

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS LIVING FLAME OF LOVE

PROLOGUE

This book was written at the request of Dona Ana dePenolosa, a widow from Granada, Spain.

Reasons For Hesitancy

Dear lady, I have felt an unwillingness to explain these four stanzas because they describe interior and spiritual things which words describe only with difficulty. Because I have little spirituality, I find it hard to speak of what happens in the depths of the spirit. So, I delayed writing. However, the Lord seems to have granted me some knowledge and some fervor (probably due to your prayers).

So, I have taken courage, knowing that from my own resources, I can say nothing of value. I submit all these writings to the judgment of the Church, under whose guidance no one can stray. What I have written is as far removed from the reality of God as a picture is different from the living person.

God's Dwelling With Us

No one should marvel that God could grant such high and rare favors. He is God and as God, bestows them with infinite love and goodness. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit come and make their abode in us. (Jn.14:23) Therefore, the soul dwells in God's life. This I will explain.

The Two Books

In expounding the stanzas of the previous book (Spiritual Canticle) I spoke of transformation in divine union. This is the most perfect degree of perfection possible in this life. This book (Living Flame) treats of a more completed and perfected love within this same state of transformation. Both books speak of this transformation. However, this book explains a more completed and perfected love. Wood set upon a fire becomes united with it. When the wood remains in the fire for a longer time, it is enkindled until the wood itself it gives off sparks of fire.

One Living Flame

This degree of enkindled love happens when the soul is at last transformed and perfected interiorly. The soul is not just united with the fire, but becomes one living flame within the fire. The soul feels itself burning with a delicate sweetness of love and speaks out about the effects that she experiences. First, I shall explain all these effects. Then I shall speak of each stanza and finally of each line.

**STANZAS OF THE SOUL
IN THE INTIMATE COMMUNICATION OF UNION OF THE LOVE OF GOD**

1. *Oh, living flame of love That tenderly woundest my
soul in its deepest center,
Since thou art no longer oppressive, perfect me now if it
be thy will, Break the web of this sweet encounter.*
2. *O, sweet burn! Oh, delectable wound! Oh, soft
hand! Oh, delicate touch
That savours of eternal life and pays every debt! In
slaying, thou hast changed death into life.*
3. *O, lamps of fire, In whose splendours the deep caverns
of sense which were dark and blind
With strange brightness Give heat and light together to
their Beloved!*
4. *How gently and lovingly thou awakenest in my bosom,
Where thou dwellest secretly and alone!
And in thy sweet breathing, full of blessing and glory,
How delicately thou inspirest my love!*

FIRST STANZA

*Oh, living flame of love. That tenderly woundest my
soul in its deepest center,
Since thou are no longer oppressive, perfect me now if it be thy will,
Break the web of this sweet encounter.*

Break the Web of Mortal Life

At last, the soul feels itself totally enkindled, totally bathed by rivers of glory flowing from its innermost substance. It sees that the living waters promised by Jesus (Jn. 7:38) flow from within.

Because the soul is transformed with such vehemence, is possessed in such a lofty way and is adorned with a wealth of virtues, it appears that only a slender web keeps it from eternal glory. This delicate flame of love burns with a gentle but powerful glory. When assailed and absorbed by the flame, the soul believes that the web of mortal life will soon be broken and only a short time will remain before it can be glorified. The soul speaks to the flame (the Holy Spirit) and begs Him to break the web of mortal life so that the Spirit can communicate complete and perfect glory. The soul says:

Oh, living flame of love

Each stanza begins with “Oh” or “How”. These signify an affective exultation. What the soul experiences cannot be expressed by the tongue. “Oh” also shows a yearning and a supplication. The soul says “Oh” to show its desire and to persuade the Spirit to set it free.

Enkindled Acts of Love

The flame is the Holy Spirit whom the soul feels as a fire which transforms it and burns within. The Spirit sends out flames which bathe the soul in glory and refresh it with divine life. Within the transformed soul, the Spirit enkindles a love which makes the soul one with the flame.

These acts of love are precious. One act is worth more than all the soul did before this transformation. A habit of virtue differs from a single act. So, the transformation in love differs from the flame of love, just as the enkindled log differs from the flame which it sends forth. The flame is an effect of the fire.

All Divine Acts

The transformed soul is like the log which is constantly assailed by the fire. The soul’s acts are the flame that comes from the fire. The more intense the fire, the more vehement the flames. Just as the angel rose up in the flames of Manoah’s sacrifice (Judges 13:20), the soul’s acts are absorbed in the Holy Spirit. In this state, the soul performs no acts by itself. All the soul’s acts are divine, coming from the Holy Spirit. Whenever the flame breaks forth, it seems to the soul that the Spirit is granting eternal life and raising it to God.

God says to transformed souls, “Your word is proved by fire.” (Ps.118:140) and “Are not my words as a fire?” (Jer. 23:29) These purified souls feel these words as “spirit and life” (Jn.6:64). Other souls who desire different things, cannot relish the spirit and life of these words. When Jesus spoke lofty words (as concerning the Eucharist) He displeased certain persons who turned back because they were not purified. (Jn.6:67)

These persons thought that these words attracted no one. Peter, however, was deeply attached to Christ and said “Lord, where shall we go. You have the words of eternal life?” (Jn.6:69) Because of Christ’s words, the Samaritan woman even forgot her pitcher. (Jn.4:8)

Foretaste of Eternal Life

When the soul is transformed and near to God, it has a foretaste of eternal life. Obviously, human life does not permit a perfect possession of heavenly glory. However, here on earth, the delight caused by the Spirit’s flames is so sublime that it can teach the soul the sweetness of eternal life.

The flame is called “living” because it makes the soul live spiritually in God. “My heart and flesh rejoice in the living God.” (Ps.134:2) Both sense and spirit have a living experience of God and of life eternal. David says “living God” because he experienced God in a living way (although still imperfect). In this flame, the soul has such living perceptions and delights, it says, “Oh living flame of love”.

You tenderly wound

“You touch me tenderly”. This flame wounds the soul with God’s tenderness so deeply and profoundly that the soul melts in love. The Bride conceived such tenderness that she melted, “When the Spouse spoke, my soul melted.” (Song 5:6) God’s speaking causes this in the soul.

Never Idle

How can the soul be wounded when it is totally consumed by the fire? Because love is never idle, it is always in motion, like a flame throwing out sparks. Love wounds so it can cause delight. The living flame sends forth arrow-wounds, tender sparks of love which play the games of love. The words are now fulfilled. “I played before him at all times, playing over the whole earth. My delight is to be with the children of men, giving myself to them.” (Pr.8:30-31) These wounds (the sparks of the flame) are God’s playings within the soul. The fire is not idle. It strikes and wounds.

My soul in its deepest center

The Spirit’s work takes place in the soul’s substance where the devil, the world and the sense cannot enter. The more interior the work the more secure, delectable and pure it is. The more pure the soul is, the more abundantly and frequently God communicates Himself. The soul’s rejoicing is greater because God does the work, not the soul. The soul usually acts through its bodily senses but their help is far removed. The soul’s only business is to receive God, Who alone works in the soul’s depth and moves the soul without touching the senses. All the actions belong now to God and to the soul (because it has given consent).

The Deepest Center

God wounds the soul at its deepest center. The phrase “deepest center” implies that the soul has many centers. I need to explain. The soul is spirit and has no height nor depth nor degrees of deepness. The soul cannot be measured. It has no parts and there is no difference between its inward and outward being. It cannot be more enlightened in one part than in another. The entire soul is enlightened in the same manner and in the same degree.

The Farthest Possible Point

The deepest center of anything is the farthest point it can go, beyond which it cannot pass. A stone (by gravity) has a natural movement to reach the center of the earth. A stone has reached its center even though it is not at the middle of the earth. It could go there if nothing impeded its descent. When obstacles are withdrawn and the stone has gone as far as it can, it is at its deepest center.

The Soul’s Center

The center of the soul is God. When the soul attains to God with its whole capacity and all its powers, it will have reached its deepest center. It will love, know and enjoy God. Even though the soul is in God, before that point it has not reached its deepest center. It is capable of going still farther. The more degrees of love the soul possesses the more profoundly it enters God and is centered in Him.

Many Centers in God

As there are many degrees of love, so there are many centers in God. Each one is deeper. Jesus said there were many mansions in His Father’s house. (Jn.14:2) A soul with one degree of

love is at its center in God because one degree suffices to abide in God. With two degrees it attains a more interior center. If the soul attains its highest degree, God will wound the soul in its deepest center, transforming it entirely in its being and faculties. Having attained all that it can receive, the soul appears to be God. It is like a pure crystal. When the light is abundant and concentrated, the crystal seems to have become the light. The two cannot be distinguished. The crystal appears to be the light itself.

To say that the flame wounds the soul in its deepest center means that the Spirit wounds it at the farthest point the soul has reached in God. This shows the abundance of its glory and delight. This delight is tender to the degree the soul is substantially transformed and centered in God.

Two Different States of Union

This is greater than ordinary union because there is a greater frequency of the fire. In comparing this soul with the soul in ordinary union, I would say the soul in this sweetness is the fire in Zion, (signifying the Church militant) and the soul in ordinary union is in the furnace in Jerusalem (signifying the vision of peace). The soul in this glory is like a furnace enkindled, more glorious to the degree that the furnace's flame is more vehement.

The soul feels that the living flame is giving it everything in a living manner. So, she says "You tenderly glorify me with your loving movements to my greatest capacity, giving Divine intelligence to my intellect's capacity, love to my will's capacity, delight to my soul's substance and the copious sweetness of Divine contact according to my memory's capacity." This happens even more than the soul can describe.

No Longer Oppressive

Because the soul and its faculties are purged, Wisdom absorbs it through this flame and reaches from one end of the soul to the other. In that absorption, the Holy Spirit beings about sweet and glorious vibrations so the soul proclaims:

"Since you are no longer oppressive"

Wisdom no longer afflicts or oppresses the soul as it did before in the spiritual purgation. When the soul entered upon contemplation, the flame was not as friendly or as sweet as in this state of union. Let me explain how this happens.

Before the divine fire is united to the soul's substance by means of a perfect and complete purgation, this flame consumes the soul's imperfections and habits. By this, the Holy Spirit prepares for Divine union and the transformation of the soul's substance into God. At first the fire purged the soul. Now the fire glorifies it, just as the same fire that cleanses the log later transforms it into itself.

Sufferings At the Beginning

In the beginning of contemplation, the soul experiences grievous afflictions in its spirit which overflow into its senses. The flame is very oppressive. In this preparatory stage, the flame is dark and not bright. It is not sweet but heavy. Even the enkindling of love is accompanied by torment. This is arid, not delectable and brings no refreshment. It is not glorious, but bitter, because it bestows the light of self-knowledge. God sends fire into the bones. (Lam.1:13)

The soul suffers darkness in the intellect, affliction in the will, and knowledge of its sins in the memory (for the eyes of self-knowledge are wide open). The soul feels abandonment and finds relief in nothing. No thought consoles it. Because the flame is so oppressive, its heart cannot rise to God. Job said, "You turn upon me without mercy". (30:21) These sufferings are like purgatory and cannot be described. I can only use Jeremiah's words, "I am a man who knows afflictions. He has forced me to walk in darkness. He has worn away my flesh and skin. He has left me like those long dead". (Lam.3:1-6)

The Remedy

Because this is God's remedy, the soul must suffer this purification according to its sickness. The heart is placed in the coals so that every evil spirit is driven out. Its sins are brought to light so the soul may feel them and be cured. Brought near the flame, the soul sees its infirmities. Oh, wondrous thing! Opposites come against opposites and they become visible in reacting to each other. War reigns in the soul. Good and evil try to expel each other. This flame is a bright light which shines in the darkened soul. The soul becomes conscious of its own natural darkness which opposes this supernatural light. The soul cannot comprehend this light because it is in darkness.

Experience While Being Assailed

As long as the light beats upon it, the soul is conscious of the darkness (which it perceives only when near the light). When all darkness is driven out, the soul will see the light. When the sight is weak, infinite light is total darkness. The soul's faculty cannot function due to the excess of light.

The flame is tender, yet it oppresses the will which has a hardness. This hardness becomes evident when compared to the flame's tenderness. The will is conscious of its hardness and aridity. Only when these are driven out can the soul perceive the love and tenderness of the flame.

Contrasts With the Flame

Because the flame is extensive, the will sees its own littleness. It will suffer until the flame gives it a greater capacity. The flame is oppressive to the soul because sweet food of love is tasteless until the soul's palate is weaned from other tastes.

The flame has great wealth and the soul has only its own poverty. It has nothing to contribute. The soul's wickedness contrasts with the goodness of the flame (for wickedness cannot comprehend goodness). This continues until the flame transforms the soul and gives it riches and glory. In all these ways, the flame is oppressive and the soul must endure the greatest suffering. A battle is being waged by contrary forces. God (all perfection) wars against the soul's imperfect habits with the flame's heat. He uproots these imperfections so He might enter in and be united to the soul in this glorious love.

Suffering Until Purged

This severe purgation happens to few souls – those whom God desires to lift to some degree of union. Those lifted to the highest degree are the most severely purged. This happens as follows.

When God wants to lead a soul from the ordinary life and meditation to a spiritual life of contemplation (which is heavenly rather than earthly), He communicates Himself to the spirit which is still impure and imperfect and which still has evil habits. Each soul suffers according to its imperfections. For those destined for perfect union on earth, the suffering is like purgatory, where we are purged to see God.

Previous Teachings

I have already described (in The Ascent of Mount Carmel and Dark Night of the Soul) the intensity of this purgation. I have explained what happens when it touches the will, the intellect, the memory, when it touches the soul's substance, and when it affects the whole soul or only the sensual faculties. No more need be said. God Himself assails the soul because He desires to enter the soul by this transforming union.

The flame is bitter at first but will be sweet at the end. The soul can say, "You are not dark to me as you were before. I can look upon you and not faint. Instead I grow strong and can enjoy you. You are no longer pain to my soul's substance, You are my glory, delight and boundless freedom. I am described in the Canticle, "Who is this who comes up from the desert, filled with delights, leaning upon his Beloved?" (Song 8:5)

Perfect me now if it be your will

This means, "Consummate the spiritual marriage with your beatific vision". In this lofty state, the soul is so transformed that it knows nothing of itself nor can it ask for anything. All is for the Beloved. The soul's charity seeks only His good.

Conscious of A Lack

Still, the soul is conscious that something is lacking. It sighs deeply because it does not yet have the complete possession of being adopted as God's child. The soul will be at rest only in this heavenly consummation. On earth, the soul (no matter how close to this union) will never be satisfied until this glory appears, especially since it has already tasted its sweetness.

This sweetness is so great that if God did not sustain the flesh or cover its natural being with His hand (as He did to Moses), the soul would die at each touch of the flame. Its natural being would be destroyed because its lower part could not endure this sublime fire.

Glimpses of Glory

Pain does not accompany this desire because the soul (in this state) is incapable of pain. The prayer is made in delight and according to reason, "if it be your will". The soul sees that its glory is to do God's will.

The soul has glimpses of glory. Love filters through the doors of the soul. However, they cannot enter because the soul's earthly house is too small. The soul would have little love if it did not ask for love's consummation.

The soul also sees that the Holy Spirit (through these delectable communications) invites it to that boundless glory which He is showing the soul. He says to the soul, "Arise, and make haste my love, my dove, my fair one. Come, for winter is now past. The rain is over. The flowers have appeared. Show me your face. Let your voice sound in my ear. For your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful." (Song 2: 10-14) The soul responds, "Perfect me now if it is your will." Jesus gave us two petitions, "Your kingdom come" and "Your will be done". These say the same thing, "Give me this kingdom perfectly according to your will."

Break the web of this sweet encounter

This web hinders the soul. Reaching God is easy once the webs are removed. There are three webs – the temporal (every creature), the natural (the soul's natural activities) and the sensual (the union of the soul with the sensual, animal body). St. Paul writes, "We know that if this earthly dwelling is dissolved, we will have a dwelling place with God in heaven." (2Cor.5:1)

Only One Remains

The soul speaks of "web" not "webs", because the first two webs were broken in the purgation by the flame. The third web (the body) remains and the flame attacks this web sweetly. Therefore, the death of these souls is even sweeter than their whole life. They die amid the delectable impulses of love. They are like swans which sing most sweetly at their deaths. "Precious is the death of the just man." (Ps.116:15)

The rivers of the soul's love are about to enter the boundless ocean. Even now, they seem like gigantic seas which all unite to accompany the departing soul, as he goes forth to the kingdom. His praises are heard to the earth's ends. (Is. 24:16)

The soul sees itself as pure and feels itself near to going forth to the kingdom! In these glorious encounters, God permits the soul to see His beauty and entrusts it with the gifts He has given. This leads to love and praise because no leaven can corrupt the soul. It sees that only the frail web of human life needs to be broken so it can be free and be with Christ.

Breaking the Bonds

The bonds between flesh and spirit must be broken, so the flesh can remain on earth and the spirit return to God. Jesus said, "The flesh is of no avail." (Jn.6:63). It hinders this spiritual good. The soul grieves that the spirit's lofty life is obstructed by the flesh's low life. She begs that this web be broken.

This life is a web for three reasons. First, there is a bond between spirit and flesh. Second, this bond creates a division between the soul and God. Third, the bond is not dense and God can shine through. The bond is only a fine web.

The soul becomes conscious of the power of eternal life and feels keenly the weakness of human life. The soul's eyes are enlarged because it has entered into God's consciousness. Life is just a web. In God's sight, "a thousand years are as a day". (Ps.90:4) Isaiah says "Before

Him, all nations are as nothing.” (40:17) The soul sees all created things and itself as nothing. Only God is all.

Why “Broken”?

Why does the soul want the web broken, and not “cut”, or “worn out”? All three would have the same result. There are four reasons. First, in an encounter of forces, one is always broken. Second, love delights in forceful contacts and breaking produces this.

Love Enters Quickly

Third, love wants the acts to be brief and quickly concluded. The briefer breaking will be more spiritual and of greater worth. United power is greater than scattered power. Love enters in a single moment. Before that moment, the soul is disposed. Spiritual acts are done in an instant. Prior to that the soul has its dispositions, very few of which become acts. Prayers that succeed instantly become acts in God. Short prayer penetrates Heaven. A prepared soul can perform more acts with greater intensity in a short time than an unprepared soul can in a longer time. The unprepared soul spends so much time in preparing that the fire never penetrates the wood.

Love enters continuously into the prepared soul. Even on the first contact, a spark can ignite dry fuel. Therefore, the prepared soul wants the quick act of breaking.

Too Much Time

Fourth, the soul wants the web to quickly end. Cutting or allowing it to wear out require more time and maturity. Breaking waits for nothing and requires no maturing.

Seeks Supernatural Ending

The soul does not want to wait until life ends naturally. Love’s force and propensities make the soul desire that life end by a supernatural assault of love.

The soul knows that God habitually takes these purified souls to heaven before their time. He removes all evil and perfects them quickly. He gives them all at once what they otherwise would acquire only gradually. “He that is pleasing to God is made beloved. Living among sinners, he was snatched away. Having been made perfect in a short time, he reached the fullness of a long career.” (Wis.4:10-13) The soul must exercise itself in love. When love is perfected here below, the soul does not stay long (in this world or in purgatory) before seeing God, face to face.

An Encounter

Why is this interior assault called an “encounter”? The soul is conscious of an infinite desire that its life would end so that glory could be consummated. However, this is not yet accomplished. So, to raise the soul above the flesh, God makes glorious assaults, called encounters, by which he continually penetrates the soul and makes its substance Divine. By these encounters, He absorbs the soul in His own being (above all created beings). He encounters the soul and pierces it with the Holy Spirit. The soul calls this encounter “sweet”. Indeed, other touches are also sweet but this encounter is eminently so. God touches the soul to set it free and to glorify it. So the soul asks “Break the web of this sweet encounter.”

Powerful Petitions

This stanza means, “Oh, flame of the Spirit, you cauterize my soul with your heat. You show me Your desire to grant me eternal life. If, formerly, my petitions did not reach Your ears because my sense and spirit were fatigued from yearnings, I ask you to loose me from the flesh because I desire You. My impatient love will not let me be conformed to this earthly life. Previous assaults were not enough. Now I am strengthened. My heart and flesh do not fail in Your presence, but are strengthened in the living God and are in great harmony with each other. I ask You for what You desire and I do not ask You for what You do not desire. (These are not even in my mind.) My petitions are more effective and more reasonable in Your eyes (for they come from You). Break this slender web of my life. Let not age cut it in a natural manner. In this way, I can love You with fullness and satisfaction.”

STANZA 2

*Oh, sweet burn! Oh, delectable wound! Oh, soft
hand! Oh, delicate touch
That savours of eternal life and pays every debt! In
slaying, thou hast changed death into life.*

The Three Blessings

The stanza explains how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit bring about this Divine union. The soul gives this work three names, hand, burn and touch. “Hand” is the Father. “Touch” is the Son. “Burn” is the Holy Spirit. They have transformed the soul into Themselves, changing its death into life. The soul praises all Three by dwelling upon the three great blessings.

The delectable wound comes from the burn of the Spirit. The soul’s desire for eternal life comes from the delicate touch of the Son. The third gift (which pleases the soul greatly) comes from soft hand of the Father. Although speaking to all three Persons, the soul says “You (singular) have changed death into life. The work is one and attributed to all.”

Oh, sweet burn!

Moses calls God “a consuming fire”. (Dt. 4:24) This fire is infinite, having the power to consume and to transform into itself whatever it touches. However, it burns according to the degree of the soul’s preparation and according to its own pleasure. God is infinite love. When He wants to touch the soul with some severity, He raises the heat to such a degree that the soul believes it is being burned with the greatest heat in the world. Therefore, this touch is “a burn” because the soul experiences an intense and concentrated fire whose effects are far greater than other fires. The soul is transformed into God and is conscious that it is one burn of the vehement fire.

Does Not Destroy

God’s fire is so vehement that it could consume a thousand worlds like a piece of straw. What a wondrous thing that this fire does not consume or destroy spirits. It delights and deifies them because they are purified. When this fire (at Pentecost) came upon the disciples, they burned with sweetness. The Divine Office says “Fire came from heaven which did not burn but

gave splendor, did not consume but enlightened.” This fire magnifies the soul. It enlarges and does not afflict. It delights and does not weary. It makes the soul rich and glorious.

The Effects of the Burn

The happy soul which has gained this burning knows everything and tastes everything. It does all that it desires and it prospers. None prevail against it. “The spiritual man judges all things and is judged by no one.” (1Cor.2:15) “The spiritual man searches the deep things of God.” (1Cor.2:10)

Oh souls, you have gained great glory. You have attained this supreme fire which has infinite power to annihilate you, but instead grants you glory. Do not marvel that God brings souls to such a state. How delectable is this burn within the soul! The soul can only say:

Oh, delectable wound!

Wounds and Heals

The same burn that wounds also heals the wound. In natural fire, the wound becomes greater as the flame is greater. Eventually all is destroyed. This Divine burn heals the wound inflicted by love. With each application, the wound and the healing become greater. This healing of love wounds again what has been already wounded until the soul is totally dissolved in the wound of love. Then it regains its perfect health and is transformed in love and wounded again in love.

The soul most severely wounded is the healthiest, and the totally wounded soul is totally healthy. Even if a soul is totally wounded and totally healthy, the burning still is vehement. It wounds and then relieves the wound. The soul cries out, “Oh, delectable wound”. The more sublime the fire, the more delectable is the wound. The Holy Spirit inflicts the wound to relieve the soul. The wound is great so God’s relief can be great.

The Highest Degree Attainable

Oh, happy wound, inflicted by Him Who alone can heal. Oh, fortunate wound, inflicted for the relief and delight of the soul! Great is the wound and great is the relief caused by an infinite fire which is limited only by the soul’s capacity. Oh delectable wound, you are delightful to the degree that the burn has touched the inmost center of the soul’s substance. It burns all to relieve all. This burn is the highest degree the soul can attain on earth. There are other degrees gained by other ways. This Divine touch has no form or figure.

Another Kind of Burn

A soul can be cauterized in another sublime way. This happens when the soul is enkindled. This is not as perfect as an encounter. By an enkindling, the soul is conscious of an assault made by a seraph armed with a dart. This will pierce the flame of the enkindled soul. Then the flame will rise vehemently (as when they stir the fire in a white hot furnace). The soul becomes conscious of this wound with an indescribable delight and is totally moved by the stirring. In its own substance, the soul can feel both this keen wound and healing herb.

Like A Tiny, Powerful Mustard Seed

This is like a grain of mustard seed which remains in the center of the spirit, at the point of the wound and the refinement of its delight. The soul experiences this as a grain of mustard

seed, small, keen and enkindled in every part of the soul. This seed's power is subtly diffused through all the soul's spiritual and substantial veins, according to their capacity and the heat's strength. The soul feels itself growing in the strength and refinement of its love to such a degree that seas of fire are filling it totally with love.

To Founders of Communities

The soul now understands why Jesus compared the mustard seed to the kingdom. This small grain because of its heat, grows into a great tree. The soul has become a vast fire of love. This happens to only a few souls, especially those whose spirituality will be passed on to their followers. God gives spiritual wealth to the head of the house so his descendents can inherit the Spirit's first fruits.

The Angel's Work

The seraph's work is to strike and wound. Sometimes the wound's effect touches the bodily senses (as when the seraph wounded the soul of St. Francis of Assisi). In this case, these wounds become visible as in Francis' stigmata (the five wounds of Christ). The body receives favors only after the soul. In these cases, the bodily suffering will be more painful if the soul's delight is greater. This happens because these souls are purged. Whatever comes from God is a delight to their spirits but painful to their weak flesh. The soul rejoices to feel the pain grow with the pleasure. Job said, "You torment me wonderfully." (10:16)

Through God's abundance as the torment increases, so the soul's delight can also grow. Only You, O Lord, could give sweetness and pleasure amid bitterness and torment! The deeper Your wound, the greater the delight!

An Unseen Wound

A wound within the soul that does not show in the body can be even more intense. This is because the flesh bridles the spirit. When the body receives the spirit's blessings, it limits the energy of God's power. This is like reining in a great horse. The body presses down the soul and the bodily habits oppress the spiritual sense. Whoever relies upon bodily sense will never become a spiritual person.

Some think they can attain the spirit's heights by the work of the senses alone. Really, the height is gained only when bodily sense is left outside.

Sometimes spiritual affections *overflow* into the senses. This is different. In these cases, the spirit touches the body. Paul wrote, "I bear in my body the marks of my Lord Jesus." (Gal.6:17) The soul praises the hand that causes these wounds!

Oh, soft hand! Oh, delicate touch!

Oh generous hand, you give me your gifts richly and powerfully! You lay Your hand softly upon the soul. Otherwise, the whole world would perish. At your glance, the earth shakes, nations tremble and mountains crumble. Your hand was severe upon Job. However, upon my soul, you lay your hand graciously. You are as soft to me as you were hard to him.

Delicate But Powerful

You both kill and you give life. No one can flee your hand. You kill to give life and you wound to heal. You have slain in me what would have killed me. You did this through Your touch of Your glory and Your substance. Through your only begotten Son You reach from one end to the other. (Wis. 8:1). Oh Word, Son of God, with the delicateness of your Divine Being, you penetrate and touch the soul's substance, absorbing it totally in Divine sweetness. As Baruch says, "This has never been heard of in Canaan nor seen in Teman." (3:22)

Your delicate touch has broken the stones in Mount Horeb. Did You not reveal yourself to Elijah in a whisper of gentle air? (1Kg. 19:11-12) How can you be so gentle to the soul when you are so powerful? Do not tell the world because it knows nothing of so gentle a breeze. The world cannot receive you or see you.

Touched Only By God

When You touch those souls whom you refine, they shall know You. You touch them delicately because You are hidden in their souls which You have now made so beautiful. Because they are withdrawn from all creatures, You hide them in Your Divine Son and conceal them from men.

With Your delicate touch, You melt the soul. You remove all other touches from it and make it Yours alone. The effect is so delicate that every other touch (high or low) seems rude and crude. The soul is tormented when it even sees other things or must deal with them.

A delicate thing has greater capacity and is more communicative. Your delicacy makes my soul simpler and purer, giving it greater capacity. Your touch is so delicate that my soul feels nothing! By penetrating my soul more deeply, you make it more Divine. You fashion it according to Your Divine Being, which is far removed from all form and figure! Finally, You touch the soul with Your pure, simple and infinite Being. This is an infinitely delicate touch.

Savors of eternal life

The soul tastes a savor of life eternal (although not to a perfect degree). This touch is substantial coming from God's substance directly to the soul's substance. Many holy people have attained this on earth. I do not even try to describe these sublime gifts of God. The person who knows them understands them inwardly. They should enjoy them and be silent.

Even The Body Feels the Glory

These touches are like the white stone given to the victor. The stone contains a name which only the person receiving can know. (Re. 2:17) This touch savors of eternal life (even though in this life we cannot perfectly enjoy it). In this sublime state, the soul tastes all of God's gifts. In one single touch God gives fortitude, wisdom, love, beauty and grace. The soul enjoys these according to its capacity.

The blessings often overflow into the body. The body's members enjoy the great feeling of glory, even in the joints of hands and feet. The body glorifies God "All my bones say 'God Who is like to You?'" (Ps.35:10) This bodily experience also savors of eternal life.

And pays every debt!

The soul now sees that its debts are paid because it has gone through many tribulations. Paul said, “It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) To attain union souls must suffer trials, so both their senses and their spirit can be purged.

Once they are purged, God’s delight finds a home in the soul. Penances refine the soul and darkness prepares the spirit. The soul must pass through these to attain transformation in God. Other souls do this in purgatory. The length and intensity of these trials depend on the degree of union God desires.

The Fire and the Hammer

By these trials, the soul acquires virtues which are made perfect in weakness. (2Cor.12:9) To mold iron, the worker must use fire and a hammer. Jeremiah wrote, “He sent fire into my bones and taught me.” (Lam.1:13) and “You chastised me. I was instructed and became wise.” (Jer.31:18) The Preacher asks, “What does he know who has not been tried?” (Eccl. 34:9)

Why So Few?

God is not pleased that so few attain this state. He would be pleased if all reached it. However, He finds few vessels in whom He can do this lofty work. When He tries them in small things, they flee and do not want the least discomfort. When He begins to purge, He finds they are too weak to accept His favor. So, He goes no further in His purification. He does not test them because they would need greater fortitude and constancy.

These souls want to make progress but not to suffer the smallest things. God says, “If running against men has wearied you, how will you run against horses? If you fall headlong on a land of peace, what will happen in the thickets of Jordan?” (Jer.12:5) In other words, “If you cannot accept ordinary human trials how could you accept greater trials? If you refused to make war against your sensual nature how will you suffer the vehement waters of spiritual tribulation?”

The Hidden Wisdom

Oh, you souls that want to walk in comfort! You must know how necessary it is to suffer to reach this lofty state. If you knew the great blessings, you would not seek consolation from God or from creatures. You would carry the cross with great happiness. Dead to the world and self, you would live for God. With patience you would accept all outward trials so God would favor you and purge you with inner trials.

God grants interior trials only to those who have served Him, have had great patience and are acceptable in His sight. Tobias was acceptable. God sent him a temptation so He could bless him even more. (Tob. 12:13) After the trial, he was filled with joy. Another example, when God accepted Job as His servant, He sent him heavy trials. After the trials, He could exalt Job even more than He had done previously.

Temptation Before Exaltation

Whatever soul God wishes to exalt, He tempts in the highest possible degree. In this way, He can deify the soul and grant divine union in His Wisdom. “The wisdom of the Lord is silver tried by fire, purged seven times (the greatest possible).” (Ps.12:6) No need to show how these

seven purgations lead us to a communion which here on earth is silver. Only in heaven will the union be gold.

Wherever these trials come from (within or without) and whether they are spiritual or bodily, the soul must be constant in receiving all these afflictions from God's hand for its own healing. The soul must not flee. The trials are for its health. "If the spirit of him who is powerful comes upon you do not leave that place." (Eccl. 10:4) The place of trial is also the place of healing which will cause great sins to cease and will cut the thread of evil habits. Because these interior trials quench evil and imperfection, the soul must value them and realize that few souls desire to suffer to gain perfection.

Recalling Past Rewards

Fortunately, the soul has memories and can recall the rewards it has received from past trials. The soul realizes its own satisfaction. David says, "You have delivered me from all my tribulations and have comforted me." (Ps.71:20-21)

The soul is like Mordecai who wept because his service received no recompense and his life was in peril. However, in just one day, he is repaid. He comes into the king's presence and receives a royal seat and the king's ring. (Esther 4:1-4) Living now in the Spouse's kingdom, the soul can do what it desires and not do what it does not desire. It is well repaid. All its enemies (the desires that would kill the soul) are now dead. Because it lives in God, the soul says:

In slaying, you have changed death into life

Death is the deprivation of life. When life comes, there is no death. The spirit has two kinds of life. The first life is seeing God (the beatific vision). This happens after natural death. Paul writes "When this house is dissolved, we have a dwelling with God in the heavens." (2Cor.5:1)

The Second Life

The second life is a perfect spiritual life on this earth. The soul possesses God through union gained by total mortification of the soul's entire nature. This is the only way the soul can gain a perfect spiritual life. Paul writes, "If you live by the flesh, you will die. If you mortify the flesh by the spirit you shall live." (Rom. 8:13)

Death must come to the "old man" who uses his powers to seek pleasures and worldly things. Seeking worldly goods is death to the spiritual life. Only if the soul dies perfectly, can it live perfectly. The soul must put on the new man who is created in justice and holiness. (Eph.4:22-24) When the soul reaches perfect union, all the soul's acts and desires (which were works of death) are changed into divine acts.

One With God

All creatures live and work in God. By dying to its own desires, the soul has been changed into life. God now moves the intellect (which formerly understood by a natural power) by supernatural light. The soul's intellect and God's intellect are now one. God changes the will (which formerly loved with natural desires) into Divine love. The soul loves by the Holy Spirit whose will is now one with the soul's will. God places in the soul's memory (which formerly had images of created things) the eternal years. God moves the desires (which formerly enjoyed

only creature food that brought death). The soul enjoys divine food and is moved by God's sweetness.

Now God's Actions

All the soul's actions are changed into God's actions. The Spirit totally moves the soul, who is now a daughter of the Father. Paul wrote, "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Rom.8:14) The soul's will, understanding, memory and desires are now all God's, even though the soul's substance is not God's substance (something which cannot happen).

The soul is united and absorbed. By participation in God, the soul is God. This is perfect although not as perfect as in heaven. The soul says "By slaying, you have changed death into life." As Paul said, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal.2:20) The soul is absorbed in life. Paul writes, "Death is absorbed in victory." (1Cor.15:54)

In the King's Cellar

Withdrawn from temporal matters and freed from its own unruly nature, the soul is led into the King's cellars. Here it rejoices in the Beloved, remembering His breasts more than the wine. "I am black but beautiful." (Song 1:4) "I am changed into the beauty of the king."

O burning, infinite fire, the more you burn, the sweeter you are. O wound, you are more delectable than health. O soft hand, the more you press on me, the softer you are! O delicate touch (which surpasses all beauty) the more intimately you touch me the greater is the delight. This gift is infinitely more precious than gold because it pays debts which could not otherwise be paid. Death is changed into life.

The Lofty State

Because the soul knows its lofty state it keeps festival and has a new song. The soul says within, "My glory shall always be renewed. As a palm tree, I will multiply my days." (Job 29:18-20) This means, "God always remains unchangeable. He makes all things new and never allows my glory to grow old. He multiplies my merits as the palm tree multiplies its branches."

The soul sings, "For me, you have turned my mourning into joy. I will praise you forever." (Ps.30:11) The soul sees that God is solicitous, grants favors and exalts the soul. She believes that there is no other soul in the world with these favors, as if God were interested in her alone. "My Beloved to me and I to Him." (Song 2:16)

STANZA 3

*Oh, lamps of fire, In whose splendours the deep caverns
of sense which were dark and blind
With strange brightness Give heat and light together to
their Beloved.*

I need God's help to explain this stanza's profound meaning. The inexperienced reader must pay great attention, because some parts might be obscure. For the experienced reader, all will be clear.

Realizes God's Favors

The soul gives deepest thanks for the favors received from union. Before, the soul's faculties and senses were blinded by other loves. Now, they are filled with abundant knowledge and are enkindled by love. They are illumined by love and can offer the same light and love to Him who infused these divine gifts.

The true lover is only satisfied when all that he has and is are used for the Beloved. The more he gives, the greater the pleasure. Understand that these lamps have two qualities. They give light and they burn:

Oh, lamps of fire

In His one Being, God is all the virtues and all His attributes. He is wise, merciful, omnipotent and has other infinite virtues that we do not know. When united to the soul, God is all these things. By infused knowledge, the soul sees all these virtues and grandeurs (goodness, wisdom, mercy, etc.) in one simple Being.

This is God's very Being in one reality (the Father or the Son or the Spirit). Each attribute is God Himself. God is infinite light and infinite fire. In each of these infinite attributes He gives light and burns.

Many Lamps With Distinct Lights

The soul possesses all these kinds of knowledge of God which are actually distinct in the one single act. God Himself is like many lamps to the soul. Each lamp gives light in a distinct way. Each lamp gives the soul knowledge and the heat of love. All are contained in one lamp which is the Word (the brightness of the Father's glory).

The soul can see clearly that this one lamp is all these lamps and can do all things. The lamp comprehends all spirits and, in the same act, both gives light and burns in all its greatness (in many ways but in one way) This one lamp gives light and burns as omnipotent, as wise, as good, as strong, as just, as true, as all the other attributes.

All In All

The lamp gives the soul knowledge and love of God according to all these attributes and according to each attribute. God, because He is all of these attributes and each of them, gives light and love according to all and each. When fire is applied, it gives heat and brightness. This happens according to each attribute. For example, when the brightness of the lamp of wisdom is applied, it also produces the heat of God's love because He is wise. The same is true when the lamps of goodness, justice, fortitude, mercy, etc. are applied to the soul. In this lofty manifestation (I think it is the greatest possible in this life) God is innumerable lamps to the soul.

Moses saw these lamps on Mount Sinai. He fell prostrate and proclaimed each grandeur separately, "God, you are merciful, gracious, slow to anger, rich in kindness and fidelity, forgiving sin but not declaring the guilty guiltless ..." (Ex.34:6-7) In this one experience, Moses learned God's various attributes of omnipotence, mercy, justice and truth. This was profound knowledge and sublime delight.

Many Lamps of Fire

The rapture of love from this fire and this light is as boundless as are the many lamps. The heat and light of one is added to all the others. All become one light and fire and each of them becomes one fire. The soul is completely absorbed in these flames and wounded by each and by all. The soul can see clearly that this love belongs to eternal life (which is the union of all blessings). It understands the Spouse who said that the lamps of love were lamps of fire. If Abraham experienced such horror when God, with one single lamp, showed His rigorous justice against the Canaanites, will not all these lamps cause the soul delight? How great and excellent is that light! The soul sees that God is giving all these gifts for the soul's enjoyment according to His virtues and attributes.

All The Attributes

When someone loves and does good to another, he acts according to his own attributes. When acting upon the soul the Divine Spouse is omnipotent, wise, good, holy, just, merciful, compassionate, strong, pure, true, generous, humble. The soul sees clearly that God loves her with wisdom, goodness, holiness, justice, mercy, compassion, strength, purity, truth, generosity and humility. God joyfully reveals His countenance. "I am yours and for you. I delight to give Myself to you and be yours."

Abundance Everywhere

"Oh soul, how can you describe what you see so clearly – that you are loved and exalted? Your body is like a heap of wheat covered with lilies." (Song 7:3) The wheat is the bread of life which you are tasting. The lilies are the virtues which delight you by means of the knowledge that God gives you. You are absorbed and engulfed in the vehement living waters of Mount Lebanon which cause a harmony of body and soul. (Song 4:15) "The vehemence of the river makes glad the city of God." (Ps.46:5)

Living Water and Boiling Fire

The soul is overwhelmed with divine waters flowing from it in every direction. These lamps give fire, but the fire is sweet. It is like the water of life which fulfills all the soul's desires. The lamps of fire are living waters of the spirit, which came upon the apostles as fire. "I will pour out clean water upon you and put my spirit in your midst." (Ez.36:25-26) Nehemiah poured water on the sacrifice and everyone marveled that fire blazed up. (2Mac. 1:20-22)

God's fire is hidden in the soul's veins and is like delectable water. When the soul offers its sacrifice of love, this water quenches the soul's thirst and becomes living flames of fire. The lamps are lamps "of fire and of flames". (Song 8:6) The soul tastes the waters of wisdom and experiences the fire of love. Really, this cannot be described. Transformed in God, the soul has become a fountain of living waters boiling in the fire of love.

In whose splendours

These splendors are the communications which come from the lamps and shine in the soul's memory, understanding and will. All the faculties are illumined and united in this loving knowledge. This enlightenment is not like material fire which heats things outside of itself. This fire heats what is within. "In whose splendours" shows that the soul is within the lamp's flames

and transformed into the flame. The soul is like the air within the flame and is transformed into the fire. Flame is enkindled air and the flame's movements are acts of both air and fire.

Trying To Bring To Glory

In the same way, the soul's faculties are illumined within God's splendors. Neither the soul alone nor God alone bring about the flame's movements. The Holy Spirit and the soul work together. The Spirit moves the soul as fire moves enkindled air. These movements of God and the soul are glorifications worked by God in the soul.

The Holy Spirit gives these flickerings to the soul when He seems about to grant eternal life. These bursts of flame are the Spirit's provocations so He can take the soul into perfect glory and have it enter into Himself. God gives every blessing to the soul for one reason – to bring the soul to eternal life.

The movement of natural fire brings air into the center of its sphere. However, the flame's flickerings are unsuccessful attempts because the air has its own sphere. Similarly, the Spirit's movements try to absorb the soul into great glory. However, nothing is accomplished perfectly until the soul leaves the flesh and enters into the center of its spirit. This is perfect life in Christ.

Among the Highest Favors

These are the soul's movements, not God's. These glimpses of glory are not stable, perfect and continuous as they will be in heaven. There, the soul will understand that, although it seemed like God was moving, He was not because God does not move in Himself. Nevertheless, these splendors are God's inestimable graces to the soul. They are called overshadowings and are among the highest favors granted on earth in this transformation process.

Overshadowing

"Overshadowing" signifies a protection and a granting of favors. The shadow is a signal to another that the person wants to befriend and protect the other. Mary was told that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her. (Lk.1:35) The Spirit approached so closely that He came upon her. Everything makes a shadow according to its size and nature. A dense thing (like a log) makes a dark shadow. A clear thing (like a crystal) makes a light shadow.

The same is true in spiritual matters. Death is total privation and the shadow of death deprives us of everything. This is true of bodily death or spiritual death. Divine life casts a divine light. Human life casts a natural light. The shadow from beauty, strength or wisdom will be the light of beauty, strength or wisdom. The shadow reveals the nature of what is casting the shadow.

Shadows of the Spirit

What, then, are the shadows of the Holy Spirit and His attributes? He is so near to the soul that His attributes do not just touch the soul. Rather, the soul is united to the attributes in shadow and experiences them in shadow.

The soul understands God in God's shadows. It understands divine power, divine wisdom, infinite goodness, God's delight and God's glory in their respective shadows. God's attributes are lamps which will cast shadows according to their natures. They will cast a multitude of shadows in one sole being.

Experiencing the Vision of Ezekiel

Ezekiel saw figures resembling the four living creatures. Among the living creatures he saw burning coals of fire. (Ex. C1) He saw the four wheels filled with eyes. The wheels are wisdom and the eyes are wisdom's manifestations. What a grace for the soul to experience these! They will hear the multitude of the great armies passing. This signifies the many different things of God. The soul experiences all this in one single sound of God's visitation. It experiences the beating of the creatures' wings as the sound of many waters. This overwhelms the soul and makes it rejoice because it enjoys God's protection and the favor of his shadow. To what heights the soul may find itself raised, seeing itself in a holy beauty beyond all telling! It is so immersed in these waters that the soul can see the Eternal Father pouring forth the streams that water the earth. Just as Caleb gave his daughter Achsah the upper and lower pool (Judges 1:15), so these waters penetrate both body and soul.

Infinite Simplicity

How wonderful that all these lamps of God's attributes are one simple being in whom all are experienced. Still, the soul easily sees the distinction of the lamps and that each lamp is substantially the other and is enkindled in the other. "Oh God, your riches are gathered together in infinite simplicity! The soul experiences perfect absorption into each lamp but is not impeded in experiencing all of them. In You, when one is seen many things are seen. You are the storehouse of the Father's riches." In your splendors are:

The deep caverns of sense

The faculties (memory, understanding and will) are the caverns. Their depth is their capacity for blessings and they can be filled only with the infinite. By seeing how much they suffer when empty, we can learn their joy when they are filled.

Not Conscious of Capacity

These caverns are not conscious of their emptiness until they are purged. Before purification, any creature can fascinate them. The facilities do not realize their capacity for the infinite or their ability to be blessed. Because the least thing can hinder these blessings, the soul can receive them only when completely empty.

Intolerable Thirst

When they are purged, the hunger and yearning of their spiritual sense becomes intolerable. The caverns are deep and the pain is deep. The food they lack is God. This great feeling of pain happens toward the end of the purification so that the soul can attain to the union which alone can satisfy it.

When the spiritual appetite is empty, it becomes attuned to the Divine and is ready to be filled. However, God's favors have not yet reached it and the soul's thirst is worse than death. This is especially true if God has given the soul some glimpse of His divinity. These souls have impatient love and want either to receive or to die.

Emptiness of the Three Caverns

The emptiness of the cavern of understanding is a thirst for wisdom. David wrote “As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God.” (Ps.42:1) The deer’s thirst is the most vehement of all the animals.

The emptiness of the cavern of the will is a hunger for God. This causes the soul to faint. “My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord.” (Ps.84:3)

The emptiness of the cavern of memory is a languishing to possess God. The soul remembers and melts away. It ponders all things and lives in hope.

Infinitely Deep

These caverns are deep. Their hunger and thirst are infinite for they are capable of receiving God. Their pain and languishing are an infinite death. Although not suffering the pains of hell, the soul suffers from a vivid image of that infinite deprivation. This suffering is different from hell because the soul actually dwells in the bosom of love. Yet, love does not alleviate the pain, which is greater according to the soul’s impatient desires to possess God.

The soul already possesses God by desiring Him in total truth. Why, then, does the soul yearn for Him Whom it possesses? The angels have no pain because they have possession. If the soul possessed God according to its desires, then these desires and this possession should delight the soul.

However, the soul and the angels are quite different. The angels fulfill their desires and satisfy their spirits without any weariness. They have possession with no pain. The greater the soul’s desires, the more satisfaction it should have, not grief or pain.

The Difference

I must note the difference between possessing God by grace alone and possessing Him by union. The first consists of mutual love. The second includes communication. This is the same difference between engagement and marriage. In engagement, there is only mutual consent, which includes a unity of wills and the engagement ring. In marriage, there is communication and union. During the engagement, the groom sees the bride and gives her gifts but there is no union.

When the soul has been purged from other desires and has given God its consent, God’s will and the soul’s will are one in a free consent. At this stage, the soul has attained to possession by grace and by will. Through grace God has given His true and entire consent.

The State of Betrothal

This is the lofty state of the soul’s spiritual betrothal to the Word. The Spouse visits the soul frequently and gives great gifts, but these have nothing to do with marriage. It is true that the soul is purged because spiritual betrothal cannot take place before this happens. Nevertheless, God must make other positive preparations. By His visits and gifts, He purifies, beautifies and refines the soul to prepare her for union. Some souls need more time than others. The maidens

of King Ahasuerus were kept waiting at least a year. These were taken from their father's house and put in the enclosure of the palace (Esther 2:12). Before going to the king's bed, they were prepared for the first six months by spices and for the next six months, by choicer ointments.

During this betrothal, God prepares the soul by the choice ointments of the Holy Spirit. These cause the soul's yearnings to be extreme and delicate. These ointments are the nearest to God and the proximate preparation for union. Therefore, they inspire more delicate and deeper desires.

An Important Warning

Souls should not go backward. I must warn those whom God is leading toward these delicate anointings to take care and to see into whose hands they are committing themselves. My heart fills with pity when I see souls going backward. They fail to submit themselves to the Spirit's anointing. Even worse, they lose the effects of the anointings they have already received. Even though I interrupt my main teaching for a while, I have to explain what must be done to avoid this loss. This will also help in understanding the qualities of the caverns. I am anxious to help these souls and all who seek the Beloved.

Choicer Anointments

First, every soul that seeks God must know that God seeks the soul even more. If the soul sends its loving desires to God, God also sends the fragrance of His ointments to draw the soul and to make it run after Him. These ointments are His touches and inspirations which are always ordered to the perfection of God's law and of faith.

In this perfection, the soul must always draw nearer to God. By all His favors, God desires to prepare the soul for choicer ointments (which are even more attuned to God) until the soul reaches that pure state of perfection, which merits union with God and transformation of all the soul's faculties.

Three Blind Guides

The soul is blinded but it realizes that God Himself is leading where it could otherwise not go - to supernatural gifts far beyond its understanding, will and memory. The soul's chief care must be to place no obstacles to its guide, the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, there can be three other blind guides, the spiritual director, the devil and the soul itself.

The Director

Concerning a director, the soul must understand that the disciple will be like the master. No director exists who will perfectly guide the soul in all respects along the highest stretch of the road, or even along the intermediate stretches because the guide must be wise, discreet and experienced. The fundamental requirements are knowledge and discretion.

If a director has no experience of the higher parts, he cannot direct the soul that reaches that stretch of the road. He could do great harm to the soul and cause it to lose the delicate anointings by which the Spirit gradually prepares the soul for union. Instead, he might guide the soul to the lower parts of the road which he has studied and are suitable for beginners. Such guides do not

allow souls to go beyond the rudimentary acts of meditation for beginners. Even though God is leading it farther, the soul never goes beyond this natural capacity in which they achieve little.

Understanding Spiritual Progress

The beginners' state involves meditation and reasoning. The soul needs material to make interior acts and to profit from sensual spiritual consolations which orient the soul to good things. Nourished by these delights, the soul can grow detached from the world. When this has been accomplished, God leads the soul to contemplation (this happens quickly with religious). Contemplation attunes their senses and desires to God. They need only move away from meditation to contemplation. This happens when the discursive activity ceases and when the first fervors and sweetness are no longer. The soul cannot meditate as before. It cannot use its senses. These become arid because God's treasures are now placed directly into the spirit. God is the agent. The soul just receives. God gives spiritual blessings in contemplation. This is knowledge coming from love. Now, the soul must set aside meditation.

A Different Path

At this point, the soul should follow a road totally opposed to the first way. The soul should not try to meditate. The material for meditation should be removed because it is a distraction. The soul must not seek sweetness. Trying to find sweetness will cause dryness. By trying to make acts, the soul turns away from the peaceful blessings which God is secretly giving to the spirit. The soul will not have meditation or contemplation.

The soul must not be forced to meditate or to make acts. This would be an obstacle to God. He is secretly infusing wisdom with no acts being made. At times, God produces acts in the soul. In these cases, the soul must have loving advertence to God and conduct itself passively without making any efforts. The soul just keeps her eyes open to God.

Abandoning the Natural

God communes with the soul by simple knowledge. The soul communes with God by receiving this simple knowledge. In this way, knowledge is united to knowledge and love to love. To retain a gift, the recipient must act according to what he receives. If the soul does not abandon natural meditation, it cannot receive supernatural contemplation. By desiring its own spiritual work, the soul places an impediment to God's work and cannot stay in the passive advertence needed for contemplation. By its own acts, the soul establishes a total impediment to God's supernatural communication in loving knowledge.

In the beginning, contemplation causes purgation and later brings sweetness. To receive these blessings passively (in God's way and not in the soul's way) the soul must be detached, peaceful and adapted to God's manner. Air receives greater light when it is pure. So, the soul must be pure and attached to nothing (not even to meditation and sweetness).

The soul must be free and completely annihilated in its desires. Any attachment would introduce noise into the deep silence which the soul needs to hear God's delicate voice (which speaks to the heart in the secret place). Like David, the soul must hear God's words in peace of soul.

Staying Free

When the soul is conscious of being led into silence, it must stay free. It must set aside even loving advertence when it is conscious of being led into solitude or forgetfulness or attentiveness in the spirit (which is always accompanied by a certain interior absorption).

Not Going Back

After entering contemplation, the soul must never seek to gather meditations nor to experience spiritual sweetnesses. It must stand in complete detachment and freedom of spirit. Habakuk said, "I will stand watch over my senses and stand guard over my faculties. I will wait to see what is said to me." (Hab.2:1)

Contemplation is receiving. Only a spirit which is silent and detached from knowledge can receive this lofty wisdom. "To whom would he impart knowledge? To whom would he give the message?" (Is.28:9) To whomever is weaned from milk (sweetness and pleasures) and from the breasts (making interior acts).

O soul, remove the mist from your eyes. Let the sun shine and you will see. Set your soul at liberty. Be free from slavery's yoke of Egypt. By your own acts, you only gather straw to make bricks. Let the Spirit lead you to the promised land of milk and honey.

Teaching For the Director

Oh, spiritual director, remember that God called the soul to the desert to give it holy rest. In the desert, it journeys in the robes and jewels which it took from Egypt. The Egyptians have drowned in the sea of contemplation because their senses could find no foothold.

This contemplation sets the child of God free. The spirit has gone forth from the narrow natural limits of its lowly understanding. God wants to give the soul manna which already contains the sweetness. You, inexperienced director, make the soul work for its food. This manna melts in the mouth but the soul cannot taste it if it seeks other delights.

Director, detach the soul from sweetness and meditation. Don't make it seek any particular spiritual thing (high or low). Bring it into solitude and withdrawal. The sooner it reaches this point, the more abundantly it will receive Divine Wisdom, Who is the lovely, lonely, sweet ravisher of the spirit. At times, the soul will feel itself serenely ravished and wounded, not knowing how or by whom. The Spirit communicates Himself without the soul acting.

Great Blessings

Even the smallest part of this gift brings blessings far greater than the soul or the director can imagine. All will be evident in due time. At this stage, the soul can see its detachment from all things and its sweet desires of love. It inclines toward solitude and has no desire for creatures and the world. By tasting the Spirit, the soul receives a distaste for the flesh.

The soul cannot count the blessings impressed by this silent contemplation. They are delicate anointings of the Spirit. They fill the soul with rich graces because God acts as God. His touches are delicate and pure. Neither the soul nor the director can understand them. By infusing them, God makes the soul pleasing to Himself because any activity hinders His blessings. It is a grave evil and pity for the soul to try to make acts.

Serious Harm

This is a grave matter even though the harm done seems negligible. This destruction is more serious than the ruining of many more ordinary souls which have not attained this supreme fineness. It is like a portrait of supreme beauty being touched by a clumsy hand and painted with strange colors. The damage is greater than if many ordinary portraits were similarly ruined. Who can restore the beauty of a work done by a delicate hand when it has been so roughly treated?

Although the gravity of this evil cannot be exaggerated, it happens all the time because directors harm souls whom God is leading to contemplation. This is what happens. God anoints the soul with the peaceful unction of loving knowledge. Because God is keeping the soul in that lovely unction, the soul cannot meditate or find pleasure in things (above or below). Then some director who knows only the hammering of the blacksmith will say, "Leave all of this. You are wasting time and living in idleness. Get to work. Make interior acts. You must be diligent and do things for yourself because these other practices come from the Illuminists and fools."

Walking A Road Already Traversed

Such directors have no idea of the degrees of prayer. They urge the soul to meditate when the soul has already gone beyond the meditation. This soul has already gained the negation of sense. Why walk a road that has already been traversed? This is to walk away from the goal. Meditation is ended. God is the agent. He speaks and the soul keeps quiet. By imposing these lower acts, the director ruins the soul's solitude and spoils God's work. As a result, the soul neither meditates nor allows God to act.

Only An Instrument

Let these directors realize the Holy Spirit is the principal agent and He never gives up His role. The director is only an instrument who should lead souls according to the Church's teachings and God's path. They should not guide the soul by their ways. They should know the way God is leading. If they don't know this, then do not disturb the soul.

Let the director lead the soul into greater solitude, liberty and tranquility so their body and spirit are not bound to anything when God leads. Let them not worry as if they are doing nothing. When the soul is detached from all knowledge and all desires, when it dwells in poverty of spirit and is emptied of all sweetness, God will certainly do His part. The soul's task is to deny itself. The director's task is to help the soul deny itself. Just as the sun enters your house if you open the curtains, so God will enter a soul that is empty.

The Director's Task

God is always ready to enter the soul. The spiritual director should lead the soul according to evangelical perfection, that is, detachment and emptiness. Let them go no further. The real work belongs to the Lord from whom comes every perfect gift. (James 1:17) "If the Lord does not build the house, everyone labors in vain." (Ps.127:1) He will build according to His plan.

Let the director prepare the soul by annihilating its acts. His task is to direct the soul to supernatural blessings by ways unknown to himself or to the soul. Do not say, "He is doing

nothing and making no progress.” The soul makes progress when it takes no pleasure in the understanding. Do not say, “He understands nothing distinctly.” If he understood, he would be making no progress, for God transcends the understanding.

To make progress, the soul must walk in faith. By not understanding it approaches God more closely. The soul must not grieve if the understanding has no distinct knowledge. Not to go backwards is to go forward. When the understanding does not and cannot know what God is, it is walking toward Him. What the director condemns in the penitent is actually for his good.

Communicates Both Light and Love

The director should not complain that the will is idle and does not love, just because there is no understanding. Certainly, in natural activity the will loves only what it understands. However, in infused contemplation, the soul does nothing. In one act, God communicates loving knowledge which is both light (for the understanding) and heat (for the will). There is no perceptible distinction between the two.

Because this infused knowledge is general and dark, the soul cannot understand it distinctly. Also, the will loves in a general way without any distinctiveness. In this delicate communication, God is both light and love, touching equally both intellect and will. At times, He works more on one than on the other. At times, the soul is more conscious of understanding than of love and at other times, of love more than of understanding.

In natural activity, the soul cannot love without understanding. However, when God acts, He can touch one faculty and not the other. He can enkindle the will (with the heat of love) but give nothing to the understanding, just as a person can receive the fire’s heat without seeing the flame. In this way, the soul feels itself enkindled without understanding anything new. God is setting love in order. “The king introduced me into the wine cellar and set love in order in me.” (Song 2:4)

God Acts

Do not fear that the soul will be idle, even though it performs no acts by its own efforts. God performs these acts. He inebriates the soul with infused love, with or without the knowledge of contemplation. God’s acts are much more meritorious and more delectable than the soul’s.

God establishes love in the soul because it is near Him and is detached. The soul’s only task is to strip its will of all desires. If it does not go backward (by desiring sweetness) then it is going forward, even though it perceives nothing. Because it takes pleasure in nothing it is soaring upward, above all things, to God. Even though it has no particular delight and is not loving God by any distinct act it is going toward Him.

The Soul is Free to Love

The soul is secretly taking greater pleasure in God by means of this dark, general infusion and realizes that its greatest pleasure comes from solitary quiet. Now, the soul can love God above all things because all other sweetness has become distasteful.

There is no reason to be troubled. The will moves forward because it finds no pleasure in individual acts. By not embracing what belongs to sense, the soul approaches the inaccessible God. No wonder the soul has no perception!

Need For Detachment

To journey to God, the soul must continually detach itself from everything that is pleasant. In this way, it can love completely. Loving God above all things happens only in spiritual emptiness.

The soul has nothing to fear if the memory has no forms or figures, because God has no form or figure. The memory only approaches God when it is voided of forms. If the memory leans upon images, it goes farther away from God and is in greater peril because the imagination cannot comprehend God.

Mistakes of Directors

Directors must understand that this soul is walking in solitary, quiet contemplation. If the director has not advanced beyond ordinary meditation, he often thinks that this soul is idle because the soul which does not advance beyond the senses cannot really perceive the things of God. (1Cor.2:14) This director disturbs the peace of hushed contemplation which God gives by His own power. He forces the soul to meditate. This causes repugnance and distraction. Instead, this soul should remain in peaceful recollection. The director tells the soul to seek sweetness when it should seek the opposite. The soul can do none of these things because that time for these acts is over. The soul is now doubly disturbed. First, its spirit is parched. Secondly, its director has removed the unctions which God was giving in solitude. This is a great evil and the director himself is plunging the soul into the mire. The soul loses the favors which God is giving and gains no profit from its own work.

God's Work

These directors have no idea of spirituality and they insult God by placing their coarse hands upon His work. God paid dearly to bring these souls to this place. He needs their solitude and emptiness to speak to their hearts. He has taken them by the hand and He reigns in their hearts by peace. He causes their natural faculties to fail because these have fished all night and have caught nothing. He has brought peace to their spirits without any activity of sense (which cannot receive spirit).

Tearing Down the Vine

The Spouse says, "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the goats and deer of the fields. Do not cause my beloved to awaken before she pleases." (Song 3:5) This shows how precious is the slumbering of the faculties. "The goats and deer of the field" are solitary animals. They show God's love for detachment. However, these directors won't let the soul have repose. They demand continual labor. They leave no room for God to work and wipe out what He has already accomplished. They are foxes who tear down the flowering vine. (Song 2:15) God complains "You have devoured my vineyard." (Is. 3:14)

Need For Knowledge

Possibly these directors err from lack of knowledge. This does not excuse them from giving rash advice without first learning the road that the soul is taking. They lay their hands upon what they do not understand. They should leave these souls for others who do understand. It is no small thing to cause a soul to lose these blessings. The director who rashly errs will be punished because of the harm he has caused. God's business must be done with great circumspection and with eyes wide open. This is a delicate matter and a director can bring infinite gain to a soul (if he gives good advice) or infinite loss (if he is mistaken).

Refusing Another Director

Although you might see some excuse for a director who errs from ignorance (I see none.) yet there is absolutely no excuse for a director who never allows a soul to go to another director (for vain intentions known only to himself). This director will be punished. To make progress, the soul must change its prayer method. This requires a director with a higher level of instruction and a deeper spirituality.

Not all directors have sufficient knowledge nor is their spirituality so perfect to know how to direct a soul in every state of the spiritual life. No one should think they know everything or believe that God will not lead the soul farther than they can guide. Some people can cut a block of wood but they cannot carve an image. Some can carve but not polish. Some can polish but not paint. Each person can do only what he is familiar with. Trying to do more ruins the image.

Chastising the Arrogant Director

Some directors can only cut the wood. These can lead souls to despise the world. Others can only carve. These can lead souls to meditation. If a director has only these basic skills, how can he guide the soul to attain perfection? How can the soul be a delicate painting in which God Himself does the work if the director knows only how to cut or to carve and then demands that the soul come only to him? The soul will not go forward. What will the image be like if the director can only hammer upon the soul's faculties? When will the image be finished? How will God be able to paint it? Can you perform all these tasks? Are you such a perfect director that the soul will never need another one?

Possibly, you can direct a soul which is not called to advance beyond your teaching. However, you cannot have enough experience to guide all those souls whom you forbid to leave you. God leads souls along different roads. One soul cannot walk in a way that is really suitable for another. Who can be like St. Paul and make themselves all things to all men to gain all? (1Cor.9:22)

You tyrannize souls and take away their liberty. You not only strive to hold on to the soul but you go no further. If the soul even seeks the advice of another director, or if God should teach him what you cannot, you behave like a husband who is jealous of his wife. (I say this without shame.) Your jealousy does not honor God but comes from your pride. How do you know that the soul has no need for another director? God promises punishment upon such directors. "You do not feed the flock. You just clothe yourself in their wool, and drink their milk." (Ez.54:2,3,10)

Needed Freedom

Directors must give souls freedom and allow them to go to others because they do not know how God wants to lead these souls, especially if they do not like what they are being told. This is a sign that they need another director and the director himself should advise a change. Other advice comes from pride.

Turning Souls Away

Let us speak of another bad habit of directors. God anoints certain souls to leave the world, to change their condition and to serve Him. To despise the world is a great gift in God's eyes. These false directors teach differently than Christ about despising all things. They advise the soul to delay the decision. They even put obstacles in the soul's path (for their own interests). They fear where there is no fear. Even worse, they sometimes try to remove these desires for detachment.

These directors are not devout. They are dressed in worldly garb and they do not have Christ's tenderness. They do not enter and they do not allow others to enter. Jesus said, "Woe to you who have taken away the key of knowledge. You do not enter and do not allow others to enter." (Lk.11:52) These directors are obstacles at heaven's gate. They are supposed to compel those called by God to enter in. Instead, they take them away from the narrow gate that leads to life. They are blind guides and obstruct the Spirit's guidance. Some do this knowingly. Others do it unconsciously. Both will be punished because they accepted the office and must reflect on what they do.

The Devil's Deceptions

The other blind guide is the devil who desires that the soul be blind. The devil envies these lofty souls because he sees them gaining great riches by flying so high. He tries to cover the soul's detachment with the cataracts of knowledge and the mists of sensible sweetness (which are sometimes good). He tries to entice the soul by consolations and cause it to become sensual again. He wants the soul to embrace these spiritual things and try to travel to God with knowledge and delights.

By this deception, he easily withdraws the soul from solitude where the Holy Spirit has been secretly working great things. The soul is inclined to this sensible enjoyment and is easily led to cling to knowledge and delights. As a result, it withdraws itself from the solitude where God is working. The soul believes that it was doing nothing. Now it seems to be doing something. What a pity! The soul accepts a little mouthful when it could feed totally on God who absorbs it in these solitary unctions of His mouth.

Removed From God's Waters

By these tactics, the devil does much harm and causes the soul to lose great riches. The soul is engulfed in God like a fish living in the pure waters of the spirit. Then, the devil uses a little bait to drag it to the bank of the river where it finds support in the land. Instead of floating in the silent waters of Siloe, (Is.8:6) the soul uses great effort to walk. This is a matter of great importance. A slight injury to this soul is greater than serious injuries to other souls. When it is injured, every soul on this road of perfection suffers great loss.

Gives Sensual Spiritual Delights

The devil takes his position on this road of the spirit. He gives sensual gifts to the soul so that it rests in them and cannot escape him. With great ease, the soul is entrapped because it knows nothing better. It thinks that these sensual spiritual consolations are God's greatest blessings and that God has come to visit. Because of this mistake, the soul fails to enter the spouse's innermost chamber. Instead, it stands at the door to see what is happening.

Job says that the devil sees the soul's lofty favors and wants to rob it. (Job.41:34) If the soul enters into recollection, the devil sends fears, bodily pains, noise, or sense distractions to destroy this interior spirit. He easily corrupts these precious souls who squander their great riches. This is more important to the devil than the fall of many other lesser souls. The devil pierces these lofty souls with darts of knowledge and disperses their spirituality. He causes enlightened souls to lose the rays of God's knowledge and rich souls to lose the precious gold of God's adornment.

Advice to the Soul

Oh souls, by leading you to solitude and recollection and by withdrawing you from sensual labors, God shows you mercy. Do not return to sense again. You labored when you were beginners. These labors helped you to deny the world and yourselves. Now, your works are obstacles because God Himself labors within you. You must abandon your faculties, withdraw from everything and wait upon God, as I have described. Do no violence and do not ruin your peace. God will feed you with heavenly food.

The Blind Soul

The soul itself is the third blind guide. Not understanding itself, the soul becomes perturbed and harms itself. It knows only how to use its senses. When God brings the soul into solitude (where it can make no acts) it thinks it is doing nothing and strives to do something. In this striving, the soul is filled with distractions, aridity and displeasure.

Before, it was rejoicing in the spiritual silence of God's secret joys. God is trying to keep the soul in this tranquility but the soul wants to cry out with its imagination and to walk with its understanding. The soul is like a crying baby who wants to walk when her mother would carry her. By her obstinacy, the soul makes no progress and neither does her mother. The soul is like a subject who refuses to sit still so the painter can do her portrait.

Great But Hidden Progress

Although making much more progress, the soul is not conscious of movement because God is carrying her. While doing nothing, the soul accomplishes more than when working. Although God is working within, the senses cannot perceive God's work. At this point, the soul must trust God instead of itself and others. The soul is in danger only when it wants to do something.

The Great Suffering

Let us return to the great suffering in the faculties' deep caverns where God is preparing the soul for union by these unctions. These unctions are so subtle and sublime that they penetrate the depths of the soul's substance. The soul's desires are so great that its suffering is boundless.

Note this. If these preparatory unctions preparing for spiritual marriage are so sublime what will be the actual possession of the Beloved? As great as the thirst, hunger and suffering, so great will be the fullness and delight. As the delicacy of the preparation, so will be the wonder of the enjoyment. The soul will enjoy the objects of its faculties with all the vigor of its substance.

Able To Possess

The soul calls its faculties “caverns” and can see that these faculties can hold the deep splendors of these lamps. The soul realizes that it possesses the capacity to receive all of God’s gifts. The soul can possess, perceive and have pleasure in everything. Just as the soul’s inner faculty can receive all the experiences of the senses, so the soul’s ordinary sense can possess these lofty favors.

Which were dark and blind

Both darkness and blindness cause the eye not to see. God is light. He alone is the true object of the soul. When the soul lacks God’s light, it suffers from darkness. When it is in sin, the soul suffers from blindness. The soul’s darkness is its ignorance. Even though God’s light shines upon the soul it still does not see. Before God enlightened the soul through this transformation, it was ignorant of many good things of God. The prophet said, “He illumined my ignorance.” (Eccl. 51:26)

Two kinds of Darkness

Spiritually, it is different for a soul to be in darkness and in thick darkness (which is sin). A soul can be in darkness in two ways. It might have no light about natural things and it might have no light about supernatural things. Concerning both, the soul was in the dark before this precious union with God.

Before God said “Let there be light.” (Gen.1:3), darkness covered the soul’s cavern of sense. When God does not enlighten, the darkness grows more profound, making it impossible for the soul to raise its eyes or even to think about the Divine light. Knowing only darkness, the soul will go from one darkness to the next. It is guided by a darkness which leads to greater darkness. David says, “Day to day conveys the message. Night unto night shows its night”. (Ps.19:2) One abyss of darkness calls to another abyss of darkness. In contrast, an abyss of light infuses light. Like calls to like.

Call to Greater Light

By grace, God’s light has opened the soul’s eyes to the abyss of light. Now He calls the soul to still another and greater abyss of light. This is the transformation of the soul in God. Here, the eye of sense is so greatly enlightened and pleasing to God, that light and will are both one. Natural light is united to supernatural light which alone shines (even though the natural light continues).

Cataract Covering

The soul was also blind in desiring what was not God. This is a blindness of the higher, rational sense. It is like a cataract upon the eye of reason so it cannot see. Blinded by its love for

pleasure, the soul could not see God's riches and beauties in creatures. Even a small object placed immediately before the eyes can obstruct the view of everything. Just so, even the smallest desire or idle act obstructs the vision of Divine things.

A soul with other desires cannot see God's things as they really are! To see God's things, the soul must not let its own desires enter into its judgments. Otherwise, the soul will see God's things as if they are not of God, and other things as if they were. When the cataract covers the eye of judgment, the soul sees only the cataract and thinks the cataract is God. The soul's desires and pleasures hinder its knowledge of lofty things. "Vanity obscures good things and inconstancy of desire overturns reason." (Wisdom 4:12)

No Desire For Lofty Goals

Those souls not purged of their desires and pleasures still follow their animal nature in these matters. They may think highly of lowly spiritual goods, (like consolations which are closest to the senses) but will not esteem lofty spiritual goods (those farthest from the senses). The soul considers these lofty goods as of little value. "The natural person does not accept what pertains to God's Spirit. To him it is foolishness and he cannot understand them." (1Cor.2:14)

The soul still lives according to nature's pleasures, even those which come from the spirit. The soul must be clinging to spiritual things, but it does so by natural desires. Therefore, these are still natural desires even though their object is supernatural. A desire rooted in nature is still natural even when its goal is supernatural.

Natural Desires For the Supernatural

You ask, "Is it not supernatural to desire God?" The answer is "yes" but only on those occasions when God infuses this desire and gives it His firmness. To desire God from your own will is only a natural desire and will remain so unless God inspired it. When you cling to spiritual pleasures, you spread a cataract over your eyes. You are an animal being. You cannot understand the spiritual (which is higher than natural desire). If you doubt this, then please read my words again because I cannot explain any more. However, a change occurs! This sense was dark because it lacked the Divine light and it was blind because of its own desires. Now, by Divine union, its deep caverns are in a new condition:

With strange brightness give heat and light to their Beloved

These faculties (the caverns) are now marvelously filled with the lamps' splendors. Besides their surrender to God, they send back to God the same splendors which the soul received from His loving glory. They have become lamps themselves and now give to the Beloved the light and heat which they have received. They glow with the very brightness that God gives to them.

Receiving To Be Able To Give

"With strange brightness" means that this brightness is far beyond all ordinary description. In this is the special brightness the understanding receives Divine wisdom and is made one with God's understanding. The soul gives as it is given to. This is true of every attribute of God.

The brightness which unites the soul to God's goodness is the same brightness of goodness which the soul gives back to God. The soul receives the blessings only to give them back to

God. The brightness which unites the soul to knowledge of God's greatness gives forth the heat of love. Whatever brightness of any attribute of God which the soul is united to (fortitude, beauty, justice, etc.) it gives back to God. The soul returns to the Beloved, the same light and heat received from the Beloved.

One With God

The soul has been made one with God, and, in some manner, is God by participation, (although not as perfectly as in heaven). The soul, by substantial transformation, is the shadow of God. The soul does in and through God what God does in the soul and in the same way God does it. The will of these two is one. God gives Himself freely to the soul and the soul gives God in God to God Himself. It does this with a freer and more generous will to the greater degree of its union. The soul's gift is true and entire.

Giving God His Due

In this state, the soul sees that God belongs to it through God's grace. It possesses God as its inheritance, as God's adopted child and as by rightful ownership. The soul also sees that, since God belongs to it, the soul can communicate God to whomever it wishes. Therefore, the soul gives God to Himself, the Beloved.

In this way, the soul pays all that it owes. It freely gives what it has received. In this way, the Spirit can be loved as He deserves because the soul gives the Holy Spirit what is His. This is the soul's inestimable delight – to give God what is His own and what is appropriate to His infinite Being.

Full Reciprocal Love

Truly, the soul cannot give God Himself to Himself anew (since in Himself He is always Himself). However, as far as the soul is concerned, it gives perfectly all that God has given and pays the debt of love. The soul gives all it has received and God is repaid by the gift. (He cannot be repaid with anything less than this).

God accepts this as if it belonged to the soul and was a new gift. He, therefore, surrenders Himself anew which causes the soul to love Him anew. Between God and the soul there is reciprocal love as in the union of love and marriage. The possessions of both are freely possessed by each and are possessed by both in a mutual and voluntary surrender. Each says "All that is mine is yours and all that is yours is mine. In them I am glorified." (Jn.17:10)

In heaven, this happens without any intermission. On earth, in this state of union this takes place in the acts made by the soul. The soul can give back what is beyond the soul's capacity and being. A person who possesses many nations and peoples can give them to whomever he wants.

Returning All God's Gifts

The soul's great satisfaction is to give God more than the soul itself is worth. With great liberality, the soul returns to God the Divine light and warmth which it receives. In heaven, this happens by the light of glory. On earth, it happens through enlightened faith. The deep caverns

with strange brightness give both heat and light to the Beloved, because the communication of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in the soul are made together.

The Marvelous Aspects of the Surrender

I must make a brief observation concerning this brightness which leads to the soul's surrender. In the union of the soul's understanding and desires in God, the soul makes both a surrender of God to God, and a surrender of itself in God. Regarding love, praise, and gratitude, the soul presents itself to God in marvelous ways.

Three Qualities of Love

Concerning love, the soul has three qualities of excellence:

1. The soul loves God, not through itself but through God Himself. It loves through the Holy Spirit. This is how the Father loves the Son. Jesus said "That the love with which you love me, may be in them and I in them." (Jn.17:26)
2. The soul loves God in God. By this vehement union, the soul is absorbed in God's love and God surrenders Himself.
3. The soul loves God for Who He is, not only because He is good and glorious toward the soul, but because He is all these qualities essentially in Himself.

Three Qualities of Enjoyment

Concerning the soul's enjoyment there are three other qualities of excellence:

1. The soul enjoys God through God Himself (although not as clearly as in heaven). In this state, the soul unites all His attributes and yet enjoys each one distinctly.
2. The soul is delighted only in God alone, without any intermingling of creatures.
3. The soul enjoys God for Who He is. There is no mingling of the soul's own pleasure.

Three Qualities of Praise

Concerning the soul's praise of God there are also three qualities of excellence:

1. The soul sees that it was created to praise. "I have formed this people for myself. They shall sing my praises." (Is.43:21)
2. The soul receives blessings and delights by offering praise.
3. The soul praises God for what He is in Himself. Even if the soul received no delight, it would still praise God.

Three Qualities of Gratitude

Concerning gratitude, there are three qualities of excellence:

1. The soul is grateful for all its natural and spiritual blessings.
2. Absorbed with great vehemence in praise, the soul delights in praising God.
3. The soul praises God for what He is. This is a profound and delectable praise.

STANZA 4

*How greatly and lovingly you awake in my bosom,
Where you dwell secretly and alone!
And in Your sweet breathing, full of blessing and glory,
How delicately you inspire my love!*

The soul thanks the Spouse for two wondrous effects of union and for the way He produces each. The first effect is the awakening of God in the soul through gentleness and love. The second effect is God's breathing in the soul which communicates the blessing and the glory. This produces a delicate and tender inspiration of love.

The Meaning

The stanza means this: "You awaken, O Spouse, in the depth of my soul where You dwell as its Lord alone, secretly and in silence. You awaken not only as in Your own house and in Your own bed but as intimately as in my own bosom. How gentle and loving your delectable awakening which is filled with blessing and glory. How delicately You inspire me with love for yourself." The soul uses this analogy of someone's breathing that awakens another from sleep because it aptly describes the soul's condition.

How gently and lovingly you awake in my bosom

There are many ways by which God awakens in the soul. The awakening described here is one of the highest and brings the most good. The Word moves in the soul's substance with such greatness and dominion that it seems as if all the perfumed spices and balms of the world are shaken together to give a special sweetness. The soul believes that all the world's kingdoms and all heaven's powers are moved. All the perfections of all created things shine forth and move as one. Scripture says, "All things in Him are life." (Jn.1:2) and "In Him, all live and move, and have their being." (Acts 17:28) When this great Emperor moves in the soul, ("Whose Kingdom is vast." Is.9:6) then the three spheres (heaven, earth and under the earth) move with Him. When the earth moves, everything that is on the earth also moves. When this Prince moves, He carries His whole court.

The Soul's New Vision

In this moving, all things reveal their being, their loveliness and the root of their life. The soul can see that all creatures (above and below) have life in Him. "By Me, kings reign, princes rule and the powerful establish justice." (Pr.8:15) Although the soul sees that creatures are distinct from God, it also knows that God in His Being, is all these things in an infinite way. The soul knows created things much better in God than in themselves. To know creatures through God (and not just God through His creatures) is the great delight of this awakening. The soul now knows creation (the effect) through God (its cause) and not the cause through the effect.

God Seems to Change

Since God is unchangeable, the manner of this knowledge is wondrous. God doesn't change, but it seems to the soul that He is changing. This knowledge comes because the soul is changed and can see this supernatural sight. Divine life and the being of every creature are revealed to the soul in great newness. It seems that God changes and takes the name of the effects He causes. In this way, it can be said that God is changing because Wisdom is the beginning and root of all change. "Wisdom is more moveable than all moveable things." (Wis.7:24) Stable in itself, wisdom renews all things and is more active than all active things. By this awakening, the soul is changed from its sleep of natural vision to a life of supernatural vision.

The Palace Thrown Open

The soul sees that God is always active. He gives being and gifts to all creatures and contains them all in Himself. The soul sees what God is in Himself and in creatures. When a palace is thrown open, in one glance a person can see the eminence of the prince and what he is doing. This same effect happens through this awakening and the soul's single glance.

Like every creature, the soul is substantially in God. Yet, God draws aside some veils and allows the soul to see His nature. The soul even sees that His face is filled with graces. (This is somewhat dark for all the veils are not removed.)

Besides allowing the soul to see him (because God is moving all things) God also reveals what He is doing. There is continual movement. God moves in them and they in God. Because of this knowledge, the soul believes God has awakened, when really the soul has awakened.

Our Lowly Judgments

We live at such a low level that we judge others as we ourselves are. Our judgments begin with ourselves and not outside ourselves. The thief believes that others steal. The lustful man believes that others lust. The good man thinks good of others because his judgment flows from his goodness. When we are slothful and negligent, we think God is such with us. "Arise, Lord, why do you sleep?" (Ps.44:23) The Psalmist attributes to God, qualities that are really in himself. The Psalmist sleeps and then tells God to awaken.

God alone Can Awaken

Every blessing comes to man from God. By himself man can do nothing. Therefore, the soul's awakening seems to be an awakening of God. The soul had fallen into a sleep from which it could never awaken. God alone caused this awakening. This experience is described by the words, "You awaken in my bosom." Awaken us, O Lord, to the blessings you have given us and we shall know that you have been mindful of us.

The soul cannot describe what it experiences in this awakening because God communicates His excellence to the soul's substance. This is the soul's breast where it hears a voice filled with a multitude of excellences and thousands of virtues. The soul is entrenched in these virtues and stays firmly arrayed like an army. It is made gracious in the sweetness of creatures.

How Able to Receive?

A question arises. How can the soul accept this violent communication while still in the flesh, when it has no strength to suffer so greatly? When Queen Esther saw King Ahasuerus on his throne, she fainted because he seemed to have the glory of an angel. (Esther 15:16) Glory oppresses anyone whom it does not glorify. Should not the soul faint at seeing God? His face is filled with glory and His voice is a multitude of excellences. Job wonders how we can survive after hearing the greatness of His thunder. (26:14) Later Job says, "I do not want him to contend against me with his great power and oppose me with the weight of his greatness." (23:16)

Two Reasons

There are two reasons why the soul does not fear in this glorious awakening. First, the soul is purged and conformed to the Spirit. Therefore, the soul does not experience the suffering that

always accompanies God's touches when the soul is not purged. This perfection does not prevent the soul from suffering when faced with such glory. The soul's faculties experience pain from these experiences because they exceed their capacity.

The second reason given in the stanza's first line is more relevant. God Himself is gentle and loving. He shows His glory to comfort and exalt the soul. He also grants grace so the soul does not suffer and is protected. He shows His greatness with such tenderness that the soul doesn't know if it is in the body or out of the body. When Moses saw God's glory, God protected him with his right hand. (Ex. 33:22)

Power and Gentleness

The soul feels the gentleness of God in proportion to His power. In God, these are one and the same. The strength of His gentleness protects the soul and the soul becomes stronger. Esther fainted because at first the king showed his burning eyes and the fury of his breast. She regained her strength when he looked favorably and embraced her.

Friend, Equal and Brother

Because heaven's king shows Himself to be a friend, an equal and a brother, the soul no longer fears. God shows His power in gentleness not in wrath. As a spouse, He leaves His bridal chamber where He was hidden. As a brother, he touches the soul with the scepter of His majesty. The soul perceives the fragrance (God's virtues), the gold (charity) and the precious stones (created things). The soul looks upon the face of the Word, whose graces strike the soul, clothe her and transform her. She sees herself as a queen, "The Queen stood at your right hand clothed in gold." (Ps.45:9) All this happens in the soul's substance so the soul says:

Where You dwell secretly and alone!

The soul says that God dwells secretly in its breast because God embraces the soul in its substance. God dwells secretly in all souls, hidden in their substance and causing them to exist. However, there are two, very different ways of dwelling. In one soul, God dwells contented because He rules over it. In another, He dwells displeased because He is a stranger who is not allowed to do anything.

Most Complete Dwelling

He dwells most completely in the soul that has the fewest desires. There, He rules and governs. He dwells most secretly when the soul is completely alone and where no desires exist. He gives the closest embrace when the soul is totally withdrawn.

The devil cannot attain this place and the understanding cannot attain any knowledge of how God acts. However, His presence is not secret to the soul who perceives clearly that God is within. When God causes these awakenings the soul perceives that He Who was always present, is now waking from sleep. Even though the Beloved slept in its bosom, the soul enjoyed His presence. However, love is communicated only when both are awake.

God is Asleep

Happy the soul which is always conscious of God sleeping within its breast. It should withdraw from all business and live in tranquility lest anything should disturb the Beloved within. He habitually sleeps in the soul's bosom. The soul knows this and profits from it.

If He were always awake, what would the soul's state be? It would always receive knowledge and love, and would be living in heavenly glory. If one awakening and one glance can cause such bliss, what would the soul's condition be if God were habitually awake within?

Other Souls

In other souls who have not attained this union God also dwells secretly. He is not displeased with them but they are not yet ready for union. These souls are aware of His presence only when there is a delectable awakening.

This kind of awakening is different. It is not secret from the devil or from the soul's understanding. Before union, sense is not yet totally annihilated and its movements can be understood. Also, the soul can perform some actions because it is not yet spiritualized. In the perfect soul, the awakening is perfect because God is its only cause. In this awakening, the soul is conscious of God's breathing and says:

*And in thy sweet breathing, full of blessing and glory,
How delicately You inspire My love*

I do not want to speak of this breathing, because I can say nothing. It is the breathing of God Himself. The Spirit breathes into the soul in proportion to its knowledge in which He absorbs it and inspires love for Himself. The soul is full of glory because the Spirit has filled it with goodness and has inspired it with a love that transcends all description. Therefore, I cease speaking of it.