first in the order of generation, and through them must pass all the “virtuality” [*virtualitas*] which from grace is communicated to the other virtues, and all that from the other virtues is referred back to grace. As ordered immediately to God, they are the most excellent, because their object is the ultimate end in Himself, whereas that of the other virtues is the means ordered to Him.¹⁰

For this reason, all the supernatural life is compendiated in them. For since this life consists in the participation of the divine life by the soul, the formal ratio of this life will be found where there is the ratio of union between the soul and God, because it is in the union that this life is communicated. Such is the office and *ratio essendi* of the theological virtues. For this reason, their increase or their loss will mark the increase or the loss of the sanctity of the soul.

This, however, does not mean that they suffice for the performance of all the supernatural acts necessary in the spiritual life. Limited as they are to the spiritual potencies and to the objects of these, there remain still other objects and other potencies which must be supernaturalized in themselves. The ordering of acts with respect to the supernatural end, the work of the theological virtues, demands ordering in relation to the means, which the theological virtues accomplish only in an initial manner.¹¹

Such is the *ratio essendi* of the moral virtues, which are born in a certain manner from the theological ones.

Moral virtues are infused habits which dispose the appetitive potencies to obey reason illuminated by faith, in relation to the means which lead to the supernatural end.

Just as sanctifying grace demands the theological virtues, because the soul, elevated to the order of the divine nature and directed to God as end, must be so directed, so also the theological virtues in turn demand the moral virtues, because that which is ordered to its end demands disposition and order in relation to the means.

The means, whose regulation is the office of the moral virtues, are all the acts of man, including the very acts of the theological virtues themselves. For these, although considered in themselves they can never be excessive, nonetheless in the mode of our operation they admit of excess; the mode of the theological virtues, therefore, is also the object of the moral virtues. The relation which the moral virtues bear to the theological is, in the order of grace, the same as that which the acquired virtues bear, in the order of nature, to the acts of synderesis and the rectitude of the will.

As numerous as the movements of the appetitive potencies, the moral virtues can, however, be reduced to the four cardinal virtues:

⁹I-II, q. 110, a. 4, ad 1um. Cf. Salmanticenses, tract. XIV, disp. IV, dub. VI.

¹⁰II-II, q. 4, a. 7. — I-II, q. 63, a. 3.

¹¹Salmanticenses, tract. XII, disp. 3, dub. I, par. III.

prudence, which regulates all the acts of man;

justice, which defends the rights of each one;

fortitude, which impels one in the face of difficulties and sustains against sorrows and the assaults of enemies;

temperance, whose object is to moderate the inclination to the pleasures and delights of the flesh.¹²

By all these virtues, then, all the potencies and energies of man are elevated to the order of grace. In each potency, and in relation to each specifically distinct object, there is a supernatural habit which disposes man to operate according to the principle of grace and to develop with this operation the supernatural life.¹³

Yet, constituted in this way, this divine organism is still not complete. The theological virtues do not suffice to give to the potencies of the soul all the perfection necessary in the acts which are directed to the supernatural end. Partly by reason of the imperfection of human reason in the present state, partly by reason of the excellence of God, a force is necessary which may supply these deficiencies of reason and of the appetitive part, which the infused virtues cannot make up for.¹⁴

Article III — The Gifts of the Holy Ghost

The gifts of the Holy Ghost are supernatural habits which dispose the potencies of the soul to follow promptly and readily the divine influence.¹⁵

As derivations of the theological virtues, to which they are subordinated and by which they are regulated, the gifts are inferior to them, but they are superior to the intellectual and moral virtues, although they be posterior in the order of generation and existence.¹⁶ As inseparable from grace, with which they are infused, they are inseparable among themselves and exist in all justified souls from the very moment of their justification.¹⁷

The difference between the gifts and the virtues is grounded in the diverse moving principle to which these habits respectively refer. While the virtues dispose one to follow the dictamen of reason, the gifts dispose one to follow that of the Holy Ghost. This difference of principle is what demands a difference of disposition and of formal ratio in the acts, even though the

¹²I-II, q. 61, a. 2 and 3.

¹³II-II, q. 109, a. 2: *Ubi in actu hominis invenitur specialis ratio bonitatis, necesse est quod ad hoc disponatur homo per specialem virtutem.*

¹⁴I-II, q. 63, a. 2. Wishing to indicate the reason why the theological virtues do not suffice, we indicated in another place the imperfection of the intellect as a consequence of the first sin, but without affirming in any way that this were the entire and sole *ratio essendi* of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Besides the reason of necessity, there always remains the reason of fittingness (Cf. our study *La perfection et la mystique selon les principes de saint Thomas*, p. 17 [Beyaert-Bruges, 1932]). We note this in response to certain critics who attributed to us affirmations which neither follow from our words nor did we ever imagine.

¹⁵I-II, q. 68, a. 4: *Dona sunt quidam habitus perficientes hominem ad hoc quod prompte sequatur instinctum Spiritus Sancti, sicut virtutes morales perficiunt vires appetitivas ad obediendum rationi.*

¹⁶I-II, q. 68, a. 8, ad 2um.

¹⁷I-II, q. 68, a. 5.

material object be the same. It is manifest that the habits which dispose one to receive and follow the influence of the Holy Ghost must be specifically distinct from those which dispose one to follow the dictamens of reason, even when illuminated by faith: *Est enim considerandum, quod in homine est duplex principium movens: unum quidem interius, quod est ratio, aliud exterius, quod est Deus. . . Virtutes perficiunt hominem secundum quod natus est moveri per rationem. . . Oportet igitur inesse homini altiores perfectiones secundum quas sit dispositus ad hoc quod divinitus moveatur et istae perfectiones vocantur dona.*¹⁸

To this radical difference other secondary differences may be added, which are born from it.

However, it is not licit to characterize the operation of the virtues by the human mode, and that of the gifts by the divine mode, because this would not suffice to establish a specific distinction between the habits of the one and the other, since, as we shall see, one and the same habit can be the principle of operations specifically distinct in mode.

When St. Thomas writes: *Dona a virtutibus distinguuntur in hoc quod virtutes perficiunt ad actus (modo humano) sed dona ultra humanum modum (In III Sent., dist. 34, q. 1, a. 1)*, he does not indicate a difference between the gifts as such and the virtues, but only between these and a species of operations of the gifts, namely, the extraordinary operation.

It should be noted that the distinction between the gifts and the virtues is denied by many theologians: Scotus, Gabriel, Vázquez. . . (*In III Sent., dist. 34. — Disput. 89, c. 1–2*). The habits of the gifts are, according to them, the very same as those of the virtues, which, when actuated under a special influence, receive the name of gifts.¹⁹

Seven are the gifts according to the Fathers and Doctors:

the gift of *understanding*, which disposes the intelligence for a penetrating intuition of the revealed truths;

the gift of *wisdom*, which disposes the spirit to know and to relish the divine things by their first principles;

the gift of *knowledge*, which illuminates the relations existing between creatures and the Creator;

the gift of *counsel*, a species of superior prudence, which makes the soul see without discursive reasoning, as if by instinct, what is fitting to do in difficult cases;

the gift of *piety*, which causes in the spirit a sentiment of respectful devotion toward all that is divine;

the gift of *fortitude*, impeller and sustainer of the soul in obstacles and adversities;

and the gift of *fear*, whose office is to infuse, together with the horror of offending God, a continual solicitude to please Him.²⁰

¹⁸I-II, q. 68, a. 1. — Salmanticenses, *Arbor praeda.*, § 2, n. 7.

¹⁹Jean de Santo Tomás, *Les dons du Saint-Esprit*, p. 31 seq. (tr. Raïssa Maritain, Juvisy, 1930).

²⁰I-II, q. 68, a. 4. This number of gifts corresponds to the text of Isaias (XI, 2–3), as found in the Vulgate and in the Septuagint, and as the Fathers and Doctors expounded it. St. Thomas demonstrates the necessity of the seven gifts (*ibid.*).

The first four, understanding, wisdom, knowledge, and counsel, have the intellect as their subject and are called *intellective*; the last three, piety, fortitude, and fear, pertain to the will and are called *affective*.

Are the seven gifts so many distinct habits, or do there exist no more than two habits for all the gifts, one in the intellect and another in the will? In the latter case, the intellectual gifts would be distinguished among themselves only by the diverse offices of the same habit. St. Thomas does not determine this, although he seems to suppose the former. We feel a predilection for the latter. If the ratio of the habit of the gifts is to dispose the soul to receive the divine influence, it seems that a single habit suffices to produce this disposition in each potency. In this case there is no need of seven habits; consequently, there would be no reason for affirming them, because entities are not to be multiplied without necessity.

We believe, however, that given the inseparability of the gifts, this question of the number of habits is of little importance for Mystical Theology.

From the necessity which we assign to the existence of the gifts, that of perfecting the acts of the virtues, the extension of their object and the correspondence existing between the former and the latter is easily deduced.²¹

The gifts embrace all the matter of the virtues, theological as well as moral, concerning whose material object there can always exist an act of the gifts perfecting that of the virtue.²² Those of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and fear correspond to the theological virtues; the other three, counsel, fortitude, and piety, to the moral virtues.²³

The operation of the gifts can be of two species: one in which the soul is moved by the Holy Ghost after the human mode; another in which it is moved after a mode that is superior, angelic, or divine.²⁴

The first is caused by an influence in which God accommodates Himself to the mode of proceeding of man; that is, making use of what surrounds him to move him: readings, a conversation, a misfortune. . . . From this influence there follows an operation which, although proceeding from this actuation of the Holy Ghost, is not perceived by the soul as such, but rather as one of its ordinary operations, since it follows its normal process.

The second is the effect of a particular influence, which dispenses with the ordinary process and which, for that very reason, is perceived by the soul as caused by an exterior force, alien to itself. Such is the case when the intellect finds itself in the presence of ideas which it neither sought nor which entered through the senses; or when the love of the will does not correspond either to the nature or to the intensity of the knowledge. This implies a mode which is not proper

²¹Marie-Amand de Saint Joseph, C.D., *Los Dones del Espíritu Santo y la contemplación, según la escuela carmelitana* (Rev. Espir. 2 [1943] 35–47).

²²I-II, q. 68, a. 4: *In omnibus viribus hominis, quae possunt esse principia humanorum actuum, sicut sunt virtutes, ita etiam sunt dona.*

²³Salmanticensis, *Arbor praedicam.*, § 2, nn. 7–8.

²⁴Calatayud, *Divus Thomas... sive Dissertationes theologicae scholastico-dogmaticae et mystico-doctrinales, etc.*, lib. V, dissert. III, p. 361, t. V. — *Ibid.*, art. 5, p. 378 seqs. (Valentiae, anno MDCCXLIV).

to the human operation, because the human mode is to know by discourse; it is a superhuman mode, because it is proper to the angels.

For this reason, the first is called ordinary operation or operation after the human mode; the second, extraordinary operation or operation after the superhuman mode.²⁵ The first exists under diverse forms throughout the whole of the spiritual life, is morally necessary for the salvation of adults and all the more so for perfection, and is imperceptible to the soul. The second, on the contrary, does not exist in all souls nor throughout the whole of the spiritual life; it is not necessary for perfection and much less for salvation; and it is perceptible to the soul in which it takes place.

Some authors have denied the fact and the possibility of the twofold operation of the gifts, believing it impossible that one habit should have two specifically distinct operations.²⁶

Having already studied this question elsewhere, we here summarize our doctrine and our arguments concerning the possibility and the fact of habits with a twofold specific operation.²⁷

I. A habit can have two specific modes of operation, because the mode of the operation specifies the operation itself, but not the habit. The habit is specified only by its active principle, by its relation to the nature of the subject, or, finally, by its formal object.²⁸ Since the difference of mode does not imply a difference in any of these three specificative principles of the habit, the habit can have operations distinct among themselves by difference of mode, provided both fall within one and the same specificative principle of the habit. The same occurs in the case of the potencies in relation to their object. One and the same potency perceives objects which, although falling under the specific concept of objects proper to it, are nevertheless specifically diverse among themselves, as St. Thomas says: *Sicut potentia, cum sit una, ad multa se extendit secundum quod conveniunt in uno aliquo, id est, in generali quadam ratione objecti, ita etiam habitus ad multa se extendit secundum quod habet ordinem ad aliquod unum...*²⁹

II. The fact of habits with a twofold specific operation is verified, according to St. Thomas, in charity, in the infused moral virtues, and in the gifts of the Holy Ghost. — 1° It exists in charity, because, charity being one and the same habit here below and in heaven, the act of charity performed in this life is specifically distinct from that performed in the other.³⁰ That the difference between these acts is specific, St. Thomas says in express terms: *Est quidem*

²⁵Card. Billot, *De virtutibus infusis*, p. 188 (ed. Roma, 1905).

²⁶P. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Perfection chrétienne, etc.*, p. 438, vol. 1, note (6th ed.). A synthesis of the current controversy is given by P. Lucinio del Santísimo, in the review cited, V (1946), 550–560.

²⁷P. Crisógono de J.S., *La perfection et la mystique selon les principes de saint Thomas*, pp. 34 seqs. (Bruges, 1932). *Una cuestión filosófica previa al problema místico. La naturaleza de los hábitos según Santo Tomás*, *Rev. Espir.*, 3 (1944) 367–75. *Relaciones entre la perfección y la mística*, ib. 2 (1943) 113 sgs.

²⁸I-II, q. 54, a. 2.

²⁹I-II, q. 54, a. 4. — See especially the *Quaestiones disputatae*, q. unica de virt. cardin., art. IV in corp. et ad 6um, where the holy Doctor proves how not every specific difference of acts implies a specific diversity of habits: *Non omnis differentia actuum demonstrat diversitatem habituum*.

³⁰II-II, q. 24, a. 7, ad 3um. P. Garrigou-Lagrange denied this distinction of St. Thomas. *Vie Spirituelle*, Nov. 1932, p. [70–71]. Perhaps he forgot that he was setting himself against the masters of his own school, Capreolus and Cajetan, who affirm the specific distinction of the act of charity on earth in relation to the act of charity in heaven. (Capreolus, *In I Sent.*, dist. 1, q. 3; Cajetanus, I P., q. 82, a. 2. — Cf. Ripalda, *Tractatus theologicus et scholasticus de virtutibus fide, spe et caritate* (opus posthumum), disp. 38, sect. 3, n. 22, p. 514 seqs. Lugduni, 1652).

*actus differens specie, sed virtus est eadem.*³¹ 2° It exists in the moral virtues, because they have a twofold act: one which they perform concerning their proper matter, and another which takes place when they have arrived at their term: *quaelibet virtus praedictarum habet duos actus: unum quem exercet circa propriam materiam; alium quem habet quando pervenit ad finem.*³² 3° It exists in the gifts of the Holy Ghost because, like the moral virtues, they have one species of acts in this life and another in heaven, while the habit remains the same: *Habitus donorum sunt idem in via et in patria; actus autem non.*³³ St. Thomas determines still further this difference of acts, saying that it is a difference of mode: *Quantumcumque dona ad altiorem modum elevent quam sit communis homini modus, nunquam tamen in via ad modum patriae pertingere possunt.*³⁴

It is manifest, then, that according to St. Thomas there is not only no impossibility that one habit should have specifically distinct operations, but that it is a fact with respect to the habits of charity, of the moral virtues, and of the gifts.³⁵

The gifts of the Holy Ghost are the last supernatural habits to be infused. With them the organism of the supernatural life, insofar as it is an organism, is complete. We have grace as principle or substance; the virtues as potencies; the gifts as instruments of perfection. There now remains wanting the active principle which may set in motion this organism, which, since it is constituted by habits, is incapable of moving itself. Such will be the office of the actual graces.

Article IV — Actual Graces and the Inhabitation of God in the Soul

Actual graces are supernatural and transitory influences of God ordered to the sanctification of the soul.

Ordered by their nature to the infused habits, they serve to dispose the soul to receive them, when it does not yet have them, and to actuate them, when they already exist. For this reason they operate in the intellect as well as in the will: a direct actuation, which comes from God and terminates without intermediaries in our spiritual potencies.

This relation to the habits is what determines the necessity of actual graces in the spiritual life. Given the infused character of all the supernatural habits, it is impossible that they should come to actuate themselves by themselves. Nor can the natural effort of the soul actuate them, because the natural order cannot determine the operations of the supernatural. The intervention of God is necessary; the nature of the habit demands it, for a habit can never be actuated except by virtue of and by the action of the principle which caused it. Since the infused habits are not caused by acts of the soul but by God, God alone can actuate them. This divine influx which

³¹ *Quaestiones disputatae*, q. unica de virt. card., art. 4.

³² *In III Sent.*, dist. XXXIII, q. 1, a. 4.

³³ *In III Sent.*, dist. XXXIV, q. 1, a. 4 *in corp. et ad 3um.*

³⁴ *In III Sent.*, dist. XXXIV, q. 1, a. 3.

³⁵ Responding to our French opuscule *La perfection et la mystique selon les principes de saint Thomas*, where we set forth this doctrine, P. Garrigou-Lagrange wrote a long and erudite article in the *Vie Spirituelle*, Nov. 1933. Having confirmed our doctrine in an article which we sent to the same review, we maintain here integrally the conclusions of our opuscule.

moves the habit to operation is an actual grace.³⁶ Every act of virtue and every operation of the gifts supposes, consequently, an actual grace, although not every actual grace actually induces an act of virtue.

How actual graces operate in the soul, and what the nature of this divine influx in man may be, it is neither possible to determine with certainty, nor is it of great interest for the spiritual life. Well known are the long and harsh controversies concerning the physical premotion of the Thomists. Setting aside all of that, which is foreign to our purpose, let us note simply that they are real influences, capable always by their nature of provoking supernatural actions in the soul, but whose effect is often suspended by the free opposition of the soul.

From all of this it is deduced that the difference which exists between the habitual graces and the actual is that between a permanent quality, which produces its proper effect in the subject in a continuous and unfailing manner, and a fluid and transient quality, whose effect is frustrated many times.

Another difference is that the habitual graces, grace, virtues, and gifts, only dispose for action; actual grace, on the contrary, impels toward it. Finally, while the former have a limited field, because each one is limited to certain potencies and to determined objects and operations, actual grace extends to the entire supernatural order.

According to the diverse effects and offices which it performs, it receives a particular name:

If it helps the potency intrinsically and concurs formally in the production of the act, it is called *internal* grace; if it only influences exteriorly, moving the potency by means of the objects which surround it, it is *external*.

Insofar as it precedes the act of man, it is called *prevenient* grace; if it accompanies him, concurring with him toward one and the same effect, *cooperating*; if it is with relation to a prior effect, *subsequent*; if it is itself the entire reason of the effect, it is called *operating*.

When it produces the intended effect, it receives the name of *efficacious*; but if it is frustrated, it is called *sufficient*.

These are all divisions whose significance for the spiritual life is quite limited.

Of greater importance are the concepts of *ordinary* grace and *extraordinary* grace. The first is that grace which responds to the dispositions of the soul and which enters into the normal development of the supernatural life; the second is that which neither responds to the dispositions of the soul nor enters into the normal development of sanctifying grace.

The concepts of ordinary grace and of extraordinary grace are relative, with a twofold relativity: one, by the relation they bear to sanctifying grace, to the virtues, and to the gifts; and another, by the relation they bear to the subject, which is the soul. To determine whether a grace is ordinary or extraordinary, one must attend to both aspects, although giving to the

³⁶I-II, q. 110, a. 2: *Dupliciter ex gratuita Dei voluntate homo adjuvatur; uno modo in quantum anima hominis movetur a Deo ad aliquid cognoscendum vel volendum vel agendum; et hoc modo ipse gratuitus effectus in homine non est qualitas sed motus quidam animae.*

first, that is, to the relation which it bears to sanctifying grace, the maximum importance, because it is the fundamental specificative principle.

An actual grace which were of itself necessary for the normal development of the supernatural life, but which were bestowed upon a soul whose state of perfection did not demand it, would not properly be an extraordinary grace; it would be so only subjectively, that is, in relation to that soul. The grace in itself would be ordinary.

On the other hand, a grace which corresponded to the state of the soul (of a mystical soul, for example), but which were neither necessary for the development of sanctifying grace nor entered into its normal development, would be extraordinary in itself, although it might in a certain manner be ordinary for the soul.³⁷

A threefold office has actual grace, taken in any of its divisions: first, to actuate the supernatural habits; second, to impede their disappearance from the soul; and third, to dispose the soul to receive them.

The actuation of the habits brings with it the effective development of the same and, consequently, the perfecting of the supernatural life. In the following chapter we shall study how this development is realized.

The impeding of the disappearance of the supernatural habits, the second office of actual grace, involves the strengthening against temptations, the indicating of dangers to virtue, the softening of the violence of the passions, the fostering of good thoughts, which move the soul to avoid sins.

Finally, the disposing of the soul to receive the habits when it lacks them, whether because it never had them or because it has lost them, brings with it the exciting of sorrow for one's own faults, of confidence in the divine mercy, and of fear of eternal punishments.

Such are the offices of actual grace. It is, in the strict sense, that which gives efficacy to habitual grace, to the virtues, and to the gifts. It is the impulse of God, who draws near to man to communicate His life to him, if he did not have it; to increase it, if he has it; or to restore it to him, if he has lost it. A contact more or less intimate, but always full of love, of the Divinity, who sets about stripping man of his imperfect qualities, communicating to him the resplendent form of God, who dwells in him.

And we have arrived at the summit of this admirable supernatural organism: the inhabitation of God in the soul, golden cupola and at once transcendent principle of the spiritual life of man.

The inhabitation of God is an intimate, real, and substantial presence of the three divine Persons in the just soul.

It is not to be confused with the mode of God's being in creatures, by essence, presence, and power. This presence is that of God as Creator; for this reason it exists unfailingly in all creatures. The inhabitation pertains to the supernatural order; it is the presence of God as Sanctifier, and it is given only in souls that are in grace.

³⁷ Joseph de Guibert, *Études de Théologie Mystique*, ch. 1, p. 36. Toulouse, 1930.

As a real presence of God, the entire Trinity intervenes, who lives, just as He is, within the soul. There the Father really begets the Son, and from the Father and the Son there really and truly proceeds the Holy Ghost, there being realized within the soul the sublime mystery of the triune Unity and the one Trinity, which is the life of God.

As the presence of God insofar as Sanctifier, it is from this center that He operates directly in the spirit with actual graces; it is from there that, by actuating the infused habits, He sets in motion the entire organism of the supernatural life, bringing it to its perfect development.³⁸

CHAPTER TWO

The Development of the Supernatural Life

Article I — Its Nature

The organism having been thus constituted, the operation which develops the life is necessary.

Now, what operations are those which develop the supernatural life?

They must, of course, be supernatural operations; because the habit and the potency are not perfected except by acts of their own order. Since grace, the infused virtues, and the gifts are supernatural habits, it is necessary that the acts which develop them be supernatural as well.

But there are two species of supernatural acts: the act of the soul, which operates with grace and the virtues, and the act of God which is received in the soul. Which of the two is the cause of the increase and perfection of the supernatural life? The second.

The supernatural life cannot be developed except by acts of God; because the habits cannot be actuated, and consequently neither developed nor perfected, except by the same principle which caused them. Since the habits of grace, virtues, and gifts, which constitute the organism of this life, are infused and, by that very fact, produced directly by God, He alone can increase and perfect them. The acts of God are, then, the efficient principle of the development of the supernatural life.³⁹

Herein lies one of the characteristics of the infused habits as contrasted with the acquired. While the latter increase and are perfected by their own acts, the infused habits require an exterior agent to perfect them. Moreover, in the case of acquired habits, the acts necessarily precede the habit, because they cause it; in the infused habits, on the contrary, it is the habit which precedes the act. For this reason, from the existence of a supernatural act there can be deduced, at least ordinarily, the existence of a supernatural habit; but from the existence of a natural act the existence of an acquired habit can never be deduced, because the supernatural act presupposes the habit, but the natural does not.

³⁸Aniceto del Divino Redentor, C.D., *La inhabitación de la St. Trinidad en el alma, según S. J. de la Cruz*, Rev. Espir. 2 (1943) 37-49. Efrén de la M. de Dios, C.D., *S. Juan de la Cruz y el misterio de la Santísima Trinidad en la vida espiritual*, Zaragoza, 1947.

³⁹I-II, q. 92, a. 1, ad 1um.

The action of God, which immediately and directly causes the development of the infused habits, is not, however, arbitrary. It is subjected by the same most free divine will to the acts of man. These are what ordinarily determine the action of God in this order.⁴⁰

The meritorious cause of the increase of grace is all good acts informed by charity.⁴¹ Whatever the intensity of grace may be, every act merits its increase; the intensity of love with which the act is performed determines the quantity of the merit, and, in accordance with the merit, will be the increase which God will cause by infusion in the supernatural habits.

Two things it is well to determine here: the nature of the merit of our acts with relation to the increase of grace, and the time in which God really increases it. The merit of our acts is that called *de condigno*, that is, merit of justice; not because the act demands by its nature or by its merit the increase of grace, merit in this strict sense of justice does not exist in the supernatural order, but because God has so promised. For this reason, to every supernatural act the increase of grace is due.

The time in which God realizes the increase is not, according to St. Thomas, the moment in which the act is performed, if the act does not correspond to the intensity of the habit. One must wait until the summed intensity of various acts equals the habit from which they proceed.⁴² We confess that the arguments of St. Thomas do not convince us with respect to natural habits, much less applied to the infused, and we prefer the opinion which affirms the increase of the habit at the moment of performing the act. In any case, it is not a question of great importance for the spiritual life.

The productive cause [*causa efficiens*] of the increase of the infused habits is the sacramental acts. If the acts of virtue do no more than merit the increase of habitual grace, the sacramental acts produce it themselves, in addition to the particular grace which each sacrament carries with it. It is not the act of the soul, as part of the sacrament, which produces the grace. As efficient and sole cause, there is in this no other efficient and principal cause than God. The sacrament and, consequently, the act of the soul, which enters as an indispensable part of the same, function as instrument, but which, as such, produce really and truly grace and its increase. And they produce it in an infallible manner, provided there be no obstacle of fault in the soul. The intensity of fervor will determine the minimum of the increase of grace caused by the sacrament. We say the minimum, because the disposition of the soul is but one of the measures; above it stands the will of God, who increases grace as it pleases Him, prescinding from the merit of the soul.⁴³

⁴⁰We say *ordinarily* to express the common mode of things, without excluding either the possibility or the fact that God may increase the infused habits prescinding from the acts and merits of the soul.

⁴¹This information of acts by charity is inherent in every good act performed by a justified soul: St. Thomas, *Quaestiones disputatae, De malo*, q. 2, a. 5, ad 7um: *Non omnis humanus actus, etiam in singulari consideratus, est meritorius vel demeritorius, licet omnis sit bonus vel malus. Et hoc dico propter eos qui caritatem non habent, qui mereri non possunt, sed habentibus caritatem omnis actus est meritorius vel demeritorius.* Cf. I-II, q. 114.

⁴²I-II, q. 52, a. III. — II-II, q. 24, a. VI.

⁴³*Concil. Trident.*, sess. VI, c. 7: *Spiritus Sanctus partitur singulis prout vult et secundum propriam cujusque dispositionem et cooperationem.*

The mode of development corresponds to the nature of the habits which grace and the virtues possess. Inherent forms as they are, they can grow only in intensity. This consists in the subject participating more or less in the form, because the nature of the form is to adhere to the subject and penetrate it.⁴⁴ For this reason, the first effect of grace and of the virtues is to communicate to the soul their properties. When all the movements of the spirit are realized totally under the influence of charity, the development of grace has arrived at its perfection, because it is the effect of perfect habits to inform completely the activities of the subject in which they inhere.

This development of the supernatural organism is uniform. It does not affect grace and charity alone; it is development at the same time and in the same intensity of all the infused habits. United all among themselves, rooted in grace from which in a certain manner they flow and to which they are ordered, and having all as their single form charity, when each act of virtue develops the habit from which it proceeds, it develops also grace, which is its principle, and with grace all the virtues.

Two things are deduced from the nature of this development: first, the impossibility that a virtue be perfect in isolation. The perfection of any one of them implies the perfection of the habits of all the rest, although not the facility in their exercise. And second, as a consequence of the foregoing, that it is not necessary for the development of grace and the virtues that all of them be practiced. Even those which are not exercised for lack of matter develop in step with and through the exercise of the others.

But, we have noted this intentionally, this uniform development refers only to the supernatural habits. The rest, the natural effect of the repeated act, which is the facility in exercise, is produced only in the virtue to which that act corresponds. The other virtues, perfect though they be as supernatural habits, will encounter in practice the same difficulty as before the development of the habit, because facility is the natural effect of repeated acts. For this reason a saint can encounter difficulty in the practice of a virtue which he never exercised for lack of matter, and yet possess with perfection the supernatural habit of the same.⁴⁵

For the rest, what pertains to the supernatural organism develops, like the natural, in unison in all its members; and if in the natural this harmony can be broken by the disproportionate development or the atrophy of an organ or of a particular member, in the organism of grace this disproportion is impossible, on account of the simplicity of the forms which constitute it. In the supernatural order there are no monsters.

But in how many modes can this development be realized?

Article II — Its Modes and Vicissitudes

Two modes can the development of the supernatural life have: one human; another superhuman.

⁴⁴I-II, q. 24, a. V. — I-II, q. 52, a. II. — Ripalda, *De ente supernaturali*, l. IV, disp. 119, sec. 1 e. 2, p. 661 seqs.

⁴⁵I-II, q. 65, a. 3, ad 2m. et ad 3m.

This division corresponds to two species of acts which the soul can perform in the supernatural order: some, whose supernaturality is reduced to the substance of the act, their mode being natural; others, whose supernaturality is twofold, because it embraces the substance and the mode of the act at the same time. The first characterize the development of the supernatural life after the human mode; the second, the development after the superhuman mode.⁴⁶

In the development after the human mode the process is normal. The habits are actuated by virtue of ordinary grace, which moves them to operate in conformity with the nature and the mode of grace and the virtues. Since the mode of these is human, as we have seen, human also is the mode of the act which results.

This first mode of development is, then, the simple actuation of the supernatural habits.

Two characters it possesses: one negative, the exclusion of every extraordinary element; and another positive, that the grace which actuates the supernatural habits responds to the mode of them, being in this sense demanded by them. For this reason, when set into act, they operate thus, after the human mode, because grace limits itself to actuating them, and this is the connatural mode of the actuation of the supernatural habits.

The possibility and the existence of this mode of development are demanded by the very nature of the supernatural organism. Because every form, by the exigencies of its being, not only can, but must develop itself by acts corresponding to its mode of being in the subject. Anything else would require the intervention of a superior agent, who would draw the acts and the form out of their own proper laws. For this reason, since grace and the virtues are forms which are in the soul after the mode of the soul, that is, after the human mode, it follows necessarily that their normal development, that demanded by their nature, is that which is realized by acts and operations after the human mode. As we shall see further on, this species of development of the supernatural life is what characterizes ascetics.

The development after the superhuman mode, which will characterize mystical theology, implies, in the first place, an actual influence of God, not demanded by the supernatural habits, not even in the sense of a merit of congruity, precisely because it is outside the mode of them; because no one can ever demand anything outside one's own proper order, and here there is a grace which refers to a superhuman mode, outside, therefore, the order of the infused habits, which is the human mode.

It implies, in the second place, as the effect of that particular grace, operations which transcend the human mode and which cause, in an identical sense to those realized after the human mode, the increase of grace and of the virtues.

The possibility of this mode of development is evident. Above the ordinary laws stands God. The infused habits cannot demand this grace, which draws them out of their connatural mode of operating, but they do not reject it as contrary to their nature.

⁴⁶Concerning the sense of the terms *human mode* and *superhuman mode*, see what was said on Article III of Chapter I, above.

And upon the possibility comes the fact. This mode of development manifests itself in diverse ways. Sometimes, they are acts of love excited not by a new knowledge, but by a divine touch; other times, it will be an idea which did not enter through the senses and which inflames the will; at still other times, finally, breaking with all the laws, God increases grace by divine infusions, without meritorious acts on the part of the soul having preceded this increase. In all these cases the development of the supernatural life evidently departs from the ordinary ways and from the human mode.

The cause which determines these two modes of development of the supernatural organism is, as has already been indicated, the difference of the actual graces, which move the infused habits. If the actual grace, which is the divine impulse, does no more than actuate the habits, the operations of the latter will follow their connatural mode, which is the human; but if the actual grace not only moves the habit, but concurs in the operation by modifying its order (replacing the actuation of the inferior potencies, for example), the operation of the habits enters into the superhuman mode.

In either of these two modes, the development of the supernatural life has its vicissitudes, as does that of the natural life.

First, it has impediments which hinder it. Such are the defective natural dispositions and the disorder of the passions. Because the supernatural habit does not, upon being received in the potencies, remove the contrary dispositions which exist in them. The facility which a repeated sin has left in the potency for that kind of acts, and the consequent difficulty for the contrary acts, remain in the soul together with the infused virtues, whose actuation they obstruct and hinder.⁴⁷ To this must be added the influence of the passions, of natural weakness, and of external agents; all of which is an impediment to the development of the supernatural life.

Second, there exist causes which destroy it. Such is the effect of mortal sin. It is not merely a paralysis of the development of grace; it is a destruction of that life; a total death, which differs from that of the body only in that the supernatural life can be easily and repeatedly recovered.

However, while grace exists, the development of the supernatural life can neither halt nor diminish. It must grow continually.

It cannot halt, because the soul cannot live without operating, and since every operation of the soul in the state of grace is informed in some manner by charity, in every operation it merits and, consequently, the supernatural life develops continually.⁴⁸

It cannot diminish, because once the soul has arrived at a determined number of degrees of charity, it never returns to having fewer degrees. It can lose them all by mortal sin, but it cannot decrease in them. Once the mortal sin is removed, grace is resurrected at the same degree of intensity which it had before. A soul, then, which has attained five degrees of grace can never

⁴⁷I-II, q. 65, a. 3, ad 2um. et ad 3um. — Ripalda, *De ente supernaturali*, l. VI, disp. 118, sect. III, p. 582.

⁴⁸Recall the celebrated aphorism of the Fathers: *in via Dei non progredi, regredi est*. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 169, n. 18. — St. Bernard, *Epist.* 254, n. 4 and 91, n. 3.

have four. To lose them all, yes it can; to lose some only, to diminish, is not possible in the present economy.

The effect of venial sins is twofold: to dampen the fervor of charity and to impede rapid progress in virtue. But neither of these two things means that the degree of grace is diminished. Venial sin produces this only indirectly and remotely, insofar as it disposes for mortal sin, which does not diminish but rather destroys grace.

The term of the development of grace is the supernatural perfection of the soul.

CHAPTER III — PERFECTION

Article I — Its Nature and Its Degrees

The supernatural perfection of the soul consists essentially in the perfection of charity; because the perfection of a being is in its union with its proper end, and charity is the union of the soul with its supernatural end, which is God.⁴⁹

But what degree of charity constitutes perfection?

First: it cannot be an absolute perfection of charity, because the perfection of love is measured by the thing loved and not by the potency which loves.⁵⁰ Since the object, which in this case is God, possesses an infinite ratio of loveliness, there would be necessary in the soul a potency as infinite as the object in order that there be an adequation between them and, consequently, absolute perfection of charity. For this reason, such perfection exists only in God.

Second, it cannot be the ultimate degree of charity, because charity has no ultimate degree, since, being as it is a participation of the divine charity, it has no term, being always capable of increase. Moreover, if we suppose the ultimate degree of charity as constitutive of perfection, there could be no degrees of perfection, because these are constituted by diverse degrees of charity, and we would be supposing that at the beginning of perfection charity is already at its maximum degree.

Third, neither can it be a degree which responds to the capacity of the soul, first, because the capacity of the soul before receiving grace is neither determined nor limited by itself to any degree; and second, because, once grace is received, since charity is dispositive of itself, that is, one degree disposes for another greater, so that as the soul progressively possesses more charity it has a greater disposition to receive more, it would follow that the capacity of the soul would never be filled and, consequently, there would be no possible perfection. It is not, then, the capacity of the soul which determines the degree of charity that constitutes perfection.

⁴⁹ *In II Sent.*, dist. XVIII, q. 2, a. 2. — II-II, q. 184, a. 1. — Simeón de la Sagrada Familia, C.D.: *El principio teológico previo y fundamental de toda la obra sanjuanista*, Rev. Espir. 3 (1944) 225–237.

⁵⁰ *In III Sent.*, dist. XXVII, q. 3, a. 3, ad 3m.: *Amor mensurandus est ad ipsam rem amatam magis quam ad amantem*. Cf. II-II, q. 184, a. 2.

Fourth, if the degree of charity which constitutes perfection is determined neither by the nature of charity, nor by its relation to the object, nor by its relation to the subject, it is necessary to have recourse to God, who is its cause. The free will of God is what determines the degree of charity necessary for the perfection of the soul. St. Thomas says this and his most authoritative commentators confirm it.⁵¹

Now, can we know what the degree determined by God is? Directly, no; indirectly, yes.

Because we can know: *First*, that it is not the same degree for all souls. Because the plenitude or perfection of grace can be considered, according to St. Thomas, in two ways: either with relation to grace itself, or with relation to the subject who possesses it. Let us call the first *objective* perfection, and the second *subjective* perfection.⁵²

Objective perfection exists when grace has arrived at the highest degree of its excellence and at its maximum extension insofar as it embraces all the effects proper to it. Subjective perfection is attained when the soul possesses the grace which corresponds to its condition, that is, that degree which it needs in order to fulfill without deficiencies the obligations of its office or of its state.

Objective perfection, insofar as it is possible, is exclusive to Christ, because only in Him does grace extend to all its effects. In the saints there exists nothing more than subjective perfection.⁵³

Now then, since this consists in the degree of grace necessary to fulfill without deficiencies all the obligations of one's own state, and since each soul has its particular state and office and its role to fulfill in the world, each soul needs a particular degree of grace to accomplish fully its office and, consequently, a particular degree of grace in order to be perfect.

The degree of grace and charity determined by God for perfection is not, then, the same for all souls. It is more or less elevated, according to the state of each one. For this reason a soul can be perfect with ten degrees of charity, while another will not be so even with fifteen. The charity which sufficed for St. Stephen to be a saint and to be full of grace, as the Scripture says, would not have sufficed for the Virgin Mary, whose mission was immensely superior.

This doctrine is already expressed in the Gospel. Thus, the Lord called equally faithful the servant who had gained two talents and the one who had gained five. Why did He not demand five of the first also, except because, not having given him more than two, he was not under the same obligation as the one who had received five? It is because, as St. Paul says, God destines some for prophets, others for doctors, and the measure of grace corresponds to the

⁵¹III, q. VII, a. 10. — II-II, q. 24, a. 3: *Quantitas caritatis non dependet ex conditione naturae vel ex capacitate naturalis virtutis sed solum ex voluntate Spiritus Sancti distribuentis sua dona prout vult.* — Salmanticenses, tract. XXI, disp. 15, dub. unic., § 2 (ed. Palmé, etc.): *Dicendum est gratiam habitualement non habere ex natura sua aliquem terminum intrinsecum ultra quem nequeat promoveri et augeri; sed ex divina tantum sapientia et voluntate provenire quod certum aliquem semper intensiois gradum de facto habeant. Si namque gratia ex propriis nullum sibi certum terminum praefigit in intensioe, consequens est quod ille terminus non aliunde ipsi praestituatur nisi a voluntate et sapientia Dei sanctificatoris, eam ordinantis in finem a se institutum atque dispensantis majoris gratiae intensioem. Eadem ratio est de gratia et de caritate.*

⁵²III, q. VII, a. 10.

⁵³III, q. VII, a. 10.

office which each one has to fulfill.

The Doctor of the Church, St. John of the Cross, determines this same doctrine with precision: “Although in this life,” he writes in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, “we find some souls with equal peace and tranquility in the state of perfection, and each one is satisfied, yet for all that, one of them may be many degrees higher than the other and be equally satisfied, inasmuch as each one has its capacity satisfied.”⁵⁴

Second, that degree of charity determined by God, whatever it may be, implies perfection of the infused virtues. This is another element which serves to know indirectly the degree of charity which a particular soul needs in order to be perfect.

This perfection of the virtues, depending as it does on the perfection of charity, cannot be absolute. It does not suppose, then, that the virtues be at the supreme degree of intensity, nor even at the heroic degree. The sense of this perfection is that the virtues extend habitually to all objects and that the soul operates without difficulty according to the exigencies of those virtues.⁵⁵ It will operate with two degrees of intensity or with five, little does it matter; what matters is that it operate totally according to virtue.

By saying *totally*, we refer to all objects, to all occasions, and to all the forces of the soul. It would not suffice to operate virtuously on all occasions for the virtue to be perfect; the entire intensity of which the soul is capable in the act of practicing virtue is necessary. Remission in the affection would suffice to destroy the perfection of the operation. The soul would not be perfect, because it would not love God with all its heart, with all its soul, and with all its strength.

Third, that degree determined by God excludes all voluntary imperfection.⁵⁶

It is a consequence of the foregoing; because to operate totally according to virtue and to operate with voluntary imperfection is a contradiction.

This absence of voluntary defects is the negative element of perfection, as charity is the positive. In consequence, and since negative elements do not by their very nature admit of degree, the absence of voluntary defects, as a negative element, cannot have more or less. Negation is always, with relation to what it negates, total, absolute, universal. It does not permit the slightest affirmation, because then it would be destroyed. For this reason, from the moment that the slightest voluntary imperfection exists, it cannot be said that there is an absence of defects and, consequently, neither can it be said that there is perfection.

⁵⁴ *Subida*, l. 2, c. V, p. 104 (ed. P. Silverio, 1931). See the same doctrine beautifully expounded by St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus in her *Histoire d'une âme*, ch. I.

⁵⁵ *Salmanticenses*, tract. XII, disp. IV, dub. 1, § 4: *Virtutem esse perfectam est esse habitualiter extensam ad omnes suos actus et objecta; quod non habet per solam essentiam sed per intrinsecum modum intensiois.*

⁵⁶ II-II, q. 184, a. 2: *Tertia autem est perfectio quae neque attenditur secundum totalitatem ex parte diligibilis, neque secundum totalitatem ex parte diligentis, quantum ad hoc quod semper actu feratur in Deum, sed quantum ad hoc quod excludantur ea quae repugnant motui dilectionis in Deum; sicut Augustinus dicit venenum caritatis est cupiditas, perfectio, nulla cupiditas.*

Now then: if there are no possible degrees in this absence of voluntary defects which perfection implies, it follows necessarily that this negative element must be identical in all perfect souls. The absence of defects either does not exist or, if it exists, it must necessarily be total, absolute, universal. If between two perfect souls there can be a difference in the degree of charity without either of them ceasing to be perfect, in the absence of voluntary defects there can exist no difference whatsoever. All perfect souls must be equally exempt from consented defects; the slightest that existed in one of them would destroy the perfection, because there would no longer be an absence of defects.

St. John of the Cross illuminated this doctrine with the lovely simile of the bird and the cord that holds it: "It comes to the same thing whether a bird be held by a thin thread or by a thick one; for, even though it be thin, the bird will be as well held as though it were thick, so long as it does not break it in order to fly. True it is that the thin one is easier to break; but easy though it be, if it be not broken, the bird will not fly. And thus the soul that has attachment to anything, however much virtue it may have, will not arrive at the liberty of divine union."⁵⁷

This doctrine has, beyond being philosophically true, the advantage of killing all justification of one's own defects. Because even the soul which is called to the lowest degree of perfection must strip itself, in order to attain it, of every disordered affection and direct, in consequence, all its activities to God. The slightest reserve in this fatally destroys perfection. The generosity of the soul with God must be, then, total.

In summary: from all of this it is deduced that perfection is constituted by two elements: the absence of defects, which is separation from creatures, and which we have called the negative element; and charity, which is union with God, and which is the positive element. Both were embraced by St. John of the Cross in the following definition: "It consists in having the soul in such a manner that there be nothing in it contrary to the will of God (negative element); but that in everything and through everything its movement be solely the will of God (positive element)."⁵⁸

It is easy to deduce from this that perfection admits degrees, and what it is that determines them. It admits them because, being constituted by charity on the one hand, and not implying on the other the ultimate degree of the same, the diverse degrees of charity which exist above that which constitutes sanctity will mark as many other degrees of perfection. It is, then, charity which causes the degrees of perfection and which determines them.

For this very reason the number of degrees of perfection is indeterminable; because, constituted as they are by charity, and since charity has no term or measure, neither will the degrees of perfection have them, for they can, like charity, always increase.

⁵⁷ *Subida*, l. 1, c. XI, p. 75. We do not manage to comprehend the contrary doctrine, which admits degrees in the negation of voluntary defects. It is not mystical theology but philosophy which rejects the middle between having and not having consented defects. For this reason those who affirm it incur evident contradictions. Cf. *La Vie Spirituelle*, Nov. 1933, p. [78] (Supplement).

⁵⁸ *Subida*, l. 1, c. XI, p. 74.

Such is the nature of perfection. Let us now see who are called to it.

Article II — The Call to Perfection

The call to perfection is universal for two reasons: because the nature of things demands it and because Christ so expressed it in the Gospel.

First, because the nature of things demands it. In effect, every being is intrinsically and essentially ordered to the end proper to its nature. Elevated to the order of grace, man has in that order a supernatural nature to which there necessarily corresponds a supernatural end as well, which is God as author of that order. Consequently, man is ordered to the supernatural end and obliged to attain it.

Now then; since the perfection of the soul consists in its union with God by charity, as the supernatural end of man, all who are obliged to attain their supernatural end are, by that very fact, obliged to attain perfection. Since all men are called to the supernatural end and have the obligation of arriving at it, as all beings have the obligation of arriving at their own, it must be concluded that all men are called to perfection and obliged to attain it.

It is, then, a call which is born of the very nature of things. For this reason there is no exception possible. It would be necessary to exclude from the call to the supernatural order anyone who wished to exempt himself from the duty of being perfect. It would be to be called and not to be called at the same time. It does not imply, then, a special grace; it is already included by the nature of things in the call to the supernatural order.

Second, it is a universal call because Christ so expressed it in the Gospel: “Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”⁵⁹ These words, according to the interpretation of the Fathers taken up by St. Augustine, were addressed to all men:

“Do not think”, preached the Holy Bishop of Hippo, “that those words of Jesus Christ: *Sed perfectos*, apply to virgins and not to the married; to widows and not to those who have a husband; to religious and not to fathers of families; to clergy and not to laity. The entire Church, the whole body, accompanied by its members, must follow Jesus Christ bearing the cross.”⁶⁰

But, if this obligation extends to all men, it does not oblige all with the same gravity nor does it refer to one and the same term.

It does not oblige all with the same gravity, because while the simple faithful has no other obligation than that which results from his ordering to the supernatural end and from the general call expressed by Christ, the religious is obliged in addition by the nature of his state, whose

⁵⁹Matt., V, 48.

⁶⁰*Sermo 47 de diversis*, n. VII. Here is the same doctrine proclaimed by Pius XI in 1923: *Nec vero quisquam putet ad paucos quosdam lectissimos id pertinere, ceterisque in inferiore quodam virtutis gradu licere consistere. Tenentur enim hac lege omnes, nullo excepto.* AAS, t. XV, 50.

object is precisely to tend to perfection, and the priest is bound by the sanctity of the office which he fulfills.⁶¹

This obligation does not refer to the same term, because if we are all called to perfection, we are not all called to the same degree. The reason is plain; because, since what determines the degree of perfection is charity, and this is not given to all at the same degree, even supposing the same fidelity in all souls, as one must suppose when treating of perfection, it is manifest that one who has received two degrees of grace does not have the obligation of arriving at the degree of another who has received five.

But can the degree of perfection to which God calls each soul be known? No. No one can know, except by a particular revelation, to what degree God wishes to elevate him. But it is not necessary, because it suffices for the soul to keep at every moment the fidelity which God then asks of it, in order to be elevated to the degree which is pleasing to Him. The saints have not ordinarily known either the degree in which they stood or that to which God was leading them.

What can be known is the general degree, which depends on the state and kind of life of each one. Ordinarily the degree of perfection is measured by the obligations of one's own state. We say ordinarily, because nothing prevents God from calling, at times, certain souls living in the world to a sanctity superior to that to which He calls many religious, even though the state of the latter implies of itself a calling superior to that of seculars. But in these cases God Himself takes charge of making known to the soul in an unmistakable manner the divine desires for a greater sanctity. For the rest, the perfection to which each one is obliged is ordinarily the perfection of his state.

The perfection of one's own state must not be confused with the *state of perfection*.

The state of perfection has a twofold sense: it can signify that stage of the spiritual life which begins at the moment in which the soul has attained perfection, or it can refer to that particular state of life whose exercises are, as it were, demanding the perfection of the soul.

In the first sense, the state of perfection implies sanctity and is identified with it; in the second, it neither implies nor includes it, nor is it always truly found. The former is the state of the saints; the latter, that of religious and bishops.⁶²

It is needless to add that all of us are called to the state of perfection understood in its first sense, while very few are those who are called to it in comparison with the others, those called to what we might call the state of perfection by office.

In summary: the call to perfection is universal; we are all obliged to walk toward it.

By what paths shall we be able to attain it?

⁶¹It is well known that St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori is of the opinion that the religious who, by conscious and firm determination, does not tend to perfection sins mortally. *Theol. Moral.*, l. IV, n. 18: *Peccat mortaliter religiosus qui firmiter statuit non tendere ad perfectionem vel nullo modo de ea curare.*

⁶²II-II, q. 184, a. V.

Article III — Paths Leading to Perfection

Is there one or are there several paths leading to perfection?

If it is a question of a *total* difference, which supposes a diversity of principle and of form, there is no more than one path, because one is the grace and one the charity which essentially constitute the supernatural life in all souls.⁶³

If it is a question of merely *accidental* and external differences to the same spiritual life, but which influence upon it, communicating particular nuances, the paths leading to perfection are innumerable; as innumerable as the souls which aspire to perfection, because there are not two spirits whose ascent to God is identical.

But, if it is a question of a *specific* difference intermediate between the total and the accidental, the paths leading to perfection are two: ascetics and mystics. Since, on the one hand, the one essential path is included in these two, and since, on the other, the innumerable accidental paths cannot be determined, because they do not fall within the general rules such as those we seek here, since each subject has its own, let us limit ourselves to declaring the difference and the relations of these two specifically distinct paths which, anticipating names and concepts, we have called ascetics and mystics. Further on we shall study their nature, their stages or periods, and their term.

I. Difference between ascetics and mystics. — The difference between these two paths corresponds to the two modes of development of the supernatural life.

Ascetics is characterized and specified by the normal development of grace and of the virtues, an ordinary development which is realized by operations after the human mode, that is, by acts which respond to the mode of man, of grace, and of the virtues.

In this path there is no extraordinary intervention of God. It is a life of faith, of hope, of charity, without illustrations, consolations, and gifts which are not demanded by the state and merits of the soul. It develops the virtues by dint of labor and of constancy, by daily acts, struggling with its passions, which are the obstacles it carries within, and with the world, which is the obstacle it encounters without.

If it falls, it is the consideration of the goodness or of the justice of God which, with ordinary grace, helps it to rise, and then it continues on its path, ever working, ever struggling. The gifts of the Holy Ghost operate throughout the whole of this path, but only in those things necessary for the sanctification of the soul, and without ever drawing it out of its connatural mode of operating.

The prayer which is exercised in this path does not include infused illustrations, but is an exercise in which the intellect and the will labor: the former to find a concept which may move the affection; the latter, an affection which may unite one to God. When, by dint of simplifying discourses and affections, one arrives at an affective intuition, this is nothing more than the natural term of the discourses and meditations which preceded.

⁶³P. Crisógono: *Relaciones entre la perfección y la mística*, Revista de Espiritualidad, 2 (1944) 113 sgs.

Thus, by ordinary and constant labor the soul arrives gradually at mastery over its passions, at cleansing itself of its appetites, and at uniting itself without reserves to God by the perfect practice of the virtues. Such is the ascetical way.

The other path, the *mystical way*, is specified by the development of grace and of the virtues realized by operations after the superhuman mode.⁶⁴

The principle and the substantial form are the same as in the preceding path: grace, the virtues, and the gifts; but there is in this one an element which does not exist in the former and which affects the mode of development of the supernatural life: namely, the extraordinary influence of God, which draws the operations of the soul from their connatural mode in order to elevate them to another, superior, not demanded by the infused habits.

It is a life in which the soul is moved more passively than actively. The intellect, instead of taking ideas from what the senses offer it, receives them from God, who operates in it by infused illustrations and illuminations; and charity, more than by acts of the soul, is developed by divine influences which inflame the will with touches of infused love. In prayer, it is not the intellect which seeks and discourses in order to kindle the affection; it is God who provokes it, infusing lights and ideas which engender what we shall later call infused contemplation, and which, together with the sentiment of the divine presence, is principally what distinguishes this path.⁶⁵

That which is essential to this path accompanies it ordinarily, although not necessarily, by certain phenomena, such as visions, revelations, ecstasies, and raptures. Such is the mystical way.

But it is necessary to add: first, that this path is not constituted exclusively by the phenomena indicated, but rather presupposes the entire order of grace and of virtues which exists in the ascetical way; and second, that a single isolated mystical phenomenon does not suffice to determine the difference of paths; it must be something frequent, with a certain law of continuity — something which, though it is not properly habitual, because, as we shall see, the superhuman mode which characterizes mystics cannot be habitual, must be sufficiently repeated and united so that it may characterize a state. A touch of infused love or an act of infused contemplation would not suffice to place the soul in the mystical way.

With this, it is already easy to determine the principal relations which exist between the two paths.

II. Relations between ascetics and mystics. — There is no mutual independence, because ascetics can exist without mystics, but mystics cannot exist without ascetics.

Ascetics can exist without mystics, because grace and the virtues do not need, in order to arrive at their perfect development, extraordinary operations. Grace, as a vital principle, can

⁶⁴Let this be understood as a state, because the superhuman mode is not totally excluded from ascetics either. We consider this clarification necessary, within the traditional Carmelite doctrine. P. Crisógono himself comes to say this further on.

⁶⁵Cf. P. Dorsch, *Zum Begriff der Mystik (Zeitschrift für Ascese und Mystik*, 1 [1926]), p. 19 ss. — Eugenio de S. José, C.D.: *Característica del estado místico*, El Mensajero de Santa Teresa, III (1926) 162 y siguientes. *La Ascética y la Mística (Su mutua diferencia)*, ib. (1925) 3–8. Amor Ruibal, o. e. t. 3, cap. VI, pp. 128–9. Adolfo de la Madre de Dios, C.D.: *Estado y acto de contemplación*, Rev. Espir. VIII (1949) 96–126.

attain its perfection without departing from the operations of its mode of being in the soul, which is the human mode. Since mystics implies operations which are above this mode, it is manifest that grace does not need it to arrive at its perfect development. Ascetics is, then, a complete path; without departing from it the soul will arrive at the spirit's union with God in perfection of charity.

On the other hand, *mystics cannot exist without ascetics*. First, because it is founded upon it, since, as we shall see, mystics is nothing more than the life of grace insofar as it is known experimentally by the soul;⁶⁶ for this reason, when mystical phenomena begin to appear, the soul has already traversed a good part of the ordinary or ascetical path. And second, because even in the full mystical period the soul cannot withdraw from the exercises of ascetics, because mystical phenomena are neither continuous, nor for all the orders of life, but almost exclusively of prayer. God does not continually actuate the potencies of the soul in that order of operations after the superhuman mode, and from the moment that this extraordinary influence ceases, the soul either ceases to operate entirely, condemning itself to an absurd and quietistic inaction, or it must exercise itself in the acts of the ascetical way. In this sense, the mystical way is insufficient and incomplete.

They are not, then, two parallel and independent paths. By both one arrives at the same term: namely, perfection. But the mystical path is not continuous; it is often lost in the ascetical one, only to separate from it again, although without ever totally abandoning the necessary help of ascetical exercises.

Are these two paths available to all souls? The first, yes; the second, no.

The ascetical way is for all souls, because it is a necessary means for attaining perfection. From the moment in which the soul receives grace, it has everything necessary to walk this path, and it is obliged to follow it, because it is obliged to labor for the development of that supernatural life which consists in grace, the virtues, and the gifts, which it possesses as a principle or seed which must be fostered and developed. Ascetics is nothing more than this development, its necessary development; and for this reason all souls are called and obliged to walk by the ascetical way.⁶⁷

The mystical way, on the contrary, is not available to all, because it implies an element which is outside the exigencies of the development of grace. This element is the special influence of God, which actuates the infused habits after the superhuman mode. For this reason, although the soul be elevated to the supernatural order, it is not always elevated to the mystical order.

From this it is deduced, first, that, since grace does not demand this mode of development, the mystical way depends exclusively and totally on the will of God; and second, that to follow this path a special and gratuitous call from God is necessary, which He will give to whom He wills, when He wills, and however He wills. It will be useless for the soul to endeavor to set itself upon

⁶⁶De la Taille, *L'oraison contemplative*, p. 20 seq. (Paris, 1921).

⁶⁷Amor Ruibal arrives at the same conclusions by another path, o. e. t. 3, cap. I, pp. 6 sgs. and chapters VI and VII *passim*.

this path and to walk in it; because, since this order is produced by a special influence of God, as long as that influence does not exist, all the efforts of the soul to arrive there will be useless and harmful. Further on we shall set forth the signs by which this special call to the mystical way may be discerned.

Now, with the differences and relations of the two paths determined, let us pass to the study of their nature, their periods, and their term.