

## The Grades of Prayer according to St. Teresa of Avila

When Pope Paul VI proclaimed St. Teresa of Avila the first woman Doctor of the Church on September 27, 1970, he selected one of her many titles as the basis for raising her to that honor: *St. Teresa of Avila, Teacher of Prayer*. In this fourth centenary of the death of St. Teresa, the present Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, stated in a letter to the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites:

Teresa considered that her vocation and her mission was prayer in the Church and with the Church, which is a praying community moved by the Holy Spirit to adore the Father in and with Jesus «in spirit and in truth» (Jn 4:23)... Saint Teresa considered the life of prayer to be the greatest manifestation of the theological life of the faithful who, believing in the love of God, free themselves from everything to attain the full presence of that love<sup>(1)</sup>.

In all of her major works — *The Life*, *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle* — St. Teresa teaches the practice of prayer. It is noteworthy that she did not begin to write until she was 47 years old, after her second conversion, and when she was already well-versed in prayer. For that reason her teaching on prayer flows more from her own experience than from the study of books about prayer. She does, however, acknowledge her indebtedness to two authors: Francisco de Osuna, author of the *Third Spiritual Alphabet*, and Bernardino de Laredo, author of *Ascent of Mount Sion*. The book by Francisco de Osuna treated of the prayer of recollection and St. Te-

1

2

(1) Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, November 9, 1981.

resa states that she was « delighted with the book and resolved to follow that way of prayer with all my might »<sup>(2)</sup>. The second work, by Bernardino de Laredo, described the prayer of union that Teresa was experiencing, after « almost twenty years of experience in the practice of prayer »<sup>(3)</sup>.

3

As we have noted, St. Teresa began writing *The Life* when she was 47 years old, and she finished it three years later. In the same year (1565) she began to write *The Way of Perfection*, having been asked by the nuns of the reformed Carmel of St. Joseph to teach them the practice of mental prayer. In these first two works Teresa expounds at some length on the ascetical grades of prayer, whereas in *The Interior Castle* she devotes most of the book to a detailed description of the higher grades of prayer on the mystical level. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of *The Interior Castle*, written when Teresa was 62 years old, she says: « I want to say very little to you about this [the prayer of the second mansions], because I have written of it at length elsewhere »<sup>(4)</sup>.

4

St. Teresa realized as well as any theologian that all souls do not travel by the same path to perfection<sup>(5)</sup> but that God leads souls by many different roads<sup>(6)</sup>. Yet she also knew that in order to teach the theology and practice of prayer, one needs to discuss the various grades of prayer according to some basic pattern or structure. Since a person advances towards perfection by passing from the lower to the higher degrees of charity, we should also expect to find that an individual's prayer life will likewise admit of various stages.

5

One would expect that St. Teresa's clearest and most detailed exposition of the practice of prayer would be found in her definitive work and masterpiece, *The Interior Castle*. Such, however, is not the case, since she treated only briefly of the ascetical grades of prayer in that work. Consequently, we shall

<sup>(2)</sup> Cf. *The Life*, chap. 4.

<sup>(3)</sup> See *op. cit.*, chap. 23.

<sup>(4)</sup> *The Interior Castle*, Second Mansions.

<sup>(5)</sup> Cf. *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 24.

<sup>(6)</sup> Cf. *Conceptions of the Love of God*, chap. 2.

consult her three major works in order to glean from them St. Teresa's division of prayer and her description of the various grades of prayer. At the same time we shall be able to note how her own understanding of the theology of prayer became clearer and more precise with the passing years.

### « THE LIFE »

In her first work, *The Life*, St. Teresa presents the grades of prayer under the symbol of the « four waters, » or more precisely, the four methods of watering a garden. The first method is by drawing water from a well by means of a bucket attached to a rope. This is the method of beginners in the practice of prayer, who occupy themselves with *vocal prayer* and *discursive meditation*. In this first stage of prayer the individual is active, exercising the faculties of the soul, gaining what fruit one can, largely by one's own efforts. But lest the individual think too much and exert constant effort, St. Teresa offers the following advice:

6

Returning, then, to those who can make use of their reasoning powers, I advise them not to spend all their time in doing so. Their method of prayer is most meritorious, but since they enjoy it so much, they sometimes fail to realize that they should have some kind of a sabbath, that is, a period of rest from their labors... Let them imagine themselves, as I have suggested, in the presence of Christ, and let them continue conversing with him and delighting in him, without wearying their minds or exhausting themselves by composing speeches to him, but simply placing their needs before him and acknowledging how right he would be not to allow us to be in his presence<sup>(7)</sup>.

(7) *The Life*, chap. 13. In chapter 12 St. Teresa recommends the book by Alonso de Madrid, *The Art of Serving God*, as a good guide for the practice of meditation and affective prayer. In chapter 1 of the fourth mansions of *The Interior Castle*, she states: « Most of the souls which dwell in the mansions already described are familiar with these feelings of devotion, for they labor with the intellect almost continuously and make use of it in their meditations. They are right to do this, because nothing more has been given them, but they would do well to spend

Although she does not use the term « affective prayer, » the foregoing description does fit that type of prayer. It is something more than purely discursive meditation, but still closely related to it. Later on, St. Francis de Sales will speak of it as a type of prayer in which the affections rather than the intellect play the predominant role<sup>(8)</sup>.

The second method of watering the garden is by means of a waterwheel to which buckets are attached. As the wheel is turned, the buckets empty the water into a trough that carries the water to the garden. This second method signifies the *prayer of quiet*, but the expression is somewhat ambivalent, because here St. Teresa uses the expression to apply indiscriminately to both active and passive prayer. Moreover, she sometimes identifies the prayer of quiet (*oración de quietud*) with recollection (*recogimiento*), while in her later works she considers the two to be quite distinct. In *The Life* St. Teresa describes the « prayer of quiet » as follows:

7

This state, in which the soul begins to recollect itself, borders on the supernatural, to which it could in no way attain by its own efforts...

This state is a recollecting of the faculties within the soul, so that its enjoyment of that contentment may provide greater delight. But the faculties are not lost, nor do they sleep. The will alone is occupied, and in such a way that without knowing how, it is captivated. It allows itself to be imprisoned by God, as one who knows surely that it is the captive of him whom it loves<sup>(9)</sup>.

After stating that the « prayer of quiet » *borders* on the supernatural because, although the faculties are active, the will

short periods in making various acts, and in praising God and rejoicing in his goodness and in his being who he is, and in desiring his honor and glory. They should do this as best they can, for it greatly aids the stimulation of the will. But when the Lord gives them that other grace, they should be very careful not to reject it for the sake of finishing their usual meditation ».

<sup>(8)</sup> Cf. ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part III, chapter 8. The term « affective prayer » was introduced, it seems, by Alvarez de Paz (1560-1620).

<sup>(9)</sup> *The Life*, chap. 13,

is captivated by God, St. Teresa states that « there are many, souls that reach this state and few that pass beyond it »<sup>(10)</sup>. Yet, in the very same chapter of *The Life* she seems to say that there is a supernatural, passive (and therefore mystical) element in the prayer of the second water.

I have already said that in this first state of recollection and quiet the faculties of the soul do not cease to be active, but the soul finds such satisfaction in God that, although the other two faculties may be active, the soul's quiet and repose are not lost because the will is united with God as long as the recollection lasts...

This prayer, then, is a little spark of true love of the Lord, which he begins to enkindle in the soul, and he desires that the soul should come to an understanding of the nature of this love and its attendant joy.

This quiet and recollection, this little spark, if it proceeds from the Spirit of God and is not a pleasure bestowed on us by the devil or sought by ourselves, is not something that can be acquired...

In my opinion it is possible to tell if this state comes from the Spirit of God or if, starting with devotion given us by God, we attain it by our own efforts. In the latter case..., we try of our own accord to pass on to this quiet of the will, but nothing comes of it. If it comes from the devil,... it leaves behind it agitation and very little humility and does little to prepare the soul for the effects produced when such prayer comes from God. It gives neither light to the intellect nor strength to the will<sup>(11)</sup>.

St. Teresa's description of the prayer of quiet in *The Life* seems to apply, as we have said, to an affective type of recollected prayer which is at the same time the predisposition for mystical contemplative prayer. One could likewise see here a correspondence with the teaching of St. John of the Cross concerning the threefold sign by which one can know that it is time to abandon discursive meditation<sup>(12)</sup>. In any event, the

<sup>(10)</sup> *The Life*, chap. 15.

<sup>(11)</sup> *Ibid., loc. cit.*

<sup>(12)</sup> Cf. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, chaps. 13-14; *The Dark Night*, Book I, chaps. 9-10.

division between ascetical and mystical prayer is not exclusive; rather, there is an alternation between active and passive prayer or at most a lower and higher stage of meditative prayer.

The third method of watering the garden is by means of water from a stream, a type of irrigation without human effort. This state of prayer is totally mystical and passive, and is called *sleep of the faculties*. It is not, says St. Teresa « a complete union of all the faculties » and yet it is « obviously something higher than the previous state of prayer »<sup>(13)</sup>. She uses the phrase « sleep of the faculties » because all the soul's faculties are occupied only with God; « not one of them, it seems, ventures to stir, nor can we cause any of them to be active except by striving to fix our attention very carefully on something else, and even then I don't think we could succeed entirely in doing so »<sup>(14)</sup>. At the same time, St. Teresa states that « this kind of prayer... is quite definitely a union of the entire soul with God, » although God allows the intellect to understand and the will to rejoice<sup>(15)</sup>.

8

Here again we find that St. Teresa is ambivalent — almost contradictory — in her description of the prayer of the third water. In chapter 16 she had stated that the « sleep of the faculties » is not a complete union of all the faculties with God, but in chapter 17 she says that this state of prayer is a union of the entire soul with God. Indeed, she speaks of three degrees of union in chapter 17: *first*, the union in which the will is united with God but the intellect and memory are free; *second*, the intellect and the will are united with God but the memory and imagination are free; *third*, all the faculties are occupied with God and none of them dares to move (as described in chapter 16). Thus do we understand Teresa's statement: « There is another kind of union [no. 2 above], which, though not a complete union, is more nearly so than the one I have just described [no. 1 above], but not so much so as the one which

<sup>(13)</sup> *The Life*, chap. 16.

<sup>(14)</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>(15)</sup> *The Life*, chap. 17.

has been referred to when speaking of this third water [no. 3 above] »<sup>(16)</sup>.

Another point that may cause some confusion is the fact that both in the *prayer of quiet* (second water) and in the *sleep of the faculties* (third water) the soul dares not stir; but in the union that occurs in the third water, St. Teresa states:

This may seem to be just the same as the prayer of quiet, of which I spoke, but it is really different, partly because in that prayer the soul does not want to stir or move, but is rejoicing in that holy repose which belongs to Mary, while in this prayer it can also be a Martha. Thus, the soul is, as it were, occupied in the active and the contemplative life at one and the same time<sup>(17)</sup>.

The fourth and final method of watering the garden is by means of falling rain, and this symbolizes the *prayer of union*. However loosely St. Teresa uses the terms « prayer of quiet » and « quietude » in *The Life*, she is quite precise in describing the prayer of the fourth water as the prayer of union. However, if one seeks a theological explanation of the prayer of union, it is St. John of the Cross who provides it. St. Teresa deals more with the effects and concomitant phenomena of the prayer of union, thus establishing herself as an authority on the psychology of the mystical state. In fact, St. John of the Cross, in one of his few specific references to St. Teresa, excuses himself for not treating at length of such matters as rapture, ecstasy and flight of the spirit: « This subject must be left for someone who knows better than I how to deal with it. Moreover, the blessed Teresa of Jesus, our Mother, left admirable writings about these spiritual matters, which I hope shortly will see the light of day in print »<sup>(18)</sup>.

The problem at this point is that the grades of prayer described in *The Life* do not correspond to the division of prayer commonly given in the manuals of the spiritual life. There are several reasons for this, and the first is that St. Teresa did not write a systematic theology of prayer; in fact she frequently

19

10

<sup>(16)</sup> *Ibid., loc. cit.*

<sup>(17)</sup> *Ibid., loc. cit.*

<sup>(18)</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle*, chap. 13.

admitted her inability to describe accurately the experience of prayer. Secondly, precise terminology to describe the grades of ascetical prayer and the transitional prayer leading to contemplation did not come into use until the seventeenth century, at the hands of St. Francis de Sales, Bossuet and Alvarez de Paz — a century after the death of St. Teresa. Finally, since she was writing largely from her own experience, it is possible that St. Teresa herself passed almost immediately from meditative prayer to infused, mystical prayer.

11

#### « THE WAY OF PERFECTION »

When we turn to *The Way of Perfection*, which Teresa began in the same year that she completed *The Life* (1565), we find some adjustments in the Teresian division of prayer. This is not surprising, since this book was written at the request of the nuns of the convent of St. Joseph and therefore it is a book of instruction on the practice of prayer. The most noticeable difference in *The Way of Perfection* is that St. Teresa clearly distinguishes *active recollection*, the highest grade of ascetical prayer, from the *prayer of quiet*, which is « the beginning of pure contemplation »<sup>(19)</sup>.

12

St. Teresa's description of the *prayer of active recollection* is contained in chapters 28 and 29 of *The Way of Perfection*, in her commentary on the *Pater Noster*. After recalling that St. Augustine had stated that he had looked for God in many places and finally found God within himself, St. Teresa asserts that one need not go to heaven to speak to God and find delight in him, nor is it necessary to speak in a loud voice. « However quietly we speak, he is so near that he will hear us. We need no wings to go in search of him, but have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon him present within us »<sup>(20)</sup>.

13

If one prays in this way — conversing with God present in

<sup>(19)</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 30.

<sup>(20)</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 28.

the soul through sanctifying grace — even if the prayer be vocal, the mind will be recollected. Hence, it is called « prayer of recollection » because « the soul gathers together all its faculties and enters within itself to be with its God »<sup>(21)</sup>. Although a person may find it something of a struggle in the beginning, if one cultivates the habit of recollection, the soul and the will gain such power over the senses that « they will only have to make a sign to show that they wish to enter into recollection and the senses will obey and let themselves be recollected »<sup>(22)</sup>.

We have already noted that when St. Teresa spoke of the prayer of recollection in chapter 15 of *The Life*, she stated: « This quiet and recollection... is not something that can be acquired ». Here, however, in *The Way of Perfection*, she says: « You must understand that this is not a supernatural state, but depends on our will, and that, by God's favor, we can enter it of our own accord. ... For this is not a silence of the faculties; it is an enclosing of the faculties within itself by the soul »<sup>(23)</sup>.

Although the commentary on the *Pater Noster*, contained in *The Way of Perfection*, is basically an instruction on how to use vocal prayer as a means for attaining to the prayer of recollection, St. Teresa goes a step further and explains the *prayer of quiet*, which is a type of contemplation. This is an important development in her doctrine on prayer because she more clearly delineates the division between ascetical and mystical prayer and she restricts the scope of the prayer of quiet.

14

Now, daughters, I still want to describe this prayer of quiet to you in the way that I have heard it explained and as the Lord has been pleased to teach it to me. ... This is a supernatural state and however hard we try, we cannot acquire it by ourselves. It is a state in which the soul enters into peace, or rather, in which the Lord gives it peace by his presence. ... In this state all the faculties are stilled. In a way that has nothing to do with the external senses, the soul experiences that it is very close to God and that if it were but a little closer, it would become one with him through union...

<sup>(21)</sup> *Ibid., loc. cit.*

<sup>(22)</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 28.

<sup>(23)</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 29.

The faculties are stilled and have no wish to move, for any movement they make seems to hinder the soul from loving God. They are not completely lost, however, since two of them are free and they can realize in whose presence they are. It is the will that is captive now. ... The intellect tries to occupy itself with only one thing, and the memory has no desire to busy itself with more. They both see that this is the one thing necessary; anything else will cause them to be disturbed<sup>(24)</sup>.

The predominant characteristics of the prayer of quiet are peace and joy, for the will is totally captivated by divine love. The faculties of intellect and memory<sup>(25)</sup> are still free and may wander, but St. Teresa observes that the soul should pay no attention to the operations of these faculties. To do so would cause distraction and anxiety. In the higher state of the prayer of union there will not even be the possibility of interference from the intellect and memory, for then all of the faculties are centered on God. However, St. Teresa does not expand at length on the prayer of union in *The Way of Perfection*. For that, we must turn to her final work, *The Interior Castle*.

15

16

#### « THE INTERIOR CASTLE »

St. Teresa's last major work, known in Spanish as *Las Moradas* (apartments or suites of rooms), was written between June and November of 1577, when Teresa was 62 years old. St. Teresa portrays the soul « as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many mansions. ... Let us now imagine that this castle... contains many mansions (*moradas*), some above, others below, others at each side; and in the center and midst of them all is the chiefest mansion, where the most secret things pass between God and the soul »<sup>(26)</sup>.

17

<sup>(24)</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 31.

<sup>(25)</sup> St. Teresa does not always make a clear distinction between the faculties of imagination and memory.

<sup>(26)</sup> *The Interior Castle*, First Mansions, chap. 1.

In the center of the castle of the soul is the throne room, where the divine Majesty dwells and gives light to the entire castle, although the outer apartments are not as brightly illuminated as are those closest to the center. The individual is advised to enter into the castle of the soul by means of prayer and meditation and to pass through the various apartments until at last it comes into the presence of God in the center of the soul. The castle of the soul is spacious, comprising many rooms, and it is important that the soul that practices prayer should not be placed under any constraint. « Since God has given it such dignity, it must be allowed to roam through these mansions — through those above, those below and those on either side. It must not be compelled to remain for a long time in one single room »<sup>(27)</sup>.

Of the seven mansions contained in the interior castle, the first three pertain to the ascetical or active phase of the spiritual life and prayer. The treatment is very brief: two short chapters on the first mansions, only one chapter on the second mansions, and two chapters on the third mansions. The fourth to the seventh mansions represent the various grades of mystical prayer and when she begins to describe these mansions, St. Teresa advises the reader:

18

It may be that I am contradicting what I have myself said elsewhere. This is not surprising, because almost fifteen years have passed since then, and perhaps the Lord has now given me a clearer realization of these matters than I had at first<sup>(28)</sup>.

Bearing this in mind, we should not be surprised that in her last major work St. Teresa further refines her division of the grades of prayer. The most noteworthy changes in *The Interior Castle* are the clear distinction between acquired and infused recollection, further precisions concerning the prayer of quiet, and the distinction between sensible consolations and infused spiritual delights in the practice of prayer. As regards the prayer of recollection and the prayer of quiet, one must

19

<sup>(27)</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

<sup>(28)</sup> *Ibid.*, Fourth Mansions, chap. 2.

read chapters 3 and 4 of *The Interior Castle* very carefully in order to understand St. Teresa's teaching.

First of all, she had written somewhat extensively on the *prayer of recollection* in chapters 15 and 16 of *The Life* and in chapters 28 and 29 of *The Way of Perfection*. Therefore, in *The Interior Castle* she makes only a passing reference to it, saying that « in the prayer of [acquired] recollection it is unnecessary to abandon meditation and the activity of the intellect »<sup>(29)</sup>. In the subsequent literature on prayer, this grade — the highest — of ascetical prayer will be called by various names: the prayer of simplicity, the prayer of simple regard, acquired contemplation and loving awareness of God. This prayer is characteristic of the third mansions.

20

It is in St. Teresa's description of the prayer proper to the fourth mansions, however, that we find an interesting adjustment in her teaching. At the outset she states that in the fourth mansions « we now begin to touch the supernatural ». The grade of prayer to which she now refers is the *prayer of quiet*, which she also calls the « prayer of consolations from God ». But then she turns back to describe yet another grade of prayer — that of *infused or passive recollection*:

21

First of all, I will say something (though not much, as I have dealt with it elsewhere)<sup>(30)</sup> about another kind of prayer, which almost invariably begins before this one. It is a form of recollection which also seems to me supernatural. ... Do not suppose that the intellect can attain to him merely by trying to think of him as present within the soul. This is a good habit and an excellent kind of meditation, for it is founded on a truth, namely, that God is within us. But it is not the kind of prayer that I have in mind. ... What I am describing is quite different....

As I understand it, the soul whom the Lord has been pleased to lead into this mansion will do best to act as I have said. Let it try, without forcing itself or causing any turmoil, to put a stop to all discursive reasoning, yet not to suspend the intellect nor to cease from all thought, although it is good for it to remember that it is in God's presence and who this God is. If this experience should lead to a state of absorption, well and good, but it should

<sup>(29)</sup> *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions, chap. 3.

<sup>(30)</sup> Cf. *The Life*, chaps. 15-16; *The Way of Perfection*, chaps. 28-29.

not try to understand what this state is, because it is a gift bestowed on the will. Therefore the will should be allowed to enjoy it and should not be active except to utter a few loving words<sup>(31)</sup>.

Thus, the prayer of infused recollection is for St. Teresa the first and lowest grade of mystical prayer and in the fourth mansions she clearly distinguishes it from the prayer of quiet. In this latter prayer the will is not only united with God but is made a captive of divine love. Consequently the soul experiences great peace, sweetness and spiritual delight. Sometimes the experience is so intense that the individual passes into a state of languor which St. Teresa calls a « sleep of the faculties ». However, she warns that some persons of weak constitution, bad health or austere life may think they are experiencing a spiritual sleep when in fact it is due to purely natural causes<sup>(32)</sup>.

22

Since St. Teresa had stated that the prayer of quiet may also be called « consolations from God, » she goes to some pains to explain the difference between the consolations experienced in the senses and feelings, and those that are purely spiritual. While she admits that some persons do have a physical reaction to spiritual consolations, she insists that they are experienced at a much deeper level, at the center of the soul. As is her custom, she explains what she means by the use of an example.

To understand it better, let us imagine that we are looking at two fountains, the basins of which can be filled with water. ... The water in the one comes from a long distance, by means of numerous pipes and through human skill; but the other has been constructed at the very source of the water and is filled without any noise. ... No skill is necessary here and no pipes have to be laid, for the water is flowing all the time. ... The carrying of water by means of pipes... corresponds to the spiritual consolation which is, as I say, produced by meditation. ... To the other basin the water comes direct from its source, which is God and... its coming is accompanied by the greatest peace and quiet and sweetness within ourselves. ... And that content and delight are not felt, as earthly delights are felt, in the heart — I

(31) *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions, chap. 3, *passim*,

(32) *Ibid., loc. cit.*

mean not at the beginning, although later the basin becomes completely filled, and then the water begins to overflow all the mansions and faculties until it reaches the body. It is for that reason that I said it has its source in God and ends in ourselves (33).

We conclude, therefore, that there are two grades of prayer proper to the fourth mansions: that of *infused, passive recollection* and that of the *prayer of quiet*. Although some authors add a third type of prayer, namely, the sleep of the faculties, St. Teresa makes so little of it that it hardly seems to be more than a temporary intensification of the prayer of quiet. It is also worth noting that St. Teresa states at the end of her discussion of the fourth mansions: « I have written at great length of this mansion, as it is the one which the greatest number of souls enter » (34).

23

From the fifth to the seventh and final mansion St. Teresa discusses the various degrees of the *prayer of union* and offers valuable instruction concerning the phenomena that frequently accompany these highest stages of prayer. In the fifth mansions she describes the *prayer of simple union* by saying that « God implants himself in the interior of that soul in such a way that, when it returns to itself, it cannot possibly doubt that God has been in it and it has been in God » (35). Then, to explain better the nature of the prayer of simple union, St. Teresa uses the well-known example of the butterfly emerging from its cocoon.

24

In the sixth mansion « the soul has been wounded with love for the Spouse and seeks more opportunity of being alone — so far as is possible to one in its state — and to renounce everything that could disturb its solitude. ... The soul is now determined to take no other spouse » (36). This is the grade of *ecstatic union*, at which time the mystical espousal usually occurs. And since it is at this time that mystics normally experience both concomitant and extraordinary phenomena, this is the longest section of

(33) *Iibd.*, Fourth Mansions, chap. 2.

(34) *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

(35) *The Interior Castle*, Fifth Mansions, chap. 1; cf. also *The Life*, chap. 18.

(36) *Ibid.*, Sixth Mansions, chap. 1; cf. also *The Life*, chaps. 19-21.

*The Interior Castle* — eleven chapters. Throughout the chapters of the sixth mansions St. Teresa discusses various trials and special gifts of grace such as wounds of love, locutions, raptures, ecstasies, flights of the spirit and visions. And while she points out the dangers connected with such charisms St. Teresa believes that if rightly accepted, they can contribute greatly to the soul's purification and sanctification.

Finally, in the seventh mansions, St. Teresa describes the transforming union or spiritual marriage. Already in the fifth mansions she gave some indication of this when she mentioned the spiritual betrothal and compared the union of the soul with God to the state of matrimony. This is the highest state of prayer that it is possible to attain in this life. St. John of the Cross and numerous other spiritual writers call it the transforming union<sup>(37)</sup>, and perhaps this term is more acceptable to modern Christians. St. Teresa develops three points in treating of this seventh mansion: in chapter 1 she describes how the soul experiences the indwelling Trinity; in chapter 2 she explains more fully the nature of « nuptial love »; in chapter 3 she lists the various effects of the prayer of mystical marriage.

25

#### SUMMARY

At the outset of this article we stated that our intention was to analyze the three major works of St. Teresa in order to observe the evolution of her doctrine on prayer and then to state the grades of prayer according to the Mother of Carmel. There definitely was a modification of her teaching as she more clearly understood the various stages through which the devout soul normally passes on the path to the transforming union. Since *The Life* is an autobiography describing Teresa's own spiritual journey, we have suggested that the sudden transition from the prayer of acquired recollection (which she there identifies

26

(37) St. John of the Cross also uses term « spiritual marriage »: « This spiritual marriage is incomparably greater than the spiritual espousal, for it is a total transformation in the Beloved » (*The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 22). Cf. also the Prologue to *The Living Flame of Love* for a similar statement.

with the prayer of quiet) to the prayer of union may have been St. Teresa's own experience in prayer. *The Way of Perfection*, on the other hand, is a book of instruction for her spiritual daughters and therefore it contains a lengthy treatment on the prayer of acquired recollection, but also distinguishes this prayer from the prayer of quiet. Finally, in *The Interior Castle*, the Saint explains why she spends little time on the ascetical grades of prayer but develops at length the section on the mystical degrees of prayer. Now, by collating all the material contained in the three major works, we can offer the following schema of the grades of prayer according to St. Teresa:

VOCAL PRAYER, with attention to what one is saying or reading and the God whom one is addressing.

MEDITATION, at first *discursive* and later becoming *affective prayer*.

ACQUIRED RECOLLECTION, called in modern manuals the prayer of simplicity, prayer of simple regard, acquired contemplation, centering prayer.

INFUSED RECOLLECTION, the first fully passive and mystical grade of prayer.

PRAYER OF QUIET, sometimes reaching the intensity of the *sleep of the faculties*.

PRAYER OF SIMPLE UNION, in which the intellect and will are captive but the other faculties are free.

PRAYER OF ECSTATIC UNION, in which all the faculties are suspended; often leading to the mystical espousal or conforming union.

PRAYER OF TRANSFORMING UNION, also known as mystical marriage which is the highest grade of prayer.

The two concepts that form the basis of St. Teresa's teaching on prayer are *the presence of God in the soul* and *recollection or interiorization on the part of the individual*. As to the first, she states at the beginning of *The Interior Castle* that God dwells in the interior — in the throne room of the castle of the soul in the state of grace. Therefore, as Christ himself had

27

28

stated, we need not look here or there, because the « kingdom of God is within us », if we abide in his grace. Yet, to come into the divine presence, to the center of the soul where God dwells, it is necessary to detach oneself from everything outside the castle of the soul and to pass through the various mansions (*moradas*) until one reaches the center, where his Majesty dwells. That is the goal of all prayer: to experience the divine presence by means of an intimate union with God through love.

29

The entrance into the castle of the soul is prayer and meditation, which means that the soul must cultivate the practice of recollection (*recogimiento*), and this in turn presupposes humility and detachment<sup>(38)</sup>. Souls that are not detached from created goods will not likely be drawn to the things of God; souls lacking humility will not be obedient to the divine will.

30

When the soul sets out on the road to union with firm determination, even vocal prayer will become mental prayer, and soon the individual will practice daily meditative prayer. The faithful practice of discursive meditation will, in turn, lead to a deeper recollection, and prayer will become the language of love. It is at this point that the transition occurs, acquired recollection being the passage from ascetical prayer to the truly mystical prayer of infused recollection.

31

Many souls reach this point says St. Teresa, but only those who are completely docile to the Holy Spirit are led further into the prayer of quiet and the subsequent grades of the prayer of union. Hence the sound advice given by St. Teresa to all those who set out on the road of prayer:

Those who can thus enclose themselves in this little heaven of the soul wherein he dwells who made heaven and earth, and are able to accustom themselves not to look at anything or remain in any place where these external senses would be distracted, may be sure that they are travelling along an excellent way and that they will not fail ultimately to drink the water of the fountain<sup>(39)</sup>.

JORDAN AUMANN, O. P.

*Pontifical University of St. Thomas - Rome*

<sup>(38)</sup> Cf. *The Way of Perfection*, chaps. 2-3; 8-13; 17-18.

<sup>(39)</sup> *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansions, chap. 3.