

THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL

This Treatise explains to both beginners and proficients how to reach divine union quickly. It teaches them how to be free of all earthly things, to avoid spiritual obstacles and to live in the nakedness and freedom of spirit needed for divine union.

Theme

The following stanzas describe the way to the soul's union with God. I will quote them individually when they are explained.

EIGHT STANZAS

The soul sings of the happy chance which it had in passing through the dark night of faith, to union with the Beloved.

1. On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings –
oh, happy chance!
I went forth without being observed,
My house being now at rest.
2. In darkness and secure, By the secret ladder, disguised -
oh, happy chance!-
In darkness and in concealment,
My house being now at rest.
3. In the happy night, In secret, when none saw me,
Nor I beheld aught, Without light of guide,
save that which burned in my heart.
4. This light guided me
More surely than the light of noonday,
To the place where he (well I knew who!) was awaiting me –
A place where none appeared.
5. Oh, night that guided me,
Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,
Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover,
Lover transformed in the Beloved!
6. Upon my flowery breast,
Kept wholly for himself alone,
There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him,
And the fanning of the cedars made a breeze.
7. The breeze blew from the turret
As I parted his locks; With his gentle hand he wounded my neck.
And caused all My senses to be suspended.

8. I remained, lost in oblivion;
My face I reclined on the Beloved.
All ceased and I abandoned myself,
Leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies.

PROLOGUE

Explaining the Dark Night

A deeper intellect than mine is needed to describe the dark night which a soul passes through to gain perfect union with God. Human science cannot explain these spiritual trials. Even an experienced soul cannot describe them. I will not rely on science or experiences but on Sacred Scripture. I submit all to the Church or to anyone more competent than I.

Reasons For Failures

Because many souls need this teaching, I will rely upon the Lord. Many souls have begun the road of perfection and the Lord desires to place them in the dark night. Sometimes, they do not want to enter the dark night. At other times, they do not understand themselves, or they lack a director who can show them the way. To many souls, God gives graces to advance. If they made the effort they would arrive at the summit. It is sad to see them stay as beginners.

If God makes them advance, they reach the summit, but much later. They gain less merit, because they do not adapt themselves to God's road. God leads them, but they resist. Their activity causes great sufferings and hampers God. They are like children who decide to walk when their mother would carry them.

The Soul's Trials

Our doctrine (for beginners and the advanced) teaches souls how to practice abandonment to God's guidance. Some spiritual directors have no enlightenment or experience. They are like the builders of Babel's tower (Gen. 11:1-9). They fail because they do not understand the language. It is difficult when a soul does not understand and has no director to guide him.

Making the Trials Worse

Sometimes, when God leads a soul along a road of trials, someone falsely says that these trials are due to depression or that God has abandoned him.

Others say the soul is negligent, because it has no consolations. This advice doubles the soul's trials, at a time, when God is showing the soul its own sinfulness. Concerned that these trials are its own fault, the soul's sufferings become worse than death. Sometimes, the confessor urges the soul to make a general confession. This is another crucifixion. Really, the soul should be encouraged to endure this suffering until God ends this trial. No other remedy is adequate.

Our Goal

We will show how the soul must act, how the confessor can recognize the signs of these purifications (whether of sense, of spirit, or from depression).

Some people work very hard and yet go backward. They place their hope in spiritual exercises (which are really a hindrance). Some souls find obstacles even in God's favors. Other souls make

progress in great peace. With God's help, everyone who reads this book will discover the road he ought to follow to reach the summit.

Nakedness of Spirit

At first, the reader will have difficulty understanding this doctrine on the nights. However, by continued reading, he will understand. Later chapters explain the earlier ones. If people do not understand, the cause is my awkward style. The doctrine itself is sound and necessary. Please note, I am not writing for people who approach God on sweet paths. I am writing solid doctrine for those who seek a nakedness of spirit. The Carmelite friars and nuns, whom God has put on this path, have asked me to write this. Detached from the world, they will easily grasp this doctrine of nakedness.

1.1 THE TWO DARK NIGHTS

First Stanza

On a dark night, kindled in love with yearnings –
oh, happy chance! –
I went forth without being observed,
My house being now at rest

The Two Purgations

The soul sings of her happy state which she experienced by going forth from sensual desires and imperfections. The soul must pass through two purgations. We call these nights because the soul must journey in darkness.

In the first night, the sensory part of the soul is purged (treated in the book's first part). In the second night, the spiritual part is cleansed (treated in the book's second and third part). The fourth part describes the soul's passivity in this second night.

The first night occurs when God brings the beginner into a state of contemplation. The second night happens when God brings the proficient into a state of union. This latter is a more obscure purgation.

Explaining the Stanza

This stanza means that the soul was led by God into a dark night. There its sensual desires for the world and the flesh are purged. The soul goes forth only when the house is at rest, meaning that the sensual part is asleep and mortified.

When this happens, the soul has a happy chance. Her sensual desires cannot hold her back. God leads her out when she is deprived of all things. Now, I must explain the stanza.

1.2 ON A DARK NIGHT

This journey is called night for three reasons. First, the soul deprives herself of all worldly desires. This is night to the senses. Second, the soul must use the road of faith to travel to union. Third, the soul travels to God Who, in this life, is a dark night to the soul.

Three Aspects of One Night

Tobias spent three nights before being united with his bride. On the first night, he burned the heart of the fish in a fire. This signifies the soul's heart which must be purified in the fire of God's love.

On the second night, the angel tells Tobias he will be admitted into the presence of the Patriarchs, the fathers of faith. The soul is alone in faith and all the knowledge gained by the understanding is excluded.

On the third night, Tobias obtains a blessing. God communicates himself in such an intimate way that the experience is another night, far darker than the others. When this third night is complete, the soul is united with the Bride, the Wisdom of God. After this, the angel tells Tobias to have union with his bride in fear of the Lord. When fear is perfect, love is perfect.

These three nights are really one night with three parts. In the first part, light begins to fade from sight. In the second part, there is total darkness (midnight). In the third part, the soul is near to the daylight. We will treat each part separately.

1.3 THE PRIVATION OF DESIRE

Deprived of Desires

At night, the eyes see nothing. So, the mortification of all desires is night to the soul. Deprived of these pleasures, the soul is in a void. As the eye is nourished by seeing objects, so the soul is fed by experiencing pleasure in her faculties. In this night, the soul experiences no pleasure and remains in darkness. With her desires not satisfied, her faculties are empty and in darkness. Having put away these desires, the soul is in darkness.

Detachment From the Senses

When God creates a soul, it is like a smooth, blank board upon which nothing is painted. During life, the senses communicate experiences to the soul, which is like a prisoner, knowing only what it experiences through the senses (the prison windows).

If the soul rejects what the senses provide, it remains in darkness, like when the person closes his eyes. David chose poverty. He wrote, "I am poor and in labor since my youth" (Ps.88:15). Because he did not desire riches, he was poor.

Detachment is night to the soul. However, just to lack things is not detachment. Only a detachment from desires leaves the soul free. Only through desire can things enter into the soul. Let me show the importance of entering this dark night.

1.4 NEED TO GO THROUGH THIS NIGHT

Darkness and Light

In God's eyes, the soul's desires for creatures are darkness. While clothed in these desires, the soul has no capacity to be possessed by God's pure light. John wrote, "The darkness could not receive the light" (Jn.1:5).

This darkness of an affection for creatures cannot exist with the light which is God. "What communion can there be between light and darkness?" (2Cor.6:14) Divine light dwells in the soul only when these affections have been purged.

A Proof

Attachment for creatures makes the soul like those creatures. Love creates a likeness between he who loves and what he loves. Speaking of those who love idols, David says, “Let those that set their heart upon them be like to them” (Ps.113:8).

A soul which loves anything besides God is incapable of pure union with God. The creature’s lowliness cannot unite with the Creator’s greatness any more than darkness can unite with light. Compared with God, all earthly things are nothing. “I beheld the earth and it was nothing and void” (Jer.4:23). Jeremiah also said “All the heavens have no light” (4.23). Compared with God, even the stars are darkness.

Creation Compared With God

A soul who desires creatures cannot comprehend God. Until purged, the soul cannot possess God by faith here on earth, or by a clear vision in heaven. All creation compared with God’s infinite Being is nothing and, a soul who desires creation cannot reach union. What is not cannot be one with what is. “Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain.” (Pr. 31:30)

The World’s Beauty

While attached to created beauty, the soul cannot be transformed into God’s beauty. Ravished by created beauty, the soul cannot be grasped by God’s infinite loveliness. Created goodness is wickedness when compared to God’s infinite goodness. “Nothing is good except God.” (Lk.18:19)

The World’s Wisdom

“The wisdom of the world is foolishness to God.” (1Cor.3:19) A soul trying to arrive at divine union by its own knowledge is ignorant. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became foolish.” (Rom.1:22) Souls must be like innocent children, setting aside knowledge to acquire God’s wisdom. “If any of you thinks he is wise, let him become ignorant so he might be truly wise”. (1Cor.3:18) To gain divine union the soul must proceed by unknowing rather than by knowing.

The World’s Liberty

Compared with God’s liberty, the world’s liberty is slavery. In God’s sight, anyone who wants to satisfy all their desires is a slave, not a son. Slavery cannot coexist with liberty, and liberty cannot live in a heart filled with desires. Sara told Abraham to cast out the bondwoman and her son. The slave should not be co-heir with the son.

The World’s Delights

Compared with God’s delights, the delights of the world are torments. While seeking those delights, a soul cannot attain the delights of the divine embrace. The world’s wealth is poverty and the soul which loves wealth is supremely poor.

Divine Wisdom grieves for those poor souls who love the world. He exclaims “My appeal is to the children of men. You fools, gain sense” (Pr.8: 4-5) and “My fruit is better than gold. I grant wealth to those who love me” (Pr.8: 19 and 21). High riches and true wisdom dwell with Divine Wisdom, not with creatures.

1.5 SCRIPTURAL TEXTS ON MORTIFICATION

The Great Distance

A soul which clings to material or spiritual creatures is a great distance from God. St. Augustine realized this. “When will my littleness be able to have fellowship with Your greatness? You are good, merciful, holy and just. I am evil, impious, a sinner and unjust. You are light and I am blind. You are life and I am death. You are medicine and I am sick. You are supreme truth and I am utter vanity”.

While still attached to its desires, the soul cannot have union with God because these desires hinder union. A great distance exists between created things and divine transformation. Jesus said, “Whoever does not renounce all things, cannot be my disciple” (Lk.14:33). Until everything is renounced, the soul has no capacity to receive the pure transformation of the Spirit.

The Food of the Exodus

Only after the flour ran out did the Israelites receive the food from heaven (Ex.16:3-4,15). This shows the need to renounce all things. The soul who feeds on strange food is incapable of receiving the Spirit. Souls who intermingle a desire for spiritual things with desires for created goods, greatly offend His Majesty.

Choosing Other Food

In the Exodus, the people desired to intermingle base food with the noble bread of heavenly manna (Num.11:4,6,10). So, the fiery wrath of God consumed thousands. They sought earthly food when God gave them heavenly food.

Spiritual persons must realize that they find all sweetness in simple spiritual food. Instead, they desire other bread and do not receive God’s sweetness. Those who love something other than God, make God of little account.

Climbing the Mountain

When man’s heart is attached to something, he loves that more than another (even though the other might be better). By trying to enjoy both, he makes the more important equal to the lesser. If the soul loves both God and a created thing, it offends Him. It does even worse by loving something more than it loves God.

When Moses ascended the mountain, he left behind both the Israelites and the beasts. To ascend God’s mountain, the soul must leave behind all things (the people) and all desires for things (the beasts). A person climbing this mount must habitually quell their desires. The faster he does so, the sooner he will complete his journey. Until he extinguishes these desires, he cannot gain the goal. Even his virtues require purifying every desire.

The Altar of Sacrifice

Ascending Mount Bethel, Jacob commanded the people to do three things – cast off all strange gods, purify themselves and change their garments (Gen.35:2). To ascend the mount of perfection, the soul must cast off all strange attachments, purify herself of these attachments, and change its garments.

God’s Actions

If the soul does the first two, God will do the third. He will give new love in place of the old desires and will bring the soul to a new state of knowledge. When the old forms of knowledge are cast away, He will clothe the soul with a supernatural aptitude.

Before this purgation, the soul's acts are human. Afterward, they are divine. In the state of union, the soul becomes God's altar. God wants his altar to be hollow (Ex.27:8), meaning that the soul must be completely empty to be a worthy altar.

God killed Nadab and Abiv when they offered strange fire (Lv.10:1-2) because God's love must never be mingled with any other love. God does not permit anything else to dwell with Him. When the Philistines put the Ark of the Covenant in the presence of their idol, the idol was broken to pieces (1Kg.5: 2-4).

1.6 TWO EVILS CAUSED BY DESIRES

The Two Serious Evils

These desires cause two serious evils. The first evil deprives the soul of the Holy Spirit. The second torments and weakens the soul. "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water. They have built broken cisterns which can hold no water" (2:13).

The soul's desire for a creature causes the soul to lose some capacity for God. A soul cannot contain a desire for a creature and a desire for God. What has the sensual, visible, temporal creature to do with the spiritual, invisible, eternal Creator? How can poverty coexist with attachment?

Crumbs For the Dogs

Whatever possesses the soul is an obstacle to God's possessing the soul. When the soul is subjected to a sensual spirit, God's Spirit cannot enter. Jesus said, "It is not good to give the children's food to dogs" (Mr.15:26). Dogs are souls which are attached. Children eat from their father's dish, while dogs are given crumbs.

All created things are crumbs. Whoever feeds on them is correctly called a dog. These souls do not feed upon the uncreated Spirit of God. They are always hungry, because crumbs stir up the appetite and do not satisfy it. "They shall suffer hunger like dogs" (Ps.58:15). A soul filled with desires is always hungry. Hunger and fullness cannot dwell in one person and the Spirit enters only when desires for created things are cast out.

God's action in purifying the soul is greater than when he created the soul from nothing. Nothingness does not resist God, but the soul's desires can offer great resistance to God's Spirit.

Five Evils

These desires cause five evils. They wear, torment, darken, defile and weaken the soul. I will talk separately of these five evils.

Weariness

These desires are like discontented children, wearying the soul and never allowing their mother to rest. As a person grows weary digging for treasure, so the soul grows weary in pursuing its desires. The soul filled with desires is like a man with a fever whose thirst always increases. "When he has satisfied his desires, he will be even more oppressed." (Job.20:22)

Why the Weariness?

These desires are like wind which moves the waters and allows them no rest. “The heart of the wicked man is like a raging sea”. (Is.57:20). The soul is like a hungry man who opens his mouth and is filled with the wind. “In the desire of his will he drew in the air.” (Jer.2:24)

The Fire of Desires

Desire is like fire which increases as it is fed. Natural fire dies after consuming the wood. However, sensual desires always increase. “He shall turn to the right and be hungry. He shall eat on the left and not be filled.” (Is.9:20) When these souls turn to the right they see just souls enjoying sweetness. When they turn to the left to indulge themselves, they hunger even more.

1.7 DESIRES TORMENT THE SOUL

Bound By Cords

These desires bind the soul. “The cords of my sins have constrained me” (Ps.118:6). The soul lies naked on the thorns of its desires. “They were enkindled against me like fire among thorns”. (Ps.117:12)

As a farmer who covets his harvest will torment his ox to plow, so, these desires torment a soul to gain what she seeks. Delilah desired to know the source of Samson’s strength and was tormented to the point of death (Judges 16:15-16).

Desires increase torment. God says, “Her desires, give her torment and anguish. (Rev. 18:7). Having desires is like Samson falling into the hands of his enemies, who removed his power, blinded him and bound him to a mill to grind corn (Jg.16:21).

God’s Invitation

Having compassion on these souls, God says, “All you who thirst, come to the waters. All you with no silver of your own desires, buy from me. Buy wine and milk (that is, spiritual sweetness and peace) without any silver or without any labor in exchange. Why give your money for what is not bread (the Holy Spirit) and set your hearts on what does not satisfy? Come to Me. You shall eat good food and your soul will delight. (An application of Is.55:1-2)

Creatures torment the soul. God’s Spirit refreshes it. Jesus said “Come to me all you who labor and are burdened and I will refresh you” (Mt.11:28-29), “All those burdened by their desires leave them behind and you will get back the rest which your desires stole from you.”

1.8 DESIRES DARKEN THE SOUL

Desires are like vapors that darken the air, like a clouded mirror that cannot receive a good image, and like water defiled by mud. Desires darken the soul, allowing neither natural reason nor supernatural Wisdom to enlighten it. “My iniquities have taken hold of me and I could not see.” (Ps.39:13)

Three Faculties

All three faculties are affected. The soul has a darkened understanding, a benumbed will and a disordered memory. When the soul is darkened, the intellect cannot receive divine enlightenment any more than night air can receive light. The will cannot receive God’s pure love, any more than a

clouded mirror can receive a clean image. The memory cannot receive God's image any more than muddy water can mirror a person's face.

A Light That Blinds

Desire is blind and reason led by desires is like someone who cannot see being guided by a blind man. They "both fall into the pit" (Mt.1:14).

A soul guided by desires is like a fish dazzled by the light, blinded to the snares of the fishermen. Because desires force their object upon the understanding, the soul cannot see the light of its own understanding.

Removing Desires

Certain souls do extraordinary penances to arrive at divine union. Instead, they should mortify their desires. As the farmer tills the earth to bring forth fruit, so the soul must mortify desires to make progress. Without this mortification, their good acts are like seeds cast on untilled ground. Nothing will ever grow. Desires are like cataracts which must be removed so the soul can see.

God says to these souls, "Do not allow the thorns of your desires to shut out the sight of God". They must be swallowed up by purgation (either in this life or the next). Blinded by their desires, men cannot see the blessings of divine light. Souls who receive divine favors and indulge their desires, will fall into a worse state.

Example of Solomon

Look at wise Solomon. His desires for women brought him to weakness of will. In the beginning, Solomon was cautious. Gradually, when he was blinded by desires, the wisdom given by God was quenched. In his old age, he abandoned God. If unrestrained desires harmed Solomon, how much will they do to us?

This darkness blinds us. We call good, evil and evil, good. Isaiah says, "Like blind men we grope along the wall. Like people without eyes we feel our way" (Is.59:10). "We stumble at midday, as if it were dark." Blinded by desires the person cannot see what is true and good.

1.9 DESIRES DEFILE THE SOUL

Desires Defile the Soul

These desires defile the soul. "Whoever touches pitch is defiled by it." (Eccl.13:1) This describes a soul attached to creatures. The soul is greater than creatures, more than pure diamonds are greater than pitch. A heated diamond placed upon hot pitch would be defiled. So a soul, hot with desire, draws filth from the created world. Another example. The soul is like a clear liquid and creatures are like mud. A soul clinging to creatures mingles the clear liquid with the filthy mud. As soot defiles a beautiful face. so disordered desires defile a soul.

Jeremiah says about the princes, "Now their appearance is blacker than soot. They are not recognized on the streets" (Lam.4:8). Formerly they were whiter than snow, clearer than milk, ruddier than ivory and lovelier than sapphire (Lam.4:7). Now, their faces have turned blacker than coal.

Destroying the Image

No image taken from human life can describe how much these unruly desires harm the soul. God creates the soul perfect. However, by these desires, the soul becomes abominable and full of evils. A single unruly desire (even without mortal sin) can bring the soul into bondage. Until this desire is purified, divine union cannot happen. Imagine how far removed from divine union is that soul which is completely given over to its passions!

Power of Each Desire

Although many desires bring about great impurity, even a simple desire deposits some impurity and a single disorder brings forth innumerable impurities. The righteous man's soul has innumerable gifts, while the unruly soul has a variety of impurities.

The Vision of the Temple

After showing the prophet Ezekiel the temple's interior, painted with creeping things and unclean beasts (8:10), God said, "Have you seen what these abominations do?" (8:12) The prophet saw women weeping for Adonis (the god of love). Entering the temple even more, he saw greater abominations, twenty-five men with their backs to the temple (6:14 and 16).

Here is the analogy of the vision. The unclean beasts represent lowly earthly things, painted on the walls of the understanding. The women weeping for Adonis represent the will's desires. The men in the third chamber represent the memory constantly reflecting on lovely creatures. The men's backs turned to the Temple represent a soul which completely embraces earth. The Temple itself represents the soul's right reason, which should never admit creatures.

If I tried to describe the lesser foulness (of imperfections), the greater foulness (of venial sins), and the complete foulness (of mortal sins) I would never end. Even angels could not grasp this unsightliness. My point is this. Any desire, even for the smallest imperfection, stains the soul.

1.10 Desires Weaken the Soul

Desires Weaken the Soul's Virtues

With these desires, the soul has no strength because the will is divided. A will that seeks created goals, has less strength in seeking virtue.

Examples

Attachments are like holes in a container. Jacob said about Reuben "You do not grow because you are poured out like water" (Gen.44:4). When uncovered, hot water loses its heat and aromatic spices will lose their fragrance. So a soul, uncovered by a single desire, loses its heat and the fragrance of its virtue. David said "I will keep my strength for You" (Ps.59:9).

Jesus said "Woe to those who are pregnant and nursing in those days" (Mt.24:19). Being pregnant or nursing weakens the mother. So, these unrestrained desires will suck away the soul's strength. Jesus said, "Have your loins (i.e. desires) girt" (Lk.12:25). Proverbs calls these desires leeches whose two daughters are "Give! Give!" (Pr.30:15) Unmortified, desires rob the soul.

The Viper's Offspring

The offspring of the viper grow in the womb and eat their mother so they themselves can survive. They remain alive at the cost of her life. Unmortified desires, if not killed first, will kill the soul. "Surrender me not to shameless desires." (Sir.23:6)

Even when desires do not kill the soul, they make the soul unhappy toward herself, fruitless toward her neighbor and slothful toward God. Desires are like an infection, weakening the sick man and taking away his appetite. Many souls have no eagerness for virtues because their desires are not fixed on God.

1.11 REMOVING ALL VOLUNTARY DESIRES

Complete Freedom Needed for Union

It is legitimate to ask if all desires (large and small) must be mortified to reach perfection. Can those of little moment be let go? To have no affection for anything seems difficult.

Natural Desires

Certainly, all desires are not equally harmful. Also, I am speaking of voluntary desires. There are natural desires, which rise and the reason does not consent. These do little or no harm. To mortify these natural desires entirely in this life is impossible.

These desires do not hinder union because they come from nature and leave the rational soul free. The soul might even be in full union in the Prayer of Quiet while these desires dwell in the soul's sensual parts. The higher part of the soul has nothing to do with them.

Voluntary Desires

All voluntary desires (mortal sins, venial sins and imperfections) must be driven out. Divine union is the soul's transformation according to God's will and nothing in the soul must be contrary to God's will. All movement (interior and exterior) must be the will of God.

By divine union, God's will becomes the soul's will. A soul desiring any imperfection, would will what God does not will. For divine union, the soul must be free from the slightest desire, not knowingly consenting to imperfections.

I say "knowingly" because the soul can fall "unknowingly" into imperfections and venial sins, seven times a day, and still rise up. (Pr.24:16) Voluntary desires, however, are intentional venial sins and they can impede union. When mortified, these desires have less power. However, when not conquered, they become habits and prevent union.

Describing Habitual Imperfections

These habitual imperfections are common habits (such as much speaking or having a slight attachment) which the soul never wants to conquer. There are attachments to a person, a garment, a book, a room, a habit of gossip, certain foods, knowing certain things, etc. If the soul is attached to these imperfections they will hinder progress more than venial sins which do not come from a harmful attachment. A bird can be held by slender cord or a heavy one. If it doesn't break the cord, it cannot fly away. The slender cord, although easier to break must be broken to fly. An attached soul, even if possessing great virtue, will not gain this freedom of union.

The "sucking fish" clings to boats, making it impossible for them to sail. Some souls are rich vessels, laden with virtues, favors and good works. However, they are not resolved to break some affection and do not reach the port of perfection, even though they need only to snap the cord of desire and remove the "sucking fish".

Breaking the Final Cord

Although God helped these souls to break stronger cords (sins and vanities), they fail to gain the great blessing. They do not shake off some childish desire which God has asked them to conquer. Even worse, they fall back and lose what they had gained. They retrace the road they have walked. Not to go forward is to go back. “He who is not with me is against me.” (Mt.12:30)

If the cracked vessel is not fixed, all the liquid will be poured out. One imperfection leads to many more. A soul which does not correct one desire, will have many more desires coming from the same weakness. “A great fire comes from a single spark.” (Sir.11:32)

Indulging An Attachment

God has led some people into great detachment. Later, they indulge in some slight attachment. Under the pretext of zeal, they lose their spirituality and fall from joy. They end up losing everything because they held on to sensual desires and lost their solitude for God.

We must never take that road. A log of wood must be totally transformed into the fire, but a soul with an attachment will not be transformed. In the night of faith, the soul must be one with God’s will. If attached to creatures, it will not be ready for this divine transformation.

Examples From the Israelites

God told the Israelites not to make a pact with the inhabitants (Judges 2:3). When they made such a pact, God did not clear out these inhabitants, but left them as enemies. This happens with souls. God takes some souls out of the world, kills the giants (their sins) and destroys their enemies (the occasions of sin). Yet these souls maintain friendships with insignificant peoples (the imperfections). The Lord is angry and allows these enemies to remain.

God commanded Joshua to kill all the people and beasts in Jericho and to covet no spoils. (Jos.6:21) So, for a soul to enter divine union every attachment (great or small) must die. The soul must be without any desire but God’s will. “The time is short. Let those having wives act as not having them ... those buying as not owning ... those using the world as not using it fully.” (1Cor.7:29-31) Only by this complete detachment can the soul journey to God.

1.12 DESIRES THAT CAUSE THESE EVILS

Before teaching the manner of entrance, I want to treat of two possible questions.

1. Is any desire enough to deprive the soul of God’s grace?
2. Can a slight desire produce all of these evil effects, or do some desires produce some effects (as torment, darkness) and other desires produce other effects?

Various Levels of Desires

First, only voluntary desires that are mortal sins deprive the soul of grace. Second, all voluntary desires (mortal sins, venial sins and imperfections) can produce these five evils. There is one difference. Mortal sins produce total blindness and torment, while venial sins and imperfections do not cause the death of the soul. They produce evil according to how much they hinder grace.

Causing Evil

All desires produce all these evils. However, some desires produce certain evils directly and other evils indirectly. For example, the desire of avarice directly produces only misery. Vainglory directly produces blindness and darkness. Gluttony directly produces lukewarmness in virtue.

Virtue produces sweetness, peace, light, fortitude etc. An unruly desire produces fatigue, blindness and weakness. When the soul practices one virtue, all the virtues grow. When the soul practices one vice, all the vices grow. The indulged desire always leaves something behind. Therefore, every desire produces effects against some virtue.

John was commanded to eat the scroll which was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his belly (Rev. 10:9). Desires are sweet, but afterwards they leave a bitter taste. Although experience shows that this is true, some are so blind that they do not perceive this.

Involuntary Desires

Involuntary natural desires are initial temptations that are not consented to. These desires do not defile the soul and produce no evil. Rather, they bring the opposite advantages. By resisting the desires, the soul gains fortitude, purity and consolation. Virtue is made perfect in weakness (2Cor.12:9). Voluntary desires are different and do cause these evils. Spiritual directors must require their disciples to remain free of these desires.

1.13 HOW TO ENTER THE NIGHT OF THE SENSE

Active and Passive

The soul enters this night in an active and passive way. Actively, the soul does what he can. (I will teach this now.) Passively, the soul just remains patient while God acts. Here I present three teachings:

1. Reasons for calling this journey a “night”
2. The nature of this night
3. How many parts it has.
- 4.

Brief But Profitable

The following counsels are brief, but still profitable. Anyone sincerely desiring to practice them will need no further advice. All is included here.

The soul must have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything. To do this, he must meditate on Christ’s life and reject any sense pleasure which is not for God’s honor and glory. Christ desired only the will of His Father. He called this his meat and food (Jn.4:34). If a person has the opportunity to enjoy something sensual which is not for God’s glory, he should not desire the pleasure. He should avoid the pleasure or, at least, avoid the desire. Doing this, he empties the senses and gains much profit.

Calming the Natural Passions

There are four natural passions, joy, hope, fear and grief. To calm these passions, the soul should live by the following counsels.

Always prefer the most difficult, not the easiest; the most unpleasant, not the most delectable; what gives the least pleasure, not the most; what is wearisome; not what is restful; what is the least consoling, not the most; what is lowest, not what is most precious. For Christ’s sake, seek to have detachment concerning everything. If the soul embraces these acts with all his heart, she will quickly find great consolation and will act with discretion.

Three Other Acts

This is sufficient to enter the night of the sense. However, I will also describe three other ways to mortify the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life. From these three, all other desires proceed (1Jn.2:16).

The soul must do three things:

1. Act with contempt for self and desire that others do likewise
2. Speak against self and desire that others do likewise
3. Think lowly of self and desire that others do likewise

Instructions to Ascend the Mount

Detachment is both spiritual (interior) and sensual (exterior). Here, I will focus on sensual (exterior) detachment.

To arrive at pleasure, seek pleasure in nothing. To arrive at having all, seek to possess nothing. To arrive at being everything, seek to be nothing. To arrive at knowing everything, seek to know nothing. To arrive where you have no pleasure, go by a way where you have no pleasure. To arrive at what you do not know, go by a way you do not know. To arrive where you possess nothing, go by a way in which you do not possess. To arrive at what you are not, go by a way in which you are not.

Remember the following:

When your mind dwells upon anything, then you are ceasing to cast yourself upon the All. To pass from the all to the All, you must deny yourself totally in all. When you come to possess it fully, you must have it without desiring anything. If you have treasure in having all, you do not hold your treasure purely in God. In this detachment, the soul finds repose because it covets nothing. Nothing wearies it when it is lifted up. Nothing oppresses it when it is cast down. The soul is in the center of humility. However, the moment the soul covets, then it becomes wearied.

1.14 THE NEED FOR YEARNINGS

“Kindled in love with yearnings”

Qualities and Effects

Now, I must describe the night’s qualities and its wonderful effects. Then, I will explain the other part of the night.

Need For Greater Yearnings

Although through this dark night of sense, the soul is “kindled in love with yearnings”. The soul must experience a different and a greater enkindling toward the heavenly Bridegroom to conquer all desires for created pleasures. Finding satisfaction in these yearnings, the soul gains courage to deny all other appetites.

The sensual nature has yearns for sensual things. Therefore, the soul must experience greater spiritual yearnings to throw off this sensual yoke and to have the courage to remain in darkness, deprived of all desires.

Unable to Describe

I cannot describe the great variety of these spiritual yearnings nor the means they use to leave the house of self-will or how these yearnings make all the trials appear easy and sweet. So, I will just expound the remaining lines.

1.15 OH, HAPPY CHANCE!

Oh, happy chance! –
I went forth without being observed
My house being now at rest

The House at Rest

The soul has a “happy chance”. None of his jailers can hinder his release. By original sin, the soul is a captive in this mortal body, so its “going forth” is a “happy chance”. The soul is not engulfed by its desires, because it took advantage of the “dark night” (the mortifications of all desires). The “house” (the soul’s sensual part) is at rest. The desires are lulled to sleep. Now, the soul can go to true liberty and divine union.

End of First Book

BOOK TWO

This second book describes faith as the proximate means of ascending to divine union. This second part of the night belongs to the spirit and is described in the second stanza.

2.1 THE SECRET LADDER

In darkness and secure,
By the secret ladder, disguised –
Oh, happy chance –
In darkness and in concealment
My house being now at rest.

The Ladder of Faith

Stripped of all its spiritual imperfections and of its desires, the soul sings of its happy chance. The happiness is greater because of the greater difficulty of entering this interior darkness. Detached from all sensual and spiritual things, the soul must lean on faith alone to ascend to God.

This ladder is secret. Its rungs are hidden from sense and understanding. The soul has remained in darkness and has ascended this divine ladder of faith to the heights of God.

Hidden From Satan

The soul travels “disguised”. With its garments changed into the Divine, the soul is not impeded by reason, and is so hidden from the devil’s deceit that it travels “in darkness and concealment”. Faith is darkness to the devil.

The soul, “in darkness and secure”, is filled with the happiness of journeying by faith. Leaving behind all natural and spiritual reasoning, the soul journeys very securely. Its spiritual and rational parts are at rest. When the soul attains divine union, these faculties will remain at rest.

Need For Faith

Before this stage, the soul needed yearnings of sense love. Now the soul must deny all desires and in pure faith, enjoy a union of simplicity with the Beloved.

In its sensual part, the soul went forth in “a dark night”. Now, in its spiritual part, the soul goes forth “in darkness”. Darkness is a greater obscurity than a dark night because nothing can be seen).

In the night of the sense, some light is present. In the night of the spirit, the soul is deprived of all light. Traveling “in darkness and secure”, the soul uses its own ability less and is more secure in faith. The second book will explain this.

2.2 THE SECOND PART OF THE NIGHT

The Midnight of Faith.

In the second part of this night, faith, leads the soul to God, Who then causes the third part of the night. This stage of faith is like midnight, darker than the first or third part.

Because the third part precedes the dawn, it is closer to the daylight. In this third part, God illumines the soul by supernatural means and begins the perfect union. Therefore, it is less dark.

The Darkest Part

Belonging to the higher, spiritual part of man, the night of faith is darker than the night of sense. It is also more obscure, blinding the soul and depriving it of the light of reason. It is obviously equal to midnight.

I must prove how this second stage of faith is night to the soul. Also, I must describe what is contrary to it and how the soul must actively prepare to enter it.

2.3 FAITH IS A DARK NIGHT

An Excessive Light

Faith is a habit of the soul. It is certain, yet obscure, because God’s revealed truths transcend all natural human understanding. This excessive light of faith is thick darkness to the soul. It overwhelms all other lights. Just as the sun blinds us because its light goes beyond our power to see, so, this excessive greatness of faith blinds the understanding (whose power extends only to natural knowledge).

Sense Knowledge

A man knows things through his senses and stores them in forms and likenesses. A man understands only what he has experienced. A man born blind cannot understand colors. He only knows their names.

Faith – Beyond the Senses

Faith tells the soul what it has never seen and the soul has no likeness because they are truths of faith which have no relationship to any of our senses. “Faith comes from hearing” (Rom.10:17), not from any other sense.

Faith transcends these examples. It gives no information and no knowledge. It even blinds us to all other knowledge and information. Natural knowledge is acquired by understanding, but faith is acquired without the illumination of the understanding. The understanding must be darkened, so faith is not lost. “If you do not believe, you will not understand” (Is.7:9)

In the Dark

When this faith gives light the soul perceives darkness. The more faith darkens the soul, the more light it receives. A cloud separated the Israelites from the Egyptians (Ex.14:20). Although this cloud was full of darkness, it gave light to the night.

Faith is a dark cloud to the soul, depriving it of natural light. However, it also gives light to the soul's darkness. Only someone in darkness can save a man in. "One night to the next imparts knowledge" (Ps.19:2). God reveals His Son to the angels and saints so they can enjoy Him. However, on earth, faith is night because the soul does not yet see God and has become blind to natural light.

Need For Darkness

"Night will be my illumination in my delights." (Ps. 138:11), that is, faith will guide me in the delights of contemplation and in union with God. The soul must walk in faith to receive light for the road.

2.4 DARKNESS AS A GUIDE

The Need for Darkness

Two things are clear. First, faith is a dark night to the soul. Second, the soul must be in darkness so faith can guide it to union. I will describe this darkness which the soul needs so it can enter the abyss of faith. Later, I will describe how the soul must act so it does not stray from the path or impede God.

The soul must be in darkness concerning both sensual things and those spiritual things which pertain to the natural faculties. To gain spiritual transformation, the soul must be carried far away from what is sensual and rational, because the supernatural soars above the natural.

Need For Emptiness

Although the soul cannot comprehend this transformation, it must voluntarily empty itself of all desires that can enter in. Nothing can prevent God from doing His will if the soul is annihilated and detached, even from spiritual experiences. The soul must be a blind man, guided only by dark faith and not dependent upon what he understands, experiences or feels. These will lead him astray because faith is above all of these. Faith must blind the soul so it gains the greater good of God Himself.

Need For Blindness

A partially blind man accepts no guide and chooses his own direction. This is a like the soul who relies upon his experiences of God, rather than upon God Himself. This soul will go astray (or come to a standstill) because he refuses to be a blind man led by faith.

"To approach God it is necessary to believe that He is." (Heb.11:16) To journey to union, the soul must believe in God's Being. To gain union, a soul must not walk by understanding, by experience or by imagination, because God's Being is not perceptible to sense or to reason.

Whatever can be felt or experienced of God is infinitely remote from God and from possessing Him. "Eye has not seen and ear has not heard and it has not entered the human heart to conceive what God has prepared for those who love him." (Is.64:4 and 1Cor.2:5)

Impeded by Clinging

In this life, the soul must aspire to be perfectly united by grace, so that in heaven it can be perfectly united by glory. To attain that union of grace, the soul must be in darkness concerning all that can enter through the eye or ear or be imagined by the heart. A soul clinging to understanding or imagination (or any act of its own) is greatly impeded from reaching union with God because lies beyond all that can be known or experienced. The soul must pass from knowing to unknowing.

Walking in the No Way

To enter upon the road is to leave the road. Or better, to gain the goal (God), the soul must leave its own way for what is no way. The soul must no longer have any methods and not be attached to its ways of understanding, perceiving and feeling.

If the soul has the courage to pass beyond its own limitations, it can enter into supernatural limits. To arrive at these limits is to leave these limits, going out from its lowly estate to the highest estate.

Leaving Experiences Behind

Passing beyond all that can be known (spiritually and naturally), the soul will desire what cannot be known in this life. Leaving behind all its experiences, the soul will desire what surpasses all experiences. To remain free, the soul must not cling to what it receives (either spiritually or sensually).

If a soul esteems any spiritual or sensual experiences, it loses the supreme good. As the soul puts away these experiences, it approaches the highest good. The soul makes progress toward union by faith because a soul desiring to see or experience God is in darkness concerning God.

If the soul blinds its own faculties, it can see the light. "I have come so that those who don't see, might see, and those who do see, might become blind." (Jn.9:39) The soul that is blinded to its own lights will see supernaturally. The soul that depends on its own lights will be blind and will halt upon this road to union.

I will now describe the nature of the soul's union with God. Although this will interrupt the thread of our teaching, it will illustrate what is being described. So, the following chapter is somewhat parenthetical.

2 5 DESCRIBING THE UNION

What Won't Be Explained

I will not describe the union according to the understanding, the will and the memory, or to describe what is permanent and what is transitory. That will be explained gradually as we go along.

Here, I will describe the permanent and total union in the soul's substance and faculties. This is an obscure habit of union because, in this life, a permanent, actual union of the faculties with God is impossible. On earth, this union can only be transient.

Two Different Unions

God is substantially present in every soul (even the greatest sinner). Without this union, every creature would cease to exist. Please understand, I am not speaking of God's substantial union with every creature (which happens all the time) I am speaking of a union which happens only when there is love. The first union is natural and I call it an essential union. The second union is supernatural and I call it a union of likeness.

This union of likeness happens when the soul's will and God's will are conformed. This occurs when nothing in the soul is repugnant to God. Then, the soul is transformed in God through love.

Casting Out What is Not God

Both the voluntary acts of imperfections and the habits of imperfections must be annihilated. Also, the soul must be stripped of everything created, including its own actions and its own abilities (of understanding, perception and feeling). When everything unlike God is cast out, the soul can receive God's likeness. When only God's will remains, the soul will be transformed.

Natural and Supernatural

Although God's presence always conserves the soul's natural being, He does not always communicate supernatural being, which is given only by grace. Those who have grace possess supernatural being in different degrees. God communicates Himself most to those who have progressed most in love, the soul whose will most conforms with God's will. The soul with total conformity is totally transformed supernaturally.

The more a soul is attached to creatures, the less prepared it is for union. Such a soul does not give God a complete opportunity to supernaturally transform it. Therefore, the soul must strip itself so God can communicate Himself supernaturally.

Born of God

Only God gives this power. This birth does not come by human choice, by man's decision, by natural temperament, by natural ability or by man's natural faculties. Being sons of God comes only to those born of God (Jn.1:13).

By dying to the natural, these receive an adoption which transcends all imagination. "Unless a man is born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (Jn.3:5) To see the Kingdom of God is the state of perfection. To be born again of the Spirit is to have a soul like God, with no mixture of imperfection. Only in this way does transformation happen.

The Sun and the Window

Let me give an example. If sunlight strikes a window that is stained in any way, the sun cannot transform the window totally. The sun will illumine the window to the degree that it is free from stain. This failure is due to the stains on the window. If totally clean, the window would give the same light as the sun. The soul is like the window and God's Divine light is always upon it.

The soul which is perfectly united with God's will is immediately transformed when God communicates His supernatural Being. The soul appears to be God Himself and have all that God has. God and the soul are one by a supernatural transformation. The soul seems to be God more than a soul, and, indeed, is God by participation. The soul's transformed natural being is still distinct from God's Being (just as the window remains distinct from the sun).

Prepared By Detachment

The soul does not prepare for divine union by knowing or experiencing something about God. It prepares by perfect resignation and detachment. Perfect transformation requires perfect purity.

Another comparison. A perfect picture has many beauties. However, a person with unclear vision will miss many of these beauties. Someone with more refined vision will see more and whoever has the purest vision will see the most.

Degree of Enlightenment

Every soul attains divine union in a different degree. This degree depends on what the Lord wants to give. In heaven, all souls see God, and are content and satisfied. Yet, some see more and others less.

On earth, some souls have a higher degree of union than others, but all are satisfied according to their capacity. However, a soul which has not gained its full measure of purity has not gained the detachment required for simple union.

2.6 THE WORK OF FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY

Three Virtues and Three Faculties

Faith, hope and charity affect the three faculties of understanding, memory and will respectively. These virtues bring three faculties into this spiritual night by producing the needed emptiness and darkness in each faculty. Faith works in the understanding; hope in the memory and charity in the will. The understanding perfects the darkness of faith. The emptiness of hope purifies the memory and charity buries the will by detaching the soul from every desire.

The soul must walk through this night by depending on these three virtues which empty it of everything. The soul cannot reach union through understanding, enjoyment, imagination or sense. Transformation comes only through faith in the intellect, hope in the memory and love in the will.

The Work of the Three Virtues

These virtues empty the faculties. Faith causes darkness (in the understanding). Hope causes emptiness (in the memory) and charity causes detachment from all that is not God (in the will).

Faith affirms what the intellect cannot understand. The understanding must consent to them by a faith which brings not clearness but obscurity.

Hope relates to what is not possessed and it makes the memory dark concerning earthly and heavenly things. "Hope that is seen is not hope." (Rom.8:24)

Charity causes emptiness by obliging us to love God above all things by withdrawing all our desires. "Whoever does not renounce all things, cannot be my disciple." (Lk.14:33) Therefore, these three virtues bring the soul into emptiness and obscurity.

Scriptural Stories

A man sought three loaves from his friend at midnight. (Lk.11:5-8) The three loaves are the three virtues. Midnight shows that the soul must gain these virtues in the night.

Isaiah saw two angels with six wings at God's side (6:2). Two wings covered their feet (binding the will's desires). Two covered their eyes (the darkness of the understanding). With two wings they flew (the soul raised above all that is not of God).

Describing a Method

We must lead our understanding, memory and will to these virtues of faith, hope and charity so they can be set in darkness. This is the active spiritual night. The soul must do all it can to enter it. In the night of sense, the soul had to empty all its desires for sensual things. Now I will describe a method by which the soul allows faith, hope and charity to set the intellect, memory and will in darkness.

This method is secure against the devil and against self-love. Many souls who do not know how to use these three virtues, do not journey by the straightest and shortest road. I am speaking to those who have entered the state of contemplation. I am not speaking to beginners (who need a fuller explanation).

2.7 THE NARROW ROAD TO ETERNAL LIFE

I describe the detachment caused by these three virtues, so I can make clear to spiritual persons how narrow is the road that leads to life. The soul must realize the emptiness to which it must abandon its faculties in this night.

Narrow Gate and Narrow Road

“How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. Those who find it are few.” (Mt.7:14) “How” means that the gate is more narrow than you think. Jesus mentions that even the gate (not just the road) is narrow. The gate, (which is Christ) is the beginning. So, from the very beginning, the soul must be detached from sensual things and must love God above all. This belongs to the night of sense.

Jesus also says that the road (the way of perfection) is narrow. To enter the gate, the soul must empty itself of sensual things. To continue on the road, the soul must be emptied of spiritual things. The gate pertains to the sensual desires, and the road to the rational faculties.

“Few” gain the goal because few desire to enter into complete detachment and emptiness. Because this path leads to the top, the traveler must not be burdened either by lower things or by higher things. God alone must be the object of the search.

Free From Sense and Spirit

The traveler must be free from sensual and from what belongs to the spirit. Our Lord taught this but many spiritual persons do not follow it. “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel will save it.” (Mk.8:34-35)

A spiritual person who understands and practices this counsel, would realize how different they must act on this road than they think. Some believe that reformation of life suffices. Others are content with virtue, prayer and mortification. However, these never attain to detachment, poverty, selflessness or spiritual purity (which are all the same thing).

They prefer to feed and clothe their natural selves with spiritual feelings. Instead, they should be stripping themselves. They sacrifice worldly things without annihilating their spiritual attachments.

Solid Spirituality

When confronted this solid spirituality of aridity and trial (the true cross of Christ), they flee and seek sweet communion with God. This is spiritual gluttony not self-denial. Spiritually, they are enemies of the cross of Christ because true spirituality seeks what is distasteful, not delectable. It inclines to suffering, not to consolation. It seeks to endure **aridities**, not sweet communications.

The soul knows that to follow Christ is not to seek self. To seek God's favors is to seek self. To seek God is to forsake favors, to renounce refreshments and to choose what is most distasteful, in both the world and in God.

Annihilation In Everything

Our Lord desires this self denial that be carried very far! Self-denial, death and annihilation is all that the soul esteems. Whoever possesses or seeks anything for himself will lose what he seeks. Whoever renounces his desires will gain his everything.

John and James sought their own glory. Jesus offered them his chalice to drink (which is more precious than earthly enjoyment). Jesus' chalice is death through self-annihilation so the soul can travel the narrow path. By spiritual annihilation, the soul is not hindered. The cross is the staff by which the road is made easy.

Relief in the Trials

The Lord said, "My yoke is easy and my burden (the cross) is light." If a man resolves to carry his cross (to bear all trials) these trials will give great relief and sweetness by which he can continue to travel. If he desires to possess anything (even what comes from God) he has not stripped himself. He is unable to walk the narrow road or to climb upward.

I want to convince spiritual persons. This road does not consist of multiple meditations or methods, or consolations (which may be necessary for beginners). Only one thing is needed - the ability to deny oneself, giving self over to suffering and total annihilation for Christ. The soul which practices this annihilation will gain everything.

Profitless Spiritual Exercises

If the soul lacks this detachment, then using spiritual methods is just beating the bush. Their meditations are profitless, even if they are lofty as the angels! Progress comes from imitating Christ, because no one comes to the Father except through Him (Jn.16:6). Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved" (Jn.10:9). A spirituality that walks in sweetness and flees an imitation of Christ crucified is worthless.

Christ's Self-Dying

We come to Christ by dying to our natural selves. Even during His life, Christ died to sense, saying that He had nowhere to rest His head. We must die as Christ died, both in sense and in spirit.

At the moment of death, Christ was annihilated in soul and deprived of any consolation. He experienced in aridity in His lower nature. "My God! My God! Why have You forsaken me?" (Matt.27:46) The cross was the moment of Our Lord's complete annihilation concerning His human reputation (men mocked him), his nature (which died) and the protection of His Father (who abandoned Him).

Christ united mankind to God by being reduced to nothing. "I was reduced to nothing and did not understand." (Ps.73:22) The spiritual man must understand the mystery of the gate and the way. He must be completely annihilated in the sensual and the spiritual, so he can be completely united with God.

Death of Sense and Spirit

When the soul is reduced to nothing, a spiritual union takes place between the soul and God. This union does not consist of consolations and spiritual feelings but of death both inwardly and outwardly.

Speaking to Christ's Friends

I will not go any further because those who consider themselves Christ's friends really know Him very little. They seek Him in consolations. Because they love themselves, they do not love Christ's trials. I am speaking of those who consider themselves Christ's friends. I am not speaking about worldly men who live far from Christ. I make no mention of them because they will be judged bitterly on the Last Day.

I am speaking to the spiritual man whom God has led into a state of contemplation, so he can go toward God in faith and enter this narrow path of obscure contemplation.

2.8 CREATED KNOWLEDGE NOT A MEANS TO UNION

An Impediment

First, I want to show that no created or imagined thing can be a proper means of union. If the soul clings to what its understanding has gained, then this knowledge is an impediment to union. Later, I will show the evils that come if the soul clings to knowledge instead of faith.

A Proportioned Means

All means must be proportioned to and have some resemblance to their goal. To enter a city, a man must take a road that leads there. When fire touches wood, the wood gains some resemblance to the fire. Wood doused in water will never catch fire. To be united with God, the understanding must use means that resemble God.

All creatures (high or low) have some relation to God and bear a Divine resemblance. Yet, no essential connection exists between creatures and God because the distance between the creature's being and God's being is infinite. Therefore, the understanding cannot gain divine union through creatures.

Many scriptural texts teach this. The psalms say, "O God, your way is in the holy place" (76:14). The approach to God must be holy and in the purity of faith. "What God is there so great as our God?" (Ps.87:13) What angel is so exalted that a man can approach God through him? "The Lord is high and looks on lowly things. High things he knows from afar" (Ps.138:6). God's own Being is so lofty that He sees earthly things as lowly. Even heavenly things are very far from His Being. No creature, then, can be an adequate means to union.

Not A Proximate Means of Union

All that the imagination can imagine and all that the reason can understand cannot be a proximate means of union. The understanding grasps only the forms and images which come from the senses. Natural intelligence is not a means of acquiring divine union.

In the supernatural realm, the understanding can receive clear knowledge of God only in heaven. Moses sought this clear knowledge, but God said, “No man shall see me and stay alive” (Ex.33:20). John said, “No man has ever seen God” (Jn.1:18). Paul and Isaiah say “Eye has not seen” (1Cor.2:9 and Is. 64:4).

Moses could not understand God’s presence at the burning bush (Acts 7:32). Elijah covered his face in God’s presence on the mount (1Kg.19:13). Man’s understanding is blind. Whatever he understands is completely unlike God.

Understanding, Will and Memory

On earth, supernatural knowledge cannot be a proximate means to union with God’s love. All that the reason understands, what the will relishes and what the imagination creates, bears no resemblance to God. “To whom can you liken God? Will the iron worker be able to make a graven image or he who works in gold, a golden one, or the silversmith, a silver one?” (Is.40:18-19)

The iron worker signifies the understanding producing rational forms. The goldsmith signifies the will, desiring the figures of pleasure. The silversmith signifies the memory inventing images. Isaiah says that the understanding really understands nothing; that the will tastes no pleasure resembling God and that the memory cannot represent Him. None of these can lead directly to God. To reach God, the soul must desire not to understand. To approach divine light, the soul must set itself in darkness rather than open its eyes.

Secret Wisdom

Contemplation gives the soul its loftiest knowledge of God. This is a wisdom which is secret even to the soul receiving it. St. Dionysius calls this a ray of darkness. To reach union, the understanding must be blind to all possible paths. God is total darkness to us just as the sun is darkness to a bat’s eyes. Paul writes, “The lofty things of God are the least known to men” (1Cor.2:9-10).

The understanding has no ladder to reach God, and the soul must know that creatures are not a proximate means to divine union. If the intellect uses creatures, they become a source of errors and delusions.

2.9 SCRIPTURES TEXTS ON FAITH

The understanding must be detached from everything sensual. The soul must silence the intellect and must lean totally on faith, because the likeness between faith and God is so close that there exists only the difference between believing in God and seeing Him.

Role of Faith

God is infinite and faith alone acknowledges that God is infinite. God is three and one, and faith sets God before us as three and one. God is darkness to our understanding and faith blinds our understanding. Only by faith does God manifest His Divine light (which surpasses all our understanding).

The greater the faith, the more the soul is united with God. “Whoever will be united to God, must believe.” (Heb.11:6). The understanding is blind. The psalm says, “He set darkness under His feet. He rose above the cherubim and flew upon the wings of the winds. He made darkness His hiding place” (Ps.18: 9-11).

God and Darkness

Setting “darkness beneath His feet” and “making darkness His hiding place” show that God is concealed in the obscurity of faith. “He rose above the cherubim” means God soars above all understanding. The “wings of the wind” signify our lofty conceptions which cannot attain to God’s Being.

After Solomon completed his temple, God filled it with darkness and the Israelites could not see. Then, Solomon exclaimed, “The Lord promised that He would dwell in darkness.” (1Kg.8:12). In darkness, God appeared to Moses. God spoke with Job “from the darkness of the air” (Job 38:1). Darkness signifies God’s hidden presence in the obscurity of faith. There will be no darkness of faith only when “that which is perfect has come” (1Cor.13:10).

Gideon’s army had lamps concealed by pitchers. When the pitchers were broken, the light was seen. These pitchers symbolize faith, which both contains and hides the light. At death, this faith is broken and allows the divine light to appear.

Seeking the Darkness

To attain union with God, the soul must unite itself to the darkness of Solomon’s Temple. It must have Gideon’s jars in its hands. When death breaks the pitchers, the soul will see God face to face in glory.

I must now describe the types of knowledge received by the understanding, as well as the hindrance and harm that can happen. In this way, the soul will know how to act and gains profit, from what comes from the senses and the spirit .

2.10 THE TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Natural and Supernatural Knowledge

I want to teach about the profit (or harm) which comes to the soul through the ideas of the understanding. To do this, I must describe the divisions of all ideas (natural and supernatural

The understanding receives knowledge from both natural and supernatural sources. Natural knowledge comes from the bodily senses or the intellectual powers. The supernatural comes from what is beyond all natural powers.

Supernatural knowledge is either corporal or spiritual. The corporeal supernatural knowledge comes from the exterior bodily senses or the interior bodily senses (such as imagination). The supernatural knowledge can be distinct (particular) knowledge or it can be vague (general) knowledge.

Distinct and Obscure

The distinct supernatural knowledge comes to the spirit in four ways. These are visions, revelations, locutions and spiritual feelings. The obscure supernatural knowledge comes only from contemplation. The distinct supernatural knowledge leads the soul to contemplation. Then, the soul must become detached from these means.

2.11 HARM WHICH CAN COME

In this chapter I will teach only of supernatural knowledge which comes through the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching.

Spiritual Unction

The person can see forms of dead persons in eternity, of saints, of good and bad angels and of extraordinary brightnesses. They can supernaturally hear words from other persons (whom they see or do not see). They can supernaturally smell the sweetest of perfumes. They can supernaturally taste the sweetest savors and experience the greatest delights of touch. They can be bathed in delights and their bones sing in joy. This is called “spiritual unction”, which flows from their spirit to bodily members. This sensible sweetness comes to spiritual persons according to their capacity.

Do Not Rely On Them

Although God gives these experiences, we must never rely on them. We must flee them (even without discerning if they are good or evil). The more bodily they are, the less certainly they come from God. God communicates more habitually with our spirit (where there is security and profit) rather than with our senses (where there is danger and deception). The senses judge these spiritual things by feelings. However, the senses do not know spiritual things anymore than an animal knows rational things.

The Dangers

To esteem these bodily experiences places the soul in danger of deception. To cling to them is a total hindrance to spirituality. The soul must suppose that these experiences are from the devil rather than from God, because the devil’s influence on the exterior senses can more easily deceive us.

Exterior experiences profit less than spiritual ones. Although these experiences give some spiritual profit (because God gives them), they would give greater profit if their source was interior and spiritual. Also, they can cause presumption and vanity. Because these experiences are readily felt, the soul tends to give them more value. Also, the soul often seeks them and leaves faith behind, believing that these experiences are a good guide. If the soul pays attention to these, it will stray from the true way of faith.

A Secret Complacency

Experiencing these extraordinary gifts, the soul feels a secret complacency, thinking it is important in God’s eyes. This offends humility. Also, the devil gives a secret satisfaction to the soul, communicating figures of saints, beautiful lights, dissembled words, the sweetest perfumes, delicious tastes and experiences of touch. By getting the soul to desire these experiences, he leads it into evil.

Therefore, these feelings must always be rejected (even if they come from God). He is not offended by this rejection because, the soul will still receive the fruit which God desires.

God Produces Effects

The reason is this. A corporeal vision or any sensual feeling given by God produces its effects the moment it is felt, even before the soul can decide to accept it or reject it. God gives these gifts with

no effort from the soul. God also produces the effects independent of the soul's capacity. The gift comes about passively. Acceptance or non-acceptance is not the soul's decision.

Fire applied to a naked body burns the person, whether he accepts it or not. Even if the soul does not desire these experiences, good visions have their effect because they work chiefly on the soul and not on the body.

Effects of the Devil's Work

The devil's visions and representations (even without the soul's consent) cause disturbance, aridity, vanity and presumption in the spirit. However, the devil's acts cannot work evil without the soul's consent. The devil can only touch the soul in its first movements. After this, the soul itself must give consent. These diabolical actions cannot continue unless the soul lacks prudence and allows them.

God's visions are different. They penetrate and the soul cannot resist their effects (even if it tried) anymore than a window can resist the sun's rays.

Six Harmful Results

The soul that desires to receive these experiences will suffer six kinds of harm (even if the experiences come from God):

1. Faith will grow less. With eyes opened to these sensual favors, the soul withdraws from faith (the only means of union).
2. They become a hindrance to the spirit. By accepting them, the soul will rest in them and cannot soar to the invisible. Mary Magdalene was forbidden to touch Jesus' feet after the resurrection, so she would grow in faith.
3. The soul becomes attached to these experiences and makes no progress toward resignation.
4. Focusing on the unimportant sensual aspects, the soul loses the inner spiritual effects that God intends by these favors. If the soul rejects sensual aspects, it will gain the spiritual profit.
5. By claiming a right to these experiences, the soul gains no profit. God does not give these favors so the soul can seek them. Also, the soul should not believe that they are from God.
6. A readiness to accept favors opens the door to the devil who can deceive the soul by similar experiences, because he knows how to disguise his actions. He can transform himself into an angel of light (2Cor.11:14). I will teach about this problem under spiritual gluttony.

Rejecting Everything

The soul always does well to close its eyes to these experiences (whatever their source). Otherwise, the devil will have an open door. His visions will replace God's visions and he will have all power and God will have none.

Many ignorant souls have found it difficult to return to God in pure faith. Many others were unable to return because the devil had securely rooted them in himself. By rejecting the devil's visions, the soul avoids his errors. By rejecting God's visions, the soul offers no hindrance to faith and still harvests its fruit.

When the soul opens the door to spiritual experiences, God withholds these visions because the soul is becoming attached. Also, where the devil finds an opportunity, he increases his own visions.

However, when the soul rejects the visions, the devil desists and causes no harm. Then, God can increase His favors in the lowly soul, as He did to the faithful servant in the parable (Mt.25:21).

Fruits of Humility

If the soul is humble, God will raise the soul, step by step. First, He gives unpretentious favors according to the soul's small capacity. When the soul receives these first morsels with moderation, God grants more and better food. If the soul conquers the devil at the first step, it moves through all seven mansions (cf. St. Teresa's Interior Castle), until the Spouse brings the soul into the wine cellar of perfect love.

The War

Happy the soul that can fight the seven-headed beast (Rev.13:1) which makes war against the soul in each mansion. By acting against each of these seven heads, the soul gains the victory, passing from one mansion to the next and leaving the beast vanquished. In Revelation (13:7) John says that the beast was given the power to overcome the saints at each of these seven steps. He has weapons in each mansion.

How sad that many do not even destroy the beast's first head by rejecting the world's sensual things. Others do not destroy the second head, namely these sensual visions. Most lamentable is that some have conquered the third head of interior sense experiences. They have gone past the stage of meditation but yet are overcome at the moment of entering into purity of spirit. At this point, the devil's first head comes back to life and the soul's last state is worse than its first. When the soul falls back, the devil brings seven others worse than himself (Lk.11:16).

Entering the Early Mansions

To enter the first and second mansion, the soul must destroy the beast's first and second head. He must deny himself the delights which belong to the outward senses. To enter the first and second mansion the soul must not desire what comes from the senses (and, therefore, subtracts from faith).

Clearly these visions are not means to divine union since they bear no resemblance to God. When the soul seeks these revelations, it gives the devil a great opportunity to make the soul ignorant and lead it into temptations.

First Thoughts

I have written extensively to give light about the other favors, which I will treat more briefly. Otherwise I would never end. I will just say that we should never receive these visions, except occasionally and on the advice of another. This permission should be rarely given. Even then, I have no desire for them. I have said enough.

2.12 BEING DETACHED FROM THE IMAGINATION

The Natural Workings

Before teaching about supernatural visions in the imagination, I must treat of the imagination's natural powers. We then can proceed from the exterior to the interior until we reach the most interior recollection (where the soul is united with God). We have already treated of detachment from the sensual desires and from the supernatural favors that affect the exterior senses.

Here, I speak of two interior bodily senses, called imagination and fancy. One is discursive and the other forms images. For our discussion, we will call these two powers the imagination. The imagination can have both supernatural and natural images. The supernatural images come passively, without any personal effort. We call these imaginary visions and they are produced supernaturally. I will discuss these later. There are also natural imaginations, which the soul actively fashions into images.

Detachment From Meditation

By the imagination, the soul practices meditation. A soul can imagine Christ crucified or God seated upon a throne or even the light of glory. The soul can imagine natural things or divine things. To attain divine union, the soul must cast out all these forms because these imaginings (like the objects of the five senses) cannot be the proximate means of union.

The reason is this. The imagination can only fashion what it has experienced through the exterior senses. It composes likenesses of what it has seen or heard. A man might imagine palaces of gold but his images are less than the reality of gold. No created image can bear any proportion to God's Being and nothing imagined can be a proximate means to union. (Note: Later, St. John of the Cross will give teaching on when the soul should set aside these images.)

Going Beyond Meditation

Whoever imagines God in these forms (as a great fire or as brightness) and thinks that these images are like God, is far from approaching him. These meditative forms are necessary to beginners because meditation can also serve as a remote means to union. However, the soul must pass through these images to reach spiritual repose. While profiting from meditation, the soul must not remain there forever. Otherwise, they will never reach divine union.

Stairs have nothing to do with what is at the top. They are just the means to reach the next floor. A climber leaves the stairs behind and does not desire to remain on one of them. Otherwise, he would never reach the peaceful room that is his goal.

The soul attains to this life of union by the stairs of meditation. To reach the goal the soul must put the stairs behind. St. Paul said, "We ought not think that the divinity is like an image fashioned by human art and imagination." (Acts 17:29) God is not like anything which our imagination can fashion.

Errors of Spiritual Persons

Although approaching God by images and meditation is necessary for beginners, God wants to lead souls to spiritual blessings which are more interior and invisible. To do this, he removes souls from the sweetness of meditation. Unfortunately, souls grow accustomed to meditation and are unable to detach themselves from these methods.

So, the soul works hard to use meditations and spiritual scenes. The soul labors greatly but aridity and weariness increase. The soul finds no pleasure and does not enjoy this sensual food, because it needs another food, more delicate, more interior and less sensual.

Resting At the Goal

The soul must not labor with the imagination but remain in quiet. As the soul makes greater progress, the faculties will cease to operate and the soul can focus on one general, pure act. The

faculties were journeying to a place. Since the soul has arrived, the journey is over. The motion must stop, so the soul can enjoy the goal.

However, instead of being filled with God's peace, the soul leaves this tranquility, goes back to exterior things and retraces the ground it has already walked (all to no purpose). The soul abandons the goal and clings to meditation which was the means to the goal. This causes great suffering and resumes work that is already completed.

The Faculties Are Passive

Not being acquainted with this new experience, souls think that they are idle. They withdraw from quiet and try to meditate. They suffer aridity because they seek pleasure where they can no longer find it. The more they work, the less they receive. They leave the greater for the lesser and are drawn further away from spiritual peace. They are retracing steps and accomplishing what is already done.

These souls must abide lovingly in the state of quiet and pay no attention to the imagination. The faculties are working passively, receiving what God works in them. If they do work, it is without effort or by elaborate meditation. They are moved more by God than by their own faculties (as will later be explained). For now, these souls will make further progress by detaching themselves from the works of the imagination. They need this detachment to truly profit.

When the Right Time

I will teach how and when this should happen in the next chapter. I will show the signs by which a spiritual person can know when to stop journeying by meditation and imagination.

2.13 WHEN TO LEAVE MEDITATION BEHIND

The spiritual person must know the right time to lay aside meditation and imaginary forms. This should be neither sooner nor later than when the Spirit leads. The soul certainly must set aside meditation to journey to God. However, if the soul does this too early, it will go backward. For beginners, these imaginations are the remote means, needed to dispose them to spirituality. Meditation voids the senses of lower images (temporal, worldly and natural). Therefore, I will explain signs and examples so the spiritual person can know whether or not to set aside meditation.

First Sign

The first sign is that the soul cannot meditate or reason with his imagination. Formerly his senses experienced a sweetness in meditation. Now, he now finds aridity. When a soul still finds a sweetness in meditation, he should not leave it, unless he is led into a quiet (which I will describe later).

Second Sign

The second sign is a lack of desire to fix his mind or imagination upon any interior or exterior object. The imagination continues to move freely but the soul does not find pleasure in fixing it upon a particular scene.

Third Sign

The third (and surest sign) is that the soul takes pleasure in being alone and in waiting upon God, with no particular meditation. There is an inward peace and rest, without any acts of the faculties

(memory, understanding and will). There are no discursive acts and no passing from one thing to another. The soul is alone. There is attentiveness and a loving knowledge without the soul having any particular understanding of what it is contemplating.

All Three Signs

The spiritual person must see all three signs before abandoning meditation for contemplation. The first sign alone (an inability to meditate) is not sufficient reason to abandon meditation because this might be due to distractions or to lack of diligence. The second sign (no desire to even think of these things) must also be present. When the inability to meditate is due to lukewarmness and distraction, the soul still has the desire to fix the imagination.

The first and the second signs are not enough. Even though the soul cannot meditate and has no desire to think upon God's things, this state might come from melancholy or from physical illness or, the soul might just prefer a state of daydreaming. There must also be the third sign – a loving attentiveness to God in peace.

Unaware At First

At first the soul is not aware of this new state, for two reasons. First, this loving knowledge is subtle, delicate and almost imperceptible. Second, the soul is used to meditating and is hardly conscious of this new, imperceptible, purely spiritual condition. Not understanding this, the soul does not allow itself to rest. The inner peace is abundant but the soul does not enjoy it. It seeks what it used to have.

If the soul allows itself to rest, it will grow more conscious of this loving general knowledge of God and will enjoy this delight (which comes without any labor). In the next chapter, I will explain why these three signs are necessary for the soul to journey to pure spirit.

2.14 THREE NEEDED SIGNS

The First Sign – Two Reasons

There are two reasons why the person no longer takes pleasure in meditating and is unable to reason. First, the soul has already acquired from meditation all the spiritual good that it can receive. The soul found sweetness in meditation because it had not yet reached the level of spirituality intended by God. In general, spiritual pleasure, accompanies a spiritual blessing. In this way, the soul profits from the blessing. As the philosophers say “What is palpable, also nourishes”. Job asks, “Can an insipid thing be eaten without salt?” (6:6) Now, God does not allow the soul to meditate, to show that there is little profit in these acts.

Secondly, the soul has accomplished the purpose of meditation, namely, to gain knowledge and love for God. By meditating faithfully, the soul has gained this habitual knowledge of God.

No Need to Work Hard

God wants the soul to have this knowledge without making any meditative acts. So, He places the soul in contemplation. What the soul used to gain slowly (by meditation) has now become its habitual state. This knowledge is general, not distinct. God brings the water and the soul drinks peacefully. Before, the soul had to work hard for this water. Now, the soul immediately makes loving and passive acts of knowledge. The soul drinks God's wisdom with delight.

Laboring in Vain

When directors ask souls to make particular acts, they feel a weariness. It is like forcing a child who enjoys milk from the breast to gain its own food. Or, like forcing someone who has already peeled the orange and is enjoying its fruit to peel the outside again. The soul leaves the prize already gained.

Many souls who enter contemplation make this mistake. They think prayer must always consist of reasoning and forming images. They think they are wasting time when they do not find images in this prayer of quiet. They make no progress in meditation, yet they become troubled, fearing that they are going backward and becoming lost.

They are becoming lost to their first manner of prayer, but God is giving them great gain in their new spirituality. The less they understand, the more they will penetrate into the night of the spirit. This leads to a union which transcends all knowledge.

Second Sign

Concerning the second sign (inability to take pleasure in spiritual images) little needs to be said. In this state of recollection, the imagination comes and goes. The soul is troubled by this because its peace and joy are disturbed.

Third Sign

I do not need to say anything about the third sign (the presence of a loving attentiveness to God) because I will speak of this confused and general knowledge.

Why the Soul Needs This Knowledge

I will give one reason to show why the contemplative needs this loving knowledge of God when he leaves meditation behind. If the soul, at this time, did not have this realization of God's presence, he would do nothing and have nothing. A soul who turns away from meditation and who does not yet enjoy contemplation would be making no acts at all. **The soul would neither work actively nor passively receive what God works within.** It would have neither the works of sense (when the soul reasons about God) nor the works of the spirit (when God acts).

The Two Different Approaches

The difference in these two approaches is between working and enjoying the fruit of the work; or between journeying and enjoying the rest at the journey's end; between preparing a meal and eating it; between receiving a gift and enjoying the gift.

If the soul is not occupied with meditation or with enjoying contemplation, it will have nothing to do. It will be totally idle, in no way useful to God or self. Therefore, the soul needs this contemplation before abandoning meditation.

Not Always Perceived

However, I must make this clear. This general knowledge is sometimes so subtle, delicate, pure, simple, spiritual and interior that the soul can be enjoying it and not realize it. This happens when the knowledge penetrates a soul who has already withdrawn from what the understanding could perceive.

In these cases, the soul's faculties have practice of enjoying contemplation and the soul does not experience its usual sense enjoyment. When this knowledge is purest and most perfect, the understanding perceives it least. On the other hand, when the knowledge is least pure, the soul sees it clearly and gives it the greatest importance. In this case, the knowledge is clothed in intelligible forms which the understanding seizes upon.

Sunlight Through the Window

Consider the following comparison. As a ray of sunlight enters the window, it is more visible if filled with particles of matter. Yet, a ray filled with particles is the least pure. A pure ray, free from particles, is the most difficult to see. The purer ray is perceived less.

A completely pure ray, (free of every speck of dust) would be completely invisible. Everything that can be seen is absent. There would be no objects for the eye to see. Light enables the eye to see objects and if no particles exist, nothing will be seen. The eye sees nothing because the ray is so pure.

Why Not Perceived

The same is true of spiritual light and the soul's understanding. A contemplative, general, supernatural knowledge strikes the understanding purely and simply. The soul does not perceive this knowledge because it is so completely detached from all intelligible forms. When this knowledge is purest, it becomes darkness and withdraws the understanding from its usual light. At this stage, the darkness is clearly felt and realized.

A Forgetfulness

When this divine light strikes the soul less forcibly, the soul perceives neither darkness nor light, apprehending nothing from either heavenly or earthly sources. The soul spends many hours in a great forgetfulness, not knowing where it has been, or what it has done or how much time has passed. When the soul returns to itself, it thinks that only a moment has passed.

The soul experiences this forgetfulness because this knowledge is pure, cleansing the senses and memory of all forms and images. This leaves the soul in a forgetfulness, with no consciousness of time. Even though the time might be quite long, the soul experiences it as quite brief. The reason is this. By contemplation the soul is united to a pure intelligence which does not belong to time. This is the brief prayer which pierces heaven.

A Heavenly Intelligence

Because the soul is united with a heavenly intelligence, when it awakens it possesses the effects which this knowledge placed within, even though the soul was not conscious of what was happening. These effects lift up the spirit to a heavenly intelligence and withdraw the soul from images and memories.

"I have watched and I have become like a lonely bird on the housetop." (Ps.102:7) Lonely shows the soul is withdrawn from all things. Housetop means the spirit is elevated. In this state, the soul remains ignorant, knowing God without knowing how. In the Canticle, the Bride says her sleep and forgetfulness produced unknowing. (Song 6:11) She did not even know how she got into the garden.

In this state, the soul believes she is doing nothing because she is working with neither the senses nor her inner faculties. The soul is not wasting time. Although the harmony between the senses and the spiritual faculties cease, the understanding is occupied with this knowledge. The Bride answered her own question, “While I was sleeping, my heart kept vigil.” (Song 5:2). Her natural self ceased to labor but her heart was lifted up by the supernatural knowledge.

Contemplation doesn’t always cause this forgetfulness. It results only when God suspends all the natural and spiritual faculties. This happens very seldom, because this heavenly knowledge does not always fill the soul entirely. If the understanding is detached from all particular knowledge (temporal or spiritual) and the will has no desire for this knowledge, then the soul is occupied with God. God can give this knowledge only to the understanding and the soul cannot observe what is happening.

Another Experience

When God communicates this knowledge to the will (which almost always happens), the soul does realize that it is experiencing this knowledge. It is conscious of love’s sweetness without knowing exactly what it loves. I call this knowledge general and loving because God communicates it obscurely to the understanding, and confusedly to the will, which has no distinct knowledge of what it is loving.

Importance of This Knowledge

It is important that the soul experience this knowledge so it can turn away from meditation. By these three signs, the soul can be sure that it is busy (even when it seems to do nothing). The soul also knows that if this light is palpable and comprehensible, then the contemplation is not pure. The Divine light which is more sublime is darker to our understanding.

Confused Teaching

I have written about this Divine knowledge because there is little teaching (verbally or in writing) because the matter is supernatural and obscure. My rude style and lack of knowledge make it even more obscure. Often I write at length and go beyond what is necessary. Sometimes, I do this intentionally because some reasoning appeals to one person and a different reasoning to another. Before ending, I want to reply to one question concerning the duration of this knowledge. This I do in the next chapter.

2.15 - SOME NEED FOR MEDITATION

Never to Use Meditation Again?

The question arises whether those souls, whom God is bringing into supernatural contemplation (called “progressive souls”), must never again return to meditation. Truly, from time to time, they should return to meditation, because at the beginning stages, contemplation is not perfected and the soul cannot pray in this way whenever it wishes. Also, the soul has not gone so far beyond meditation that it cannot occasionally profit from meditative prayer and find something new in it.

In these early stages, the soul must use meditation until it acquires some perfection in the habit of contemplation. The signs of having acquired contemplation are clear. As soon as the soul begins to meditate, it experiences this contemplative knowledge and finds itself unable to meditate and with no

desire to do so. Until the soul reaches this stage (advancing from being a progressive soul to being a proficient soul) it should meditate sometimes and contemplate at other times.

From Meditation to Contemplation

Frequently, the soul will find itself in a peaceful state, waiting upon God. The soul receives and does not work actively at all. To reach this state, the soul should use meditation quietly and in moderation. When brought into this other state, the soul should not use these faculties.

Contemplative knowledge works in the soul and the soul works not at all. The soul only waits upon God, without desiring to feel or to see anything. Then, God communicates Himself to the soul passively just as light is communicated to an open eye. All the soul does is keep its eyes open.

The Soul Just Receives

This light is a passive understanding that is infused supernaturally. Although the soul does not work, it does understand. With no personal effort, the soul receives illuminations, enlightenments and inspirations given by God. The will freely receives a general and confused knowledge of God. To receive this Divine light more abundantly, the soul must not interpose other lights that come from its own meditation. These would not be pure lights.

Obstructing By Desires

Any desire of the soul to understand these spiritual gifts would obstruct this pure, general light. A person can place an object before his eyes which impedes the light. So, the soul can place its own thoughts in the understanding. In doing this, it would cloud its own spirit. When the soul has completely voided all forms and images, it will remain in this pure light and be transformed into a state of perfection.

Removing the Veils

This light never fails but sometimes God does not infuse the light because the soul clings to images (which are veils). When these veils are removed, the soul is in complete poverty of spirit and is transformed into pure Wisdom (which is the Son of God). When an enamored soul discovers the complete failure of its natural understanding, it becomes naturally and supernaturally imbued with the Divine. God fills the vacuum.

Being Empty

When the spiritual person cannot meditate, he must remain still in God even though he feels he is doing nothing. Little by little (but quickly), God will infuse the Divine peace and knowledge embedded in his Divine love. Let not the soul meddle with forms or reasoning. This will draw the soul out of its peace and cause distaste. Let the person not have any scruples. By remaining still and by emptying itself of any desire, the soul does much. "Learn to be empty and you will see that I am God." (Ps.46:10)

2.16 IMAGINARY VISIONS – AN INADEQUATE MEANS

Imaginary Visions

Having discussed the natural images formed by the imagination, I want to treat of supernatural forms, called imaginary visions. (Ed. Note: "imaginary" does not mean the visions are not real but that God places the visions directly into the person's imagination.)

This term “imaginary visions” refers to everything which can be supernaturally represented to the imagination (such as images, forms and figures). All images which the soul receives naturally from the five senses can also occur supernaturally in the soul without any help from the five senses. The imagination and memory are like an archive which stores images for the intellect.

An Inner Storehouse

Inside itself, the soul has a mirror, which stores images, received either naturally (through the five senses) or supernaturally. The soul can also imagine other forms which it has never experienced.

As the five senses can naturally present images to the imagination and memory, so God (or the devil) can supernaturally also bring images. Scripture shows that God, by these images, often teaches the soul much wisdom. Beneath the smoke which covered the temple, Isaiah saw God in His glory (Is.6:4). Jeremiah saw a branch of a watching tree. (1:11) Daniel had a multitude of visions (8:14). The devil also used visions to deceive. He deceived all the prophets of Ahab, who saw an image of horns and told the king he would destroy Assyria (1Kg.22:11).

Two Sets of Visions

To advanced souls these imaginary visions come more frequently than bodily visions. Bodily and imaginary visions do not differ in their nature, because both use images and forms. They differ according to their effects and the degree of perfection which they produce. Visions of the imagination are more subtle and produce a deeper impression because they are more interior than bodily visions. Sometimes, the bodily visions produce a deeper impression. This is as God wills. Concerning their nature, the imaginary vision is more spiritual.

Used By God and the Devil

The devil, naturally and supernaturally, habitually uses the imagination and the memory as an entrance into the soul. The understanding uses these faculties to receive images or to leave them. The understanding stores images in these faculties. Therefore, both God and the devil come to these faculties with supernatural forms and images to offer them to the understanding. God, however, doesn't use this means alone. Because He dwells in the soul's substance, He also has other methods.

The Same Advice

I do not need to discuss the signs which show whether these visions are from God or not. Nor must I discuss the various kinds. I am writing so that the soul is not impeded by God's good visions nor deceived by the devil's visions.

The same advice pertains to all imaginary visions, whether from God or from the devil. The understanding must not feed upon them and the soul must not desire them.

These images contain certain modes and manners while God's wisdom has no mode or manner and is not contained in any particular form. It is totally pure and simple.

No Forms or Images

So that the soul and God can be united, they must have a certain mutual resemblance. The soul must become pure, simple and detached, not limited by any image. God does not come in images and is not contained in a particular form. To reach God, the soul, too, must be pure and simple.

“You heard the voice of his words and you saw no form in God.” (Dt.4:12) This text speaks of that obscure knowledge by which the soul finds divine union. Later it says, “You saw no likeness of God on the day when He spoke to you in the fire of Mount Horeb”. Dt.4:15).

Moses’ Experience

In the Book of Numbers, God reprovved Aaron and Miriam who murmured against Moses. God said that he spoke differently with Moses. “Face to face I speak to him, plainly and not in riddles. The presence of the Lord he beholds.” (Num.12:6-8) As Moses did not see God by images or figures, so in divine union, God does not communicate with the soul by imaginary visions or but “face to face”. God’s naked and pure essence communicates with the soul’s naked and pure essence.

The Effects Come Passively

To reach this essential union, the soul must not depend on images or particular objects of the understanding. Because they would disturb union, the soul must renounce them.

The soul should prize the good effects which visions produce. Visions accomplish their purpose, even if they are rejected. Imaginary visions and bodily visions communicate intelligence, love or sweetness. The soul, however, does not need to desire the visions. Their mere presence in the imagination produces whatever God wills and the soul cannot hinder these effects. The soul is powerless both to hinder the effects and to acquire the effects.

The Window

A window receives the sun with no effort. So the soul, even if it wants to resist cannot do so. It must receive the influences of these visions. A will inclined against these visions (if humbly resigned) cannot resist supernatural infusions. Only the soul’s imperfections can resist the visions, as window stains can impede the sunlight. A soul detached from all desires for these spiritual communications, is better prepared to receive them with greater abundance, clarity and liberty of spirit.

Setting Aside the Veils

The soul sets aside these forms because they are only veils, covering the spiritual gifts which lay behind them. When the soul desires forms, Spirit cannot be freely communicated. A soul that eats the outer skin of the fruit, cannot enjoy the inner fruit. By valuing these visions, the soul is attached to what the understanding can comprehend, which is the vision’s least important aspect.

The soul cannot understand deep spiritual gift, which God infuses into the soul because this knowledge is purely spiritual. The soul can only know the perceptible forms. The soul receives the important effects passively, without making any effort.

Faith is Foundation

The soul must take its eyes away from those forms because they are not the basis for faith. Faith rests upon what is not seen, what belongs to the spirit, and no figure or form can express. Faith is the only means to union.

These visions profit the soul if it renounces their sensible forms and uses them for God’s purposes. God gives visions so the soul seeks Him and not His visions.

Why Does God Give Visions?

There is a question. If God gives these visions and then asks the soul to be detached from them, why does He given them at all? Cannot the soul fall into error or find them obstacles to true

progress? Certainly, God doesn't need to use visions. He can communicate to the soul substantially and spiritually without sensible forms.

I will answer this important question in the next chapter because many do not know God's purposes. Souls think that they should receive and trust visions, not realizing that these visions can become a hindrance to union.

Mistakes of Spiritual Directors

Spiritual directors think true visions must be received and false visions rejected. In doing this, they place souls in great peril in trying to discern their visions. God does not demand this labor. He does not want simple souls led into conflict and danger. They need only the sound teaching of faith. With this, they can move forward.

Light In A Dark Place

Faith demands that souls close their eyes to this intelligence. St. Peter knew that his vision of the Transfiguration was true, yet he directs his hearers to a different foundation for their faith. "We possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable. You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." (2Pt.1:19) We have a surer testimony than the Transfiguration vision. We have the prophets who point to Christ and cling to Him as a candle in a dark place.

By telling us to look at Christ, Peter asks us to have our eyes closed to all other lights. In this darkness, faith alone is our light. If we cling to particular lights we no longer cling to faith. We no longer have the "lamp shining in a dark place." Our understanding must remain darkened until the clear vision of God dawns by the soul's transformation and union.

2.17 WHY GOD GIVES THESE VISIONS

Raising Up the Soul

God uses these visions to raise the soul from its lowly estate to divine union. Since all spiritual books deal with this, I will just answer the single question, "Since these visions contain so much hindrance and peril why does God communicate visions?"

I will begin with three fundamental points:

1. Paul writes "The works that are done by God are well ordered" (Rom.13:1).
2. Wisdom says "She governs all things well" (8:1).
3. Theologians say "God moves all things according to their nature".

Acting With Right Order

To lift the soul from lowliness to high union, God must act according to the soul's nature. The soul gains its knowledge through images of created things, which it acquires through the senses. To raise the soul to supreme knowledge, God must begin with lowest parts of the soul's senses. Then He can gradually lead the soul to the highest extreme, to his wisdom which has no sense forms.

First, God leads by forms and images, which He gives naturally through meditation and then supernaturally through contemplation. Through these forms, He leads the soul to His supreme Spirit.

According to the Soul's Nature

God would certainly give spiritual wisdom immediately if the two extremes (human and divine) could unite in a single act. However, union requires preparatory acts given in order. Therefore, God gives one gift which prepares for the second, etc.

In this way, God brings about perfection according to the soul's own nature. He works from the lowest to the highest, and from the exterior to the interior. God begins by exterior acts. The person hears sermons, attends mass and mortifies his senses. When these senses are somewhat prepared, He bestows other supernatural favors to confirm the soul in good. Then He offers supernatural communications (visions, sweet perfumes, locutions and delights of touch) to withdraw the senses from evil things.

Further Steps

At the same time, He perfects the imagination and memory through sacred meditations. This habituates the soul to the good. When these faculties are prepared, God enlightens them by supernatural visions of the imagination. Both bodily and imaginary visions gradually reform the soul.

God leads step by step until the soul reaches the most interior. Certainly, God is not bound to observe this order. He can lead from the more interior to the less, or effect two stages of progress at the same time. He can abandon His ordinary ways both when it profits the soul or when He desires to do so. Usually, however, the soul's progress follows the ordinary method.

From Outward to Inward

God uses outward things to make the soul more spiritual. By these exterior good things, the soul can gain a spirituality which is completely removed from sense, but only gradually and in its own sensual way. As the soul comes close to God, it is emptied of imaginative meditations. To perfectly attain divine communion, the soul must be totally detached from sensual images.

When led to the extreme good of God, the soul becomes further removed from the senses. When it rests perfectly in God, it is perfectly withdrawn from creatures.

“When the person tastes the spirit, the carnal is insipid.” This “carnal” includes even God's sensual favors because the senses cannot comprehend pure spirit. What the natural grasps contains less of the supernatural.

Putting Away A Child's Things

The perfected soul receives nothing through the senses and does not use the senses in relating to God (as it did formerly). Paul writes “When I was a child, I thought as a child. When I became a man, I put away the things of a child.” (1Cor.13:11) What the soul receives from sense images are a child's business, and if it clings to these, it stays a child, never gaining the mature substance of a perfect man. A child leaves the breast to gain strong food, and the soul must leave these revelations to grow in spirit. You ask, “If the immature soul needs these methods, must it abandon them when grown?” Concerning meditation, the soul must not leave meditation until God leads the soul to contemplation.

Concerning imaginary visions and other supernatural revelations, the perfect or less perfect soul must never receive these, even if they come from God.

There are two reasons. First, in these supernatural visions, the soul cannot hinder God's purpose. Only the soul's imperfections and attachments can hinder God's actions and renouncing these imaginary visions is neither an imperfection nor an attachment.

Second, the soul saves itself from both the peril and the effort in discerning good visions, in deciding whether the vision comes from an angel of light or an angel of darkness. Discerning visions brings no advantage, wastes time, causes imperfections and hinders progress. The soul should set aside what is unimportant and trifling.

Why Such Narrow Channels

Our Lord leads the soul according to its own nature. Therefore, He communicates His abundant Spirit by these narrow imaginary visions, which are really aqueducts. "He sent His wisdom to souls through morsels." (Ps.147:17) The soul has an infinite capacity, but its spirituality is limited and God feeds it by sensual morsels. Paul also used this method. "I fed you milk, not solid food, because you were unable to take it." (1Cor.3:12)

The soul must not focus its eyes on locutions, visions, radiances, perfumes, tastes, and delights of touch, even if given supernaturally. The soul must also renounce interior visions and set its eyes only upon their good effects. In this way, the soul uses these spiritual goods for God's service, receiving the spirit of devotion and casting aside the sensual experiences.

2.18 HOW VISIONS CAN DECEIVE

Need For More Detail

There is so much to say about visions! So far I have explained how the spiritual person must act and how the spiritual directors must lead. Yet, I need to go into greater detail because much harm can happen if the soul and the director are over-credulous (even if the visions come from God).

Lack of Discretion

I write at length because I have observed much lack of discretion among spiritual masters. These directors trust in them and souls fall into error. As Jesus says "The blind leading the blind fall into a pit" (Mt. 15:14).

First, some directors use the wrong method and cause souls to stray. Instead of leading souls to faith, they lead them to value the visions. Because the director values them, the soul does not seek detachment from these visions and, therefore, it cannot soar to the heights of dark faith. The director esteems these visions and removes the soul's eyes from faith.

Evils that Happen

By nature, every soul is inclined to experiencing sensible forms. If the director esteems these, the soul will be lured away, feeding upon them and valuing them.

The soul will lose its humility and think it produces something which God esteems. The devil increases this feeling and suggests that others do not enjoy these gifts. This violates simplicity and spiritual solitude.

There are also other evils which are more subtle and hateful in God's eyes. I will treat this subject later under the vice of spiritual gluttony.

Advice to Confessors

These subtle and delicate stains adhere to the soul because the director does not lead the soul to complete detachment. Since the disciple grows according to his director, I want to speak about how certain confessors guide souls. This is difficult to describe. If the spiritual father has an inclination toward these revelations, then he will delight in them. He will also impress that delight upon the disciple. From this, great harm may occur. From the director's inclination toward these visions comes an esteem for them which he will pass on to the soul. Then, the soul, also, will have a great esteem for them.

Mistakes of Confessors

Even a confessor who does not value visions might not remove his disciple's desires for them. Instead, he will describe the signs needed to distinguish good visions from evil ones. This might be good to know. However, the soul should not be immersed in this labor.

Everything could be prevented by instructing the disciple to refuse all visions. Matters get even worse when confessors ask the soul to have God reveal some things for themselves. Then, the soul thinks it is lawful to seek knowledge by means of visions. Because God has revealed something, the soul thinks He will reveal even more. If God does answer the request, the soul becomes more confident and thinks that this is God's will (which it isn't). Becoming attached to these revelations, the soul acts according to what God has revealed. The soul takes pleasure in its own way of thinking and easily goes astray.

Results

When something unexpected happens, the soul begins to doubt if this revelation is of God, because it thought that events would happen according to the vision.

This is the great delusion. God's revelations and locutions do not always turn out as men expect and they must never be blindly believed. Even if these visions are true in themselves, they are not always true according to how we understand them. Also, God can even give a supernatural answer and yet be angered that He was asked. I will show this in the next chapter.

2.19 BEING DECEIVED BY TRUE VISIONS

Why do God's visions and locutions not always come true? There are two reasons. First, we understand them in a defective way. Second, their basic causes are variable.

Our Frail Minds

God is vast and boundless. In His visions and locutions He uses concepts and methods that differ greatly from our normal understanding. The more certain visions always appear less certain to us. In Scripture, many prophecies did not happen as expected because the people understood them in a wrong way. The following are clear passages.

God said to Abraham, "I will give you this land" (Gen.15:7). Later, Abraham asked, "By what sign am I to know that I will possess it?" God then revealed that Abraham himself would not possess the land. His sons would possess it four hundred years later. Abraham had misunderstood God's words. Fortunately, he did not act on his belief, because others would see that it was not true.

God said to Jacob, “Do not be afraid to go to Egypt, for there I will make you a great nation.” (Gen.46:30) In fact, Jacob never left Egypt alive. The prophecy was only fulfilled in his children. Therefore, God’s words are true but we can mistakenly interpret them.

Three Battles (Judges C.20)

When all the tribes of Israel fought against the tribe of Benjamin they felt certain of victory because God had appointed a captain for the war. However, the Benjaminites killed 22,000 men. The Israelites again asked God if they should go into battle. When God said “Yes”, they felt sure of victory. However, the Benjaminites killed 18,000 men. This greatly confused them.

However, God did not deceive them. He would give victory only on their third attempt. By these two defeats, God chastised them for their presumption. On the third occasion, He told them that they would win and they did, but only after great toil.

Letter and Spirit

Also, souls interpret God’s revelations according to their literal meaning, when God is trying to convey a spiritual meaning.

The spirit is more abundant than the letter, and goes far beyond the limits of revelation. Whoever clings to the letter will always go astray and will fall into confusion because they do not allow the spirit to work. “The letter kills but the spirit gives life.” (1Cor.3:6) In everything, the soul must remain in the darkness of faith.

Mocking the Prophet

Many Israelites took the prophetic sayings by the strict letter and when this was not fulfilled, they even ridiculed the prophet Isaiah, “Command on command. Rule on rule. Here a little, there a little” They also said, “Wait and wait again” meaning the prophecies were not yet fulfilled (Is.28:9). The soul must learn that God speaks in His own doctrine and in His own tongue.

God’s Language is Different

To interpret prophecy we must know that God’s spiritual language is far removed from our understanding. Jeremiah understood how the people falsely interpreted prophecies. “Lord God, they will say you only deceived us.” God had promised through the Messiah (4:10) but they thought it meant temporal peace. When they suffered wars they said, “We waited for peace but to no avail.” (8:15). They took the prophecy in the literal sense.

David said of Christ, “May he rule from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth.” (Ps.72:8) Yet Christ was born in poverty. David said “He rescues the poor from the power of the mighty”. (Ps.72:12) Yet, God allowed Christ to die under Pontius Pilate. Jesus did not even deliver His disciples. He allowed them to be handed over to death for His sake.

Prophecies About Christ

These prophecies of Christ are totally true, but must be understood in a spiritual sense. Christ frees His followers from the devil and makes them heirs of heaven. God’s prophecies about Christ speak of the heavenly reward for His followers. However, the people thought of temporal dominion and liberty. Blinded by their insufficient understanding of God’s words, they killed their Lord on the cross. Paul said, “The inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders failed to recognize him and by condemning him they fulfilled the oracles of the prophets” (Acts 13:27).

Even Jesus' disciples believed His reign would be temporal. Even as Christ was about to ascend to heaven, some still did not understand, "Lord at this time, will you restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts.1:6)

Caiaphas prophesied that it was important for one man to die for the good of the nation (Jn.11:50). He said this with a temporal meaning but it was true according to spiritual meaning.

Too Limited A Meaning

Clearly, we can be deceived by interpreting God's revelations by our way of understanding. God's words are an abyss, a depth of the Spirit, but we limit their meanings.

A disciple should not try to interpret supernatural revelations. The director should wean the disciple away from these. Let the soul live in faith where there is wisdom to interpret God's sayings.

Only a spiritual man can judge God's things. If the person is not spiritual, he will judge by sense. "The natural person does not accept what pertains to the Spirit of God ... He cannot understand it because it is judged spiritually. The spiritual person alone judges everything." (1Cor. 2:14-15). It is rash to communicate with God only through sensual visions or to allow another to do so.

Some Examples

I will use a few examples. God says to a persecuted holy man, "I will deliver you from your enemies." If the man dies, the literal interpretation is wrong. God meant the higher meaning of a perpetual victory of salvation.

We must always believe God's words in their most profitable sense or else, we will be deceived. When God said, "With an iron rod you shall shepherd them", he spoke of Christ's eternal dominion, yet many believed in Christ's temporal dominion, which he never sought.

What if God told someone, "You will be a martyr" and he not martyred. Still the promise is true because God will give the soul the reward of martyrdom. The soul did not desire a martyr's death but a martyr's reward. The soul is well satisfied that the promise was fulfilled.

Fulfilled In A Better Way

When the soul's desires come from love, God fulfills them in a better way. "The Lord granted the desires of the poor" (Ps.10:18) and "He will give the just what they desire." (Pr.10:24) Many holy men desired things for God's sake which they did not receive. We must believe God fulfilled them perfectly in the next life.

In so many ways, God's words are true, yet we can be deceived. We must interpret God's words as He intends them. So, let us train souls in prudence and lead them by a pure spirit in dark faith. This gains divine union.

2.20 WHY GOD'S WORD CHANGES

What is Presently True

Mistakes are also made because these visions are often based on causes which can change. Statements founded upon changeable causes are changeable. God might promise a plague within a

year because a sin is being committed. If the sin ceases, God can withdraw the punishment, even though his threat was true. God said, "In forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed" (Jonah 3:4). This did not happen because the city did penance. Elijah prophesied a great punishment upon King Ahab. However, the king did penance and God said, "I will not bring the evil in his time ... but during the reign of his son" (1Kg.21, 27-29).

God can reveal something to a soul (good or evil) and God's word can be changed) if a change occurs in what caused the revelation. Many times, only God knows why his word is not fulfilled as promised. Sometimes, only later, does the soul gain to understand God's words and promises.

Understood Later

Jesus taught parables and pronounced judgments which the disciples only understood after the resurrection. "His disciples did not understand this at first. Yet, when Jesus had been glorified, they remembered that these things were written about him." (Jn.12:16) A soul might receive many detailed messages from God which neither he nor his director will understand until the proper time.

Conditioned and Non-Conditioned Promises

God was angered by Eli's failure to chastise his sons, so he sent Samuel to say to Eli, "In the past, I said that your family and your father's family should serve Me continually in the priesthood forever. Now the Lord declares 'Away with this'" (1Sam.2:30). God made the promise to the Eli's father, but when Eli honored his sons more than God, the promise failed.

Revelations which come from God do not invariably come to pass because there are human causes which change. Although knowing these human causes, God sometimes makes no condition about his revelation (as in saying that Nineveh would be destroyed). At other times, He does give conditions. His said to Jeroboam, "If you do all that I command and please me like my servant David, I will establish a lasting dynasty." (1Kg.11:38)

We Cannot Understand

Even without any condition, the soul cannot understand God's hidden truths amid the multitude of meanings. We are on earth and we understand only the ways of time. "God is in heaven and you are upon earth. Do not be long or hasty in speaking." (Eccl.5:2)

Why Given At All?

You ask, "If we are not to understand anything, why does God give these revelations?" The person whom God wants to understand, will know in the proper time. God does everything with right reason. If the soul tries to decide the meaning, he is open to great error and confusion.

The Prophets' Understanding

When the people saw that these promises did not come true literally, they laughed at the prophet. Jeremiah said "They mock me all day long for I have been promising destruction and now the word of the Lord has been made a reproach. I must no more speak in His name." (Jer.20, 7-9) The prophet knows the difference between the way God's words are fulfilled and the people's understanding of their meaning.

Jonah fled from preaching God's message because he knew people would misunderstand. He waited forty days, to see if the city would be destroyed and when the city wasn't destroyed (as he

prophesied) he wanted to die. “While I was in my own country, did I not say that this would happen? Therefore, I fled to Tharsis.” (4:2)

Revelations Based Upon Changeable Truths

God can reveal something to a soul which is based upon the soul serving God or upon the soul committing a sin. If the soul ceases to serve or repents of the sin, then the revelation will not be carried out.

2.21 WRONG TO SEEK PROPHETIC ANSWERS

Mistakes of Directors

Some spiritual directors try to know things by supernatural methods. Yet, this is neither good nor pleasing to God. Often He is greatly offended because God has given natural and rational limits to creation. A soul seeking to attain something by supernatural means violates these limits and displeases God. King Ahaz said “I will not seek a sign. I will not tempt God.” even though Isaiah told him to seek a sign (7:12).

Why Does God Answer

If God is displeased, why does He sometimes answer the request? Sometimes it is the devil who answers. At other times, God answers because of the soul’s weakness. Otherwise, it could go backwards.

God treats weak souls with sweetness not because he is pleased but because it best suits the soul. God is like a spring from which every soul draws water according to their need. At times, God gives water by these extraordinary channels.

We cannot conclude that this is lawful. We only say that God permits this when, how and to whom He wills, because the soul has no rights to revelations. Even though God is not pleased with their requests, He does not want to sadden them.

Like A Father

When a father puts many foods on the table, a child might ask for a certain dish. The father sees that the child is refusing the better food, but he gives the child what he seeks. Otherwise, he might go hungry.

When Israel asked for a king, God said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people. They are rejecting me not you” (1Sam.8:7). God grants some souls what they want because they will not walk any other road. So, God gives them sweetness because they cannot eat the stronger food of the cross (which He really prefers).

Sinful To Seek

The desire to know revelations by supernatural means is at least a venial sin and a director who encourages this also sins, because there is no need for this knowledge. The soul has the gospel teachings and his rational powers. Problems can be solved by means which please God and profit the soul. When something is told to us supernaturally, we accept only what conforms with the Gospel and with reason. You must examine revelations carefully because the devil can reveal much that is true and which happens. In this way he deceives. In all difficulties, our best means are prayer and trust in God.

Scriptural Examples

Scripture shows that even though God sometimes answers a request for supernatural knowledge, He is angry. King Saul asked the dead prophet Samuel to instruct him. Samuel answered, “Why have you disturbed me and made me rise? (1Sam.28:15)

In the desert, God provided the meat which the Israelites sought. While they were eating, the food, “God’s anger attacked them and killed their best warriors” (Ps.78:30-31). The prophet Balaam received permission to go to Balak, King of the Midianites. While on his way God sent an angel to say, “Your way is contrary to Me” (Num.22:30).

God satisfies the soul’s desires but he also grows angry. I say this. To desire to commune with God by supernatural revelation is perilous, and anyone who values such means will err greatly. Those who have done so understand my teaching from their own experience.

Visions From the Devil

Also, many visions come from the devil, who habitually uses God’s clothing (like a wolf in sheep’s garments). Because he correctly foretells the future, the soul believes this is God’s work. The soul doesn’t realize that the devil has a clear mature light into the causes of things and can easily deduce what will take place. Let us take an example.

Because the devil knows the earth and the atmosphere, he can also know the certain moment when a pestilence will infect people. So, the devil reveals to a soul, “In a year there will be a pestilence”, and the devil’s prophecy is true. Also, the devil can see what happens beneath the earth and says to a soul “There will be an earthquake”. This seems to be supernatural, but for the devil this is only natural knowledge.

Knowledge By Causes

The devil can even know supernatural events because God deals justly, with both good and evil. A devil can know that a given person or city is provoking God to justice and that God must deal with that person or punish that city. Then he can say, “At such and such a time God will do this.”

Judith told King Holofernes that Israel had to be destroyed because of its sins. She knew the punishment by it’s cause. Wisdom says, “A man is punished according to how he sins” (Wis.11:16).

The Devil’s Natural Knowledge

The devil knows many things naturally. Having seen how God acted on previous occasions, he can foretell correctly what he will do in the future. Tobias knew that Nineveh would be punished for its sins, so he told his son to leave the city. “I see clearly that its sins will cause its punishment.” (Tob.14:13) By his natural knowledge the devil knows the world’s sins and possibly could know that had seen God destroy the world by the flood. Tobias’ knowledge was supernatural, coming from God. The devil’s knowledge is natural coming from his intellectual powers. Really, it is impossible to recount the many intricate ways that the devil confuses. The soul can escape this only by fleeing from supernatural visions and revelations.

God’s Anger

God grows angry against those who expose themselves to peril, presumption, curiosity and these souls disdain God and come into many evils.

Some souls have so angered God that He allowed them to be deceived. They leave God's ordered paths and give full reign to their vanities. Isaiah said, "The Lord has prepared among them a spirit of dizziness." (Is.19:14)

Here, he was speaking of those who used supernatural means to know the future. God did not will this error, but these souls meddled with what they could not attain. God allowed them to act foolishly by withdrawing His light so they fell into error.

God Permits Deception

When souls sin in this way, God allows the devil to deceive them. The devil acts successfully because the soul has reached a point where it cannot avoid deception.

God allowed a lying spirit to deceive the prophets of King Ahab. The Lord said, "You shall succeed in deceiving him. Go forth and do this" (1Kg.22:22). The devil deceived the king's prophets so he did not believe Micah (who prophesied the truth). These prophets wanted the king to have a victory, so God answered them according to their desires and deliberately willed that they be deceived.

Speaking Against False Seeking

Ezekiel spoke against using the prophets to gain direct knowledge from God. "When the man inquires through the prophet, I will set my angry countenance against that man. As for the prophet, I will deceive him and stretch my hand against him." (Ez.14:7-9) The soul is deceived because God has abandoned him. After that, the devil responds according to the man's desires. Pleased with the devil's answer, the man allows himself to be deceived.

One truth is evident. God does not want us to desire visions because we can so easily be deceived.

2.22 WHY THE NEW LAW IS DIFFERENT

Clearing Up Difficulties

There are so many difficulties that I must clear them up, because there is an advantage of making our teaching more explicit.

Lawful in the Old Law

The soul must not desire anything from visions or locutions. In the Old Law, this was lawful and, at times, commanded by God. He even reproved the Israelites for going down to Egypt without first asking Him (Is.30:2). When the Gibeonites deceived the Israelites, God reproved Israel "They ate their food without consulting the mouth of the Lord" (Jos.9:2-14).

Moses, David and other kings always inquired of God concerning wars and other necessities. God answered the priests and the prophets. When they obeyed they succeeded and when they did not, they did poorly. Why is the New Law different?

The prophets could put questions to God and have visions, because the law of the Gospel was not yet established. Therefore, God had to reveal the mysteries of faith by words or visions. Faith comes from God's mouth and God reproved the Israelites for not seeking His words.

The New Law

At that time, Israel did not have a knowledge coming from faith. We, however, are in an era of grace. Faith is founded in Christ and the gospel law is manifest. No reason exists to inquire of God, or for God to answer because He has given us His Son (Who is His word). He has no other word. He spoke once and for all in this single Word.

Paul highlights this difference. “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets. In these last days, he spoke to us in His Son.” (Heb.1:1-2) God has become speechless. He has no more to say. He has spoken everything in His Son.

Everything Spoken in the Son

Anyone who inquires of God is foolish. Even worse, they offend God. God will answer, “If I have spoken everything in My Son, what can I now say or reveal? Set your eyes on Him and you will find everything. Souls ask for locutions and revelations but Jesus is my complete locution and all my revelation. On Tabor, I said ‘This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased, listen to Him.’” (Mt.17:5)

I have stopped answering. I will reveal no more faith nor declare more truths. Whoever inquires of Me, asks Me for Christ again. This is a great offence against Christ, obliging Him to become man once more. All that you ask (and even more) has been given you in Him. If you want Me to reveal secret things, set your eyes on Him, because in Him you will find all mysteries.

Suffering In Christ

There is no reason to inquire of God, because nothing remains to be revealed. Seeking knowledge by supernatural means faults God for not giving a complete revelation in His Son. Although having faith, the soul shows a curiosity which belongs to faithlessness.

When Christ died, He said “It is finished” (Jn.19:30). An end was made. Now, we must be guided by Christ, by His Church and by His visible ministers. If we leave this path, we are guilty of audacity. Believe nothing in a supernatural way except the teachings of Christ. Paul wrote, “If any angel were to preach a different gospel than what we preach, let him be anathema” (Gal.1:8).

God’s Word Through Others

In the Old Law, God answered only priests and prophets and a person desiring revelation had to go to a priest or a prophet. They also had to believe that the priest’s or prophet’s words came from God.

People gave credence to the words, only when the priests and prophets approved. God wants souls to be guided by others, and not give credence to what He communicates supernaturally. Words are securely confirmed only when they come from another mouth. When God communicates revelation to a soul, the soul must tell this to a spiritual guide. Only then should the soul believe.

Gideon

Many times God told Gideon that he would conquer the Midianites, but Gideon believed only when others said it. God said, “Go down to the camp. When you hear what they are saying, you will have the courage to descend on the camp” (Judges 7:11). Gideon heard a Midianite saying that Gideon

would conquer their camp. So, he joyfully prepared for battle. God wanted Gideon to feel insecure, so, he would trust not only in the supernatural revelation, but would seek words spoken by others.

Moses

Moses was uncertain about going forward, even after God's command. So, God encouraged Moses to trust his brother Aaron. "Your brother, Aaron, is an eloquent man and I will put my words in his mouth. Each of you will believe what is in the mouth of the other" (Ex.4:14-15). Moses found consolation in his brother's words. This is how the humble soul acts. Besides speaking with God, he also uses human guidance.

The Person Standing Alone

God draws near to those who are united with others in the truth. God confirmed the truth by drawing Moses and Aaron together.

Jesus said "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst" (Mt.18:20). He shows that one person must not believe that his experiences are from God. He must believe the Church and her ministers. God will not confirm truth for a person who stands alone.

"Woe to the man who is alone for when he falls, he has no one to raise him up. A lone man may be overcome, but two together can resist." (Eccl.4:10-12) The devil can prevail against one person, but when both the master and the disciple are together, he will not prevail.

Consulting Others

A lone person is habitually weak in the truth. Saint Paul received his gospel from Jesus Christ, but he consulted Saint Peter. "Lest I run or have run, in vain." (Gal.2:2) The God who revealed the gospel to Paul also revealed to his need to consult the Church.

Paul was certain of his Gospel and was preaching it. Yet, he could still err, so he spoke with Peter. God did reveal how Paul should proceed. Usually He reveals nothing which can be learned by human counsel.

Others Give Advice

God spoke continually with Moses yet he had Jethro, his father-in-law, tell Moses to appoint other judges so the people would not have to wait (Ex.18:13-23). God did not reveal this approach because it fell within human judgment. God reveals truths transcend reason and, in other matters, he wants us to use our own intellects.

God does not reveal their faults to his saints when they can discover these by other means. When St. Peter went astray concerning Gentile ceremonies, God had Paul reprove him. God did not reprove Peter directly, because he could learn by his mistakes and by listening to Paul.

Did Not Learn

On Judgment Day God will punish many souls to whom He gave much light in prayer because they did not learn from natural means, but depended on enlightenment in prayer. People will ask, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?" Jesus will reply "I do not know you. Depart from me you workers of iniquity" (Mt.7:23).

God spoke through Balaam and others, yet they remained sinners. On judgment day, the Lord will reprove his chosen ones for their sins of neglect because he warned them through natural reason and law.

Speaking With A Spiritual Director

To conclude. The soul must communicate to the spiritual director all supernatural enlightenment for three reasons:

1. God only confirms his revelations when the soul consults his spiritual director. He alone has the power to approve or not to approve. After these discussions, humble souls experience a new certainty and these favors have a fresh power upon the soul.
2. The soul needs instructions so these experiences lead to spiritual poverty and detachment (the dark night). If the soul gives up this needed instruction it will grow hardened and return to sensual favors.
3. Telling everything to a director helps the soul's mortification (even if the director does not consider this important). Some souls do not like to discuss these matters, but this is lack of humility and they should submit themselves.

Others are timid, feeling that these experiences belong to the saints. They, too, should mortify themselves and tell their director. In time, they will be able to speak easily about them.

How Directors Should Respond

Although confessors should not make much of them, they should never show their displeasure or make the soul afraid to speak. The soul would suffer much in having the door closed. The director should proceed kindly and quietly, giving souls a chance to speak, and encouraging timid souls to speak.

The confessors must teach them not to desire these experiences show them that one act of charity is more precious than all the heavenly visions which have neither merit nor demerit. Many souls without these experiences have made greater progress than those with them.

2.23 THE FOUR SPIRITUAL PERCEPTIONS

I do not desire to write in great length because my goal is to direct the soul into the night of faith.

The Four Names

Here, I want to treat the four purely spiritual perceptions:

1. Visions
2. Revelations
3. Locutions
4. Spiritual feelings.
- 5.

I call these "purely spiritual" because they do not use the bodily senses to communicate with the understanding. They use supernatural means to enter the understanding clearly and distinctly, without the soul doing anything actively.

All four can be called visions of the soul. With the soul's understanding, we see, and they are called "intellectual visions". One sense cannot receive the knowledge of a different sense. However,

what the body's eyes see in a bodily way, the understanding sees in a spiritual way. This cannot be said of the other senses. Therefore, we call these four acts "visions".

Explaining The Four

These perceptions present themselves to the soul in four ways, each with a different name. What the understanding receives by sight is a vision. What it receives by understanding new things is a revelation. What it receives by hearing is a locution. What it receives through other senses (as spiritual fragrance or joy) is a spiritual feelings. From all four, the soul receives supernatural vision or intelligence. These perceptions have no form because God gives them directly to the soul supernaturally.

Same Advice

Concerning these four intellectual visions, I give the same advice. The understanding must not become attached so that these lead the soul into the night of faith and substantial union with God. Otherwise, they will hinder soul on the road to solitude. Since these perceptions are interior, they are more certain than sensual ones. Also, the devil has difficulty in counterfeiting them because the soul receives them without any effort. Yet, the understanding can still be greatly deceived through its own imprudence.

Concerning all four, I give the same advice. The soul must not desire them. I will treat them individually and explain how this can be done.

2.24 TWO SUPERNATURAL SPIRITUAL VISIONS

The understanding can receive two kinds of spiritual visions, involving either corporeal substances or incorporeal (separated) substances.

Corporeal Visions

Corporeal visions concern all material things which the soul (while still in the body) can see by God's supernatural illumination. By this favor, the soul can see anything (both in heaven and on earth). For example, John saw the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. C21). Saint Benedict saw the whole world in a spiritual vision. This vision is a light that comes from above. (St. Thomas Aquinas)

Incorporeal Visions

The visions of incorporeal substances need a higher illumination, called the illumination of glory. These visions are not of earth and cannot be seen by those with a mortal body. If God showed these visions in their essence, the soul would immediately leave the body. God said to Moses, "No man will see Me and live." (Ex. 33:20) These visions occur only occasionally and quickly. When God allows them, He totally withdraws the spirit from the body. During the vision, the body's functions are supplied by God's favor.

Paul, Moses and Elijah

When Paul was raptured, he didn't know if he was in or out of his body. God knew. Due to God's favor, his soul passed the limits of the natural means of communication (2Cor.12:2). When God showed His essence to Moses, he covered him with his right hand. Then His glory passed by fleetingly. In this way, he protected Moses' life. Elijah covered his face at God's whisper. These

visions (to Paul, Moses and to Elijah) were so substantial that they happen rarely. God does these things within those who are strong in the Church's spirit and in God's law.

Although the intellect cannot see these substantial visions clearly, the soul can still feel them. They bring the sweetest touches and unions which I will describe soon.

A Higher Knowledge

There is a higher union of the soul with the Divine Substance, which I will describe later. This higher, obscure knowledge is faith, which is the means to divine union in this life. In heaven, the light of glory is the means to the vision of God.

Intellectual Visions

I want to teach about visions of bodily substance which the soul receives spiritually by natural light. Our eyes see bodily substances by God's supernatural light. The soul's understanding can see these same natural things inwardly. The two types of visions, bodily and intellectual, differ only in mode and manner. Intellectual visions are clearer than bodily visions, and the soul sees easily what God wills (in heaven or on earth).

Lightning In the Night

An intellectual vision is like a door opening into a great brightness, like lightning in a dark night. This allows hidden things to be clearly seen. The darkness returns but the soul retains what it saw. This vision happens within and the person always sees them exactly as the original experience. These images are never totally removed from the soul (although in time they can become remote).

Effects

These visions produce peace, illumination, heavenly joy, sweetness, purity, love, humility, and elevation of the spirit to God. These effects vary in intensity. Through spiritual suggestion the devil can also produce these visions by a natural light. Thus the devil showed Jesus "All the kingdoms of the world and their glory". (Mt.4:8) He did this by spiritual suggestion.

The devil's visions produce different effects, like aridity of spirit, lack of desire to pray, an inclination to esteem oneself and to value these visions. They do not produce humility, love for God or sweetness. They are quickly removed if the soul does not desire them.

If these visions come from God, they are still creatures and they cannot be the proximate means to divine union. The soul must neither accumulate these impressed visions nor lean upon them. Otherwise, the understanding will become burdened.

How To Make Progress

These visions, even if permanent, will not hinder progress (if the soul does not desire them). Remembering visions impels the soul toward God, but faith impels the soul even more.

By faith, the soul enters into the purest love for God, and does not even know the source of these yearnings. When faith is infused God infuses his love even more deeply. When the soul desires annihilation God infuses faith, hope and love even more. At times, the soul doesn't feel this love. At other times, feelings do flow over into the senses.

How To Journey

To gain this delight, the soul must have fortitude and desire to stay in emptiness. Love cannot depend upon what is seen or felt, but upon God who transcends all things. We journey to Him by denying ourselves. Otherwise, the devil can deceive the soul, cause it to fall into presumption, and impede faith (the essential condition for union).

The same teaching we gave for sensual visions (Chapters 19 and 20) hold true here also. No need to spend more time.

2.25 TWO KINDS OF REVELATIONS

The second kind of perception is called Revelation, a part of the spirit of prophecy. By Revelation God causes the soul to discover some hidden truth or some secret of what God proposes to do.

Knowledge and Secrets

One revelation discloses intellectual knowledge. The other reveals secrets. In the first, God causes the soul to understand temporal or spiritual truths. Although not strictly revelations, they are similar to revelation.

Therefore, I divide revelations into intellectual knowledge and manifestation of secrets (the hidden mysteries). I will teach about these in the next two chapters.

2.26 TWO KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE OF NAKED TRUTH

God must guide the pen, because explaining this knowledge of naked truths is beyond words. My only motive is to lead the soul to divine union.

Truths of Creator and Creature

This knowledge of naked truths is not like seeing bodily things with the understanding. Rather, it comprehends truths of God (what is, has been, or will be) and it is very close to the spirit of prophecy (which we will explain later).

This knowledge has two parts. One concerns the Creator and the other concerns creatures. Both are delectable to the soul, but what concerns God is incomparable. No words can describe it. The soul delights in God Himself. “There is nothing like unto him.” (Ps.39:6) God is the direct object of this knowledge.

The soul experiences some attribute of God (His omnipotence, goodness, sweetness etc.), and the experience cleaves to the soul. This is pure contemplation which the soul experiences as delight and blessing and is incapable of totally understanding its experience.

Moses and Paul

“God’s judgments (i.e. His attributes) are more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey.” (Ps.19:10-11) After perceiving God in this way, Moses prostrated himself and said, “Lord, a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and rich in kindness” (Ex.34:6). Moses expressed this knowledge only in general terms. The soul uses words but the words cannot express the experience. After Paul received this lofty knowledge of God he said that it was not lawful for man to speak of it.

Perceiving and Enjoying God

These manifestations about God never deal with particular matters, because its object is the Supreme Principle. A lesser truth would have some particular reference but these Divine manifestations do not. They come only to souls which have attained union.

Receiving them is equal to a certain contact with God, because the soul perceives and enjoys God Himself. Although not as clear as eternal glory, this knowledge penetrates the soul's substance. The devil cannot meddle in, or produce any similar manifestation. He cannot infuse a similar delight because such knowledge savors of God's Essence and eternal life.

The devil can pretend to imitate it, by presenting particular matters and trying to persuade the soul that these are God. However, he cannot enter into the soul's substance nor enkindle love as God's manifestations do.

Touching The Soul's Substance

These touches in the soul's substance so enrich the soul that just one is enough to remove all the soul's imperfections and to fill the soul with God's blessings.

These touches are so delectable that to receive just one is enough reward for all of life's trials (even if these are innumerable). This experience encourages the soul and gives it energy to suffer for God. After this, the soul suffers because it does not suffer more.

God Grants

By its own imagination the soul is not capable of gaining these lofty degrees of knowledge. God must give this knowledge without the soul using its own powers. Therefore, God gives these favors when the soul least expects or desires them. These Divine touches cause the soul to remember Him and even a small recollection can bring them about. They are so sensible that sometimes, both the soul and the body tremble. At other times, the soul is very tranquil, experiencing just delight and spiritual refreshment.

They come from various sources, as when the soul hears a word from Scripture. At times, these touches are faint. Yet, even so, they are more profitable than other kinds of knowledge about creatures or about God's works. These manifestations of knowledge come suddenly, independently of the will. The soul must not desire to have them or not to have them. If the soul is resigned, God will work when and how He wills.

No Need to Reject

The soul should respond negatively to these manifestations (as it must do toward the other experiences), because these touches are part of Divine union. The soul must have humility, love for suffering, and a resignation because God does not grant these favors to those who are attached. He loves souls who are detached from everything but Him. Jesus said, "Whoever loves me will be loved by the Father. I will love him and reveal myself to him" (Jn.14:21). This revealing includes all the knowledge and touches I have described.

Second Kind

The second kind of knowledge is quite different. It is the perception of truths in things (which are lower than God) or a perception of human deeds and events. God imbeds these truths and teaches

the soul clearly. Paul calls this knowledge the spirit of prophecy and discernment of spirit (1Cor.12:8-10).

Although the soul knows something is true, it must follow what its spiritual director says, (even when contrary to its own feelings). The soul arrives at divine union by believing rather than by understanding.

Scriptural Teaching

Wisdom says, “He gave me sound knowledge of existing things that I might know the organization of the universe.” This wisdom includes time, the sun’s course, the change of seasons, cycles of the year, position of the stars, the thoughts of men, hidden things and plain things (Wis.7:17-21). This scriptural passage speaks of both general knowledge and particular knowledge infused into the soul by supernatural means. This is not the habitual knowledge but a revelation of certain truths. God does infuse habits of knowledge about different things into certain souls. Paul lists these charisms: wisdom, faith, prophecy, discernment of spirits, interpretation of tongues (1Cor.12:8-10). God gives these infused habits to the holy prophets and saints.

Enlightenment of Perfect Souls

Besides these freely bestowed charisms, perfect souls (and those making progress) often have enlightenment about many things (present or absent). “As faces looking in a mirror, the hearts of men are manifest to the prudent.” (Pr.27:19) Souls with the habit of revelation often learn things supernaturally. Even these souls do not know everything at all times because all depends on God’s will.

Purified souls can often perceive the inclinations and talents of others from their slightest words and movements. “The spiritual man judges all things.” (1Cor.2:15) “The Holy Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” (1Cor.2:10)

By their natural powers a spiritual person cannot know the thoughts of others. However, by supernatural enlightenment or by signs, they can know their thoughts. Still, they must not trust these gifts because the devil meddles greatly.

Knowing Events

Spiritual persons can know events that are far away. Elisha, the prophet, knew that his servant had received money from Naaman and was hiding it. He said, “Was not my heart present when Naaman went to meet you?” (2Kg.5:25-26) The prophet saw this as though it were happening before his eyes.

On another occasion, Elisha told the king of Syria the advice he received privately. The king felt that his people had betrayed him. His servant said, “It is not true. Elisha the prophet tells the king of Israel everything you do in private” (2Kg.6:12).

The soul needs to do nothing because this knowledge comes passively to the soul. The person receives the gift even when he is not even thinking of the matter. His understanding will be much clearer than hearing words.

The Devil

The devil can bring deceptions and these are difficult to unmask. He can implant intellectual knowledge which seems perfectly true and the soul, if not humble and cautious, will believe these falsehoods. The devil's power of suggestion brings the conveyed knowledge into the soul with great persuasiveness. The soul must pray and use great strength to cast it off.

Sometimes, the devil shows the soul the sins of others (falsely but vividly), hoping that the soul will spread these revelations and cause more sins.

Sometimes, God does tell holy souls the needs of their neighbor. For example, Jeremiah knew the weakness of the prophet Baruch, so he could counsel him (Jer.45:3). More often, however, it is the devil who speaks falsely to cause scandal and discouragement.

Rejecting This Knowledge

Such knowledge (from God or not) is of little help to the soul's progress if the soul is attached. If the soul accepts this knowledge, it will lead him astray. I have already given abundant teaching about all these perils concerning supernatural revelations.

The soul must reject them and tell everything to its director. The director must lead the soul past these, because they have no importance for divine union. When granted passively, they have the effect God intends and the soul need do nothing.

Obviously, good knowledge produces good effects and evil knowledge produces evil effects. All should be rejected so the soul does not go astray.

2.27 THE MANIFESTATION OF MYSTERIES AND SECRETS

The manifestation of hidden mysteries and secrets focuses upon two objects. The first concerns God in Himself – the Trinity and Unity of God. The second concerns His works, the truths of the Catholic faith, the many revelations of the prophets, the promises and threats of God and even particular revelations about families and persons.

Scriptures contain many kinds of revelations. God uses words, signs, figures, images and similitude. The Book of Revelation shows God's many diverse ways.

Present Day Revelations

God still makes these revelations. He tells some people when they will die or what trials to expect. To holy people He explains the mysteries of faith already revealed.

Because these revelations come through words and signs, the devil counterfeits them much more easily. Therefore, if anything against our Catholic faith is revealed, the soul must not consent. Paul wrote, "Even if an angel from heaven preached a different gospel than what we preached, let him be accursed" (Gal.1:8).

Cautious

There are no new truths to be revealed, so, the soul must be cautious of novelties and rely on faith alone. The soul must believe the Church's doctrine which "comes through hearing" (Rom.10:17) and must not give intellectual assent to these matters.

At first, the devil feeds the soul probable truths so that he can deceive it later. Like an expert apprentice, the devil pierces the leather with a sharp needle, so his thread can enter.

Old Prophecies

The soul should not desire to understand the things of faith by clearer revelation. In this way, the soul can come to divine union in the night of understanding. The soul must keep its eyes closed to new revelation and hold fast to the old. Peter wrote that we should be attentive to the traditional teaching (2Pt.1:19).

The Devil Meddles

If the soul must close its eyes to revelations concerning faith, how much more to revelations concerning other things. In these, the devil meddles habitually and the soul avoids deception only by detachment. He plants many believable probabilities in the soul's imagination and the person becomes certain that they will happen.

A cautious and simple soul will see the revelations as perilous temptations. To reach the union of love, they must not desire them. "What need has a man to desire what is above his natural capacity?" (Eccl.7:1) Detached from all revelations, the soul can journey without error in dark faith to divine union.

2.28 SUPERNATURAL SPIRITUAL LOCUTIONS

My goal is to direct the soul, without any deception and in pure faith, through all its natural and supernatural experiences to divine union.

I am not giving copious instructions, because the soul only needs sufficient cautions and explanations to behave prudently in every situation.

I have briefly discussed the topic of prophetic revelations and am content with my teaching. The soul has been warned about all that it might experience.

Three Kinds

I will follow the same method with the third type of revelation. These are supernatural locutions which come without any intervention of bodily sense. There are three kinds: successive, formal and substantial.

Successive locutions are words which the spirit fashions when it is inwardly recollected. Formal locutions are clear and distinct words which the spirit receives (as if they came from a third person). Substantial locutions are words which come to the spirit in the substance of the soul and bring about their effect. I will treat these in order.

2.29 SUCCESSIVE WORDS

Definition

Successive words come when the spirit is recollected and absorbed in meditations. While at prayer, the soul forms words with great facility and distinctiveness. By reasoning, it discovers what it didn't know about the subject. Most important, the soul doesn't seem to be doing this by itself. Another person seems to be supplying the reasoning, answering the questions and doing the teaching.

The soul reasons within and answers its own questions, as though two persons were involved. This is really true. The Holy Spirit uses the person's own spirit in producing these reasonings, words and conceptions. The soul speaks them to itself, as if to a third person.

While the person thinks about a truth, the Holy Spirit unites Himself with that truth, and leads the soul to construct other truths (which are connected). Since the door is open, the Holy Spirit can teach the soul by continual illumination.

Facility Given By the Spirit

In these successive words, God teaches and the soul comprehends and formulates its own words. The Spirit gives a facility to the soul's understanding to form words inwardly (as if coming from a third person).

There is no deception in this enlightenment. However, deception happens frequently in the soul's words that express the enlightenment.

Clumsiness of the Understanding

This illumination is subtle and spiritual, and the understanding cannot always gain a clear picture. The soul's reasonings can be false or defective, because the soul is using its weak understanding. Also, the soul's own facilities might not be stable.

I knew a person who had these successive locutions. Some were true (about the Eucharist) but others were heresy. I am appalled at what happens these days. A beginning soul becomes conscious of some locutions and claims that everything comes from God, when really much comes from themselves.

Nothing At All

People desire locutions. They answer themselves and think God is speaking. Unless their directors oblige them to refrain, they will commit grave blunders. Otherwise, they will gain nonsensical talk and not humility.

These things can greatly hinder the soul and lead it far away from faith. The understanding must journey by love and not by reasoning.

Faith and the Spirit

If the Holy Spirit inspires these truths, they cannot be evil. Why reject them? Faith is the greatest illumination. When faith is refined, the Spirit infuses more charity and greater gifts. Charity is the cause and the means of communicating the gifts.

The light of these revelations is different from the light of faith. Faith has no clear understanding and is the most precious gold. Faith is greater than gifts just as an ocean is greater than a drop of water. By this illumination, the soul receives some truths. By faith, the soul receives all of God's wisdom because the Word of God communicates Himself to the soul.

Not To Be Relied On

This illumination is good but the soul who relies upon it is impeded. The soul clings to things of little importance and hinders faith by which God secretly instructs the soul and bestows virtues.

We should “turn our eyes away” (Song 6:4) because the profit does not come by applying our natural understanding to supernatural communications. Instead, we must apply our will to God’s will. Then, they will be given in even greater abundance through love.

Changing the Illumination

Sometimes, while God touches the soul, our natural faculties are active. In these cases, the understanding starts reasoning and can go astray. The result will not be supernatural but natural, erroneous and unworthy.

Some intellects are very quick and the person invents conceptions and words which they think are from God. Many persons are deceived by these natural illuminations, thinking they are receiving communications from God. They even write them down (which only encourages vanity). Let these souls imitate the Son of God in His mortifications so that all comes to good.

If the soul is attached, the devil frequently intervenes in these successive interior locutions, offering much material and deceiving the soul to believe that these are true.

Three Sources

These successive locutions can come from three sources – the Holy Spirit, natural illuminations and the devil. To know which source these illuminations come from is difficult. However, I can give some general signs.

When the soul finds itself loving God, being filled with humility and wanting to serve God, the Holy Spirit is working. When the locutions come from intellectual brilliance, the person’s own understanding is working (without any supernatural help). After prayer, the person is inclined neither to good or evil.

At times, God, after giving revelations, will also send aridity for the soul’s good. At other times, the soul has received good effects but is not conscious of them.

The Devil

It is difficult to understand or recognize those coming from the devil. They leave the will arid and incline the mind to complacency. Yet, they also inspire a false humility and a fervent will (but rooted in self-love). The person must be very spiritual to recognize these signs.

The devil keeps himself hidden. He produces tears and implants his affections. The devil wants the person to attach great importance to these revelations so it loses true virtue.

Always Caution

This caution is needed for all these locutions. Treasure none of them. Seek only to keep God’s will. This is the wisdom of the saints. They were content to know the truths and mysteries of faith as the Church teaches. We must enkindle the will and not pry into curious things.

2.30 FORMAL WORDS

Definition

The second kind of locutions are formal words which come from supernatural means without any use of the senses. The soul's spirit does not intervene. Sometimes the soul is not even at prayer and its mind is elsewhere. Successive words always deal with a subject of meditation. Formal words deal with anything.

Formal words might or might not be clearly formed. They are conceptions. Something is said to the person's spirit (as in a reply or in a way of address). Sometimes it is one, two or more words. Sometimes the words are continuous and instruct the person (as if one person is teaching another). Daniel says the angel "instructed me in these words" (9:22). This was a formal revelation. The angel said "Daniel, I have come to give you understanding" (Daniel 9:22).

Only Instruction

When the words are only formal, they do not produce great effects. They only instruct in one thing. This is all that is necessary. When from God, they invariably make the person ready to do what God commands. The words do not remove the difficulty in accomplishing the work. Sometimes, they increase the difficulty, so the soul grows in humility. The soul feels this repugnance when commanded to do things of a higher order. Usually the soul responds better to doing lowly things. Three times, God had to command Moses to go to Pharaoh. Even then, God had to give him Aaron to share the honor (Ex.3:4).

When the command comes from the devil, the soul responds easily to great commands and with difficulty to lowly ones. God abhors souls attracted by high positions. Even when He commands them to assume them, He doesn't want them to covet the position.

Greater Effects

A formal locution inspires the soul to act. The successive locution does not have this power to move the will because the soul uses its understanding. However, successive words can have greater effect because God's Spirit and the human spirit work closely.

The great difference between successive words and formal words is the way they come. With formal words, the soul has no doubt that the words were pronounced by another. Sometimes, the soul is not even thinking. Even when it is thinking, the soul knows that the words come from elsewhere.

Difficult To Know Source

The soul must attach no importance to these formal words. Otherwise, they are attached and easily deceived by the devil. The reason is obvious. It is difficult to know if the words come from a good or evil spirit because they cannot be distinguished by their effects (which are not that important). The devil's words to imperfect souls often have more effects, than God's words to spiritual souls.

The Soul's Response

The soul, then, must take no account of these words and must repeat them to an experienced confessor to gain instruction. If no learned person is available, the soul should not tell the words to others (for these others can ruin the soul). Also, the soul should not have just any type of director because to go astray or to act correctly is a grave matter.

The soul must never act on these locutions without reflection and expert advice. Otherwise, strange deceptions can arise. If the soul is not detached, it will inevitably be deceived. I have already

talked about these cautions in previous chapters, so, I will say no more except that the soul must attach no importance to them.

2.31 SUBSTANTIAL WORDS

Definition

Substantial words (the third kind of locution) are impressed on the soul in a formal way. They differ from formal words because they produce vivid and substantial effects (which formal words do not). Thus, if the Lord said to the soul “Be good” or “Love Me” or “Fear not”, the soul would experience this goodness or love or peace, because the Lord’s words are very powerful. God’s sayings are “full of power” (Eccl.8:4). David said, “See, He will give His voice a voice of power” (Ps.68:33).

Powerful

After God said to Abraham “Walk in My presence and be perfect” (Gen.17:1), he walked in perfection. Such is the power of God’s word. By the power of His word, Jesus healed and raised from the dead. These substantial locutions do incomparable good to the soul, much more than all that the soul could accomplish on its own.

Concerning these words, the soul should do nothing, neither desire them nor reject them, neither fear them nor welcome them. The soul does nothing because God doesn’t give these words for the soul to act. Rather, God wants to act within the soul. In this, they differ from formal and successive words.

God does not need the soul’s desire to act. The soul just passively receives the effects, the good intended by God.

No Deception

The soul must not fear any deception because the souls own understanding and the devil cannot produce this substantial effect of impressing locution upon the soul.

The only exception is if the soul has made a compact with the devil, who (as its master) impresses these evil effects. In this union of perversity the devil easily impresses his evil sayings. Even to good souls the devil does great violence to make his suggestions effective. To evil souls, he might fully consummate his plans.

The devil’s locutions cannot leave the same effects as God’s. There is no comparison between the two. Comparing true and false prophets, God said to Jeremiah, “What has the chaff to do with wheat? Is not my word like fire, like a hammer shattering rocks?” (Jer.23:28-29) Substantial words (especially the more interior) lead to union with God. The soul who receives these words is greatly blessed. “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” (1Sam.3:10)

2.32 SUPERNATURAL INTERIOR FEELINGS

In the Will and the Soul’s Substance

The fourth intellectual perception is produced supernaturally through two different spiritual feelings. The first happens in the will’s affections and the second in the soul’s substance. Those in the will are the most sublime, but those in the soul’s substance are very high and of great profit. Each of these has many kinds.

Neither the soul nor the director can know how God grants these favors because they do not depend upon any work or meditation (although these prepare the soul). God gives these favors to whomever He wills and for whatever reason.

Some souls do many good works and never receive these touches. Others do few works and receive these favors in abundance. The soul does not even need to be in prayer for God to grant these experiences (although this is preferred), because many times the soul does not know what is happening. Some of these touches are distinct yet pass quickly. Others are not distinct, but last longer.

Overflow From Will To Intellect

These touches are feelings and belong to the will not to the understanding. Therefore, I will teach about them in the third book (the purgation of the will's affections). However, knowledge does overflow from these feelings, so I will mention some things.

The soul must know this. From these feelings in the will, some knowledge frequently overflows into the intellect. This sublime, delectable perception of God happens whether the feelings take place in the will or in the soul's substance.

Neither the feeling nor the perception can be named. These manifestations of knowledge vary. Some are clearer and more sublime. Everything depends on the nature and individual qualities of the touches.

Intellect Must Be Passive

There is no need to caution the understanding. The feelings are produced passively (without the soul acting) and the knowledge is passively received (without the understanding acting). To profit from these, the understanding must be passive and interfere by its natural capacity. Otherwise, the understanding could ruin the effect of these delicate manifestations.

Human nature can only receive, not gain this delectable supernatural intelligence. If the soul does not desire them, the understanding will not form its own knowledge and the devil cannot introduce false knowledge. When a soul seeks this knowledge, the devil can insert himself. Let the soul be resigned, because God grants this favor when He wants. By humility, the soul does not hinder this knowledge for divine union. Indeed, these touches are touches of union, which are brought about passively in the soul. This teaching suffices. Any case that seems different should follow these instructions.

THIRD BOOK

Purgation of the active night of memory and will.

3.1 OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

I have given instructions concerning the understanding so the soul might be united to God by pure faith. Now I need to give instructions concerning the soul's other two faculties – memory and will. They, too, must be purified of these perceptions so they can come to divine union by hope and charity. I do not need to write at equal length because the spiritual person will just follow the same teaching for his memory and will, as for his intellect. These faculties depend on each other.

I will write of the perceptions of both faculties according to the three kinds of objects (natural, imaginary and spiritual). These lead to three kinds of knowledge.

3.2 EMPTYING THE MEMORY

Progress in Contemplation

The reader must remember my purpose. I want to annihilate the faculties in their activities. This might seem like I am destroying spiritual practices, rather than constructing them. This is true if concerning beginners who need these spiritual practices. Here, I am writing for souls making progress in contemplation. The soul reaches divine union only if their faculties' activities recede into the background.

Faculties Silenced

The faculties must be silenced so God can work. Therefore, the soul must reject the workings of the faculties, so it can receive infused illumination from supernatural sources. The soul's own capacity cannot attain this experience and will hinder union if allowed to act.

The soul grows in God's knowledge by learning what He is not, rather than what He is. To come to God, the soul must renounce all perceptions (natural and supernatural). I will use a method to draw the memory away from its limitations and cause it to rise above distinct knowledge to the supreme hope of God, who is incomprehensible.

Putting Aside Natural Knowledge

The memory gains natural knowledge through the five senses and from the sensible images which it forms. The soul must strip itself of natural knowledge so the imagination retains no perceptions. The soul must be barren and be oblivion (as if it never had this knowledge).

The forms in the memory must be annihilated so the memory itself can be united with God. Union happens only by separating the memory from all images. In this night of knowledge, God does not come in any definite form. Christ said, "No man can serve two masters" (Mt.6:24). Memory cannot be united to God and to intelligible forms. God has no form which the memory can grasp.

Absorbed in God

A memory united to God has no forms or images. Its imagination is lost and absorbed in the Supreme Good. In great oblivion, it remembers nothing. Divine union sweeps away all forms of knowledge and raises the memory to the supernatural.

Sometimes, these touches of union upset the brain (where memory resides). It becomes inert, and loses its judgment. This experience varies according to God's touch which purges the memory of all knowledge. The brain is in oblivion and must work hard to remember anything. Sometimes the memory's oblivion and the imagination's suspension reach such a point that a long time passes, without the person realizing it.

Since the imagination is in suspension, it feels no pain. In this stage, thought no longer exists, so that God can give these touches of union. These suspensions do not happen in the perfect soul who has attained union. They come at the beginning stages of union.

Not A Destruction

Some would say that this leads to the destruction of the faculties' natural use and reduces man to a beast, incapable of natural reasoning. They say that God does not destroy nature but perfects it. I

reply that as the memory attains to God, its knowledge is perfected until it is entirely lost in the perfection of union.

At the beginning of this process, the soul inevitably falls into oblivion, because God is erasing the forms of knowledge. The soul becomes forgetful of outward behavior. It forgets to eat or drink. It forgets what it has said or done, all because of the memory's absorption into God.

No More Oblivion

Once the soul attains the habit of union it, it no longer experiences these periods of oblivion and performs its actions with greater perfection. When a soul has the supernatural habit of union, all its faculties fail completely in their natural functions and pass beyond their natural limitations to God Who is supernatural.

God the Master

A memory transformed in God cannot receive forms of knowledge because the functions of these faculties have become Divine. God possesses the faculties. Through transformation, He is their entire master, commanding them according to His Spirit and His will. The soul's thoughts and feelings are not distinct. All is of God and all its works are divine.

Paul says that the soul joined to God becomes one spirit with Him (1Cor.6:17). The soul's acts are divine, always reasonable and becoming. The Spirit teaches them what they should know and keeps them ignorant of what they should not know. They remember, forget, love and don't love what they should remember, forget, love or not love. Even the soul's first motions of the soul are divine because the soul is transformed into the Divine Being.

Examples

Let me give an example. A person asks a soul in union to pray for them. The soul has no form in its memory of this person. If God wants the soul to offer that prayer, He will give a desire. If not, the soul will be unable to pray, even though it tries hard.

At other times, the soul will pray for people whom it does not know, because God moves the soul according to His will. Moved only by God, the soul cannot be moved by others. Its prayers always have effects. Such was the Blessed Virgin who was raised to this high state from the beginning. No form of any creature was imprinted on her soul because she was totally guided by the Holy Spirit.

Another example. The soul in union has to attend to a business question. Without fail, the answer will come to him, at the right time and in the right way.

Light

The Spirit gives light concerning the present and the future, and even about persons who are absent. Frequently, this happens without any intellectual forms. The person knows, but doesn't know how they know. Everything comes from divine wisdom because these souls know nothing from their natural faculties. All they need to know, they know from God. "The worker of all things, Who is Wisdom, taught me all things." (Wis.7:21)

The Soul Must Prepare

The reader will say that the soul can never empty its memory of all forms to attain this high state. Certainly, the soul cannot remove the natural by natural powers, and it cannot attain the supernatural by natural ability alone.

Although God alone can place the soul in this supernatural state, the soul must prepare itself by the natural means which God continually gives it. As the soul renounces natural forms, God begins to possess the soul by union. God works passively in the soul (as I will teach on the passive night of the soul), and grants the habit of perfect, divine union.

Needed Means

In the passive night, I will describe the supernatural effects which God grants to the understanding, memory and will. Here, I speak of the necessity for the memory to place itself actively in the purgative night. The spiritual man must not store up knowledge from his five senses. Instead, he must allow himself to forget this knowledge as effectively as those who try to remember everything. No image must remain. His memory must be free, tied to nothing above or below, as if he had no memory. He must allow all to fall into oblivion because when the soul uses natural means in supernatural matters, it is a hindrance.

Response to Objections

In previous chapters, I responded to objections about the soul depriving itself of spiritual blessings by its passivity. More answers will be given in the passive night. I would add this. At times, the benefits of suspending all knowledge are not realized immediately, and the spiritual man must not grow weary. To receive this great blessing, the soul must endure much with hope, knowing that at the right time, God will console him.

Hardly any soul exists who is moved totally by God, has continual union and acts without any form. However, some souls are moved by God very habitually. Paul says the sons of God are moved by the Spirit of God. (Rom.8:14). Their works are divine because the soul is in divine union.

3.3 EVILS COMING FROM THE WORLD

Three Evils

When a spiritual man persists in using natural memories, he will experience three evils. Two are positive (coming from the world and the devil) and one is negative (hindering divine union).

The first evil comes from the world which subjects this soul to many harms. These include falsehoods, imperfections, opinions, loss of time, and other causes which breed various impurities. When trying to reason, the soul falls into many falsehoods. What is true appears false and what is certain appears doubtful and (vice-versa) because the soul does not have complete knowledge of even a single truth. However, if the memory can enter into darkness, it is free from these problems.

Imperfections Due to Desire

A soul, whose memory holds on to its sense experiences, will meet many imperfections. It will experience pain, fear, vain enjoyment etc. These are imperfections and, at times, venial sins. They leave impurities in the soul, even when the reflections are about God. Knowledge engenders desires, including a desire for this knowledge. By using its own intellect, the soul will see good and evil in

others. It will judge as evil what is good and vice versa. By blinding the memory and leading it into darkness, the soul can be free.

Answers to Objections

Some will say the soul can conquer these things. This is impossible if he values knowledge. Countless imperfections enter and cling to the soul like pitch to the skin. Better to conquer once and for all by emptying the memory completely.

By doing this, will the deprive itself of many profitable thoughts about God? The soul's greatest profit is a purity, when no creature affection clings to the soul. When knowledge is used, these affections always cling because the faculties are imperfect in their functioning. It is best to silence the faculties so God may speak. To attain union, the natural workings must be set aside, when the soul enters solitude and allows God to speak to the heart. (Osee 2:14)

The Enclosed Garden

You say that the soul needs to meditate or distractions will come. Distractions are impossible for a memory recollected in prayer, vices and distractions have no exit or entrance.

Distractions happen only if the soul opens itself to earthly things. When the soul causes the memory not to hear, the ear of her spirit can listen in silence to God alone. "My sister is a garden enclosed and a fountain sealed up." (Song 4:12) She is enclosed against all earthly distractions that might enter.

Let the soul remain "enclosed", without any anxieties. Jesus entered the upper room through locked doors, and he will enter the soul, if she locks the doors. The soul will not know how, because she has closed the understanding, memory and will to all perceptions. Do not grow careless in prayer. Wait in emptiness and God's blessings will not delay.

3.4 EVILS CAUSED BY THE DEVIL

Tainted By New Forms

The second evil comes from the devil. Because he obtains great influence through the memory's knowledge, he brings many new forms. These taint the soul with pride and envy, and cause vain love and deception.

He makes true perceptions seem false and vice-versa. The devil's worse deceptions enter through the memory. Therefore, if the memory shuts the door, the soul can enter freely into darkness and be annihilated in its oblivion.

The devil has power over the faculties, principally through the memory's knowledge (on which the other faculties depend). If the memory is annihilated, the devil is powerless.

Seeing the Harm

I want spiritual persons to see all the harm that the devil can cause in their memory. These spirits inflict sadness, afflictions and evil joys (concerning both God and the world). Because of these many impurities, the soul is greatly distracted from the highest recollection. By withdrawing from these perceptions and focusing upon God, the soul, frees itself from afflictions, sorrows, imperfections and sins. Emptying is not as good as fixing its attention totally on God, but it does free the soul.

3.5 HINDERING SPIRITUAL GOOD

The Needed Restraint

Because of these perceptions, the soul does not restrain the passions, nor the good desires which lead to the moral virtues. The passions are not restrained because the memory is the source of the soul's desires. From these desires come affections and disturbances. When the memory forgets everything, there is nothing to move the desires or disturb the peace. What the eye does not see, the heart cannot desire.

Thinking of anything disturbs the soul. If the thought is troublesome, the soul is sad if the matter is troublesome and the soul is joyful if it is pleasant. Emotions always accompany perceptions and only when the soul forgets everything, can it be at peace.

The Incomprehensible God

A burdened memory hinders the spiritual good which resides in peaceful souls. Besides this, the person cannot attend to the incomprehensible God. The soul seeks the comprehensible creature instead of the incomprehensible Creator.

3.6 BENEFITS OF FORGETFULNESS

Since evils come from clinging to knowledge, then, good must come from forgetting knowledge. The soul is free from changeableness and enjoys a purity of conscience. More important, it is prepared to acquire divine and human wisdom.

Various Benefits

Also, the soul is free from the devil's temptations, which he infuses by ideas and which cause impurities and sins. When the soul removes these thoughts, the devil cannot assail it by natural means.

Because of this forgetfulness, the Holy Spirit can teach the soul, because it "flees deceit and withdraws from senseless counsels" (Wis.1:5). This freedom from disturbances comes from an emptiness of memory. Otherwise, adversity causes inner storms which destroy the soul's peace and harm the soul.

Without disquiet, the soul could remain at peace even if everything was destroyed. In adversity, the peaceful soul judges correctly and finds some solution.

Rejoicing in Peace

Peace of mind is a blessing greater than prosperity. A man who forgets all knowledge and puts away all thoughts, can never lose.

Our frail and unstable nature will always be disturbed by remembering things. The mind is at peace when we forget everything. Jeremiah said, "Remembering it over and over leaves my soul downcast within me" (Lam.3:20).

3.7 PERCEPTIONS OF THE MEMORY

Images Remain

I have already taught about knowledge that comes to the memory through the five senses. The same teaching is needed for knowledge which the memory itself forms. The division is important because the memory loves supernatural knowledge, which comes from supernatural visions,

revelations, locutions and feelings. After these divine touches, some vivid and powerful images remain in the memory. The soul needs advice so these images do not hinder perfect union with God.

Supernatural Forms Are Not God

To attain union, the soul must never cling to perceptions, even those which enter the mind by supernatural means. The memory must not retain these images. Always keep this principle in mind. If the soul pays attention to these perceptions (natural or supernatural), it is not prepared to enter that abyss of faith which absorbs all things.

No supernatural form stored by the memory is God, and to reach God, the soul must void itself of everything that is not God. To unite itself to God in hope the memory must empty itself because possession of images is contrary to hope. Hope belongs to what is not possessed. (Heb.11:1) The disposed soul has greater hope. The soul that is the most completely dispossessed has the greatest hope. The soul that is perfectly dispossessed will have perfect possession of God in union.

Give Up Delight

Because many souls refuse to give up the delight which their memory finds in these images, they do not attain to this supreme possession. Whoever does not renounce all, cannot be Christ's disciple.

3.8 FIRST EVIL – FALSE JUDGMENTS

Five Evils

The spiritual man risks five evils if he clings to these supernatural ideas. First, he is frequently deceived and makes mistakes. Second, he is in danger of falling into presumption or vainglory. Third, the devil can deceive him. Fourth, he is hindered in his union with God. Fifth, he has a low judgment of God.

Deceived in Judgments

The soul does not have a complete understanding about these supernatural ideas, which are above his capacity and occur rarely. If the soul pays attention, he will be deceived in his judgment. What comes from the devil, he will think comes from God and vice-versa.

He will have wrong ideas about what is good and bad in himself and others. He will consider falsehoods to be true, and will judge true ideas to be false (This latter is actually safer than the former).

He will think that what is little is of great value and what is great to be of little value. He will judge by his imagination rather than by reality. He takes darkness for light and bitter for sweet. (Is.5:20) Occasionally, he will be correct, but he will go astray at other times.

Pay No Attention

To avoid deception, the spiritual man must try to understand his own condition, his feelings, his visions or his ideas. He should ask his spiritual director how to empty the memory of these perceptions. They cannot help him love God because the smallest act of faith and hope help him to love God more than these perceptions.

3.9 SECOND EVIL – PRESUMPTION AND PRIDE

Clinging to these supernatural perceptions also leads the spiritual person into presumption, while a soul without supernatural perceptions has no problem. Another problem is spiritual pride. Although he considers himself unworthy, in his spirit he experiences a certain secret self-satisfaction and self-esteem.

A Clear Proof

These souls experience a dislike for people who do not praise their spirituality or do not esteem their experiences. They also do not like to hear about others who enjoy the same or superior experiences. These souls are steeped in pride up to their eyes.

Although somewhat conscious of their sinfulness, they are full of self-satisfaction and delight in their spiritual gifts. Although not using the proud words of the Pharisees, they certainly resemble him in spirit. Being so proud, they are worse than the devil. Having devout feelings for God and believing that they are very near to God, they look down on those who are not like themselves.

Two Truths

Their remedy is to know two things. First, virtue does not consist in sublime feelings for God. Holiness consists of a deeply-rooted humility which is keenly felt, when the soul doesn't want to be esteemed by others.

Second, all visions, revelations and feelings are of less value than the least act of humility which does not esteem self and exalts others. Souls must forget these supernatural perceptions.

3.10 THIRD EVIL – THE DEVIL’S FALSE IDEAS

The False Seems True

The devil also uses supernatural perceptions. He can make many false ideas seem true. When he impresses these ideas and certifies them as true, the soul accepts his suggestions, because the devil transfigures himself into an angel of light.

Disorderly Desires

Even when God gives true supernatural knowledge, the devil moves the soul's desires in a disorderly way. If the soul delights in these true revelations, the devil causes these disorderly desires to grow and the soul falls into spiritual gluttony.

To bring this about, the devil gives delight to God's supernatural perceptions. The soul is bewildered by the sweetness and blinded by the pleasure, and seeks the pleasure more than God. It pays more attention to the perceptions than to a detachment based on faith. From here, the devil easily leads the soul into falsehoods. The soul commits a thousand foolish errors, concerning both moral and spiritual truths. The wine has become vinegar.

All this happens because the soul did not deny itself the pleasure in supernatural things. At first, this pleasure was small and the soul had no misgivings. Soon, the mustard seed became a tall tree and the little error became gigantic. To avoid this evil, the soul must seek no pleasure in supernatural things, because even without the devil's help, it will blind the soul. "Darkness shall blind me in my delights. Night shall be my light." (Ps.139:11)

3.11 FOURTH EVIL – A HINDRANCE TO UNION

No Form is God

I will say a few words about the soul hindering union by clinging to these perceptions. Hope comes when the soul renounces all the memory's possessions. No image in the memory can truly represent God. Nothing in heaven or earth, natural or supernatural, can be God. "Lord among the gods, there is none like unto You." (Ps.86.8)

By paying attention to these perceptions, the memory hinders the soul from reaching God. The more the soul possesses, the less is its hope. The soul must be stripped of all forms of supernatural knowledge and become oblivious to them to gain union in perfect hope.

3.12 FIFTH EVIL – A LOW JUDGMENT OF GOD

The fifth evil comes from the soul's trying to use these images to attain union.

God's Majesty

God's Majesty is incomprehensible. By depending on these supernatural perceptions, the soul considers God less worthy than He is. By esteeming the perceptions, the soul lowers its esteem for God and rejects the lofty truths about God which faith teaches. God is incomparable and incomprehensible. However, the soul removes its esteem from God and bestows it upon its perceptions. This prevents the soul from esteeming God as He is.

All forms of knowledge (natural and supernatural) have no comparison with God's Being. The soul only understands categories of being (e.g. man is an animal who is rational) but God falls under no category. Look at scriptural teachings. John says, "No man has seen God at any time" (Jn.1:18). Isaiah says man cannot conceive of God (64:4). God told Moses that he could not see him and live (Ex.33:20). Whenever the memory esteems these perceptions, the soul cannot esteem God as it should.

Paying Attention

Anyone giving more attention to the king's servants than to the king himself, esteems the king less, because he removes his attention from the king. When a soul pays more attention to creatures, it treats God in this way. God is infinitely above His creatures, and to gaze on God by faith, the soul must withdraw its gaze from all creatures.

Those who think that they will attain union by supernatural perceptions have gone far astray. They will lose faith, which is the only path to God. Divine union comes by the soul's total disunion from all creatures.

3.13 BENEFITS OF EMPTYING THE MEMORY

Besides avoiding these five evils, the spirit gains great rest and quiet.

Poverty of Spirit

By being freed from images, the soul gains a natural rest, not having to judge whether the perceptions are good or evil. Not desiring them, the soul uses its time in seeking God's will and being detached. This is poverty of spirit is empty of any desire for consolations coming from images. As the soul removes all images, this poverty becomes a greater help in approaching God.

Objections

Because many directors want the soul to profit from these supernatural communications, they object to my teaching and say:

1. The soul can return something only if it receives something.
2. They quote Paul's words, "Quench not the Spirit" (1Thes.5:19).
3. There is the need for some kind of perception.
4. My teaching tells souls to reject even what God sends.
5. Supernatural knowledge given by God has a good purpose and will have good effects.
6. It is pride to reject God's favors, as if we could do without them).

Responses

To meet these objections I must recall what I said. In Book Two (Chapters 15 and 16), I taught that the good effects from supernatural perceptions are produced passively in the soul, as soon as the senses perceive them. Any activity of the faculties hinders these supernatural graces. God does not want any activity because He Himself brings about all the good effects.

The spirituality from these perceptions is given passively and the soul must act passively, setting no value upon them. My approach preserves these feelings that come from God, because they are not lost by the soul's non-acceptance.

Not Quenching the Spirit

This is not quenching the Spirit. The Spirit is quenched when the soul acts differently than God wants it to. God is giving spiritual graces passively. If the soul is active and seeks something in these perceptions, then the Spirit is quenched. The soul works naturally and cannot move itself supernaturally. Only God moves the soul and brings it to a supernatural state. The soul's active workings hinder God's passive work, because the soul's own work is inferior to what God communicates.

God's work is passive and supernatural. The soul's work is active and natural and quenches the Spirit. The soul's work is inferior because the faculties cannot reflect upon the substantial. God's substance unites with the soul's faculties only when their activity ceases. I want the soul to receive the substance which lies beneath these images.

God's Activity and the Soul's Passivity

The difference between the soul's inferior active workings and God's superior passive workings is the difference between a work being done and a work already accomplished. The soul tries to gain an effect which God has already brought about.

If the soul acts upon perceptions which God gives passively, it abandons what God has already accomplished. The soul does not enjoy God's work and impedes its effects. God bestows this spirituality without any efforts by the soul's faculties. By acting, the soul quenches this spirituality, which God infuses by supernatural perceptions.

The soul must assume a passive and negative attitude, because God is moving the soul to favors above its own powers. Habakkuk said, "I will watch to see what will be said to me" (2:1). That is, "I will guard my faculties so I can hear what God says. I shall understand and enjoy what God communicates."

Pay Attention to God

God wants to be “a seal upon the soul’s heart” (Song 8:6), so he can prepare the place where all his arrows of love can strike. When these arrows strike God’s mark, they will transform the soul into God.

The soul must take no notice of what the perceptions of visions, locutions, feelings or revelations signify. It must pay attention only to possessing God’s love, which these perceptions bring about interiorly. The soul must set aside sweetness and receive the love which they cause.

Recalling the Perceptions

The soul has one task. It should recall these perceptions caused by God’s love so it can remain on love’s course. Recalling the perception is not as powerful as the original experience. However, this recall renews love and lifts the mind to God. God has sealed many supernatural images and feelings in the soul and they will remain there a long time. Some, indeed, never leave the soul. Whenever the soul returns to them, they produce Divine love, sweetness and light. God impressed them and for this reason and it is God’s favor that the soul contains a treasury of these blessings.

These deeply planted perceptions are not like other images stored in the imagination. The soul actually sees these images within itself, like looking in a mirror.

Stir Up Love

The soul does well to recall them because they stir up love. They do not hinder union because the soul does not desire absorption in the image. The soul seeks love of God, and when love is gained, it will set aside the image.

Trying To Distinguish the Source

It is difficult to distinguish between images planted in the soul and images placed in the imagination, because the latter come as frequently as the former. Some persons have these visions in their imagination habitually for three different reasons:

1. Their imagination is powerful and these images come even when they do not reflect.
2. These images come from the devil.
3. These images come from God who does not formally impress them in the soul.
- 4.

Discerned By Effects

They can be known by their effects. Those that are from natural causes or from the devil produce no effects (even if frequently recalled). They work no spiritual renewal and contemplating them causes aridity. Those images coming from God, when remembered, produce good effects, as they did when originally received.

A soul which has experienced supernatural images will readily distinguish the various kinds. I want to say this. Those images which are formally and durably imprinted images are rare. Also, whether they are imprinted or not, the soul should desire God alone through faith. Some say that to reject these images is pride. Really, it is prudent humility to profit from them and be guided by what is safe.

3.14 SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE MEMORY

Third Kind

The third perception in the memory is spiritual forms of knowledge. These have no bodily images, because bodily forms cannot contain spiritual forms. However, these spiritual forms can be perceived by the spiritual memory. After experiencing this perception, the soul can recall it.

The memory can recall this knowledge in two ways, either by the spiritual image left behind or by its effects. Therefore, I call these perceptions of the memory.

Created Knowledge

I described these perceptions and how the soul must act in Book Two, Chapter 26. There, I taught that this knowledge was either uncreated or created. I will say the same of this knowledge, as I said previously. The soul can recall (but not dwell upon) these perceptions of created knowledge when they stir up the soul's knowledge and love for God. If they produce no good effects, the memory should never pay any attention.

Effects of Uncreated Knowledge

The soul should recall uncreated knowledge as often as possible because this always produces the touches and impressions of divine union. In recalling uncreated knowledge, the memory uses no impressed form because these divine impressions have no form. When the soul recalls their effects (light, love, joy and spiritual renewal), these effects are renewed.

3.15 GOVERNING THE MEMORY

I will give a general method which can be applied everywhere to gain union. To do this, I will recall my teaching on hope. By having hope in the memory, the soul moves to union with God. What is hoped for is not yet possessed. The less we possess, the greater we can hope. The more we possess, the less we can hope.

The more the soul empties the memory of those forms which are not God, the more the memory can focus upon God. The more empty the memory, the greater is its capacity for hope.

To live in perfect hope, the soul must not rest in forms and ideas. It must empty the memory and turn immediately to God. The soul must perform its obligations, but it must not be attached to them. In this way, they produce no harm in the soul.

Sacred Images

I do not agree with those men (led by Satan) who want to destroy sacred images of Jesus and the saints. My teaching is quite different. I simply explain the difference between an image and God.

I want souls to pass beyond what is painted to attain the living truth beneath it. The soul must use the material to gain the spiritual, and sacred images are necessary means to the goal. They remind us of God and the saints. However, when the soul pays more attention to the image than is necessary progress is hindered. This is especially true of supernatural images, where many deceptions arise.

There can be no deception in the esteem for images which the Catholic Church sets before us. What is represented is esteemed and remembering serves love. The images will assist union and allow the soul (when God so favors it) to soar upwards from the image to the living God.

3.16 PURIFYING THE WILL – THE FOUR PASSIONS

Purging the Will

Besides purging the understanding (to gain faith) and the memory (to gain hope), the soul must also purge the will, to gain charity. This alone gives merit to our works. “Without charity, faith is dead.” (Jas.2:20) So, I must teach about this active detachment of the will that is needed to gain charity. Moses, said, “Love the Lord your God with all you heart and all your soul and all your strength.: (Dt.6:5) The spiritual man attains God by the union of his will through charity. The will must command all the soul’s powers to be used for God’s glory. “I keep my strength for you.” (Ps.59:10)

Keeping Its Strength For God

The soul’s strength lies in its faculties, passions and desires. When the will turns these toward God (and away from what is not God), the soul keeps its strength for God and loves God with all its strength. However, unruly passions and desires hinder the soul’s love. Therefore, I must teach about purging.

There are four passions: joy, hope, grief and fear. When these are controlled by reason, the soul rejoices only in God, and all the soul’s powers are directed to God. If the soul rejoices in something else, it cannot rejoice fully in God alone. If it hopes in anything except God, it does not hope fully in God. This is true of all the passions. I will teach on each of the four passions because attaining union demands a complete purging.

Dominating the Soul

When the will is dependent on creatures and not strongly attached to God, these four passions dominate the soul. The soul rejoices in what is unworthy, hopes in what is profitless, grieves over the wrong thing and fears what it should not.

When these four passions are unbridled, they cause vices. When ordered, they cause virtues. If one passion becomes ordered, then all will be ordered, because these four passions are united and the actual direction of one becomes the virtual direction for the others. If one is drawn in, all are drawn in. When the soul rejoices, it begins to hope. If a desire is removed, then grief and fear concerning that object are removed.

Four Living Creatures

Ezekiel saw a figure of four beasts having one body, with their wings joined. When they went forward, they did not turn back (Ex.1:5-9). So, these passions move together with their wings joined. In whatever direction one turns, all must turn. When one descends, all must descend. When one is lifted up, all are lifted up. Where hope goes, joy, fear and grief follow.

The soul follows these four passions. If the soul is in captivity to one, then the other three will be captives, and the soul cannot fly to the liberty of contemplation and union. Boetius said, “To understand truth with clear light, you must cast away joy, hope, fear and grief.” When these passions control the soul, it cannot receive natural or supernatural wisdom.

3:17 THE SIX OBJECTS OF JOY

Definition

The will's first passion is joy, a satisfaction of the will toward something it desires. The will rejoices when something is valuable and satisfies it.

The soul experiences active joy when it knows clearly the object of its joy and can choose to rejoice or not to rejoice.

Passive joy comes when the soul does not clearly understand the object, or it cannot choose whether to rejoice or not. In this chapter, I speak only of active and voluntary joy that comes from clear objects.

Six Objects

Joy has six different objects:

1. Temporal
2. Natural
3. Sensual
4. Moral
5. Supernatural
6. Spiritual.
- 7.

I will speak of each so the will can place its joy in God alone. We will learn one fundamental truth to direct our rejoicing to God. The truth is this: the soul must only rejoice in what honors God and we honor God most by serving him in evangelical perfection. Anything else is without value.

3.18 DIRECTING JOY TO GOD

Temporal blessings are riches, position and other things which men desire (such as children, marriage, etc.). It is vain to rejoice in these temporal riches. If a man serves God better because he is rich, certainly he can rejoice in these riches. However, riches are often a problem to serving God. "Son, if you are rich, you shall not be free from sin." (Eccl.11:10)

Riches

Temporal blessings do not necessarily cause sin, but man clings to them and fails God (which is a sin). Jesus described riches as "thorns" (Mt.13:22 and Lk.8:14), and whoever touches them can be wounded.

Jesus said "How difficult it is for the rich man to enter the kingdom" (Mt.19:23; Lk.18:24). A man should not rejoice in such a dangerous object. David said, "Set not your heart on riches" (Ps.61:11). No need to quote more. The matter is clear. Otherwise, I could not cease quoting Scripture.

More Quotes

Solomon, who possessed many riches, wrote "All things under the sun are vanities and vexations" (Eccl.1:14). "Whoever loves riches shall reap no fruit from them." (5:9)

In the gospel, riches led to the owner's loss. "Thou, fool, this night your soul is required of you." (Lk.12:20) David says not to envy a neighbor who becomes rich because "it will profit him nothing in the life to come" (Ps.49:16-17).

A man can rejoice in riches only if he uses them to serve God. The same is true of the other blessings (such as titles or offices). A man must not rejoice, unless God is better served, and eternal life is made more secure. Because we often cannot know if God is better served, to rejoice deliberately is not reasonable. "If a man gain all the world, he can still lose his soul." (Mt.16:26) Rejoice only when God is better served.

Children

Similarly, a man must not rejoice in his children unless they serve God. David's son, Absalom, did not use his position to serve God and it was vain for David to rejoice in him. A man should desire children only so they can serve God. If the children do not serve God, the satisfaction will become pain, the comfort will become a trial and the honor will become dishonor (as often happens).

What is Pleasant

Even if everything turns out well, the soul should still have qualms because rejoicing increases his peril of forgetting God. A man should not rejoice when all is pleasant because he is not sure if this helps his eternal good. "In the heart of the fool there is mirth. In that of the wise man there is sorrow." Mirth blinds a man, but sadness opens his eyes. "Anger is better than laughter" and "Better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting" (Eccl. 7:3).

Marriage

Spouses rejoice in their marriage but they do not know if they are serving God better. Paul says that marriage causes the spouses to set their hearts on each other and not totally upon God. He writes, "Are you free of a wife? Then do not desire one. The time is short. Let those who have wives, live as if they had none." (1Cor.7:27) "Let those using the world do so as if they did not use it, because the world in its present form is passing away." (1Cor.7:29-30) Our rejoicings must be upon what serves God. The rest is vanity. Joy apart from God brings no blessings.

3.19 EVILS FROM REJOICING IN TEMPORAL BLESSINGS

Withdrawn From God

There is not enough paper and ink to describe the evils that come when the soul rejoices in temporal goods. Small beginnings lead to great evils and destroy great blessings. A small spark, if not quenched, causes great fires. Rejoicing in temporal things contains the evil of withdrawing from God. A soul united with God has all blessings. A soul withdrawn from God by creature affection, has evils according to the degree of its withdrawal from God. These evils will probably be extensive and intensive.

Four Degrees

This evil has four degrees, each greater than the other. When the soul reaches the fourth degree, it will have all the evils. In Dt.32:15, Moses notes these four degrees:

1. "The darling grew fat and frisky.
2. You become fat and gross and gorged.
3. "They spurned the God Who made them"
4. "and departed from God his salvation" (Dt.32.15).

First Degree

“Growing fat” is the soul being absorbed in creatures. Before the soul grew fat, God loved it. So, the first degree is a going backwards. The mind is blunted and God’s blessings are obscured, like the air when filled with mist. When a spiritual man gives rein to his desires, he becomes blind to God and his judgments become clouded. “The whirl of desires transforms the innocent mind.” (Wis.4:12) This first degree blunts the mind and darkens the judgment, even if the person has no evil.

If the person rejoices in temporal things, even holiness cannot prevent him from falling into evil. God said to Israel’s judges, “Take no bribes, for these blind even the clear-sighted” (Ex.23:8). God told Moses to appoint judges who hated avarice. Greed was not to blunt their judgments (Ex.23:21-22). To be perfectly safe, a person must abhor temporal things. Samuel was upright because he received no gift from man (1Sam.12:3).

Second Degree

“He grew fat and became swollen and gross” is the second degree of this evil. Desires for temporal things bring a swelling of the will. The will moves freely toward creatures, and withdraws from God’s things. It takes no pleasure in holy practices, devotes itself instead to vain pleasures.

In this second degree, the soul totally withdraws from devotion and gives its whole mind to secular things. These souls have darkened judgments and become lukewarm and careless about acquiring knowledge. “They love gifts and are carried away by rewards”. (Is.1:23)

This is sinful. These souls are not free from guilt, especially when they have official duties. Withdrawing themselves from virtues, they are lukewarm in spiritual things and fail in their duties. Now, they perform their spiritual practices from compulsion or habit.

Third Degree

This third degree is a complete falling away from God. In seeking worldly blessings, the soul neglects His law and falls into mortal sin. The words “He abandoned God, his Maker” (Dt.32:15) describe this soul. The soul cares nothing for God’s law, because its desires are absorbed in the world, in riches and in business.

Forgetting what is needed for salvation, they have great ardor for worldly things. Christ calls them “Children of this world” (Lk.16:8). They are interested only in the world’s business. God’s business means nothing to them.

They are truly avaricious, seeking their joy in created things to such a degree that they cannot be satisfied. Their thirst grows because they have withdrawn from God (who alone can satisfy them). “They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and they have dug broken cisterns that hold no water.” (Jer.2:13)

The covetous man finds nothing in created things to quench his thirst. Loving temporal things, he falls into countless sins and innumerable evils. “Evil thoughts flood their heart.” (Ps.73:7)

Fourth Degree

The words, “He departed from God his Salvation” (Dt.32:15) describes the fourth degree. His heart is upon temporal blessings and is far from God’s law. He departs from God in his memory, understanding and will. He forgets God entirely. Temporal goods have become his god. Paul

describes this avarice as “slavery to idols”. (Col.3:5) The soul sets its heart totally upon temporal goods, as though no other God existed. These souls place supernatural things below temporal things, when they should do the opposite.

Many people belong to the fourth degree in other ways. Concerning spiritual things, their reason is darkened by covetousness. They serve money and not God. They value things and not their eternal reward. Money, not God, is their principal goal.

The Final Calamity

Some love money and goods so much that they despair and commit suicide when they lose them. Covetousness condemns the soul to a life of anxiety. The soul has no joy and earthly things bring it no satisfaction. They store up their wealth and hoarding becomes their final calamity. “Riches are kept to the hurt of their owner” (Eccl.5:11-12).

Paul writes, “God handed them over to their undiscerning mind” (Rom.1:28). Striving after possessions drags a man down to many evils. Even when these evils are not great, the soul moves away from God. David tells us not to envy a man who becomes rich, because when he dies he carries nothing with him. (Ps.49:16-17)

3.20 BENEFITS OF DETACHMENT

Small Beginnings

The spiritual man must examine his heart, because these attachments can easily increase. From small beginnings comes a gigantic end. One spark can set the world ablaze. The soul must uproot even small attachments immediately and not wait until later.

If the soul has no courage when the attachment is small, how can he root it out when it becomes large? Jesus said, “Whoever is unfaithful in little things will be unfaithful in the greater” (Lk.16:10). Great evil lies within small sins because they easily penetrate the heart.

Advantages

Even if the soul did not detach itself for God, it should do so for temporal and spiritual advantages. By detachment, the soul acquires generosity (which roots out all covetousness). The soul acquires inner freedom, clarity of reason and peaceful confidence in God.

By being detached, he will find greater joy in creatures. Attachment is an anxiety which dries up the heart. By detachment, the soul enjoys creatures quite freely.

The detached person has superiority over the attached soul. He enjoys the best side of created things. The attached soul enjoys their falseness and their worst side. Attachment is a cloud which darkens the judgment. Renouncing these desires clears the judgment about created goods.

Detached Compared With Attached

The detached soul rejoices in everything because he depends upon nothing. The attached soul loses all pleasure in created goods. By having no desires, the detached soul possesses everything in freedom (2Cor.6:10), whereas the attached person is actually possessed by his own desires. They own his heart and he is their captive.

The detached soul is free from anxieties and gains spiritual treasure without losing any time. The attached soul is chained by what binds his heart and unable to free himself. The spiritual man must restrain his first impulses and rejoice only in what serves God. By directing all to God, he turns away from all that is worthless.

A Hundred Fold

Detachment leaves the heart free for God, and disposes the soul to receive all God's favors, heavenly and earthly goods. Jesus promised a hundred-fold to those who renounce all for the gospel (Mt.19:29).

Even without this high interest rate, the spiritual man removes his desires because they displease God. In the gospel, the rich man rejoiced in his full barns. This angered God and he demanded his soul that night (Lk.12:20). Whenever we rejoice in vain things, God punishes us according to what we desire. Sometimes, brief pleasures are given eternal torments. Everything will have its particular punishment, including our false rejoicing in creatures.

3.21 A FALSE REJOICING IN GOOD THINGS

A Rejoicing in Deception

Natural blessings include beauty, grace, and bodily endowments, as well as understanding and discretion in the reason. Many rejoice in these gifts and possess them without giving thanks to God Who bestows them so He can be known and loved. This kind of rejoicing is deception. "Deceitful is grace and vain is beauty. The woman who fears God is praised." (Pr.31:30) The spiritual man should fear that these natural gifts might deceive and distract him from God's love.

Bodily grace bestows a self complacency. Beauty is vain and causes a man to fall in many ways. The soul should fear that these gifts can lead him to presumption or extreme desire. Someone with natural gifts must live carefully, because these gifts are filled with dangers. They are occasions for evil (both to the one who possesses and the one who seeks). Everyone gets their heart entangled. Many saintly persons asked God to disfigure them so their beauty would cause no vainglory.

How To Act

The spiritual man must become blind to natural gifts, always remembering that they are of earth. They are like smoke and vapor and must be seen as such. The spiritual man will direct his heart to God because God is in these beauties and, yet, is infinitely above them. They are like a garment that will grow old, for God alone is forever unchangeable (Ps.102:26-27). If these gifts are not sought in God, they will prove false and deceptive. "To joy I said, 'Why are you vainly deceived?'" (Eccl.2:2)

3.22 SIX EVILS FROM ATTACHMENT TO NATURAL BEAUTY

Primary and Secondary

I want to speak of the particular evils coming from attachment. I call these particular evils because they are caused by one particular kind of attachment. Other evils are secondary, caused by many of these attachments. For example, spiritual lukewarmness is caused by all six attachments.

Six Evils

There are six principal evils. The first is vainglory from which come presumption, pride and lack of esteem for neighbor. By esteeming one thing, the soul loses esteem for all the rest and withdraws its heart. By valuing certain goods, the soul despises what it does not value.

The second evil is sensual delight and lust. The third evil is a delight in adulation and vain praise. These lead to deception and vanity. “My people, he who praises you deceives you.” (Is.3:12) In our praise, we speak some truth. However, the person who is praised can be plunged into complacency.

The fourth evil is a serious blunting of the reason and of the spiritual sense. An attachment to beauty is worse than being attached to temporal goods because it deadens the senses more completely. This attachment clouds reason and judgment.

From this comes the fifth evil. The mind is distracted by created things. From this comes the sixth evil, a lukewarmness of spirit. By lukewarmness the soul finds God’s things tedious and even comes to hate them.

No Strength of Spirit

By attachment to natural goods, the soul loses its purity of spirit. Its spirituality will become gross and sensual (not interior or recollected) consisting of sense pleasure, not strength of spirit.

Because its spirituality is so weak, the soul cannot remove attachments. These habits can destroy spirituality (even when the soul does not consent). It lives in a weakness of sense and has no fortitude of spirit when required. Certainly, many virtues can exist with serious imperfections, but no pure, inward spirituality can exist. The flesh is in control and wars against the spirit. This causes secret distractions, even when the spirit is unconscious of the evil.

Evils Are Not Hidden

My pen cannot describe the powers of this attachment to natural beauty, which contains many other evils. These evils are not secret and the extent of the problems is evident. Every day, we hear of loss of honor, dissipation of wealth, strife, adultery, rape and fornication. Scripture says that a third of the stars of heaven fall. (Rev.12:4) Where does this evil not penetrate?

Who does not drink from the golden chalice of the Babylonian woman? (Rev.17:3-4) Hardly anyone (saint or sinner) does not drink her wine and enslave his heart. Scripture says that all the kings of the earth have become drunk in her wine of prostitution. She seizes even the greatest estates (the sanctuary and divine priesthood) and sets her abominable cup in the holy place (Dan.9:27), forcing almost everyone to drink. Very few will be found, who have not been stupefied to some extent by the pleasures of natural beauty.

Drunk With Wine

These attachments are like wine, which captures the heart and darkens the reason. The soul needs an immediate antidote or its weakness will increase. Like Samson with his hair cut, the soul will become a captive. Its enemies will taunt it, “Are you not he who tore asunder the lions and slew a thousand Philistines?” Attachment to natural beauty will produce these spiritual evils.

To counteract this poison, the soul needs these instructions. When tempted, the soul must remember that everything is dangerous, except to rejoice in God’s service. The bad angels were

attached to their natural endowments and this plunged them into shame. Consider how many people come to evil every day because of their attachments. Use the remedy at the very beginning, because when evil grows in the heart, medicine comes too late. “Look not upon the wine when it is red and shines in the glass. It bites like a viper” (Pr.23:31-32).

3.23 BENEFITS FROM DETACHMENT

Loving Creatures Correctly

Many benefits come by withdrawing the heart. The soul makes room for charity and prepares itself for God’s love. Not led by nature’s appearances, it remains free to love as God wills. Created things deserve to be loved but only for the good placed in them. Loving them this way, we please God because our attachment is contained in our greater attachment to God. If our love for creatures grows in this way, then our love for God also grows, because grounded in God.

A soul attached to nature’s good things can never obey Our Savior’s counsel, “Whoever follows Me, let him deny himself” (Mt.16:24). Attachment precludes denying self or following Christ.

Tranquility and Spiritual Cleanness

Detachment produces great tranquility, removes distractions and brings recollection, (especially to the eyes). A detached soul desires neither to see nor experience things. It is not entangled and will not waste time thinking of created goods. Like the prudent servant, the soul will not want to hear of them. (Ps.58:4-5) The soul guards and increases in tranquility and purity.

The soul becomes proficient in detachment and knowing about evil makes no impression. The soul gains a spiritual cleanness and has an angelic conformity with God. Refusing consent to evil or even to remember it is not enough, because having knowledge of the evil can stain the soul. The Holy Spirit removes Himself from thoughts that do not understand the respect owed to God (Wis.1:5).

Other Benefits

The soul also enjoys freedom from countless vanities. People have low esteem for those who are attached to natural gifts (their own or others). They have a high esteem for souls who seek only what pleases God.

Finally, the soul has a generosity of soul which is needed to serve God. The soul easily vanquishes temptations, endures trials and grows in virtue.

3.24 ATTACHMENT TO SENSUAL GOODS

The Five Senses

Attachment to sensual goods includes all that can be perceived by sight, hearing, smell, taste or touch and fashioned by the imagination. These are the objects of both the interior and exterior senses.

To purge the will, the soul must see that. Man’s lower part cannot know or understand God as He is. The eye cannot see Him and the ear cannot hear Him. There is no smell or taste, no delightful touch, nor any image that can represent Him. “Eye has not seen him, nor ear has heard him nor has it entered into man’s heart.” (Is.64:4 and 1Cor. 2:9) The soul’s sensual part cannot know God because it receives everything through the senses.

To take pleasure in these perceptions is vain because the soul cannot be occupied with God. Only by remaining in darkness can the soul rejoice in God alone.

By detachment, the soul finds pleasure in what it sees, hears and does. It soars upward to God because the natural pleasure strengthens the soul. The soul need not shun this movement, which causes devotion and prayer. The soul uses the natural pleasure to accomplish God's purpose.

Attachment To Religious Objects

Some souls are greatly moved to seek God by religious objects. Yet, they must consider the effects. By indulging these sensual enjoyments (under the pretext of devotion) many spiritual persons please themselves more than God. Their intention is to love God but the effect is self love. There is weakness and imperfection rather than renewal and surrender.

A Test

I propose a test to see if these delights are profitable or not. When a person hears music, smells perfumes, sees something pleasant, tastes what is delicious or feels soft touches, are his thoughts on God? Do these thoughts of God give more pleasure than sensual enjoyment? Is it only because of God that the soul finds any pleasure? If so, then this truly helps his spirit to know and love God better. When these sense objects cause a pure spiritual effect, the person's pleasure is in God and he abandons his enjoyment immediately to God.

Created things help him on his journey but he cares little for them. He is ready to go to God, by every means and every way. The Spirit of God so completely nourishes the soul that it lacks nothing and desires nothing. All desires quickly pass and are forgotten.

Mortifying the Desires

A soul which feeds upon sensual pleasures does not feel this liberty of spirit. It is harmed by created goods and should withdraw. The soul might want to use them to journey to God. However, their effect comes from pleasure and they will be a hindrance and not a help, a harm and not a profit. He must mortify this desire. If the attachment grows greater, the soul will grow weaker.

Whenever pleasure comes (by chance or by design), the spiritual person uses it only for God so his attachment can be useful. If a soul does not renounce all that is not God, the attachment (even to spiritual things) is a hindrance toward union.

3.25 EVILS FROM ATTACHMENT TO SENSUAL GOODS

If the soul does not quench this joy and directs it to God, it will suffer all the evils we have described (darkness, lukewarmness, spiritual weariness, etc.). I want to detail those evils.

From attachment to having visible things comes vanity in spirit, distraction of mind, covetousness, immodesty, lack of composure, envy and impurity of thought.

From attachment to hearing useless things comes distractions, gossiping, envy, rash judgments and vacillating thought.

From attachment to perfumes comes loathing for the poor, dislike for serving others, disregard for humble things and spiritual insensibility.

From attachments to food and drink come gluttony, drunkenness, anger and lack of charity toward the poor (as the rich man to Lazarus). As luxuries grow greater, bodily disorders increase. The soul experiences spiritual laziness and loss of spiritual desires. Spiritual things no longer satisfy. Distractions and discontent flourish.

Soft Things and Touch

Attachment to soft things brings evils which quench spiritual vigor. Luxury makes the mind effeminate. The senses grow soft and inclined to sin. The heart is unrestrained. The tongue speaks freely and the eyes roam without limit (yielding to the strength of the desires). The other senses are blunted.

Judgment, nourished by spiritual foolishness, grows confused. Moral cowardice and inconstancy increase. Fear arises due to moral weakness. Reason is weakened. There is a spirit of confusion and an insensitive conscience because the soul cannot receive (or give) sound advice, and is incapable of morality (useless like a broken vessel).

These evils come from the attachments and vary according to the intensity of the desire and the weakness of the person. Souls experience great harm even from very weak occasions of sin.

Other evils include a decline in spiritual exercises, an abandonment of bodily penances and a laxity of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

3.26 BENEFITS FROM DETACHMENT FROM SENSUAL GOODS

The Benefits

Detachment brings marvelous benefits, both spiritual and temporal. First, it rescues the soul from all these evils. The soul is recollected in God, and its virtues are restored and increased.

The second spiritual benefit is indeed great. What was sensual becomes spiritual, and what was animal becomes rational. The soul journeys toward the angelic, becoming heavenly and divine. An attached person is sensual, animal and temporal. A detached person merits the names spiritual and celestial.

The Spiritual Man

The power of sensuality and the power of spirituality are contrary (Gal.5:17). When one power declines, the other grows. When the soul's higher part (which receives God's communication) is perfected, the soul is perfected in the heavenly blessings. The soul which moves toward the senses is the animal man who perceives not God's things. The spiritual man, however, penetrates even the deep things of God" (1Cor.2:9,10,14). By detachment, the soul gains a capacity to receive the spiritual gifts.

Joy in Temporal Goods

The soul gains a third benefit. Its joy increases. For denying itself one joy, the Lord gives the soul a hundred others. Attachment to sensual things brings a hundredfold affliction, while detachment brings a hundredfold blessing. (Mt. 19:29)

An eye purged of sensual joy enjoys spiritually whatever it sees. The ear receives a spiritual joy in hearing. Our first parents enjoyed original innocence. Their sensual part was subject to their

reason. So, all they experienced in Paradise gave them the even greater sweetness of contemplation because. A man with purged senses delights in contemplating God.

An impure man derives evil from all things, but a pure man receives blessings in all things (high or low). The soul who conquers his desires can rejoice in God's creatures. In the detached man, all is directed to divine contemplation.

Everything acts according to its nature and the soul which mortifies its animal life, lives a spiritual life. It journeys straight to God. This soul discovers a chaste, pleasant and joyful knowledge of God in all things.

If Not Yet Spiritual

By habitually purging the senses by detachment, the soul directs all to God from the first moment of sensual attraction. Until reaching this state, he must deny himself the pleasure of these faculties and withdraw his soul from the sensual life.

Since he is not yet spiritual, he must fear that sense will predominate his actions and lead to a nourishing of sensuality. "What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of spirit is spirit." (Jn.3:6)

The soul must not think that the sensual powers can make them more spiritual. Only when sense does not intervene do the soul's powers increase.

Heavenly Glory

In heaven, the soul will experience greater glory by renouncing self on earth. Essential glory will also be greater for those who have renounced these sensual pleasures. There will be an exceeding weight of heavenly glory (2Cor.4:17), and all these benefits will be greater.

3.27 EVILS FROM ATTACHMENT TO MORAL GOODS

Definition

The will can also be attached to a moral good, to the practice of virtue, the works of mercy, the keeping of God's law and putting good intentions into practice.

Certainly, these moral goods deserve to be attached to. A man can rejoice for two reasons, either something is good or it is a means to goodness. The three goods previously mentioned (temporal, natural and sensual goods) might be instruments for the soul to journey to God, but they bring harm more often than good. However, the moral goods listed above do merit a certain attachment because they have intrinsic value. They bring peace, an ordered use of reason and consistent actions. A man cannot have anything better in life.

Deserve Esteem

These virtues deserve to be esteemed for their own sake, and a man can rejoice in possessing them because of the blessings they bring. Wise men praised these virtues and tried to practice them. God always loves good in anyone and never hinders good (Wis.7:22). For example, because the Romans had just laws, God subjected nearly the whole world to them and rewarded their good

customs. God was pleased when Solomon asked for the moral good of wisdom to govern the people. So, he gave riches and honor, which he didn't seek.

For Eternal Life

The spiritual man should rejoice in virtue and in the temporal blessings which follow. However, his joy must not stop at this first stage. (The heathen stopped here because he did not understand eternal life.) The soul must hope for eternal life and should seek to honor God by his virtues. Without this intention, his virtues are worthless in God's sight. The parable of the ten virgins illustrates this. All ten had kept their virginity and done good works, but the five foolish virgins did not direct their joy to God. So, the Bridegroom cast them out of the kingdom with no acknowledgment.

Many people practice good works which will not profit them for eternal life because they do not seek God's glory. The Christian must not rejoice in his good works but rejoice in doing them for love of God. Good works done for God will bring great glory. Those done for other reasons will bring great confusion.

The Real Value

The value of good works, penances and prayers are not based on their quantity and quality but upon the love of God that inspires them. They are more excellent when there is less self-interest, and consolation.

The soul must not concentrate on the delight caused by good works, because the soul must want to serve God and purge itself of wrong motives. Let the soul remain in darkness and allow God to rejoice in its works.

3.28 SEVEN EVILS FROM ATTACHMENT

Attachment to virtue leads to seven evils which are particularly harmful because they are spiritual.

1. Vanity

The first evil is vanity, pride, vainglory and presumption. The soul rejoices in its works and esteems them. He will boast like the Pharisee concerning his fasts and good works. (Lk.18:11-12)

2. Judging Others

Secondly, the soul judges others. He sees them as wicked and imperfect in comparison with himself. He esteems their acts less and sometimes speaks about them. "I thank thee that I am not like the rest of men; robbers, unjust and adulterers." (Lk.18:11) The Pharisee fell into two evils. He esteemed himself and despised others. Today, many are like the Pharisee, saying "I am not like such a man." Others are even worse. They see themselves as better than everybody and get envious when others are praised or accomplish greater things.

3. Being Seen

Thirdly, the soul performs works only to be praised. They do everything to be seen by men. (Mt.23:5) and not to be loved by God.

4. No Reward

Fourth, the soul receives no reward from God because it sought honor in this life. Jesus says they have received their reward. (Mt.6:2) This evil is great. All the good works done in public are either vicious, of no value, or imperfect in God's sight because.

What other judgment can I make? These souls only perform good works when they receive human honor. They want to perpetuate their name, even setting up plaques in the Church. Do they not worship themselves more than God? Some want to be praised, thanked, or have their works enumerated so the whole world knows. They sound the trumpet but they receive no reward from God. (Mt.6:2)

To flee this evil, the soul must hide its good works, even from itself. Let only God see and not allow anyone else to take notice. The soul must find no satisfaction or self-esteem in them. Jesus said "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Mt.6:3). That is, the soul must not esteem its spiritual works.

In this way, the will concentrates on God and bears fruit in His sight. Job said, "If I have kissed my hand with my mouth and my heart has rejoiced in secret. This is a great evil." (Job 31:27-28) The soul has kissed its good works and secretly rejoiced. This is to deny God.

5. No Progress To Union

The fifth evil is that the person makes no progress toward union. Attached to their own satisfaction, they cannot be led by God. God seeks to remove the milk of babies and give the dry bread of the perfect. This purges their appetites and strengthens them to enjoy the food of grown men. Instead, these souls want pleasure from their works and when dryness comes, they do not persevere.

5. False Value Given to Pleasure

The sixth evil is that they deceive themselves. They think that the good works with pleasure are better than those with none. Really, works done without pleasure are much more precious in God's sight because the soul must deny itself instead of God's glory. When consolation is present, the soul often seeks itself. "What is bad in their works, they call good." (Micah 7:3).

The extent of this is too great to describe, because few do works simply for God's sake without any consolation.

6. Incapable of Receiving Advice

The seventh evil is that the soul rejects advice about the good works he should perform. His habit of attachment has made him weak and he cannot accept the advice of others. If he accepts the advice, he cannot follow it. These indulge their self-love and their charity grows cold.

3.29 FIVE BENEFITS OF DETACHMENT

1. No Deception

By being detached, the soul does not fall into the devil's deceptions. The devil can deceive the soul especially when the soul boasts of its works. "Your arrogance deceives you." (Jer.49:16) A detached soul is purged from this boasting.

2. Consistency

The second benefit is this. The soul performs its works with greater consistency. Attachments stir up strong desires that do not submit to reason and the soul becomes inconsistent, abandoning some

works, taking up others, and often completing nothing. It acts because of pleasure and when the pleasure ceases, the soul loses its purpose for acting. Attached souls have a strength coming from the joy they receive in the work. When the joy ceases, the work perishes. Jesus said, “They receive the word with joy, but the devil takes it from them, lest they should persevere.” (Lk.8:12) In contrast, the detached soul perseveres and gains success. The soul aims at the good he is accomplishing for others, not the pleasure he gains for himself. He does not beat the air in boasting.

3. The Kingdom

The third benefit is divine. By detachment, the soul becomes poor in spirit, and Jesus says, “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt.5:3).

4. Humble and Prudent

The fourth benefit is that the detached soul will be meek, humble and prudent in his actions. He will not be impetuous, (impelled by unruly desires), nor presumptuous (driven by self-esteem), nor imprudent (blinded by his attachment).

5. Pleasing to God

He pleases God and man. He is free from spiritual sloth, gluttony, avarice, envy and a thousand vices.

3.30 CHARISMS

Paul’s Nine Charisms

Charisms are those spiritual gifts which transcend the person’s natural powers. They are called “gratis datae” (freely given). Paul mentions nine charisms: faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, discernment of spirits, interpretation and the gift of tongues (1Cor.12: 9-10).

Charisms are different from spiritual graces, because they are given for the benefit of others. “The Spirit is given for the benefit of the common good” (1Cor.11:7). Spiritual graces concern the relationship of the soul with God (in their communion of will and understanding). Charisms concern the soul, God and others. Charisms differ in their substance and in their workings from other spiritual graces.

Two Distinct Benefits

Two benefits come from charisms. They are temporal benefits of such as healings, raising from the dead, casting out of devils and prophesying the future, etc. There are also spiritual benefits. God is known and served by these works.

The temporal benefits must also have spiritual benefit, because charisms do not unite the soul to God. They can even be performed by those who are not in the state of grace. The person using the charism can attribute the power to God (as did Solomon) or to themselves (as did Balaam). They can even perform them falsely through the devil’s agency (as did Simon Magus). If these are true works given by God, they should profit the one doing them.

Need for Charity

They are useless without charity. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have no charity, I am a sounding bell. Though I have prophecy, know all mysteries and all knowledge and have all faith to move mountains and have no charity, I am nothing.” (1Cor.13:2) Christ even

rejected those who esteemed their charisms. “Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and work many miracles? He replied, “Depart from me, you workers of iniquity” (Mt.7:22-23).

A man should not rejoice in his use of charisms unless he is serving God in charity. When his disciples rejoiced in their charism of exorcism, Jesus said, “Do not rejoice that devils are subject to you, but that your names are written in the book of life” (Lk.10:20). A man should rejoice only that he is doing good works in charity. Love is perfect only if purged and set upon God alone. In this way, the will can be one with God through charisms.

3.31 EVILS FROM ATTACHMENT TO CHARISMS

Three Evils

Three evils come from attachment to charisms:

1. The soul may deceive and be deceived.
2. The soul might fall away from faith.
3. The soul may indulge in vainglory.

1. Deception

In using charisms, the soul can easily deceive others and be deceived himself. The person needs much divine light to know which charisms are true, which are false, and how to use the gifts. Attachment obscures the judgment. The person becomes eager for them and uses them when it is not proper. These two defects can lead to deception, even when charisms are genuine, because charisms might not be used properly.

I will explain. When God gives these gifts, He also gives light so the soul knows when and where to use them. However, if the soul is attached to the charisms, it might not use them as God wants, or in the way He wills. John and James wanted to call down fire upon the Samaritans for refusing permission to Jesus (Lk.9:54-55).

When souls are attached to these powers, they might perform works at the wrong time. The detached souls act only as God prompts them and at the right time. God complained of this practice, “I did not send prophets and they went. I did not speak and they prophesied” (Jer.23:21) and “They deceived my people by their lying and doing miracles when I had not commanded them.” (Jer.23:32) This would not have happened if these prophets were detached.

Devil Enters

By attachment, the soul misuses God’s gifts and use gifts which God has not given. Some prophesied from their own imaginations, or from visions given by the devil. Attachment to charisms opens a wide field to the devil. Souls spread their sails and are shameless in their freedom in using these miraculous works.

The evil does not stop there. They are so eager for charisms and to perform prodigies that they make a compact with the devil. From these compacts come wizards, enchanters, magicians, soothsayers, fortune tellers, card readers, palm readers and sorcerers.

They get sacred things. They obtain the very Body of Christ (I say this with trembling) to use for their wicked abominations. May God show them mercy! Saul destroyed the soothsayers and magicians in Israel because they had fallen into such abominations.

Waiting On God

Whoever has these supernatural charisms should not desire to use them or be attached to their use. God gives these gifts for His Church and He will move souls to use them as He wills.

Jesus told his disciples not to think of what they were to say because the Spirit would provide the words. So, a man must wait and allow God to move his heart. All true power comes from Him. Although filled with charisms, the apostles asked God to stretch out His hands in signs and healing so that they could bring men to faith (Acts 4:29-30).

Falling Away From Faith

The second evil is a falling away from faith, by the person and others. When a man, needlessly sets out to perform a marvel, he tempts God (a great sin). If he does not succeed, people are led into contempt for the faith. Even if God, for some reason, allows success on one occasions, they will not always succeed. In either case, they will sin, for having used graces at the wrong time.

Secondly, the person can also fall away in his personal faith. By esteeming his own miracles, he leans upon his powers rather than faith. Where signs and wonders abound, the person has less merit in believing.

Before revealing himself as risen Jesus did many things so the disciples could merit. To Mary Magdalene, Jesus showed the empty tomb and had the angel speak. In this way, she believed even before she saw Him. Jesus hid his identity so He might instruct her by the warmth of His presence.

He sent Magdalene to tell the apostles and they came in faith to the empty tomb. He hid his identity from the disciples going to Emmaus, he stayed so he could enkindle their hearts in faith. Later, he reproved all the disciples for not believing when the resurrection was announced to them. He reproved Thomas who wanted to see the wounds. He praised those who would believe without seeing.

God only works miracles out of necessity. He reproved the Pharisees, “Unless you see miracles and signs, you do not believe” (Jn.4:48). Those attached to charismatic powers can lose much concerning faith.

Vain Glory

The third evil is that attached souls fall into vainglory. Their joy in these wonders is vanity. Our Lord reproved the disciples for their joy that devils were subject to them. To merit reproof, the joy must have been in vain.

3.32 BENEFITS OF DETACHMENT FROM CHARISMS

Besides avoiding these three evils, the detached soul gains two excellent benefits, namely, God is exalted and the soul is exalted. God is exalted in two ways. First, by withdrawing from all that is not God, the soul seeks Him alone. “Man shall attain a lofty heart and God shall be exalted.” (Ps. 64:6-7)

Secondly, when the soul is centered on God alone, God is glorified by bearing witness to Himself. “Be still and see that I am God.” (Ps.46:10) and “In a desert land, I have seen your power and glory” (Ps.62:1-2). God is more highly exalted when the soul voluntarily withdraws from these very noble wonders, to rejoice in God alone. This gives more glory to God than to charisms. The

greater a man sacrifices for another the more he esteems the other. By detachment, the soul serves God without signs.

The Soul is Exalted

Also, the soul itself is exalted. Because the soul is withdrawn from all desires for signs, God infuses the three theological virtues. Obscure faith fills the intellect. Hope satisfies the memory and charity fills the will with delights. All these benefits lead directly to divine union.

3.33 ATTACHMENT TO THE GOOD THINGS OF THE SPIRIT

Not Enriching the Spirit

These supernatural goals are of greatest service to divine union. However, the soul (due to lack of knowledge) can use spiritual things only according to their senses. This leaves the spirit empty because sensual sweetness can corrupt the spirit. The soul becomes dry and barren because it drinks the water too early.

Delectable and Painful

There are two kinds of these spiritual goods, delectable and painful. Each delectable good and each painful good is either clearly understood or not clearly understood. Thus, there are four kinds of these goods:

1. Delectable goods that are clearly understood
2. Delectable goods that are not clearly understood
3. Painful goods that are clearly understood
4. Painful goods that are not clearly understood

Clearly Understood Delectable Goods

Here, I want to speak of the delectable goods which are clearly understood. Later, in the passive night, I will speak of the other three goods.

3.34 - FOUR SPIRITUAL GOODS

There are four kinds of delectable goods: motivating, provocative, directive and perfective. The motivating goods include images of saints, chapels and religious ceremonies.

Images

So we can be led to devotion the Church has approved images and these images should have an artistic value. However, some souls pay attention to the artistic value and remove their interior devotion away from spirituality. They squander their devotion upon the workmanship. This hinders true spirituality which demands an annihilation of affections to particular things.

Making An Idol

In our day, people clothe these images with garments to suit their own vanity. The devil uses these vanities to make devotion a little more than a dressing of dolls. Some people add image after image, while taking little account of devotion. They are like Michah who cried out when his idols were stolen (Judges 18:22-24) or like Laban who wanted to search in anger (Gen.31:34-37).

Deprived of Images

The truly devout person uses few images and sets his heart on the invisible. If they are taken from him, he does not grieve because he has the loving image of Christ crucified within himself.

Certainly images assist devotion, but attachment to them keeps the soul far from perfection, especially when it is sad at their loss.

Images excite devotion but any attachment will lessen devotion and must be purged. The image should sustain the spirit in its flight to God. Instead, the image immerses the soul in a sensual delight.

Vain Desires

To be perfect, the soul needs poverty of spirit. Look at rosaries. Everyone wants them in a certain color or of a special workmanship. God does not care for special rosary beads. He hears the prayer of the heart.

Isn't the soul's desire to have a special rosary an attachment? The soul desires one rosary over another and does not care about devotion. It troubles me to see spiritual persons attached to these instruments. They are never satisfied.

3.35 - IGNORANCE SURROUNDING IMAGES

Stupidity

This stupidity reaches a point where the person places more confidence in one image than in another. Their affection for the workmanship shows their ignorance of their relationship with God. If God grants more favors by means of one image than another, it has nothing to do with the workmanship. If the soul had the same devotion (even without the images) it would receive the same favors.

Purpose of Images

God works miracles and grants favors by one image more than another so that our devotion can be enkindled. Contemplating the image makes us persevere in prayer. God grants favors, not because of a painted image, but because of the person's devotion. A person with the same devotion to Our Lady would receive the same favor, even if there were no image. Experience shows that God often works miracles through images that are not well carved.

He even grants favors even through images that are far away. As people make the journey, their desires increase and their prayer is more earnest. By making a long pilgrimage they withdraw from noise (as the Lord did). When there is devotion, any image will suffice (or even none at all). Our Savior was the greatest image, but those without faith derived no benefit from his miracles. "He did few mighty works in his native place." (Mk.6:5)

True Effects

At times, God gives a spiritual influence to certain images. By recalling the image, the person experiences the original influence (sometimes in a greater degree).

People can be more attracted to a particular image, even though it is not as beautiful as others. Sometimes, they think the image moves or make gestures or speaks. Frequently, God produces a variety of supernatural effects to increase devotion. The soul is weak and needs something to lean on. The devil can also produce these same experiences. I will give instructions in the following chapter.

3.36 GUIDANCE CONCERNING IMAGES

The Devil Leads Astray

Although images are of great benefit, they can lead to great error when there are supernatural happenings. The soul must know what to do because the devil lays hold of incautious souls and obstructs their progress by extraordinary happenings. He uses both external images and images within the imagination. To deceive, He even transforms himself into an image of light. Therefore, the soul must always have misgivings.

One Warning

To avoid using images unworthily, or of being deceived, I set down just one warning. This will suffice for everything. We must always set our will only on what the image represents. The faithful soul, upon seeing an image, (in reality or in the imagination) must not want the senses to be absorbed (even if this produces devotion or supernatural manifestations). He must raise his mind to what the image represents. What is living should not be usurped by a painted object.

God Alone

In this way, the soul will place no confidence in an image, so it can travel freely to God.

Even if the image helps devotion by supernatural means, the soul should seek only God. When God grants these favors, He always inclines the soul to the invisible and annihilates the faculties to the visible.

3.37 IMAGES, FESTIVALS AND ORATORIES

Attachment to Holy Things

A person can easily be deceived by a pleasure in images which comes from their natural temperament. Some people collect images. Unfortunately, their affections center upon these painted images.

Some images are so poorly made that they take away devotion. With good images the senses can be absorbed, and the soul forgets to love God.

Festivals

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, they received Him with songs. However, He wept because their hearts were far from Him. They made a festival for themselves and not for God. Nowadays, many people attend a solemn festival just to be seen or to eat.

If people celebrate festivals only for their own interest, God will not account it as merit. God was angry with the children of Israel who danced before an idol while believing that they honored God (Ex.32:27-28). God killed the priests Nabad and Abu, Aaron's sons, for offering strange fire (Lev.10:1-2). The king threw the man out who was not properly clothed for the wedding banquet (Mt.22:12-13). You can see God's attitude toward lack of reverence in His assemblies.

How many of God's festivals are for the devil's advantage. "This people honors me only with their lips, for their heart is far from me." (Mt.15:8)

Oratories

Some decorate their oratories for their own pleasure. They so focus on their oratory, that they lose time meant for prayer. They are distracted by arranging their oratory.

3.38 CORRECT USE OF CHURCHES

Beginners Use of Churches

Beginners should find sensible pleasure in images and churches because these consolations help their detachment from the world. Parents give a child something for one hand to take away what he holds in the other. As time goes on, the spiritual person must strip himself of these spiritual attachments to images and churches. Then he can speak with God in interior recollection.

So, there is value in a well-ordered place because the soul should pray where it can easily journey to God. The Samaritan woman asked about the best place to pray. Jesus said that true prayer was not connected with a mountain or a temple. The Father wanted people who worshipped in spirit and truth (Jn.4:23-24).

Choosing the Right Place

The soul should choose the place that is most conducive to prayer. He should not seek places which are delightful to the senses, or he will give little thought to God.

Choose a solitary, even a wild place, so the spirit can soar to God and not be detained by sensible things. Our Lord chose out of the way places (such as mountains) which are high above the earth. The truly spiritual man is never tied to a place for his prayer. He doesn't even consider the sensual. He chooses a place free from sensible objects so he can rejoice in God.

3.39 - THE LIVING TEMPLE

Hindered By the Visible

Some souls never enter perfectly into true spiritual joy because they cannot rise above visible things. An oratory is dedicated to prayer, but the heart must not be attached to this visible temple. Otherwise, the soul forgets to pray in the living temple of its own heart.

Paul writes, "See that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit Who lives in you." (1Cor.3:16) Jesus asked us to worship in spirit and truth. The soul must have an interior nakedness in which it renounces everything.

A Solitary Place

To purge the will you must strive for a will totally with God and a spirit set upon Him. Choose the most solitary place you can find and devote yourself to glorifying God. Take no account of outward things. If attached to sensible devotion, you will never gain the power of spiritual delight.

40 WHEN ATTACHED TO A PLACE

Many evils (interior and exterior) come to the soul which is not detached from this sweetness. True interior spiritual recollection requires a forgetfulness of sensible sweetness and a great effort to acquired virtues. When attached to a church, the soul will fail to pray in others. As the saying goes, "He only understands his own village".

Lack of Constancy

This leads to great inconstancy. These souls spend time searching for the right place. They seek one spot and then another, one oratory and then a different one. They wear themselves out. They never use self-denial to gain true spiritual recollection. Instead, they go after places suited to their devotion. This sensible pleasure is not constant and quickly fails them.

3.41 THREE PLACES OF DEVOTION

God uses three places to move people to devotion. There are natural places which awaken devotion naturally by the arrangement of trees or of quiet solitude. Souls should use these places if they can quickly forget the surroundings and go immediately to God. Trying to use these natural settings to gain sensible sweetness will cause aridity. Spiritual sweetness comes only from interior recollection.

The Great Hermits

The soul must forget the place and be inwardly with God. The great hermits lived in vast, pleasing wildernesses but they built small cells to imprison themselves. St. Benedict spent three years in such a place. St. Simon bound himself with a cord so he could only go so far. The saints understood that they attained spirituality by quenching all desires for spiritual sweetness.

Where Favors Received

The second kind are places where God grants spiritual favors, and the person who has received such a favor is attracted to return. When he does return, the favor is not repeated because this is beyond his control. The soul learns that God grants these favors when He wants. He is not tied to one place.

Yet, it is good to return to these places. First, God wants to be praised in the place where He granted a favor. Second, in that place, the soul is more ready to give thanks. Third, devotion is awakened by recalling the gift.

However, the soul should not go seeking that God will repeat the favor. Before going to Egypt, Abraham built an altar where God had appeared to him. After coming out of Egypt, Abraham called upon God at the same altar (Gen.12:8 and 13:4). Jacob commemorated his vision of God by a stone anointed with oil (Gen.28:13-19). After having a vision, Hagar named the place "The well of Living Sight" saying "I remained alive after my vision" (Gen.16:13).

Where God Has Chosen

The third kind are places God has chosen. These include Mount Sinai (where He gave the law to Moses) the mountain (where He showed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac) and Mount Horeb (where He appeared to Elijah).

Only God knows why He chooses certain places. We need only know that all is for our profit. Praying in dedicated places is a great opportunity.

3.42 ATTACHMENT TO CEREMONIES

Indiscreet Devotion

Rather, I want to speak of those ceremonies which people use these days with indiscreet devotion. Unless they fulfill the devotion exactly, they think God will not hear them. For example, they want the priest to say the Mass with just so many candles, on a certain day and at a certain hour. Sometimes, prayers must be done at a definite hour in a certain way. If any detail is missed, they believe nothing is accomplished.

Even worse, the persons want to feel the effects and know that their petition is fulfilled. They get entangled in things which do not benefit their soul. They deserve this because they are attached to their own desires and not to God's will.

3.43 GOD'S WILL IN THESE DEVOTIONS

Seek First the Kingdom

The more persons rely on set prayers, the less they trust God and the less they will receive.

They multiply their petitions when really they should substitute higher and more important petitions (such as a cleansing of their conscience and eternal salvation). They would gain the more important petitions and all the others besides. "Seek first the kingdom and all these things will be given you." (Mt.6:33)

Going Beyond Our Petitions

The best petition is to seek whatever pleases God. We gain all we desire. He gives us salvation and all else that is needed. "The Lord is close to all who call on Him in truth" (Ps.145.18). Concerning those seeking salvation, David writes, "He will hear their cries and save them. God guards those who truly love Him." (Ps.145:19-20) God's is ready to grant our petitions (even those that haven't even entered our minds).

When Solomon asked for wisdom God also gave him riches (2Chron.1:11-12). God not only blessed Abraham's son. Isaac, but He also blessed the son of Hagar "for he also is thy son" (Gen.21:13).

The Wrong Ceremonies

We must not be attached to ceremonies which the Catholic Church does not approve. Behave toward God as you should and you will have everything. If you ask for selfish goals, you cannot speak with Him.

The Seven Petitions

Set your heart on the ceremonies and prayers which Christ taught us. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He taught them the Our Father, with seven petitions and nothing else. In fact, He told them not to pray with many words but to repeat these few petitions with fervor, because they contain God's will.

Jesus' Example

In the garden, Jesus said the same prayer three times. "Father, thy will be done." (Mt.26:39) He only taught us two ceremonies, to pray in our room. "Shut the door and pray" (Mt.6:6) and go to a deserted place. No need to use other forms. Use what the Church uses.

I approve of people setting days for their devotions (such as novenas). I do condemn the fixity of their methods and ceremonies. Judith rebuked the people for limiting the time of God's mercy. "Do you set a time for God to show His mercies?"

3.44 PREACHING

The second good concerns preaching which stirs us and persuades us to serve God. I speak both to the preachers and to the hearers. Both must be attached to God's will.

The Preacher

To help the people preaching must be a spiritual exercise, not a vocal one. Its power resides in the inward spirit, not in the words. However lofty the rhetoric, preaching gains its power from the speaker's spirit. Certainly, God's word is always effective, but fire will not burn when the material is not prepared.

Much depends on the preacher's preparation. The seven sons of Sceva tried to cast out demons as Paul did. The devils said, "Jesus I confess and Paul I know, but who are you?" (Acts.19:15) He attacked them because they were not prepared. Certainly, Jesus wanted them to cast out demons.

God is angry with those who teach the law but who did not keep the law. Paul writes, "You say 'don't steal' but you steal'" (Rom.2:21). God asks, "Why do you take my law into your mouth and then cast my words behind you?" (Ps. 50: 16-17)

The Preacher's Life

Therefore the preacher's life is important. His preaching will be fruitful, even if his preaching style is quite ordinary. The warmth of his living spirit will cling to the hearers. Other preachers will produce little, even with a sublime rhetoric. Certainly, good instruction and well-chosen words produce many effects, but only when accompanied by true spirituality. Without spirituality, the sermon delights only the senses. Little sweetness reaches the will, which remains weak and lacking in good works. The person retains the same vices because the preacher's words have no power to raise him from the grave. The homily is like a music concert, which does not move the person to good works. Marvelous phrases are soon forgotten, bearing little fruit. They delight the hearer's senses, but the instruction does not move their spirit. The method is appreciated. The preacher is praised but no amendment of life is brought about. "My preaching was not in the rhetoric of human wisdom but in a demonstration of spirit and power" (1Cor.2:1-4).

Paul's intention (and mine) is not to condemn good style and rhetoric. They can raise up and restore what is fallen, just as bad rhetoric can destroy good things.

(The Ascent remained unfinished. The teaching on the other goods was never completed.)