

CARMEL CLARION

September - October 2006 Volume XXII No. 5



St. Teresa & Prayer

CARMEL CLARION

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Disalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington, D.C.

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Editorial

Sisters and Brothers,

I pray all of you had a most blessed and joyous feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel! As you know, the province celebrated a milestone on the feast when we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the friars' presence in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, beginning at Holy Hill. Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan presided at an afternoon concelebrated Mass. Many friars were present for this celebration, as well as some of our nuns from Pewaukee Carmel, Secular Order members, Carmelite Sisters affiliated with the Order and a church filled to capacity with the Faithful. Planning for this great event was largely due to the hard work of Father Mark-Joseph, prior of Holy Hill, and Fathers Cyril, Jude and Matthias, and members of that community. In the name of the province, I want to thank them once again for their excellent work in making this celebration a wonderful affair.

As you might also know, the Holy Hill community has been working with the Archbishop for well over a year in efforts to petition Rome for basilica status for the National Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians. To our great joy (and much surprise) the Archbishop announced at the beginning of his homily that Rome has granted this status to the Shrine!

The Archbishop kept this good news from all of us before the Mass, wanting to announce this to everyone at once. We are overjoyed with this news and give praise and thanks to God that the Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians, has been recognized by the Church universal, in this special way. What remains most important, however, is that the Shrine continues to be what it has been for well over 100 years—a place of consolation, healing and mercy for the many who come to ask that Mary, Mother of Christ, intercede for them in their need. May this Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians, always be a place of prayer, healing and peace.



Fr. Phillip Thomas, O.C.D.
Provincial

The Marvels Of Divine Union In The Last Mansions

Philip Boyce, O.C.D.



Part I

The thought of describing the marvels of God's union with the purified soul at the summit of the way of perfection makes even saints, who have experiential knowledge of what they would relate, have their misgivings and express their reluctance. If the experience of the Divine is always beyond the range of words, how much more difficult must it be to convey the crucifying delights and heavenly secrets of that perfect union which is the theme of the Seventh Mansions of *The Interior Castle*?

Even St. Teresa of Jesus expresses her hesitancy, despite singular grace she was given of describing the mystery of her unique wealth of mystical favors. She knows very well that she is stammering only something about the many unutterable secrets that are revealed to her and to others whom God united to himself in a covenant of unending love. She therefore feels the need to ask God 'to move her pen and give her understanding' (cf. IC 7, I,I). Indeed, this hesitancy appears at the start of each of the four last Mansions, and from the Fourth onward she asks no more than to be able to say 'something' about the remaining stages in a profitable and comprehensible manner, knowing well that it is impossible to adequately communicate the tidiness and depth of the experience itself (IC 4,I,I).

Since the new world experienced by the mystics is something of which they have no true likeness or term of comparison from normal sense perception, they are obliged to have recourse to symbolic language. They endeavor to describe their experience in analogical terms, using images and symbols which have a power of suggestion beyond that of literal statements. Genuine mystics seem to have an endless store of comparisons, yet they realize that every image is inadequate to their purpose and cannot really convey the divine reality. Having expended entire pages on detailed and ingenious descriptions, as often as not they end by saying that the reality is completely different and far beyond what they have written. They seem to themselves to speak 'from the outside' and to risk betraying the beauty and dignity of what they contemplated. Sometimes their fears go further, "My words are more of a desecration and a blasphemy than a description" exclaims Bl. Angela of Foligno.

For all that, they have written what seem to us to be exceptional, almost inspired, pages about their experiences of the living God. At times they were commanded to do so, under obedience, by a confessor or spiritual director, or even by God himself. Their intention in writing their accounts was the welfare of souls and the glory of God.

The theme of their disclosures can be summarized in a few words: they speak of the purification and unfolding of divine love in their lives, and of the wonders wrought by God in their souls. Their experience is inevitably one of dying to themselves in order to live for God; a story of surrender and conformity to Christ; an interpersonal communion and donation. The deeper the union and the more overpowering the invasions of God's light and love, the more the human frame suffers and the more unutterable are the joys and marvels experienced.

In order to communicate in words something of the marvels of divine union in the last Mansions, St. Teresa has recourse to the symbolism of marriage with all its suggestive imagery: intimate love, mutual surrender, persevering fidelity, interpersonal communion, indissoluble friendship and unity of hearts. By the end of July 1577, la Madre was at Avila and had completed her account of the first four Mansions as well as a substantial part of the fifth. Then the longest interruption in the composition of the book occurred, a period of between three to four months. When she returned to her task and began the final chapter of the fifth Mansions, she left aside for the moment the allegory of the butterfly, which she had been using, and introduced another 'comparison', as she calls it, in order to give a better description of the highest stages of divine union in the last series of Mansions. It is the nuptial imagery which she develops into an allegory. And she claims she cannot find a more adequate image, 'You've already often heard that God espouses souls spiritually. Blessed be His mercy that wants so much to be humbled! And even though the comparison may be a coarse one, I cannot find another that would better explain what I mean than the sacrament of marriage' (IC 5,4,3).

I. Marriage Symbolism in the Bible

No one can enter into a human being in a relation of love as closely and penetratingly as his creator. Is it not surprising then that God made use of the most intimate of unions between two creatures on earth namely, that between husband and wife, in order to present an image, however inadequate, of the eternal fidelity, the tender and ardent love, which binds him to the soul he created and redeemed. He revealed himself to Israel as the one true God. Because of his free and elective love, Abraham and his descendants were a chosen people. The resulting bond of friendship between them in the history of salvation was a sacred covenant. This latter was persistently described by the prophets in terms of nuptial love, as a marriage between Yahweh and the people he had chosen.

The earliest prophet who spoke in a significant manner of this theme was Hosea. Through the sad vicissitudes of his own marriage, he came to realize the

'You've already often heard that God espouses souls spiritually. Blessed be His mercy that wants so much to be humbled! And even though the comparison may be a coarse one, I cannot find another that would better explain what I mean than the sacrament of marriage'



bitterness caused by a faithless 'wife of harlotry' (Hos 1,2). This gave him an insight into the incomprehensible love, tender and persevering, of Yahweh for his people, who were so unfaithful to him and continued to run after false gods and selfish loves. He contemplated the tragedy of God's unanswered love in the fickle devotion of his own wife. The experience led him to understand more deeply the reality of God's love, which is not attracted by some good quality in Israel, his beloved. Rather, by freely loving his chosen people, he makes them worthy of love, even of divine love.

In fact, the very word used by Hosea for this love (*hesed*) is a technical term in covenant or contract language. When applied to Yahweh it signifies his steadfast, tender and invincible love for his people. Used in the context of married love by Hosea, it evokes a close and indissoluble bond of friendship. Thus Yahweh is called the 'husband' who for a while repudiates Israel his unfaithful 'wife' (cf. Hos 2,2), but who will take her back again and heap spiritual gifts upon her when she abandons her adulterous loves, 'I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you

to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord" (Hos 2,19-20).

The marriage imagery of God's love for his people is developed by later prophets. They draw on it to portray the days of Israel's fidelity, when she followed Yahweh in the desert, like a devoted and loyal bride (cf. Jer 2,2). They also use it to condemn the later period of infidelity, which in their eyes is equivalent to adultery (cf. Jer 3,1-5; Ezek 16). Isaiah echoes Hosea's words censuring Israel for its infidelity (cf. Is 1,21), but even more so pledging God's personal and steadfast love for his faithful ones, "For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name (..) For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off" (Is 54,5-6). This love is forgiving and has the fervor of a first love: the little remnant will be the object of God's care, who will take his joy in her "as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride" (Is 62,5) and will clothe her "with the robe of righteousness" "as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Is 61,10).

The Song of Songs (or Canticle of Canticles) also celebrates the love of a bride and bridegroom for each other. Scholars disagree about the literal meaning and origin of this sacred text. However, a long-standing Jewish and Christian tradition has interpreted these poems in an allegorical sense as an image of the pure love and mystical union between Yahweh and his chosen people or, in the Christian tradition, between Christ and the Church. "Whatever theory of interpretation we adopt," states the Jerusalem Bible, "we are justified in applying the Song to the mu-

tual love of Christ and his Church or to the union of the individual soul with God. Mystics like St. John of the Cross were wise to use the Song as they did." Probably no other book of the Old Testament was so richly and willingly commentated and meditated in Christian antiquity, right up to the Middle Ages and beyond. The Fathers of the Church perceived its true spiritual meaning, and took its daring words of love to praise the unlimited love of God for his people and his Church. They also extended the symbolism, especially in later centuries, to signify the bond of mystical union between Christ the bridegroom and the individual soul his bride, or in a special way between God and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The New Testament continues this nuptial imagery. It is particularly evident in the writings of St. Paul who appears as the spiritual father of the Corinthian community, prepared by him to be presented to Christ on the day of his coming, "I betrothed you to Christ so as to present you as a pure bride to her one husband" (2 Cor 11,2). The locus classicus however, is in his Letter to the Ephesians, where he draws a parallel between a human marriage and the marriage of Christ to his Church. Christ is presented as the head and husband of the Church for whom he has sanctified himself to make her holy and spotless (cf. Eph 5,21-28).

Finally, in the pages of the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse), this same imagery is repeated to portray the union of the triumphant Church with God. The Church in glory is "the bride, the spouse of the Lamb" (Rev 21,9). The final and complete establishment of the kingdom of God will be a marriage union between Christ and those countless thousands saved by his blood, "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready" (Rev 19,7).

II. St Teresa's Use of the Marriage Allegory

The nuptial symbolism of love enters systematically in the final three Mansions with the advent of a strictly mystical life. Although love is never absent from spiritual growth, its manifestations previous to this point are not so intense and absorbing as to warrant the nuptial imagery. In earlier Teresian writings we do find references to this symbolism, but only in general terms. Thus, she often speaks of Christ as the spouse of the soul, and in one passage of the Way of Perfection, while explaining the familiarity and friendship that a soul of prayer should cultivate with Christ, she urges her daughters to get to know their Spouse and to have that same care for him that any woman in the world would have for her husband (W 22,7). However, the imagery is not developed any further or applied to the spiritual life in a systematic way. As one of the leading modern writers on St. Teresa states,

Only mystical love, therefore, raises the soul's relations with God to a nuptial level by initiating a process of growth that terminates in the 'mystical marriage' (7th Mansions), which is prepared by a pre-nuptial state of mystical betrothal (6th Mansions), which in its turn is preceded by an affective

"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready"

prelude or a kind of loving education imparted by the first mystical state (5th Mansions).

It is possible that St. Teresa is indebted, in her use of this imagery, to St. John of the Cross who makes even more abundant use of it. However, from her own writings it is evident that the proximate basis for her introduction of the nuptial allegory was Solomon's Song of Songs. In a mystical experience of about the year 1565, the aptness of these inspired words to describe what she herself had been recently undergoing struck her forcefully. This led her to write a commentary on this inspired book of the Old Testament. Choosing seven verses from it, she outlined in as many chapters the seven stages of the spiritual journey to complete union of love with God. These pages are a presage of the more developed and systematic treatment of the same theme in *The Interior Castle*.

It seems probable that the first draft of these Meditations on the Song of Songs (or according to Fr. Gracian's title, Conceptions of the Love of God) was written about the year 1566, and the final one between 1572 and 1575. Although these dates are culled from internal evidence in the text itself, and are only approximate, they would seem to be acceptable. From this chronological collection, one can deduce that it was while the author herself was suffering the violent raptures and painful phenomena of spiritual betrothal that she was consoled and reassured by hearing some verses from the Song of Songs, "through them she understood" she writes, referring to herself, "that her soul was being well guided" (Med I,66). The experience left her with the inner conviction that a soul in love with its divine Spouse can undergo "swoons, deaths, afflictions, delights and joys with Him" (ibid).

A few years later she gives a doctrinal and systematic exposition of this deepening union in *The Interior Castle*. In doing so, she merely follows the evolution of her own mystical experiences. As elements of her allegory, she makes use of the normal stages leading to marriage in the social structure of sixteenth-century Spain. They include the initial meetings (*vistas*) between the two young people in question, by which they come to know and like each other. As these meetings become more numerous, the couple begin to exchange gifts, fall in love and join hands. This leads to engagement or betrothal, and finally to the definitive union in the sacrament of marriage.

Applying this imagery to the spiritual and mystical journey, St. Teresa teaches that the 'meetings' that Christ has with the soul in the union of the Fifth Mansions, increase mutual knowledge and love. The soul learns 'about the goodness of its Spouse and determines to please him at all costs'. Even one meeting would be enough to leave the soul 'more worthy for the joining of hands'. The soul is left "so much in love: *tan enamorada*" that it is very careful not to refuse God what he is most seeking, its exclusive "affection" (cf. IC 5,4,4).

The souls yearnings of love grow deeper and more ardent, and it remains "wounded with love" (IC 6,1,1) in a manner that cannot be cured until union is

complete. The numerous trials, typical of this period, refine and fortify the soul making it more worthy to be a promised bride of the divine King. Mystical betrothal takes place in a rapture that draws the soul out of its senses (IC 6, 4,4). Normally, it introduces a period of ecstatic contemplation, violent raptures and painful trances. Life seems an exile, and the soul longs for death. However, in this crucible of suffering love, God protects and fortifies the soul. Since the joining of hands is a natural sign of affection and support, Christ mystically joins hands with his bride, making her understand that "the soul is now His, and that no one should touch it" and that "He will protect it, from the whole world and even from all hell" (IC 6,4,16).

The jewels exchanged between them include on the soul's part, its exclusive love for its Spouse, its zeal in caring for his honor and its avoidance of all that would displease him; and on God's part, the three precious graces of increased awareness of his grandeur, self-knowledge that induces humility, and sovereign detachment from the things of this world (IC 6,5,10).

The tormented period of spiritual betrothal which can last for years, prepares the soul for the grace of complete union with its Spouse. The effect of these excruciating pains and desires is twofold. The first one is the purification and refinement of all its tendencies at a depth beyond the reach of human effort, generous as it may be. The second one is the positive preparation for the definitive mystical espousal with Christ. The soul's surrender to God, its fidelity and love increase with great intensity. Finally, when the bride is sufficiently prepared and made worthy of her Spouse, she is introduced into the innermost Mansion. She beholds in ecstatic wonderment the life of the Holy Trinity in the deepest abode of her soul, and then one day Jesus gives her his hand, taking her as his bride, and declares that no one will ever separate them again. The spiritual marriage is complete: the two loves have become one living flame, indistinguishable and indissoluble.



III. The Union of Spiritual Marriage

As a proximate preparation for the union of spiritual marriage the Lord reveals to the soul in its inmost center, direct knowledge or a so-called intellectual vision, the splendors of the indwelling Trinitarian life. This new and deep understanding would seem to be, in one form or another, a necessity at this point, springing from the nature of a close friendship. Those who are true friends have no secrets from each other. As Christ said to his apostles, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have

called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15,15). The soul's friendship with its God has now become so close that in this deepest center the Lord "desires to remove the scales from the soul's eyes and let it see and understand (. . .) something of the favor He grants it" (IC 7,1,6).

The grace of mystical marriage was conferred on St. Teresa in concomitance with an especially intense imaginative vision of the Sacred Humanity. It occurred while she was at the Convent of the Incarnation, Avila, in November 1572. St. John of the Cross, who had been appointed confessor of that convent

six months previously, broke a final host one morning while distributing Holy Communion, in order to provide for two remaining sisters, one of them being St. Teresa. For a moment she thought he might have intended it as a mortification. In an interior locution, Christ immediately assured her that no one would separate them. Then in an imaginative vision, he gave her his right hand and said,

Behold this nail; it is a sign you will be My bride from to-

day on. Until now you have not merited this; from now on not only will you look after My honor as being the honor of your Creator, King, and God, but you will look after it as My true bride. My honor is yours, and yours Mine (SpTest 31,1).

St. Teresa's doctrinal exposition of this state of union is based on her own experience. She is certain that others may receive the same grace in a different manner (IC 7, 2,1). In fact, the extraordinary and phenomenal aspect does not belong to the essence of true union. And yet there is a danger (still very real at the present time) of giving more credit to the miraculous and the unusual, than to the ordinariness of solid virtues, self-sacrificing charity, unassuming goodness and conformity of will to God's good pleasure. Consequently, it is always necessary to differentiate with clarity and decisiveness between the essence of this highest form of union and the adventitious that may or may not accompany it. Fr. Marie-Eugene makes the point convincingly.

Confusion between being and appearing, more importance given to the appearing that is brilliant and show, than to the being that is hidden and obscure, these give rise to practical errors as to the nature of perfection and the goal to



be attained, and may occasion errors in direction from the very beginning of the spiritual life. Souls are thus retarded in the way of perfection or even brought to a definite standstill. The road of the imperfect soul, in the chart of Saint John of the Cross, that ends at an impasse, is indeed the road on which, the soul seeks as an end the goods of heaven, of glory, joy, consolation, security, light, in short, all the goods that accompany union, but are not union, and even hinder one from attaining it, if desired for themselves (*I Am a Daughter of the Church*, II, 569).

By means of extraordinary manifestations, a person is given cognizance of and may be able to express more adequately, the inner reality. The unique favors experienced by St. Teresa enabled her to gain an interior perception of the journey she had traveled, and consequently in her spiritual treatises, to map out its progress for other souls. However the essential and indispensable element in perfect union of love is mutual and unconditional surrender, conformity of wills and inner peace in bearing the cross. All this may be rendered more or less apparent through extraordinary and mystical phenomena, and more or less communicable human words. On the other hand, it may well remain a hidden and wordless secret.

It is important, then, to underline the nature of genuine union at the level of the Seventh Mansions, and to determine the true signs of its authenticity.

In Memorium

Joan P Costello, OCDS, Our Lady Queen of Peace Community, Sun City Center FL. entered eternal life, July 29, 2006.

Jean Johnson - Jean of the Sacred Heart , OCDS, age 77, founding and beloved member of St. Teresa of the Andes Community, Danvers MA, entered eternal life, August 6, 2006.

Kathleen Jurek - Mary Servant of the Lord, OCDS, age 77, St. Teresa of Jesus Fraternity, Philadelphia, PA, professed June 19, 1983, entered eternal life, July 20, 2006.

John Hogue - John Blessed by the Cross, OCDS, age 83, St. Teresa of Jesus Fraternity, Philadelphia, PA, professed June 1992, entered eternal life, July 19, 2006.

Maryanne Suttor - Marie Therese of the Blessed Eucharist OCDS, Sacred Heart Community, Morristown NJ, entered eternal life, August 17, 2006.

Ines Valdiri, OCDS, St John of the Cross Community, Ann Arbor MI, entered eternal life, July 9, 2006.



Eastern Province to Host “Mini-Congress” at Holy Hill

We were unable to organize a large Congress for 2006 due to the many transitions involved as a result of Provincial elections last year and the need to establish our own Provincial Council. In lieu of that we proposed a “Mini-Congress” attended only by the National Council and Provincial Council members for the three U. S. Provinces.

The National Council and the U. S. Provincial Councils will meet during the first weekend of November at Holy Hill in Hubertus, Wisconsin. The National Council is a collaborative body composed of three OCDS members from each of the three Provinces along with the Provincial Delegates.

Pedro Gonzalez, OCDS, from the Florida Region of the Eastern Province, attended the last National Council meeting in St. Louis and will chair the meeting this year. Two new members have been appointed to the National Council from our Province. They are: Tom McCabe, OCDS, from the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Eastern Province and also the president of the Eastern Provincial Council, along with Mary Giggey, OCDS from the Northeast Region of the Eastern Province.

Your Provincial Delegates,

Fr. Regis Jordan, OCD

Fr. Paul Fohlin, OCD

Fr. John Grennon, OCD



“*Carmel Clarion* is indeed a treasury of Carmelite spirituality. Your recent articles on lesser known Carmelite saints were excellent. Any possibility of something on St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi in this her anniversary year? Many thanks and God bless your work!”

A. L. Sherlock, Canada

Spiritual Direction In The Major Works Of St. Teresa

Pierluigi Pertusi, O.C.D.

Part I

St. Teresa gives us valuable teaching for the study of spiritual direction. Thanks to her remarkable gift of psychological intuition, the result of natural sharpness, her constant attention to observing the phenomena of the spiritual life, and also and especially her interior purity, she was able to penetrate to the soul's depths. I have tried to study Our Holy Mother under this aspect of teacher of psychology by looking for that knowledge she had of the psychological depths of human beings, and the derived teaching she has left us for spiritual direction. From this perspective, we shall also see her preoccupation with uncovering the subtle illusions that might or do infiltrate the whole evolution of the spiritual life: illusions, which, as we know, often have their origin in the influence of the subconscious. Certain acts, certain forms of behavior that take on the appearance of virtue, or even seem to be sublime moments in the supernatural life, cannot hide their inferior origin from the sharp eye of St. Teresa. She knows that the depth of our being cherishes evil tendencies; she also knows that very often a person does not succeed in discerning these tendencies, which never show their real face. "...I am convinced that the devil does us less harm than our own imagination and our evil caprices, especially if there is melancholy involved. Women are naturally frail, and the self-love that influences them is very subtle. Many people have come to me, men and especially women, and I have also talked with the nuns of this monastery: how clearly I have seen that very often these people deceive themselves without wishing to!"

Anyone who desires manifest proof of the intuition and the experience of St. Teresa with this capacity for self-deception should read the magnificent little treatise on the Manner of Visiting the Monasteries of the Nuns of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. What insistence that the visitor not trust what the nuns say! Certainly they do not wish to deceive; on the contrary, they are sure of themselves and want to tell the truth, but in these conversations with the visitor they are mistaken. "I am amazed," notes the experienced prioress, "when I see how cleverly the devil makes each sister believe that she is telling the greatest truth



in the world." "Nature, passion, self-love each has its own word to say: ... considering our self-love, it is very rare that we blame ourselves for our fault and recognize ourselves."

Based on such a keen intuition of frequent illusions in the spiritual life, the teaching of St. Teresa on spiritual direction will be welcome to modern directors, justly anxious to find a reliable road in line with the increasingly more precise conclusions of psychologists about the mistakes incited by the subconscious.



Before developing the implications of St. Teresa's teaching on spiritual direction, it seems indispensable to explain what she says about illusions, taking care to note the physiological and psychological elements described; it will then pertain to psychologists to determine the influence of the subconscious on each illusion and the mechanism of each illusion through studies whose conclusions cannot but help directors. I have gathered what seemed to be the most relevant material for the following five points: manifestations of fervor, practice of virtue, melancholy, prolonged suspension of psychic activity, interior words. I do not speak of visions because that subject would require too long an explanation, and the matter has already been covered by excellent research. On each of the five points which form the first part of this study I will give a description, the psychological elements,

the criterion used by the saint to distinguish illusions from reality, and the effects of these illusions—all very briefly. I shall leave for the second part and its treatment, *ex professo*, of spiritual direction, the advice St. Teresa gives concerning each of these five points.

Illusions In The Spiritual Life

Pseudo-Fervor

On the witness of St. Teresa, manifestations of religious fervor and spiritual consolations sometimes contain elements foreign to the life of the spirit, most of the time unconscious tendencies in which the spiritual person is basically seeking, without perceiving it, his own sensible satisfaction more than the love of God.

St. Teresa speaks of sensible devotion, movements of the heart that are very common, which seem to stifle the spirit; there are impetuous transports into which "natural weakness" sometimes creeps, or which "can pertain in great part to the sensory portion of the soul." There are sweet sentiments that a person can attain for himself in prayer or meditation. The saint has noted to what extent the spiritual person is prone to obtain for himself these sensible satisfactions. Our nature is so eager for delights that it tries everything to procure them. These satisfactions closely resemble the very sentiments that earthly things excite in us. They do not open the heart, rather they tighten it. Tears burst forth, which passion seems some-

how to have provoked. Temperament and sense are somewhat at the origin of it all.

These sentiments may be so violent as to manifest themselves exteriorly: "Consolations in the spiritual life are sometimes mixed with our own passions (and) are the occasion of loud sobbing; and I have heard some persons say they experience a tightening in the chest and even external bodily movements that they cannot restrain. The force of these passions can cause nosebleeds and other things just as painful."

Even on the subject of vehement desire for the beatific vision, which God himself enkindles in very advanced persons and which causes them a delicious torment, St. Teresa notes that "a weak constitution is wont to cause these kinds of suffering, especially in the case of tender persons who will weep over every little thing. A thousand times they will be led to think they weep for God, but they will not be doing so. And it can even happen, when tears flow in abundance (I mean, that for a time every little word the soul hears or thinks concerning God becomes the cause of tears), that some humor has reached the heart thereby contributing more to the tears than does love for God ..."

According to St. Teresa, many of the phenomena of the spiritual life: transports, tears, ardent desires ... accompanied by sensible satisfaction of varying intensity, arise from causes of a non-spiritual nature. These bear the names of nature, passion, sensitivity, and sometimes exercise a causality outweighing that of the love of God, the connatural spiritual cause of the above mentioned phenomena. Since they present themselves to the person under a facade, he is easily deceived and often attributes everything to divine action or to a desire for God.

More than subtle analysis, it was observation of the effects following manifestations of fervor that allowed St. Teresa to decide when these manifestations proceed from mixed causes. These impetuous transports and sweet feelings leave the head exhausted and the spirit overcome. They do not open the heart but rather tighten it. Soon after they have arisen in the heart the soul "is quickly left cold because however much it may desire to light the fire and obtain this delight, it doesn't seem to be doing anything else than throwing water on it and killing it."

Again in the case of these psychological phenomena, St. Teresa is careful to point out something very important: "You will indeed know when this fire is the source of the tears, for they are then more comforting and bring peace not turbulence, and seldom cause harm. The good that lies in the false tears—when there is any good—is that the damage is done to the body (I mean when there is humility) and not to the soul." The great Spanish mystic remarks, however, that the studied intensification of these vehement desires for God may greatly injure one's health (Ibid.).

It may also interest psychologists to know the attitude of the saint toward these phenomena. We could ask: should we absolutely refuse these manifestations of feeling that clearly show they lack a spiritual origin and are perhaps satisfying

Mortification and a prudent fear that everything may not come from God, always accompanied by humility, are the most suitable means for lessening the intensity of desire for sensible consolations, a desire that predisposes a person to illusions.

deep unconscious tendencies? Is it not that which is demanded of a pure spirit, conscious and free of subjection to any hidden tendency of the psyche?

These lines seem to offer a good resume of St. Teresa's thought: "It is for these reasons sometimes that these tears flow and desires come, and they are furthered by human nature and one's temperament; but finally, as I have said, they end in God regardless of their nature. They are to be esteemed if there is the humility to understand that one is no better because of experiencing them." The saint adds on the same subject further on: "The whole experience ends in the desire to please God and enjoy His Majesty's company."

Consistent with herself, St. Teresa does not believe we ought to reject totally sensible consolations, or free ourselves of them at all cost; it is better to treat them with a prudent moderation that precludes the injury they cause and permits their good effects. She gives the soul the following advice: to go gently about moderating the causes of the increase of this fire; to accustom oneself to work interiorly by earnestly striving to avoid exterior feelings; to curb gently such transports without suffocating them, by means of some appropriate reflection; to shorten one's prayer in spite of all the sweetness one finds in it, when bodily strength begins to feel it or the head to ache from it — in a word, mortification. To mortify oneself even in these intense desires is good. "for mortification helps in everything," so we do not fall into illusion and always act with caution in these matters.

I should like to underscore the wisdom of this advice, even from a simple psychological point of view. Mortification and a prudent fear that everything may not come from God, always accompanied by humility, are the most suitable means for lessening the intensity of desire for sensible consolations, a desire that predisposes a person to illusions. This mortification and this hesitation are conducive to the reflection and vigilance over oneself, which the saint recommended so much, and to having recourse to a spiritual guide. On the other hand, this mode of acting does not suppress the benefits that, according to St. Teresa, may come to a person from sensible fervor, that is, a greater love and desire for God. The manifestations of sensible fervor are not really rejected, but only restrained and purified in the proper degree. Thus, as the saint says, even if their origin is some other source than the love of God, they end up in a love and desire for God, that is no longer disguised, but authentic.

False Virtues

Another error coming from the subconscious and which, much more than pseudo-fervor, may entail serious harm to the spiritual life, consists in believing oneself virtuous when one is not; in being convinced without reason that one possesses a particular virtue. An especially dangerous error, this conviction makes one neglect the practice of virtue; even humility finally suffers from it. Such a lover of solid virtue as St. Teresa had her eyes open to this possibility. Here are some examples of illusions pointed out by the saint.

When certain people who are aware of their humility practice prayer, they imagine they desire to be publicly humiliated and to receive insults for love of God. Actually, it is 'all imagination'; the facts reveal quite other sentiments: these persons would hide a tiny fault they have committed! And let someone charge one to them without cause, well then, God help us!

But even proof to the contrary does not destroy the conviction some have that they are humble. In their eyes everything is transformed so as to leave their certainty intact: "... they have engaged so long in the practice of virtue they think they can teach others and that they are more than justified in feeling disturbed.... For everything in their minds leads them to think they are suffering these things for God ... they canonize these feelings in their minds and would like others to do so ... and please God they will not think their grief is for the faults of others and in their minds turn it into something meritorious." They are not even capable of refusing the least mark of esteem one might give them; if necessary they will go in search of it; and yet their conviction remains intact. Religious persons also know how to disguise this seeking for honor. St. Teresa is thinking of scholars who, in maintaining points of honor, are deluded to the extent of believing they have a right to them, even according to God's law. She is thinking of certain religious who are terribly sensitive to questions of seniority because they are provided for by law. St. Teresa uncovers the real tenor of these feelings: "The fact is that since we are inclined to ascend—even though we will not ascend to heaven by such an inclination—there must be no descending."

So this is how pride assumes so many different guises before people: it does not wish at any cost to call one's humility into question.

And on the subject of humility, St. Teresa mentions illusions of another kind. These are different tendencies that mask themselves under the guise of humility, to which they have a certain resemblance—in order not to appear what they really are.

True humility doubtless has as its directing norm the knowledge of one's faults, since, as St. Thomas says (following St. Augustine), humility holds fast to truth, not to falsity. St. Teresa thinks—and rightly so—that we have nothing good of ourselves, that misery and nothingness are our natural lot; we are even unskillful in the little we do. But the saint's good sense is on the alert to recognize certain convictions in regard to one's own misery and nothingness which are not true humility; they do not spring from grace: impure in origin, they are very harmful. This kind of humility engenders faintheartedness. St. Teresa is speaking specifically of persons who shelter their cowardice under the cover of humility.



She also points out the excessive timidity met with in certain people, and which they take for humility; others baptize their fear, their cowardice and lack of courage to undertake great things with the name of humility.

To distinguish true humility from counterfeits St. Teresa resorts almost exclusively to examination of the effects, rather than to introspection or analysis. Humility, which hinders us from desiring and undertaking great things for the Lord is false; it is cowardice. True humility does not trouble the soul but floods it with peace and serenity; expands it and makes it more ready for the service of God. Far from producing these effects, false humility causes the contrary: it agitates, troubles, narrows the soul and turns everything upside down; in short, it is very painful.

It is not difficult to explain the mechanism by which cowardice, excessive fear and other similar sentiments take on the appearance of humility with spiritual persons. Because these persons do not possess true humility, which is sincerity in face of one's own deficiencies—because they wish to keep a good opinion of themselves—they fear really seeing themselves. For that reason, they transform their natural cowardice, without perceiving it, into what resembles it in the spiritual life: humility.

St. Teresa speaks also of false poverty: “We think we are very poor in spirit and have the habit of saving so ... So often do we say we have this virtue that we end up believing we have it.” In reality, this is nothing but an illusion that, as the saint says, may last twenty years and even a lifetime. With the real virtue lacking, one easily seeks to satisfy his desire to have something at his disposal. Under the influence of the fixed conviction that one is poor, that one wishes for nothing, this desire is transformed. The object of desire becomes necessary, indispensable for one's support. “I must live to serve God; it is his Will that we support our bodies.” And, adds the saint, “join to this a thousand other reasons, which the devil, disguised as an angel of light, puts into the mind—for all this is excellent in itself. Thus he persuades a person that he is poor, that on this point there is nothing else remaining to be done.” But if a religious receives a gift, “it is a wonder if he judges that he does not need it.” St. Teresa uncovers similar illusions in regard to poverty in persons of the world who claim to be virtuous.

Bodily penance also furnishes matter for illusions. Some neglect it because they wish to preserve their health to serve the Lord. These are the spiritual persons, orderly about everything, of whom the third mansions speak: “The penance these souls do is well balanced, like their lives. They desire penance a great deal so as to serve our Lord by it. Nothing of this is wrong ...”

On the other hand, some give themselves to excessive penance: “The devil tempts us in regard to excessive penances so that we might think we are more penitential than others and are doing something.” Subtle transformation of self-love of this kind is so shrewd that it wins out even when it is a matter of imposing physical pain on oneself. St. Teresa told of her own case: “Once while thinking of



the distress it caused me to eat meat and not do penance, I understood that sometimes my distress was more a matter of self-love than a desire for penance.”

St. Teresa also speaks of illusory great desires for the apostolate that arise in prayer. She puts her daughters on guard against these desires and gives a shrewd psychological reason for her advice: “... sometimes the devil gives us great desires so that we will avoid setting ourselves to the task at hand, serving our Lord in possible things, and instead be content with having desired the impossible.” It is a clever disguise for laziness in people who want to excel in their own eyes.

In regard to solitude St. Teresa points out another disguise for laziness and sensuality. She asks herself “whence comes ... the vexation we usually feel when one or the other of these duties [obedience or charity] prevent our spending a great part of the day in deep recollection and immersed in God.... The first, and chief, of them is a very subtle self-love, which creeps into us in such a way that, without our perceiving it, we are seeking our satisfaction rather than that of God. So it is really evident,” she notes perceptively, “that when we have begun to taste how sweet the Lord is, there is more pleasure in keeping the body at rest and the soul in spiritual joy, than in giving ourselves up to action.”

Another illusion, whose origin St. Teresa imputes to the devil, but which may easily come from hidden tendencies, consists in being worried about the faults and sins of others. This attitude entails loss of peace and hinders the exercise of prayer; it can induce a person to interfere inopportunistically, even with superiors, for the correction of the offenders. Obviously all this does not proceed from a healthy source. And yet, in some way we persuade ourselves that it is virtue, perfection, and zeal for the glory of God; we think in all sincerity that this worry caused by the failures of our neighbor comes solely from the desire that God be not offended, from regret at seeing him insulted.

That was a whole series of illusions about virtue, capable of paralyzing the spiritual life if they are not dispelled in time. Happily, it is not impossible to recognize them.

When dealing with beautiful sentiments concerning virtue, the first rule of prudence consists in not believing, on the witness of interior dispositions, that we really possess virtues. Real virtues demand works. St. Teresa often comes back to this indispensable proof of authenticity. A superficial look at our conduct is not enough; our works have to be scrutinized. A superficial look may deceive us, an attentive examination cannot. And to avoid all illusion, especially in the highest degrees of the spiritual life, St. Teresa wishes us to examine ourselves in even the smallest things. She is convinced that, by acting in this way, we shall see the revelation of the true contours of our works. Even if we see in ourselves the works of virtue, it is better that we always maintain a certain mistrust: “The truly humble person,” says St. Teresa, “always walks in doubt about his own virtues.”

“... sometimes the devil gives us great desires so that we will avoid setting ourselves to the task at hand, serving our Lord in possible things, and instead be content with having desired the impossible.”

St. Teresa knew many persons "who have almost entirely lost their reason, but are humble and who dread offending God so much that, in spite of the torrents of tears which they shed in secret, they never swerve from what they are told to do."

The saint gives another counsel that is always useful: to avoid all illusion, we must choose a capable guide, who is not in illusion himself. We shall throw more light on this point in the second part of this study.

Melancholy

One of the best known and most frequent cases of illusion, in which the subconscious plays a great role, is melancholy. St. Teresa examines this case thoroughly: she often met and advised men and women attacked by this evil.

Here are the observations of the Holy Reformer on the nature of this evil: in general it strikes people whose imagination is weak. Melancholy, St. Teresa says, forms and builds chimeras in the imagination; its chief effect is the weakening of the reason: "Sometimes the evil is so violent that it entirely takes away the use of reason.... But there are those in whom this faculty is weakened, but not extinguished ... intermittently they are even sound in mind."

The obscuring of reason and preponderance of imagination bring on a mania for doing their own will in everything. "... these people," says St. Teresa. "are especially inclined to doing what they please, to saying whatever comes into their head, to exposing others' faults which will cover up their own, to having their own way everywhere. In a word, they are people who have no self-control." Sometimes they really do not have the strength to control themselves; but then it is not lack of strength that hinders them, but some fault. In this illness one risks getting used to acting without control, even in the healthy intervals.

Characteristic of the malady is great cunning; when necessary it can play dead. Great is its ingenuity to carry out its caprices. As we have already seen, St. Teresa admits there are many degrees of it. Not everyone infected with it is equally difficult and dangerous; if they are humble and gentle, they do not harm anyone.

The coexistence of virtue with melancholy shows well the limits of the latter. St. Teresa knew many persons "who have almost entirely lost their reason, but are humble and who dread offending God so much that, in spite of the torrents of tears which they shed in secret, they never swerve from what they are told to do. They bear their sickness as others put up with bodily illnesses. Their martyrdom is harder, and so their glory will be greater in heaven." Humility and obedience, fear and love of God alone, suffice to curb these sick people.

A correct diagnosis of melancholy should also take account of the great harm it causes. First of all, the patient's torment is a real purgatory, as the saint says: "... these persons suffer interiorly a very painful and very meritorious death in consequence of their desolations, their fantasies, their scruples... ." If the illness is not taken care of in time, they will lose their minds entirely.

The most serious harm is spiritual, both to the sick person and to his community. Melancholy destroys the whole edifice of perfection; the devil uses it to seize power over souls and make them follow their passions without control. The very eternal salvation of these sick people may be at stake. If such people live in

community, it takes only one of them to disturb a whole monastery, says St. Teresa, speaking of women's monasteries. Besides, the illness is contagious: "Nuns who are well may imagine—so miserable is our nature—that they too are infected with melancholy, and so people should put up with everything from them."

Such are the descriptive details that St. Teresa gives on the nature and effects of melancholy. She deals at greater length with the treatment to apply to this sickness—something we shall speak about in the second part.

Prolonged "Suspension"

Another psychological phenomenon that St. Teresa noticed and in which the subconscious can have a considerable part, consists in certain deep suspensions, common with many good people when they receive the favor of some sweetness in prayer.

These persons feel themselves captivated by the least exercise of piety and they give in at once to the feeling that is overcoming them. So they remain absorbed for seven or eight hours, in the most serious cases. The body is seized, but the will, the memory and the understanding are not at all so. Still, their activity lacks all control. Some people, without being subject to this kind of fainting, allow their imagination to concentrate too much, even upon aspects of highest prayer. If they have had some vision or received some extraordinary grace, they believe they are constantly seeing an object that they have seen only once, or continually feeling the presence of a grace that is completely past.

In St. Teresa's judgment, these phenomena have their roots in a great desire to enjoy in every possible way the pleasure that accompanies spiritual graces. When they concern people of weak constitution and of a tenacious temperament or imagination that foster this desire, they cling with all their might to the object, even a spiritual one, which causes sensible pleasure, and remain totally absorbed in it.

Here are some quotations from the saint: "... this sweetness surpasses all the pleasures of the world. Now suppose there is question of a person of weak constitution and whose mind, or rather imagination, is not versatile, but who, once he has begun to study a subject, continues his study and never seeks distraction. It will be with her as with many people who, when they think of something, even something unrelated to God, stay completely absorbed, or, thinking of a thing, pay no attention to what is under their very eyes: these are indolent natures, who get distracted and don't seem to know what they were going to say. This is a little of what happens in the state I am speaking of, according to the different characters, temperaments and degrees of weakness. If melancholy comes in along with this, oh: then it will fill the imagination with a thousand pleasant illusions..." Excessive penance, lack of food and sleep predispose a person to these suspensions. Those exhausted by penance "have no sooner begun to taste the sensible sweetness of love than they surrender themselves up to it entirely," we



read in the Foundations. In a more general way, St. Teresa adds: "If there is a weak constitution involved, that is enough for the transport of spirit to overcome and captivate it." Nature remains overcome by the spiritual consolations.

The following text is especially complete: "Since they feel some consolation interiorly and a languishing and weakness exteriorly, they think they are experiencing a spiritual sleep ... and they let themselves become absorbed."

The bad effects of this absorption are considerable. In the first place, no spiritual profit, wasted time: in this state, works cannot be meritorious. Then, if the person does not try to prevent the repetition of these suspensions, he risks losing his health and slowly causing his death or at least losing his mind.

The opinion of psychologists on these phenomena should be of extreme interest to spiritual directors. Without a doubt, St. Teresa's explanations admit of further clarification from both the physiological and psychological point of view.



Interior Words

What does St. Teresa say of interior words attributed to God under an illusion that prevents a person from recognizing in them the fruit of his own psychic activity?

People subject to this phenomenon assert that they see, hear, and understand. Actually, it is failings of the imagination that are deceiving them. According to St. Teresa, interior words may also come simply from the mind as it stirs up its activity in an intense desire for extraordinary graces. There may be other causes hidden from us. "A person could be recommending something to God with great feeling and intensity and think he understands something about whether it will be done or not...." Such a person is like one who composes little by little what he wants to hear said.

In the *Life*, St. Teresa manifests the conviction that the spiritual person always knows when he is the author of pseudo interior words: "If they are something the intellect [imagination?] fabricates, no matter how subtly it works, a person will know that it is the intellect that is composing something and speaking. The difference is that in the one case the words are composed and in the other they are listened to. The intellect will see that it is not then listening because it is working." In the *Interior Castle*, on the other hand, St. Teresa seems to admit the possibility of a sincere conviction on the part of the person who says he really hears and sees something.

Psychologists could greatly clarify this problem of interior words; their studies would be very appropriate in these times when entire books of interior words are published—words whose supernatural origin seems to be entirely reliable.

I shall not stop to add the signs that distinguish true words from false. These signs are found together in chapter 25 of the *Life*.

Elizabeth of the Trinity: An Exposition of Her Last Words

Gillian Leslie, O.C.D.

Part II Christological View

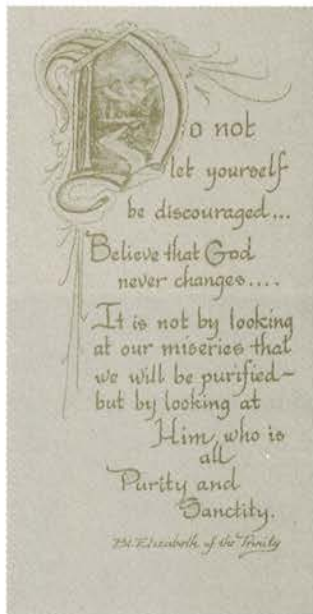
To say that the soul who is wholly open to God's Light is wholly Marian is to say, in effect, that it takes its place among all the saints, of whom Mary is the best example and the prototype. Assimilation to the Light of God is that which leads us to a participation in the state of the saints in light. The elect are those who are "wholly bathed in the great light of God." Even here below, Elizabeth says, There are some who belong to... 'this generation pure as light'... because He radiates in them the beauty of His perfections." This is an awe-inspiring thought. Already, here and now, she seems to be saying, the barrier between heaven and earth, the sanctified and the being sanctified, is being broken down. The mediator of this work is, of course, Christ himself. Perhaps nowhere else in her writings is Elizabeth so profoundly Christological as in this discussion of what it means to reflect the glory of God in heaven. Here she uses St. John's image of the Lamb. The Lamb, who is the sole light of the heavenly city, is also, by analogy, the only light of the soul. The two states, that of the blessed and that of those still on the way, here correspond with each other. And as Christ reflects the glory of the Father, so they reflect the glory of Christ.

But what is this glory? Instinctively Elizabeth turns to the passion of Jesus for her answer. The Lamb is essentially one who appears "as it were slain." Elizabeth wrote,

Before contemplating with uncovered face the glory of the Lord, they have shared in the annihilation of this Christ, before being transformed from brightness to brightness in the image of the Divine Being; they have been conformed to the image of the Word Incarnate, the One crucified by love.

It is this sharing in the passion of Christ that enables the soul on earth to share the glory of the saints in light. Elizabeth's own life bore testimony to her identification with this truth. Her last illness and dying became for her the means of sharing in that crucifixion of Jesus and thus the gateway to the heavenly life of which she spoke. She too was to be "annihilated," crushed by sick-





ness and pain. In this experience, however, she recognized the antechamber to heaven: "I think I will soon be going [to] the bosom of Light and Love," and "Sometimes I think He is going to come and take me, to carry me off to where he is in dazzling Light."

Her conviction's impact on us depends on her already reaching out in heart and mind to the destiny for which she felt her present suffering was preparing her. That destiny, by contrast with the spiritual and mental darkness imposed by her present affliction, was to be wholly light—darkness's companion and its reverse. The Light of God thus symbolizes that which the soul anticipates in hope, a hope that Elizabeth expressed in the moving cry, "What will it be...in God's great Light, the first meeting with divine beauty?"

Love

Of the three divine attributes under discussion, love has been left until last because it is the most misunderstood. It is misunderstood because, as Elizabeth perceived, love is only too frequently equated with a certain feeling. When, for instance, she wrote that love is what draws God to the creature, she hastened to add, "Not a sensible love but the love that is 'strong as death. It is, as she wrote elsewhere, a love that is pure and disinterested," not "seeking itself in the sweetness of this love." "Love of God," she wrote to Françoise de Sourdon, "must be so strong that it extinguishes all our self-love." To focus attention on the feeling dimensions of love would be to draw too close to self-love rather than to love of God.

Unlike Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth rarely alluded to feeling states in what she said and wrote. The phrase "I feel" was not a part of her vocabulary. Yet, this is not to say that love has no feeling or that feelings have no part to play in our experience of love. Indirectly, Elizabeth's own life bore witness to this fact. Not only did she continue to maintain in Carmel the friendships she had formed outside, but her deeply affective relationship with her mother never ceased to play a large role in her life. Someone who could write to a younger friend, "I love you as a mother loves her child," can hardly be accused of lacking in the kind of emotion that such a relationship implies.

Nevertheless, if love cannot be divorced from feelings, it is not, however, dependent on them. "It matters little to the soul," Elizabeth wrote, "whether it feels God or not, whether He sends it joy or suffering; it believes in his love." Love, in other words, is essentially the exercise of faith. It is shown by what we do rather than by what we think or feel or say. When Elizabeth identified this active expression of faith with the fulfillment of the will of God, she did not have in mind mere obedience to that will, but a surrender infused by the passion of total dedication. Where obedience is transformed by such passion, love is made manifest. The passion of love is proved, paradoxically, less in those circumstances when the soul may feel a sense of exaltation and confidence than when it acts according to its faith in God's love for it, in spite of its feelings or lack of feelings.

Image of Furnace

Elizabeth of the Trinity's favorite image for love was that of the furnace. It is one of the very few images that she habitually employed. Unlike Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth's writings lack the abundant imagery that characterizes the works of the former. Indeed she seems, in a certain sense, to have had more of an intellectual and theological than an imaginative type of mind. This particular image, then, would seem to be worth taking seriously precisely because its occurrence is so exceptional. In one sense it is unoriginal: she would have come across it in any number of devotional books of the period. But the fact that it had struck her to the extent of becoming a part of her language about love suggests that the natural content of the word itself must have seemed to her particularly appropriate as an expression of love's nature. Like the image of the abyss that is, arguably, the only other major image that Elizabeth consistently used, the image of the furnace refers primarily not to our love, but to the love of God.

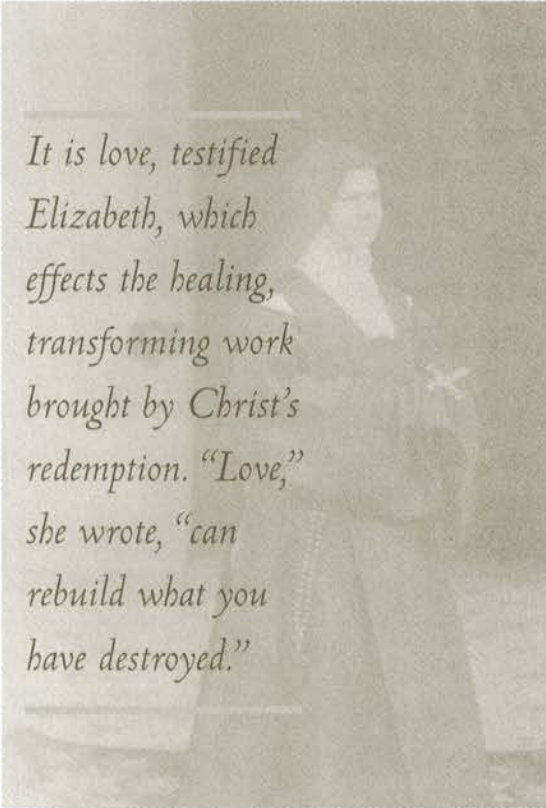
If God is the "consuming fire" mentioned in the Letter to the Hebrews, then love is the material of that fire. This is the love that burns and consumes the dross of the soul's faults and imperfections and prepares it for that loving union with God that is its desire and goal. There is, she said, a "Furnace of love" burning within us—the Holy Spirit in person—who, as the bond of love uniting the Blessed Trinity, incorporates us into that love and into the Trinity's loving relationship. The furnace, then, is what symbolizes love under the double aspect of that which consumes and that which burns: of the purification and passion already mentioned.

To talk about the meaning of love, however, it is not sufficient to describe it. Even love could be said to have no meaning if it did not have a specific purpose. The exercise of loving has to be understood in terms of the end to which it is directed, otherwise one might well be tempted to ask, "Why bother?" If it is granted that love in its active form demands both self-sacrifice and effort, then it must be provided with a motivation both greater and stronger than the degree of effort involved. This Elizabeth defines as "union." The object of loving is to become united with the God who is Love. This language of union with God is, again, one that Elizabeth of the Trinity inherited from a long spiritual tradition and one she does not seem to have fundamentally questioned. It is only indirectly, therefore, that we can tease out what she meant by it. In this context, she spoke about "centering" the soul on God, about "entering" deeply into him, and about participation in the love that God is.

In symbolic language she even spoke of the soul in this context as God's "bridal chamber," the meeting place where love is consummated in the most intimate form known to the human creature. The impression given by her use of these terms is one of intense application, of those who are wholly focused upon

Adoration, she wrote, is "the ecstasy of love." It is "love overcome by the beauty, the strength, the immense grandeur of the Object loved." Adoration is what loving surrender to God's will looks like when it is carried to the point of total self-forgetfulness.

handing themselves over to the beloved one. It is, she wrote, "to collect all one's powers in order to employ them in the one work of love." Silence is needed for such a purpose: silence, not only in the sense of a lack of speech but in the sense of a profound stillness within the mind and heart. Silence is unitive because it is the concrete expression of the intense application required and because the soul whose "powers" (as Elizabeth called them) are thus focused is thereby rendered wholly attentive, alert, and surrendered.



*It is love, testified
Elizabeth, which
effects the healing,
transforming work
brought by Christ's
redemption. "Love,"
she wrote, "can
rebuild what you
have destroyed."*

Surrender and Adoration

Love is, in fact, about surrender and is expressed through surrender: surrender, that is to say, to God in Christ. By "surrender" in this context, Elizabeth means the yielding of the will to God's will. "Let us lovingly eat this bread of the will of God," she wrote in her retreat notebook of August 1906, three months before she died. Even if that will seems "crucifying," yet, by embracing it "in strength and serenity with the divine Crucified," it will become the means of making us more like the one we love. Jesus, the Word Incarnate, is also "the one crucified by love." In this compact phrase Elizabeth expressed love's essential paradox: the will of God for us can lead to suffering and yet still be recognized as intended by God's love in the sense that those who march on the way of sorrows are those "whom He foreknew and predestined to be conformed to the image of His divine Son."

It was a perception that she applied to her own suffering as disease ate away at her body and that caused her to exclaim, "I wonder how the soul that has sounded the depths of love that the Heart of God has for it could be anything but joyful in every suffering and sorrow?" Those who recognize the hand of love behind all that happens and who yield themselves entirely to it are those who, in every circumstance, are souls of profound adoration. For it is adoration that, in Elizabeth of the Trinity's thought, is the supreme manifestation of the loving soul. Adoration, she wrote, is "the ecstasy of love." It is "love overcome by the beauty, the strength, the immense grandeur of the Object loved." Adoration is what loving surrender to God's will looks like when it is carried to the point of total self-forgetfulness.

The last important text that Elizabeth was to write has been published under the title by which its main theme is most nearly expressed: *Let Yourself Be Loved*. Written to Mother Germaine as a final testament, the idea that God asks nothing more of us than to allow him to love us is repeated throughout with all the insistence of profound conviction. This is Elizabeth's last word about love: "Let yourself be loved," to which she added Jesus' words to Peter, "more than these." The blending of ideas that, strictly speaking, depends on an inaccurate

interpretation of what Jesus actually said, seems to summarize her entire thought on the subject at the summit of her earthly existence. On the one hand it expresses the sheer gratuitousness of God's love; on the other, the fact that God can only pour out his love on individuals, not collectives.

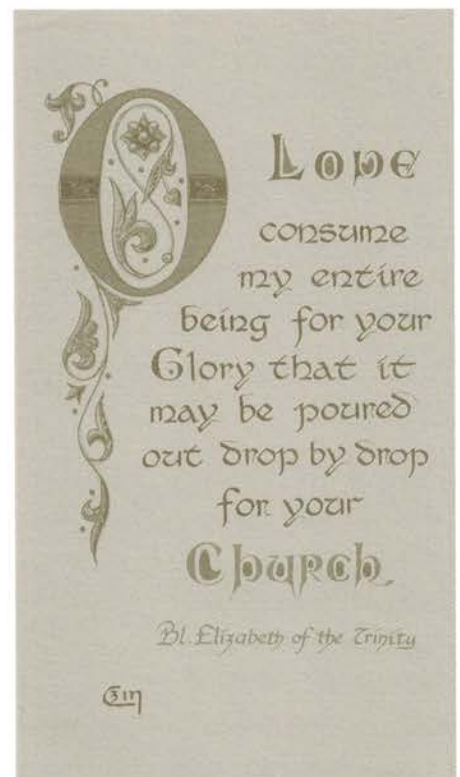
Addressing herself specifically to Mother Germaine, Elizabeth nevertheless speaks the truth about every soul. Each one of us is uniquely loved, divinely chosen. Each one of us is called to let the outpoured love of God for us become the dominant reality of our lives. It is love, testified Elizabeth, which effects the healing, transforming work brought by Christ's redemption. "Love," she wrote, "can rebuild what you have destroyed." It is "an unchanging and creative love, a free love that transforms as it pleases Him." To let oneself be loved is what praise of God's glory looks like when carried into act. It is the most perfect act of faith. By remaining in communion with his love, we prove that, no matter what afflictions may assail us, we believe that the power of God's love is at work in it all.

So deeply convinced was Elizabeth at this point of her life in the truth of her convictions about the love of God that the text *Let Yourself Be Loved* is expressed in the astonishing language of mystical priesthood. Mother Germaine, who had hitherto exercised the priesthood of offering Elizabeth to God as a victim of suffering, would in turn, she said, experience the priestly action of her "child" from heaven. Or again, actually identifying herself this time with the host of the Mass, Elizabeth made the extraordinary claim that from heaven she would live in Germaine's soul, would live in communion with her before the throne of God. Germaine, she said, had been "consecrated to me from eternity" so that she might share Elizabeth's vision and her vocation, "that you might participate in it and...may live the life of the blessed."

Such language, raising, as it does, many questions, cannot be adequately dealt with here. But insofar as Elizabeth is trying to express a fundamental truth about the nature of God's love, we see her struggling to put into words the whole meaning of our vocation as Christians. To let oneself be loved is the greatest act of faith and homage that one can show the Father of Jesus, for it is to receive all that he has to offer and thus to become "the Praise of Glory of the Holy Trinity."

Conclusion

It is tempting when reflecting on Elizabeth of the Trinity's last words to give the final place to love. In this we are undoubtedly, if unconsciously, influenced by St. Thérèse for whom "love" was indeed the last word. However, in Elizabeth's case this was not so. "I go to Light, to Love, to Life" is what she actually said. And so we must reexamine our expectations and ask what this particular order of words may mean. We can do this because it should be evident that when a person is on the



brink of death, they do not reflect on the potential theological implications of what they are about to say. Rather, whatever they say will be the spontaneous result of such thoughts and ideas, beliefs and hopes as they have been nourished throughout life. Elizabeth surely spoke at that moment out of the rich plenitude of a heart that had been formed since childhood to direct everything to God, to see everything in God.

That the last words spoken by Elizabeth of the Trinity should be overtly Trinitarian can only seem fitting and are a revelation of how profoundly inserted into this mystery she had become. Perhaps it is too simplistic to suggest that the three concepts she used correspond to each of the three divine persons so that we can identify Light with the Spirit, Love with the Son, and Life with the Father. God is not to be so neatly divided, however, and the whole Godhead is to be found in each of these realities. But what we can do is to look at the movement within Elizabeth's words toward their end.

The last word of all is Life, and by giving to Life all the weight of this concluding position, we perceive that it is, indeed, the ultimate reality. "I came that they might have life," prayed Jesus, and "because I live they also will live." Elizabeth believed that she would join the blessed in heavenly life and that from there she would continue to intervene in the lives of those she loved. If it had not been so, her death would have had no meaning. If God gives us Light, it is so that we may see the way that leads to him and participate in the outpouring of his glory. If we know Love, it is because we have come to know Love incarnate in the person of the Son and have become like him even here on earth. But neither of these graces stands on its own. They are incomplete if they do not lead to that Life which is both Light and Love and the complete realization of all that God holds in store for us.

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