

THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL

by St. John of the Cross

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This treatise explains how to reach divine union quickly. It presents instruction and doctrine valuable for beginners and proficient alike that they may learn how to unburden themselves of all earthly things, avoid spiritual obstacles, and live in that complete nakedness and freedom of spirit necessary for divine union. It was composed by Padre Fray John of the Cross, Discalced Carmelite.

## **ARGUMENT**

The following stanzas include all the doctrine I intend to discuss in this book, The Ascent of Mount Carmel. They describe the way that leads to the summit of the mount - that high state of perfection we here call union of a soul with God. Since these stanzas will serve as a basis for all I shall say, I want to cite them here in full that the reader may see in them a summary of the doctrine to be expounded. Yet I will quote each stanza again before its explanation and give the verses separately if the subject so requires.

## STANZAS

A song of the soul's happiness in having passed through the dark night of faith, in nakedness and purgation, to union with its Beloved.

1. One dark night,  
fired with love's urgent longings  
- ah, the sheer grace! -  
I went out unseen,  
my house being now all stilled.

2. In darkness and secure,  
by the secret ladder, disguised,  
- ah, the sheer grace! -  
in darkness and concealment,  
my house being now all stilled.

3. On that glad night,  
in secret, for no one saw me,  
nor did I look at anything,  
with no other light or guide  
than the one that burned in my heart.

4. This guided me  
more surely than the light of noon  
to where he was awaiting me  
- him I knew so well -  
there in a place where no one appeared.

5. O guiding night!  
O night more lovely than the dawn!  
O night that has united  
the Lover with his beloved,  
transforming the beloved in her Lover.

6. Upon my flowering breast  
which I kept wholly for him alone,  
there he lay sleeping,  
and I caressing him  
there in a breeze from the fanning cedars.

7. When the breeze blew from the turret,  
as I parted his hair,  
it wounded my neck  
with its gentle hand,  
suspending all my senses.

8. I abandoned and forgot myself,  
laying my face on my Beloved;  
all things ceased; I went out from myself,  
leaving my cares  
forgotten among the lilies.

## **PROLOGUE**

P.1. A deeper enlightenment and wider experience than mine is necessary to explain the dark night through which a soul journeys toward that divine light of perfect union with God that is achieved, insofar as possible in this life, through love. The darkneses and trials, spiritual and temporal, that fortunate souls ordinarily undergo on their way to the high state of perfection are so numerous and profound that human science cannot understand them adequately. Nor does experience of them equip one to explain them. Only those who suffer them will know what this experience is like, but they won't be able to describe it.

P.2. In discussing this dark night, therefore, I will not rely on experience or science, for these can fail and deceive us. Although I will not neglect whatever possible use I can make of them, my help in all that, with God's favor, I shall say, will be Sacred Scripture, at least in the most important matters, or those that are difficult to understand. Taking Scripture as our guide we do not err, since the Holy Spirit speaks to us through it. Should I misunderstand or be mistaken on some point, whether I deduce it from Scripture or not, I will not be intending to deviate from the true meaning of Sacred Scripture or from the doctrine of our Holy Mother the Catholic Church. Should there be some mistake, I submit entirely to the Church, or even to anyone who judges more competently about the matter than I.

P.3. I am not undertaking this arduous task because of any particular confidence in my own abilities. Rather, I am confident that the Lord will help me explain this matter because it is extremely necessary to so many souls. Even though these souls have begun to walk along the road of virtue, and our Lord desires to place them in the dark night that they may move on to the divine union, they do not advance. The reason for this may be that sometimes they do not want to enter the dark night or allow themselves to be placed in it, or that sometimes they misunderstand themselves and are without suitable and alert directors who will show them the way to the summit. God gives many souls the talent and grace for advancing, and should they desire to make the effort they would arrive at this high state. And so it is sad to see them continue in their lowly method of communion with God because they do not want or know how to advance, or because they receive no direction on breaking away from the methods of beginners. Even if our Lord finally comes to their aid to the extent of making them advance without these helps, they reach the summit much later, expend more effort, and gain less merit, because they do not willingly adapt themselves to God's work of placing them on the pure and reliable road leading to union. Although God does lead them - since he can do so without their cooperation - they do not accept his guidance. In resisting God who is conducting them, they make little progress and fail in merit because they do not apply their wills; as a result they must endure greater suffering. Some souls, instead of abandoning themselves to God and cooperating with him, hamper him by their indiscreet activity or their resistance. They resemble children who kick and cry and struggle to walk by themselves when their mothers want to carry them; in walking by themselves they make no headway, or if they do, it is at a child's pace.

P.4. With God's help, then, we will propose doctrine and counsel for beginners and



proficients that they may understand or at least know how to practice abandonment to God's guidance when He wants them to advance.<sup>1</sup>

P.4.(2). Some spiritual fathers are likely to be a hindrance and harm rather than a help to these souls that journey on this road. Such directors have neither understanding nor experience of these ways. They are like the builders of the tower of Babel [Gn. 11:1-9]. When these builders were supposed to provide the proper materials for the project, they brought entirely different supplies because they failed to understand the language. And thus nothing was accomplished. Hence, it is arduous and difficult for a soul in these periods of the spiritual life when it cannot understand itself or find anyone else who understands it.

P.4.(3). It will happen to individuals that while they are being conducted by God along a sublime path of dark contemplation and aridity, in which they feel lost and filled with darknesses, trials, conflicts, and temptations, they will meet someone who, in the style of Job's comforters [Jb. 4:8-11], will proclaim that all of this is due to melancholia, depression, or temperament, or to some hidden wickedness, and that as a result God has forsaken them. Therefore the usual verdict is that these individuals must have lived an evil life since such trials afflict them.

P.5. Other directors will tell them that they are falling back since they find no satisfaction or consolation as they previously did in the things of God. Such talk only doubles the trial of a poor soul. It will happen that the soul's greatest suffering will be caused by the knowledge of its own miseries. That it is full of evil and sin is as clear as day to it, and even clearer, for, as we shall say further on, God is the author of this enlightenment in the night of contemplation. And when this soul finds someone who agrees with what it feels (that these trials are all its own fault), its suffering and distress grow without bounds. And this suffering usually becomes worse than death. Such a confessor is not satisfied with this but, in judging these trials to be the result of sin, he urges souls who endure them to go over their past and make many general confessions - which is another crucifixion. The director does not understand that now perhaps is not the time for such activity. Indeed, it is a period for leaving these persons alone in the purgation God is working in them, a time to give comfort and encouragement that they may desire to endure this suffering as long as God wills, for until then no remedy - whatever the soul does, or the confessor says - is adequate.

P.6. With divine help we will discuss all this: how individuals should behave; what method the confessor should use in dealing with them; signs to recognize this purification of the soul that we call the dark night; whether it is the purification of the senses or of the spirit; and how we can discern whether this affliction is caused by melancholia or some other deficiency of sense or spirit.

P.6.(2). Some souls - or their confessors - may think that God is leading them along this road of the dark night of spiritual purgation, but perhaps this will not be so. What they suffer will be due to one of these deficiencies. Likewise, many individuals think they are not praying when, indeed, their prayer is deep. Others place high value on their prayer

while it amounts to little more than nothing.

P.7. Some people - and it is sad to see them - work and tire themselves greatly, and yet go backward; they look for progress in what brings no progress but instead hinders them. Others, in peace and tranquility, continue to advance well. Some others let themselves be encumbered by the very consolations and favors God bestows on them for the sake of their advancing, and they advance not at all.

P.7.(2). We will also discuss many other experiences of those who walk along this road: joys, afflictions, hopes, and sorrows - some of these originating from the spirit of perfection, others from the spirit of imperfection. Our goal will be to explain, with God's help, all these points so that those who read this book will in some way discover the road they are walking along, and the one they ought to follow if they want to reach the summit of this mount.

P.8. Readers should not be surprised if this doctrine on the dark night - through which a soul advances toward God - appears somewhat obscure. This, I believe, will be the case as they begin to read, but as they read on they will understand it better since the latter parts will explain the former. Then, if they read this work a second time, the matter will seem clearer and the doctrine sounder.

P.8.(2). But if some people still find difficulty in understanding this doctrine, it will be due to my deficient knowledge and awkward style, for the doctrine itself is good and very necessary. But I am inclined to believe that, even if it were presented with greater accuracy and polish, only a few would find profit in it, because we are not writing on moral and pleasing topics addressed to the kind of spiritual people who like to approach God along sweet and satisfying paths. We are presenting a substantial and solid doctrine for all those who desire to reach this nakedness of spirit.

P.9. My main intention is not to address everyone, but only some of the persons of our holy order of the primitive observance of Mount Carmel, both friars and nuns, whom God favors by putting on the path leading up this mount, since they are the ones who asked me to write this work. Because they are already detached to a great extent from the temporal things of this world, they will more easily grasp this doctrine on nakedness of spirit.

## **BOOK ONE - CHAPTER 1**

1. Some remarks about the two different nights through which spiritual persons pass in both the lower and higher parts of their nature. A commentary on the first stanza.

[First Stanza]

One dark night,  
fired with love's urgent longings  
- ah, the sheer grace! -  
I went out unseen,  
my house being now all stilled.

1.1. The soul sings in this first stanza of its good luck and the grace it had in departing from its inordinate sensory appetites and imperfections. To understand this departure one should know that a soul must ordinarily pass through two principal kinds of night - which spiritual persons call purgations or purifications of the soul - in order to reach the state of perfection. Here we will term these purgations nights because in both of them the soul journeys in darkness as though by night.

1.2. The first night or purgation, to which this stanza refers and which will be discussed in the first section of this book, concerns the sensory part of the soul. The second night, to which the second stanza refers, concerns the spiritual part. We will deal with this second night, insofar as it is active, in the second and third sections of the book. In the fourth section we will discuss the night insofar as it is passive.

1.3. This first night is the lot of beginners, at the time God commences to introduce them into the state of contemplation. It is a night in which their spirit also participates, as we will explain in due time. The second night or purification takes place in those who are already proficient, at the time God desires to lead them into the state of divine union. This purgation, of course, is more obscure, dark, and dreadful, as we will subsequently point out.

### **Commentary on the Stanza**

1.4. In this stanza the soul desires to declare in summary fashion that it departed on a dark night, attracted by God and enkindled with love for him alone. This dark night is a privation and purgation of all sensible appetites for the external things of the world, the delights of the flesh, and the gratifications of the will. All this deprivation is wrought in the purgation of sense. That is why the poem proclaims that the soul departed when its house was stilled, for the appetites of the sensory part were stilled and asleep in the soul, and the soul was stilled in them. One is not freed from the sufferings and anguish of the confining appetites until they are tempered and put to sleep. So it was a sheer grace, the soul declares, to have gone out unseen without encumbrance from the appetites of the flesh, or from anything else. It was also fortunate the departure took place at night; that is, that God took from the soul all these things through a privation that was a night to it.

1.5. It was a sheer grace to be placed by God in this night that occasioned so much good. The soul would not have succeeded in entering it, because souls are unable alone to

empty themselves of all their appetites in order to reach God.

1.6. Summarily, then, we have an explanation of the first stanza. Now we will expound on it verse by verse and explain whatever pertains to our subject. We will follow the method mentioned in the prologue: first cite each stanza and comment on it; then, the individual verses.<sup>3</sup>

## CHAPTER 2

The nature of the dark night through which a soul journeys to divine union.

### One dark night

2.1. We can offer three reasons for calling this journey toward union with God a night.

2.1.(2) The first has to do with the point of departure, because individuals must deprive themselves of their appetites for worldly possessions. This denial and privation is like a night for all one's senses.

2.1.(3). The second reason refers to the means or the road along which a person travels to this union. Now this road is faith, and for the intellect faith is also like a dark night.

2.1.(4). The third reason pertains to the point of arrival, namely God. And God is also a dark night to the soul in this life. These three nights pass through a soul, or better, the soul passes through them in order to reach union with God.

2.2. They are represented in the Book of Tobias [Tb. 6:18-22], where we read that the angel ordered the young Tobias to wait three nights before any union with his bride.

2.2.(2). On the first night he was to burn the fish heart in the fire. That heart signified the human heart that is attached to worldly things. To undertake the journey to God the heart must be burned with the fire of divine love and purified of all creatures. Such a purgation puts the devil to flight, for he has power over people through their attachment to temporal and bodily things.

2.3. Tobias, on the second night, as the angel told him, was to be admitted into the society of the holy patriarchs, the fathers of the faith. After passing through the first night (the privation of all sensible objects), a person enters the second night by living in faith alone; not in a faith that is exclusive of charity but a faith that excludes other intellectual knowledge, as we shall explain later, for faith does not fall into the province of the senses.

2.4. The angel told Tobias that on the third night he would obtain the blessing, which is God. God, by means of faith, which is the second night, communicates himself so secretly and intimately that he becomes another night for the soul. This communication of God is a night much darker than those other two nights, as we will soon point out. When this third night (God's communication to the spirit, which usually occurs in extreme darkness of soul) has passed, a union with the bride, who is the Wisdom of God, then follows. Tobias was also told by the angel that, after the third night had come to an end, he would be joined to his bride in the fear of the Lord. Now when the fear of God is perfect, love is also perfect, which means that the transformation of the soul in God through love is accomplished.

2.5. In actuality these three nights comprise only one night, a night divided into three

parts like natural night. The first part, the night of the senses, resembles early evening, that time of twilight when things begin to fade from sight. The second part, faith, is completely dark, like midnight. The third part, representing God, is like the very early dawn just before the break of day. To provide further enlightenment about all this, we will discuss each of these causes of night separately.

### CHAPTER 3

The first cause of this night - the privation of the appetite in all things. The reason for the use of the expression "night."

3.1. We are using the expression "night" to signify a deprivation of the gratification of the soul's appetites in all things. Just as night is nothing but the privation of light and, consequently, of all objects visible by means of the light - darkness and emptiness, then, for the faculty of sight - the mortification of the appetites can be called a night for the soul. To deprive oneself of the gratification of the appetites in all things is like living in darkness and in a void.<sup>1</sup> The eye feeds on its objects by means of light in such a way that when the light is extinguished the eye no longer sees them. Similarly do people by means of their appetites feed and pasture on worldly things that gratify their faculties. When the appetites are extinguished - or mortified - one no longer feeds on the pleasure of these things, but lives in a void and in darkness with respect to the appetites.

3.2. Let us draw an example from each of the faculties. By depriving itself of its appetites for the delights of hearing, a soul lives in darkness and emptiness in this sense faculty. And by depriving itself of the pleasure of seeing things, it lives in darkness and poverty in the faculty of sight. By denying itself the fragrances pleasing to the sense of smell, a soul abides in emptiness and darkness in this sense faculty. Then too by denying the palate the pleasures of delicious foods, it is also in the void and in darkness in the sense of taste. Finally, by mortifying itself of all the delights and satisfactions of the sense of touch, a soul likewise dwells in darkness and in a void in this faculty. The conclusion is that any individuals who may have denied and rejected the gratification that all things afford them, by mortifying their appetite for them, live as though in the night - in darkness, which is nothing else than a void within them of all things.

3.3. The cause of this darkness is attributable to the fact that - as the scholastic philosophers say - the soul is like a tabula rasa [a clean slate] when God infuses it into the body. Without the knowledge it receives through its senses it would be ignorant, because no knowledge is communicated to it naturally from any other source. Accordingly, the presence of the soul in the body resembles the presence of a prisoner in a dark dungeon who knows no more than what he manages to behold through the windows of his prison and has nowhere else to turn if nothing is seen through them. For the soul possesses no other natural means of perceiving what is communicated to it than the senses (the windows of its prison).

3.4. We can easily affirm that if a soul denies whatever is perceptible through the senses, it lives in darkness and in a void since light can enter by no other natural means than these five senses. Now it is true that the sensory perceptions of hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch are unavoidable; yet they will no more hinder a soul - if it denies them - than if they were not experienced. It is true also that those desiring to keep their eyes closed will live in darkness just like the blind. David says on this subject: *Pauper sum ego, et in laboribus a juventute mea.* (I am poor and in labors from my youth) [Ps. 88:15]. Even though he was manifestly rich, he says he was poor because his will was not fixed on riches; and he thereby lived as though really poor. On the other hand, had he been

actually poor, without his will being so, there would have been no true poverty, because the appetite of his soul would have been rich and full.

3.4.(2). Hence, we call this nakedness a night for the soul, for we are not discussing the mere lack of things; this lack will not divest the soul if it craves for all these objects. We are dealing with the denudation of the soul's appetites and gratifications. This is what leaves it free and empty of all things, even though it possesses them. Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it; rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within that cause the damage when set on these things.

3.5. This first kind of night refers to the sensory part of the soul, and it is one of the two nights mentioned above through which a person must pass to reach union with God. It is time to explain how fitting it is that the soul leave its house and journey through this dark night toward union with God.



## CHAPTER 4

The necessity of truly passing through this dark night of sense (the mortification of the appetites) in order to journey to union with God.

4.1. The necessity to pass through this dark night (the mortification of the appetites and denial of pleasure in all things) to attain divine union with God arises from the fact that all of a person's attachments to creatures are pure darkness in God's sight. Clothed in these affections, people are incapable of the enlightenment and dominating fullness of God's pure and simple light; first they must reject them. There can be no concordance between light and darkness; as St. John says: *Tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt* (The darkness could not receive the light) [Jn. 1:5].

4.2. The reason, as we learn in philosophy, is that two contraries cannot coexist in the same subject.<sup>1</sup> Darkness, an attachment to creatures, and light, which is God, are contraries and bear no likeness toward each other, as St. Paul teaches in his letter to the Corinthians: *Quae conventio lucis ad tenebras?* (What conformity is there between light and darkness?) [2 Cor. 6:14] Consequently, the light of divine union cannot be established in the soul until these affections are eradicated.

4.3. For a better proof of this, it ought to be kept in mind that an attachment to a creature makes a person equal to that creature; the stronger the attachment, the closer is the likeness to the creature and the greater the equality, for love effects a likeness between the lover and the loved. As a result David said of those who set their hearts on their idols: *Similes illis fiant qui faciunt ea, et omnes qui confidunt in eis* (Let all who set their hearts on them become like them) [Ps. 115:8]. Anyone who loves a creature, then, is as low as that creature and in some way even lower because love not only equates but even subjects the lover to the loved creature.

4.3.(2). By the mere fact that a soul loves something, it becomes incapable of pure union and transformation in God; for the lowness of the creature is far less capable of the height of the Creator than is darkness of light.

4.3.(3). All creatures of heaven and earth are nothing when compared to God, as Jeremiah points out: *Aspexi terram, et ecce vacua erat et nihil; et caelos, et non erat lux in eis* (I looked at the earth, and it was empty and nothing; and at the heavens, and I saw they had no light) [Jer. 4:23]. By saying that he saw an empty earth, he meant that all its creatures were nothing and that the earth too was nothing. In stating that he looked up to the heavens and beheld no light, he meant that all the heavenly luminaries were pure darkness in comparison to God. All creatures considered in this way are nothing, and a person's attachments to them are less than nothing since these attachments are an impediment to and deprive the soul of transformation in God - just as darkness is nothing and less than nothing since it is a privation of light. One who is in darkness does not comprehend the light, so neither will a person attached to creatures be able to comprehend God. Until a soul is purged of its attachments it will be unable to possess God, neither here below through the pure transformation of love nor in heaven through the beatific vision. For the sake of greater clarity we will be more specific.

4.4. We just asserted that all the being of creatures compared to the infinite being of God is nothing and that, therefore, anyone attached to creatures is nothing in the sight of God, and even less than nothing because love causes equality and likeness and even brings the lover lower than the loved object. In no way, then, is such a person capable of union with the infinite being of God. There is no likeness between what is not and what is. To be particular, here are some examples.

4.4.(2). All the beauty of creatures compared to the infinite beauty of God is the height of ugliness. As Solomon says in Proverbs: *Fallax gratia, et vana est pulchritudo* (Comeliness is deceiving and beauty vain) [Prv. 31:30]. So a person attached to the beauty of any creature is extremely ugly in God's sight. A soul so unsightly is incapable of transformation into the beauty that is God because ugliness does not attain to beauty.

4.4.(3). All the grace and elegance of creatures compared to God's grace is utter coarseness and crudity. That is why a person captivated by this grace and elegance of creatures becomes highly coarse and crude in God's sight. Someone like this is incapable of the infinite grace and beauty of God because of the extreme difference between the coarse and the infinitely elegant.

4.4.(4). Compared to the infinite goodness of God, all the goodness of the creatures of the world can be called wickedness. Nothing is good save God only [Lk. 18:19]. Those who set their hearts on the good things of the world become extremely wicked in the sight of God. Since wickedness does not comprehend goodness, such persons will be incapable of union with God, who is supreme goodness.

4.4.(5). All the world's wisdom and human ability compared to the infinite wisdom of God is pure and utter ignorance, as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: *Sapientia hujus mundi stultitia est apud Deum* (The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight) [1 Cor. 3:19].

4.5. Those, therefore, who value their knowledge and ability as a means of reaching union with the wisdom of God are highly ignorant in God's sight and will be left behind, far away from this wisdom. Ignorance does not grasp what wisdom is. St. Paul says that such wisdom is foolishness to God, for in God's sight those who think they have some wisdom are very ignorant. The Apostle says of them in writing to the Romans: *Dicentes enim se esse sapientes, stulti facti sunt* (Taking themselves for wise, they became fools) [Rom. 1:22].

4.5.(2). Only those who set aside their own knowledge and walk in God's service like unlearned children receive wisdom from God. This is the wisdom about which St. Paul taught the Corinthians: *Si quis videtur inter vos sapiens esse in hoc saeculo, stultus fiat ut sit sapiens. Sapientia enim hujus mundi stultitia est apud Deum* (If anyone among you thinks he is wise, let him become ignorant so as to be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God) [1 Cor. 3:18-19]. Accordingly, to reach union with the wisdom of God a person must advance by unknowing rather than by knowing.

4.6. All the sovereignty and freedom of the world compared to the freedom and sovereignty of the Spirit of God is utter slavery, anguish, and captivity. Those, then, who are attached to prelacies or to other such dignities and to freedom of their appetites will be considered and treated by God as base slaves and captives, not as offspring. And this because of their not wanting to accept his holy teaching in which he instructs us that Whoever wants to be the greater will be the least, and whoever wants to be the least will be the greater [Lk. 22:26]. Thus they will be unable to reach the royal freedom of spirit attained in divine union, for freedom has nothing to do with slavery. And freedom cannot abide in a heart dominated by desires, in a slave's heart. It abides in a liberated heart, in a child's heart. This is why Sarah told her husband Abraham to cast out the bondwoman and her son, declaring that the bondwoman's son should not be an heir together with the free son [Gn. 21:10].

4.7. All the delights and satisfactions of the will in the things of the world compared to all the delight that is God are intense suffering, torment, and bitterness. Those who link their hearts to these delights, then, deserve in God's eyes intense suffering, torment, and bitterness. They will not be capable of attaining the delights of the embrace of union with God, since they merit suffering and bitterness.

4.7.(2). All the wealth and glory of creation compared to the wealth that is God is utter poverty and misery in the Lord's sight. The person who loves and possesses these things is completely poor and miserable before God and will be unable to attain the richness and glory of transformation in God; the miserable and poor is very far from the supremely rich and glorious.

4.8. Divine Wisdom, with pity for these souls that become ugly, abject, miserable, and poor because of their love for worldly things, which in their opinion are rich and beautiful, exclaims in Proverbs: *O viri, ad vos clamito, et vox mea ad filios hominum. Intelligite, parvuli, astutiam, et insipientes, animadvertite. Audite quia de rebus magnis locutura sum.* And further on: *Mecum sunt divitiae et gloria, opes superbae et justitia. Melior est fructus meus auro et lapide pretioso, et gemina mea argento electo. In viis justitiae ambulo, in medio semitarum iudicii, ut ditem diligentes me, et thesauros eorum repleam.* The meaning of this passage is: O people, I cry to you, my voice is directed to the children of this earth. Be attentive, little ones, to cunning and sagacity; and you ignorant, be careful. Listen, because I want to speak of great things. Riches and glory are mine, high riches and justice. The fruit you will find in me is better than gold and precious stones; and my generations (what will be engendered of me in your souls) are better than choice silver. I walk along the ways of justice, in the midst of the paths of judgment, to enrich those who love me and to fill their treasures completely [Prv. 8:4-6, 18-21].

4.8.(2). Divine Wisdom speaks, here, to all those who are attached to the things of the world. She calls them little ones because they become as little as the things they love. She tells them, accordingly, to be cunning and careful, that she is dealing with great things, not small things, as they are; and that the riches and glory they love are with her and in

her, not where they think; and that lofty riches and justice are present in her. Although in their opinion the things of this world are riches, she tells them to bear in mind that her riches are more precious, that the fruit found in them will be better than gold and precious stones, and that what she begets in souls has greater value than cherished silver, which signifies every kind of affection possible in this life.

## CHAPTER 5

5. Continuation of the same matter. Proofs from passages and figures of Sacred Scripture for the necessity of journeying to God through this dark night, the mortification of the appetites.

5.1. We have some idea, from what was said, of the distance that lies between what creatures are in themselves and what God is in himself, and, since love produces equality and likeness, of how souls attached to any of these creatures are just as distant from God. With a clear realization of this distance, St. Augustine addressed God in the Soliloquies: Miserable man that I am, when will my pusillanimity and imperfection be able to conform with your righteousness? You indeed are good, and I evil; You are merciful, and I unmerciful; You are holy, and I miserable; You are just, and I unjust; You are light, and I blindness; You are life, and I death; You are medicine, and I sickness; You are supreme truth; and I utter vanity.<sup>1</sup> These are the words of the saint.

5.2. People, indeed, are ignorant who think it is possible to reach this high state of union with God without first emptying their appetite of all the natural and supernatural things that can be a hindrance to them, as we will explain further on. For there is an extreme distance between such appetites and that which is given in this state, which is nothing less than transformation in God. Instructing us about this way, our Lord stated according to St. Luke: Qui non renuntiat omnibus quae possidet, non potest meus esse discipulus (Whoever does not renounce all that he will possess cannot be my disciple) [Lk. 14:33]. This statement is clear, for the doctrine the Son of Man came to teach is contempt for all things so we may receive the gift of God's Spirit. As long as people fail to rid themselves of these possessions, they are incapable of receiving God's Spirit in pure transformation.

5.3. We have a figure of this in Exodus [Ex. 16] where we read that God did not give the children of Israel the heavenly manna until they exhausted the flour brought from Egypt. The meaning here is that first a total renunciation is needed, for this bread of angels is disagreeable to the palate of anyone who wants to taste human food. Persons feeding on other strange tastes not only become incapable of the divine Spirit, but even greatly anger the divine Majesty because in their aspirations for spiritual food they are not satisfied with God alone, but mix with these aspirations a desire and affection for other things. This is likewise apparent in the same book of Sacred Scripture [Ex. 16:8-13] where it states that the people, discontented with that simple food, requested and craved meat, and seriously angered our Lord because of their desire to commingle a food so base and coarse with one so high and simple that, even though simple, contained the savor and substance of all foods. Consequently, while morsels of manna were yet in their mouths, the wrath of God descended on them (as David also says: Ira Dei descendit super eos [Ps. 78:31]), spouting fire from heaven and reducing thousands of them to ashes [Nm. 11:1]. For God thought it shameful for them to crave other food while he was giving them heavenly food.

5.4. Oh, if spiritual persons knew how much spiritual good and abundance they lose by not attempting to raise their appetites above childish things, and if they knew to what

extent, by not desiring the taste of these trifles, they would discover in this simple spiritual food the savor of all things! The Israelites did not perceive the taste of every other food that was contained in the manna, because their appetite was not centered on this manna alone. They were unsuccessful in deriving from the manna all the taste and strength they were looking for, not because the manna didn't have these but because of their craving for other foods. Similarly, those who love something together with God undoubtedly make little of God, for they weigh in the balance with God an object far distant from God, as we have said.

5.5. It is well known from experience that when the will is attached to an object, it esteems that object higher than any other, even though another, not as pleasing, may deserve higher admiration. And if people desire pleasure from two objects, they are necessarily offensive to the more deserving because through their desire for both they equate the two. Since nothing equals God, those who love and are attached to something along with God offend him exceedingly. If this is true, what would happen if they loved something more than God?

5.6. This was also indicated when God ordered Moses to climb to the top of the mountain. He did this that Moses might be able to speak to him. He commanded Moses not only to ascend alone and leave the children of Israel below, but to rule against even the pasturing of beasts on the mountainside [Ex. 34:3]. The meaning is that those who ascend this mount of perfection to converse with God must not only renounce all things by leaving them at the bottom, but also restrict their appetites (the beasts) from pasturing on the mountainside, on things that are not purely God. For in God, or in the state of perfection, all appetites cease.

5.6.(2). The road and ascent to God, then, necessarily demands a habitual effort to renounce and mortify the appetites; the sooner this mortification is achieved, the sooner the soul reaches the top. But until the appetites are eliminated, one will not arrive no matter how much virtue is practiced. For one will be failing to acquire perfect virtue, which lies in keeping the soul empty, naked, and purified of every appetite.

5.6.(3). We also have a striking figure of this in Genesis. When the patriarch Jacob desired to ascend Mount Bethel to build an altar to offer sacrifice to God, he first ordered his people to do three things: destroy all strange gods; purify themselves; and change their garments [Gn. 35:2].

5.7. Those desiring to climb to the summit of the mount in order to become an altar for the offering of a sacrifice of pure love and praise and reverence to God must first accomplish these three tasks perfectly. First, they must cast out strange gods, all alien affections and attachments. Second, by denying these appetites and repenting of them - through the dark night of the senses - they must purify themselves of the residue. Third, in order to reach the top of this high mount, their garments must be changed. By means of the first two works, God will substitute new garments for the old. The soul will be clothed in a new understanding of God in God (through removal of the old understanding) and in a new love of God in God, once the will is stripped of all the old

cravings and satisfactions. And God will vest the soul with new knowledge when the other old ideas and images are cast aside [Col. 3:9]. He causes all that is of the old self, the abilities of one's natural being, to cease, and he attires all the faculties with new supernatural abilities. As a result, one's activities, once human, now become divine. This is achieved in the state of union when the soul, in which God alone dwells, has no other function than that of an altar on which God is adored in praise and love.

5.7.(2). God commanded that the altar of the Ark of the Covenant be empty and hollow [Ex. 27:8] to remind the soul how void of all things God wishes it to be if it is to serve as a worthy dwelling for His Majesty. It was forbidden that the altar have any strange fire, or that its own go out; so much so that when Nadab and Abihu, the sons of the high priest Aaron, offered strange fire on our Lord's altar God became angry and slew them there in front of the altar [Lv. 10:1-2]. The lesson we derive here is that one's love for God must never fail or be mixed with alien loves if one wants to be a worthy altar of sacrifice.

5.8. God allows nothing else to dwell together with him. We read, consequently, in the First Book of Kings that when the Philistines put the Ark of the Covenant in a temple with their idol, the idol was hurled to the ground at the dawn of each day and broken into pieces [1 Sm. 5:2-4]. The only appetite God permits and wants in his dwelling place is the desire for the perfect fulfillment of his law and the carrying of the cross of Christ. Scripture teaches that God ordered nothing else to be placed in the Ark where the manna was than the Law and the rod of Moses (signifying the cross) [Dt. 31: 6; Nm. 17:10]. Those who have no other goal than the perfect observance of the Lord's law and the carrying of the cross of Christ will be true arks, and they will bear within themselves the real manna, which is God, when they possess perfectly, without anything else, this law and this rod.

## CHAPTER 6

6. The harm, privative as well as positive, that appetites cause in the soul.

6.1. For the sake of a clearer and fuller understanding of our assertions, it will be beneficial to explain here how these appetites cause harm in two principal ways within those in whom they dwell: They deprive them of God's Spirit; and they weary, torment, darken, defile, and weaken them. Jeremiah mentions this in Chapter 2: *Duo mala fecit populus meus: dereliquerunt fontem aquae vivae, et foderunt sibi cisternas dissipatas, quae continere non valent aquas* (They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug for themselves leaking cisterns that hold no water) [Jer. 2:13]. Any inordinate act of the appetite causes both this privative and positive damage.

6.1.(2). To begin with, it is clear in speaking of the privative harm that a person by mere attachment to a created thing is less capable of God; and this, in the measure that the appetite has entity in the soul. For two contraries cannot coexist in the same subject, as the philosophers say, and as we also mentioned in Chapter 4.1 Since love of God and attachment to creatures are contraries, they cannot coexist in the same will. What has creature to do with Creator, sensory with spiritual, visible with invisible, temporal with eternal, heavenly food that is pure and spiritual with food that is entirely sensory, the nakedness of Christ with attachment to something?

6.2. In natural generation a new form cannot be introduced into a subject without expulsion of the form already there, which is an impediment to the new form because of the existing contrariety. Similarly, insofar as a person is subject to a sensory spirit, an entirely spiritual one cannot enter. This is why our Lord said through St. Matthew: *Non est bonum sumere panem filiorum et mittere canibus* (It is unbecoming to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs) [Mt. 15:26]. Also in another part he says through the same evangelist: *Nolite sanctum dare canibus* (Do not give what is holy to the dogs) [Mt. 7:6]. All those who dispose themselves for the pure reception of God's Spirit through the denial of their appetites for creatures, our Lord compares to the children of God. And all those who desire to feed their appetites on creatures, he compares to the dogs. It is the privilege of children to eat at table with their father and from his dish, which is to share in his Spirit; but the dogs must eat the crumbs that fall from the table [Mt. 15: 26-27].

6.3. Our lesson here is that all creatures are like crumbs that have fallen from God's table. Those who go about feeding on creatures, then, are rightly designated as dogs and are deprived of the children's bread because they refuse to rise from the crumbs of creatures to the uncreated Spirit of their Father. This is precisely why they wander about hungry as dogs. The crumbs serve more to whet their appetite than to satisfy their hunger. David says of them: *Famem patientur ut canes, et circuibunt civitatem. Si vero no fuerint saturati, et murmurabunt* (They will suffer hunger like dogs, and wander around the city. And if they are not filled, they will murmur) [Ps. 59:14-15]. This is the characteristic of those with appetites; they are always dissatisfied and bitter, like someone who is hungry.

6.3.(2). What, then, has the hunger caused by creatures in common with the fullness caused by the Spirit of God? This uncreated fullness cannot enter a soul until this other



hunger caused by the desires is expelled. Since hunger and fullness are contraries they cannot coexist in the same person.

6.4. It will be evident from our explanation that God accomplishes more in cleansing and purging people of these contraries than he does in creating them from nothing. These impediments of contrary attachments and appetites are more opposed and resistant to God than nothingness, for nothingness does not resist.

6.4.(2). Since we have already said a good deal about this first kind of harm (resistance to God's Spirit) caused by the appetites, our comments here should be sufficient.

6.5. Let us now deal with the second effect, the numerous kinds of impairment wrought in the soul. For the appetites weary, torment, darken, defile, and weaken it. We shall discuss these five effects separately.

6.6. As for the first, it is plain that the appetites are wearisome and tiring. They resemble little children, restless and hard to please, always whining to their mother for this thing or that, and never satisfied. Just as anyone who digs covetously for a treasure grows tired and exhausted, so does anyone who strives to satisfy the appetites' demands become wearied and fatigued. And even if a soul does finally fill them, it is still always weary because it is never satisfied. For, after all, one digs leaking cisterns that cannot contain the water that slakes thirst. As Isaiah says: *Lassus adhuc sitit, et anima ejus vacua est*, which means: He is yet faint with thirst and his soul is empty [Is. 29:8].

6.6.(2). A soul with desires wearies itself, because it is like someone with a fever whose thirst increases by the minute, and who feels ill until the fever leaves. It is said in the Book of Job: *Cum satiatus fuerit, arctabitur, aestuabit, et omnis dolor irruet super eum* (When he has satisfied his appetite, he will be more burdened and oppressed; the heat of appetite will have increased and every sorrow will fall upon him) [Jb. 20:22].

6.6.(3). The appetites are wearisome and tiring because they agitate and disturb one just as wind disturbs water. And they so upset the soul that they do not let it rest in any place or thing. Isaiah declares of such a soul: *Cor impii quasi mare fervens* (The heart of the wicked is like a stormy sea) [Is. 57:20]. And anyone who does not conquer the appetites is wicked.

6.6.(4). People seeking the satisfaction of their desires grow tired, because they are like the famished who open their mouths to satisfy themselves with air. But they find that instead of being filled the mouth dries up more since air is not one's proper food. With this in mind Jeremiah says: *In desiderio animae suae attraxit ventum amoris sui* (In the appetite of his will he drew in the air of his attachment) [Jer. 2:24]. To comment on the dryness in which the soul is left, he immediately adds the advice: *Prohibe pedem tuum a nuditate, et guttur tuum a siti*. This means: Hold back your foot (that is, your mind) from nakedness, and your throat from thirst (that is, your will from satisfying its desire, which only causes greater thirst) [Jer. 2:25].

6.6.(5). Just as a lover is wearied and depressed when on a longed-for day his opportunity is frustrated, so is the soul wearied and tired by all its appetites and their fulfillment, because the fulfillment only causes more hunger and emptiness. An appetite, as they say, is like a fire that blazes up when wood is thrown on it, but necessarily dies out when the wood is consumed.

6.7. In regard to the appetites, things are even worse. The fire dwindles as the wood is consumed, but the intensity of the appetite does not diminish when the appetite is satisfied, even though the object is gone. Instead of waning like the fire after the wood is burned, the appetite faints with fatigue because its hunger has increased and its food diminished. Isaiah refers to this: *Declinabit ad dexteram, et esuriet; et comedet ad sinistram, et non saturabitur* (He will turn to the right and be hungry, and eat toward the left and not be filled) [Is. 9:20]. When those who do not mortify their appetites turn to the right, they of course see the abundance of the sweet spirit that is the lot of those who are at the right hand of God but is not granted to them. When they eat at the left (satisfy their appetite with some creature), they of course grow discontented because, in turning from what alone satisfies, they feed on what augments their hunger. It is clear, then, that the appetites weary and fatigue a person.

## CHAPTER 7

7. How the appetites torment a person. Proofs through comparisons and passages from Sacred Scripture.

7.1. Torment and affliction is the second kind of damage the appetites cause in an individual. The affliction they engender is similar to the torture of the rack, where a person has no relief until freed from the torment of being bound by these cords. David says of this torture: *Funes peccatorum circumplexi sunt me* (The cords of my sins - my appetites - have tightened around me) [Ps. 119:61].

7.1.(2). A soul is tormented and afflicted when it reclines on its appetites just as is someone lying naked on thorns and nails. Like thorns, the appetites wound and hurt, stick to a person and cause pain. David says of them: *Circumdederunt me sicut apes, et exarserunt sicut ignis in spinis*. (They circled around me like bees, stung me, and burned me like fire among thorns) [Ps. 118:12]. For among the appetites, which are the thorns, the fire of anguish and torment increases.

7.1.(3). Just as a peasant, covetous of the desired harvest, goads and torments the ox that pulls the plow, so concupiscence, in order to attain the object of its longing, afflicts the one who lives under the yoke of the appetites. This is evident in Delilah's desire to know where Samson acquired such strength. Scripture states that the desire was such a fatigue and torment to her that she fainted away and almost died: *Defecit anima ejus, et ad mortem usque lassata est* [Jgs. 16:15-16].<sup>1</sup>

7.2. The appetite torments in the measure of its intensity. Thus there is as much torment as there is appetite, and the more numerous the appetites that possess a soul the greater in number are its torments. In the person possessed by appetites we find fulfilled even in this life what is said of Babylon in the Apocalypse: *Quantum glorificavit se, et in deliciis fuit, tantum date illi tormentum et luctum* (In the measure of her desire for self-exaltation and fulfillment of her appetites, give her torment and anguish) [Rv. 18:7].

7.2.(3). Those who let their appetites take hold of them suffer torture and affliction like an enemy held prisoner. The Book of Judges contains a figure of this in the passage that narrates how the enemies captured mighty Samson, who was once the free, strong judge of Israel, and weakened him, pulled out his eyes, and chained him to grind at the millstone where he was grievously tortured and tormented [Jgs. 16:21]. This same thing happens to a person in whom the enemy appetites reside and triumph. First these appetites weaken and blind, as we shall point out below, then they afflict and torment by chaining that person to the mill of concupiscence, for they are the chains by which a soul is bound.

7.3. God, then, with compassion for all those who through such labor and cost to themselves strive to satisfy the thirst and hunger of their appetites for creatures, proclaims through Isaiah: *Omnes sitientes, venite ad aquas; et qui non habetis argentum, properate, emite, et comedite: venite, emite absque argento vinum et lac. Quare appenditis argentum non in panibus, et laborem vestrum non in saturitate?* [Is. 55:1-2]. This is interpreted:

Come to the waters, all you who experience the thirst of your appetites; and you who have not the silver of your own will and desires, make haste; buy from me and eat; come and buy wine and milk (peace and spiritual sweetness) from me without the silver of your own will, without paying with labor as you do for the satisfaction of your appetites. Why do you offer the silver of your will for what is not bread (the bread of the divine Spirit) and waste the efforts of your appetites on what cannot satisfy them? Come, listen to me, and you will have the food you desire, and your soul will delight in abundance.

7.4. This coming to abundance is a going away from all the pleasures derived through creatures, because the creature torments while the Spirit of God refreshes. Accordingly, God calls us through St. Matthew: *Venite ad me, omnes qui laboratis et oneratis estis, et ego reficiam vos, et invenietis requiem animabus vestris*, as though he were to say: All you going about tormented, afflicted, and weighed down by your cares and appetites, depart from them, come to me and I will refresh you; and you will find the rest for your souls that the desires take away from you [Mt. 11:28-29]. They are indeed a heavy burden, because David says of them: *Sicut onus grave gravatae sunt super me* [Ps. 37:5].<sup>2</sup>

## CHAPTER 8

### 8. The appetites darken and blind a person.

8.1. The third kind of harm the appetites bring upon a person is blindness and darkness. Vapors make the air murky and are a hindrance to the bright sunshine; a cloudy mirror does not clearly reflect a person's countenance; so too muddy water reflects only a hazy image of one's features. In just this way a person's intellect, clouded by the appetites, becomes dark and impedes the sun of either natural reason or God's supernatural wisdom from shining within and completely illumining it. As a result David says when speaking of this: *Comprehenderunt me iniquitates meae, et non potui ut viderem* (My iniquities surrounded me and I was unable to see) [Ps. 40:12].

8.2. And because of the darkening of the intellect, the will becomes weak and the memory dull and disordered in its proper operation. Since these faculties depend on the intellect in their operations, they are manifestly disordered and troubled when the intellect is hindered. Thus David says: *Anima mea turbata est valde* (My soul is exceedingly troubled) [Ps. 6:4]. This is like saying the faculties of my soul are disordered. For, as we said, the intellect (as the murky air in relation to the sun's light) is incapable of receiving the illumination of God's wisdom; and the will is incapable of embracing God within itself in pure love (just as the mirror clouded with steam has not the capacity to clearly reflect the countenance before it); and the memory obscured by the darkness of appetite has still less capacity for receiving serenely the impression of God's image (as muddy water cannot clearly reflect the features of one who looks in it).

8.3. The appetite blinds and darkens the soul because the appetite as such is blind. It is blind because, of itself, it has no intellect. Reason always acts as a blind person's guide for the appetite. Consequently, as often as people are led by their appetites, they are blinded, just as we might say that when a blind person guides someone who has good eyesight both are blind. The logical outcome is what our Lord proclaims in St. Matthew: *Si caecus caeco ducatum praestet, ambo in foveam cadunt*. (If one blind person leads another, both will fall into the ditch) [Mt. 15:14].

8.3.(2). A moth is not helped much by its eyes because, blinded in its desire for the beauty of light, it will fly directly into a bonfire. Those who feed on their appetites are like a fish dazzled by a light that so darkens it that the fisherman's snares cannot be seen. David describes this blindness well: *Supercecidit ignis, et non viderunt solem* (Fire, that gives off heat and dazzles by its light, came upon them) [Ps. 58: 8-9]. The appetites cause this in the soul: They enkindle concupiscence and overwhelm the intellect so that it cannot see its light. The reason is that a new light set directly in front of the visual faculty blinds this faculty so that it fails to see the light farther away. And since the appetite is so close to individuals as to be actually within them, they are impeded by this interior light, feed upon it, and are unable to see the clear light of the intellect; nor will they see it until they extinguish this blinding light of their appetite.

8.4. The ignorance of some is extremely lamentable; they burden themselves with extraordinary penances and many other exercises, thinking these are sufficient to attain

union with divine Wisdom. But such practices are insufficient if these souls do not diligently strive to deny their appetites. If they would attempt to devote only half of that energy to the renunciation of their desires, they would profit more in a month than in years with all these other exercises. As the tilling of soil is necessary for its fruitfulness - untilled soil produces only weeds - mortification of the appetites is necessary for one's spiritual fruitfulness. I venture to say that without this mortification all that is done for the sake of advancement in perfection and in knowledge of God and of oneself is no more profitable than seed sown on uncultivated ground. Accordingly, darkness and coarseness will always be with a soul until its appetites are extinguished. The appetites are like a cataract on the eye or specks of dust in it; until removed they obstruct vision.

8.5. David, observing the blindness of such people, how impeded their souls are from seeing truth clearly, and the extent of God's anger with them warns: *Priusquam intelligerent spinae vestrae rhamnum: sicut viventes, sic in ira absorbet eos*, as though to say: Before your thorns (that is, your appetites) understand, God will absorb them in his wrath as he would the living [Ps. 58:9]. Before the appetites living in the soul come to an understanding of God, he will absorb them in this life, or in the next, by chastisement and correction, that is, through purgation. David says God will absorb them in wrath, because the suffering caused by the mortification of the appetites is a chastisement for the havoc they produce in the soul.

8.6. Oh, if people but knew what a treasure of divine light this blindness caused by their affections and appetites takes from them and the number of misfortunes and evils these appetites occasion each day when left unmortified! Individuals must not so rely on their good intelligence or the gifts received from God as to think that even though they have attachments or appetites these will not blind, darken, and cause them to grow gradually worse. Who would have thought that a man as perfect in the wisdom and gifts of God as Solomon could have sunk into such blindness and torpor of will, when he was already old, as to construct altars to countless idols and then worship them himself? Yet this was caused by nothing else than his affection for women and his neglect to deny the appetites and delights of his heart [1 Kgs. 3:12-13; 11:1-4]. He says in Ecclesiastes that he did not deny his heart what it asked of him [Eccl. 2:10]. Although in the beginning he was truly restrained, this rush after his desires and the failure to deny them, gradually blinded and darkened his intellect so that finally the powerful light of God's wisdom was extinguished. Consequently, in his old age, Solomon abandoned God.

8.7. If the unmortified appetites could do this in a man who possessed such lofty knowledge of the distance between good and evil, what terrible damage can they cause in us who are ignorant. For as God said to Jonah about the people of Nineveh: We do not know the difference between our right hand and our left [Jon. 4:11]. At every step we mistake evil for good and good for evil. This is peculiar to our nature. But what will happen if appetite is added to our natural darkness? Nothing else than what Isaiah says: *Palpavimus sicut caeci parietem et quasi absque oculis atrectavimus: impegimus meridie quasi in tenebris* [Is. 59:10]. The prophet is speaking with those who love to pursue their appetites, as though to say: We have felt our way along the wall as though blind, we have groped as if without eyes, and our blindness has reached the point that we stumble along

in broad daylight as though walking in the dark. For this is a characteristic of those who are blinded by their appetites; when they are in the midst of the truth and of what is suitable for them, they no more see it than if they were in the dark.

## CHAPTER 9

9. The appetites defile the soul. Proofs through comparisons and passages from Sacred Scripture.

9.1. The fourth way the appetites harm the soul is by defiling and staining it. The Book of Ecclesiasticus teaches: *Qui tetigerit picem, inquinabitur ab ea* (the one who touches pitch will be defiled by it) [Ecclus. 13:1]. And a person handles pitch by satisfying the will's appetite for some creature. It is noteworthy that the Wise Man compares creatures to pitch, for the difference between the excellence of the soul and the best in creatures is greater than that between pure gold, or a bright diamond, and pitch. The gold, or the diamond, when placed on hot pitch becomes more stained and unsightly as the heat melting the pitch increases. Similarly, those who are fired by their appetite for some creature are stained and blackened by that creature because of the heat of their desire.

9.1.(2). There is as much difference between the soul and other corporeal creatures as there is between a transparent liquid and the filthiest mire. This liquid would be polluted if mud were mixed with it; so too attachment to a creature defiles a soul, because this attachment makes it similar to the creature. Strokes of soot would ruin a perfect and extraordinarily beautiful portrait, so too inordinate appetites defile and dirty the soul, in itself a perfect and extremely beautiful image of God.

9.2. Jeremiah, weeping over the ravages of unsightliness these inordinate appetites cause in a soul, first lists the soul's beauty and then its ugliness: *Candidiores sunt nazarei ejus nive, nitidiores lacte, rubicundiores ebore antiquo, saphiro pulchriores. Denigrata est super carbones facies eorum, et non sunt cogniti in plateis* (Its hair - that is, of the soul - is whiter than snow, more resplendent than milk, ruddier than ancient ivory, more beautiful than sapphire stone. Its surface became blacker than coal and went unrecognized in the public squares) [Lam. 4:7-8]. The hair refers to the soul's affections and thoughts; when ordered to the end intended by God - which is God himself - it is whiter than snow, clearer than milk, ruddier than ancient ivory, and more beautiful than sapphire. These four objects of comparison indicate every kind of beauty and excellence in corporeal creatures; yet the beauty and excellence of the soul's operations, which are signified by the Nazarites or hair, are, he says, greater. If these operations of the soul are inordinate and occupied in an end not intended by God - that is, in creatures - their surface, says Jeremiah, will become blacker than coal.

9.3. Inordinate appetites for the things of the world do all this damage to the beauty of the soul, and even more. So great is the harm that if we try to express how ugly and dirty is the imprint the appetites leave in the soul we find nothing comparable to it - neither a place full of cobwebs and lizards nor the unsightliness of a dead body nor the filthiest thing imaginable in this life.

9.3.(2). Although it is true that the disordered soul possesses in its natural being the perfection that God bestowed when creating it, nevertheless in its rational being it is ugly, abominable, dirty, dark, and full of all the evils here described, and many more besides. One inordinate appetite alone, as we will explain,<sup>1</sup> suffices to make a soul so captive,



dirty, and unsightly that until the appetite is purified the soul is incapable of conformity with God in union. This is true even though there may be no matter for mortal sin in the appetite. What then will be the ugliness of a soul entirely disordered in its passions and surrendered to its appetites? How far it will be from God and his purity!

9.4. The variety of filth caused in the soul is both inexplicable and unintelligible! For were it comprehensible and explainable it would be surprising and also distressing to see how in the measure of its quantity and quality each appetite leaves a deposit of filth and an unsightly mark in the soul. It would be a surprise and a pity to observe how only one inordinate act can in its own way occasion innumerable kinds and various degrees of filth. The well-ordered soul of the just in a single perfect act possesses countless rich gifts and beautiful virtues. Each of these gifts and virtues is different and pleasing in its own way according to the multitude and diversity of the affections the soul has had for God. Similarly, in an inordinate soul the deposit of filth and degradation is as miserable and has the same variety as the variety of its appetites for creatures.

9.5. We have an excellent figure of these varied appetites in Ezekiel. It is written that God showed this prophet all kinds of crawling reptiles and all the abomination of unclean animals painted on the interior walls of the temple. God then said to Ezekiel: Son of man, have you not seen indeed the abominations that each of these accomplishes in the secrecy of his chamber? And when God commanded the prophet to enter further and behold greater abominations, Ezekiel says he saw women seated there and weeping for Adonis, the god of love. Being commanded by God to penetrate still further for the sight of even greater abominations, he says he beheld there 25 old men whose backs were turned on the temple [Ez. 8:10-16].

9.6. The many reptiles and unclean animals painted on the walls of the first room in the temple represent intellectual thoughts of abject earthly things and of all creatures. These creatures are painted just as they are in the temple of the soul if it allows its intellect, the first chamber, to be encumbered with them.

9.6.(2). The women further within, in the second chamber, weeping for the god Adonis, represent the appetites residing in the second faculty of the soul, which is the will. These appetites weep as it were by coveting what the will is attached to; that is, they covet the reptiles painted in the intellect.

9.6.(3). The men in the third room are a representation of the images of creatures that the third part of the soul, the memory, preserves and focuses on. The passage states that these men turned their backs on the temple, for when the soul is wholly joined with an earthly object by embracing it with these three faculties, we can say that soul has turned its back on the temple of God. And the temple of God represents the soul's right reason, which admits nothing of creatures.

9.7. What we have said is sufficient at present for some understanding of the unsightly disorder of the soul caused by its appetites. We would never finish if we tried to discuss in particular the lesser degree of ugliness, and its variety, that imperfections cause in the

soul, or the still greater degree, and its variety, produced by venial sins, or the degree of total ugliness caused by mortally sinful appetites. The variety of the total ugliness corresponds to the extensive diversity of all three degrees. Not even the angelic intellect could have an adequate understanding of all this unsightliness. The point I am making and desire to make is that any appetite, even one that is just slightly imperfect, stains and defiles the soul.

## CHAPTER 10

10. The appetites weaken a soul and make it lukewarm in the practice of virtue.

10.1. Weakness and tepidity is the fifth kind of harm the appetites produce in a person. The appetites sap the strength needed for perseverance in the practice of virtue. Because the force of the desire is divided, the appetite becomes weaker than if it were completely fixed on one object. The more objects there are dividing an appetite, the weaker this appetite becomes for each. This is why the philosophers say that virtue when united is stronger than when scattered. It is therefore clear that if the appetite of the will pours itself out on something other than virtue, it grows weaker in the practice of virtue. A person whose will is divided among trifles is like water that, leaking out at the bottom, will not rise higher and is therefore useless. This is why the patriarch Jacob compared his son Reuben, who had given rein to his appetites in a certain sin, to spilled water: You are poured out like water, grow not [Gn. 49:4]. This was like saying: Because according to the appetites you are poured out like water, you will not grow in virtue.

10.1.(2). Hot water quickly loses its heat if left uncovered, and aromatic spices when unwrapped eventually lose the strength and pungency of their scent. So the soul that is not recollected in one appetite alone, the desire for God, loses heat and strength in the practice of virtue. Clearly understanding this, David said to God: Fortitudinem meam ad te custodiam (I will keep my strength for you) [Ps. 59:9]. I will do this by concentrating the strength of my appetites on you alone.

10. 2. The appetites weaken a person's virtue because they are like shoots burgeoning about a tree, sapping its strength, and causing it to be fruitless. The Lord says of such people: Vae praegnantibus et nutrientibus in illis diebus! (Woe to them who will be with child in those days, and to them who will be nursing!) [Mt. 24:19]. Being with child and nursing refer to the growth of the appetites that, if not cut off, will weaken the soul in virtue. Their growth will be costly, like the growth of sprouts around the tree. Our Lord consequently advises us: Let your loins be girt [Lk. 12:35]. The loins here indicate the appetites. They are indeed like leeches, always sucking blood from one's veins. This is what the Wise Man calls them: The daughters (the appetites) are leeches always calling: give! give! [Prv. 30:15].

10.3. Manifestly, then, the appetites do not bring any good to a person. Rather they rob one of what one already has. And if one does not mortify them, they will not cease until they accomplish what the offspring of vipers are said to do within the mother: While growing within her they eat away at her entrails and finally kill her, remaining alive at her expense. So the unmortified appetites result in killing the soul in its relationship with God, and thus, because it did not put them to death first, they alone live in it. This is why it says in the Book of Ecclesiasticus: Aufer a me Domine ventris concupiscentias et concubitus concupiscentiae ne apprehendant me [Ecclus. 23:6].<sup>1</sup>

10.4. Even though they do not go to this extent, it is sad to consider the condition of the poor soul in whom they dwell. How unhappy it is with itself, how cold toward its neighbors, how sluggish and slothful in the things of God! No illness makes walking as

burdensome, or eating as distasteful, as do the appetites for creatures render the practice of virtue burdensome and saddening to a person. Ordinarily, the reason many people do not have diligence and eagerness for the acquisition of virtue is that their appetites and affections are not fixed purely on God.

## CHAPTER 11

11. Proofs of how freedom from all appetites, even the smallest, is necessary to attain divine union.

11.1. The reader has apparently desired for quite a while to ask if the total mortification of all the appetites, large and small, is a requirement to attain this high state of perfection, or if it is sufficient to mortify just some of them and leave the others, at least those that seem trifling. For it seems it would be an arduous task for individuals to attain such purity and nakedness that they would have no attachment to anything.

11.2. First, I respond that it is true that the appetites are not all equally detrimental, nor are all equally a hindrance to the soul. I am speaking of the voluntary appetites because the natural ones are little or no hindrance at all to the attainment of union, provided they do not receive one's consent or pass beyond the first movements, those stirrings in which the rational will does not take part either before or after. To eradicate the natural appetites, that is, to mortify them entirely, is impossible in this life. Even though they are not entirely mortified, as I say, they are not such a hindrance as to prevent one from attaining divine union. A soul can easily experience them in its sensitive nature and yet be free of them in the rational part of its being. It will happen sometimes that while a person is experiencing an intense union of will in the prayer of quiet these appetites will be actually dwelling in the sensory part. Yet the superior part of the soul, which is in prayer, will be paying no attention to them.<sup>1</sup>

11.2.(2). But all the other voluntary appetites, whether they be the most serious that involve mortal sin, or less grave in that they concern venial sin, or whether they be the least serious of all in that they only involve imperfections, must be mortified. A person must be liberated of them all, however slight they be, in order to arrive at this complete union. The reason is that in the state of divine union a person's will is so completely transformed into God's will that it excludes everything contrary to God's will, and in all and through all is motivated by the will of God.

11.3. Here we have the reason for stating that two wills become one. And this one will is God's will, which also becomes the soul's. If a person were to desire an imperfection unwanted by God, this one will of God would be undone because of the desire for what God does not will.

11.3.(2). Clearly, for a soul to reach union with God through its will and love, it must first be freed from every appetite, however slight. That is, one must not give consent of the will advertently and knowingly to an imperfection, and one must have the power and freedom to be able, upon advertence, to refuse this consent.

11.3.(3). I say "knowingly" because one will fall into imperfections, venial sins, and the above-mentioned natural appetites without having advertence or knowledge or control in the matter. It is written of these semivoluntary and inadvertent sins that the just will fall seven times a day and rise up again [Prv. 24:16]. But any one of the voluntary appetites that are advertent venial sins, even if trifling, if not conquered is sufficient to impede

union, as I have said. I am referring here to habitual appetites because certain scattered acts of different desires are not such a hindrance to union when the habitual appetites are mortified. However, the soul must be liberated of these acts too, since they also proceed from habitual imperfection. Yet some habitual voluntary imperfections that are never completely conquered are an impediment not only to divine union but to spiritual progress as well.

11.4. Some examples of these habitual imperfections are: the common habit of being very talkative; a small attachment one never really desires to conquer, for example, to a person, to clothing, to a book or a cell, or to the way food is prepared, and to other trifling conversations and little satisfactions in tasting, knowing, and hearing things, and so on. Any of these habitual imperfections to which there is attachment is as harmful to progress in virtue as the daily commission of many other imperfections and sporadic venial sins that do not result from a bad habit. These latter will not hinder a person as much as will the attachment to something. As long as this attachment remains, it is impossible to make progress in perfection, even though the imperfection may be very small.<sup>2</sup>

11.4.(2). It makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord. Even if it is tied by thread, the bird will be held bound just as surely as if it were tied by cord; that is, it will be impeded from flying as long as it does not break the thread. Admittedly the thread is easier to break, but no matter how easily this may be done, the bird will not fly away without first doing so. This is the lot of those who are attached to something: No matter how much virtue they have they will not reach the freedom of the divine union.

11.4.(3). An individual's appetite and attachment resemble the remora, which, if successful in clinging to a ship, will hold it back and prevent it from reaching port, or even from sailing, even though this fish is exceptionally small. It is regrettable, then, to behold some souls, laden as rich vessels with wealth, deeds, spiritual exercises, virtues, and favors from God, who never advance because they lack the courage to make a complete break with some little satisfaction, attachment, or affection (which are all about the same) and thereby never reach the port of perfection. This requires no more than a sudden flap of one's wings in order to tear the thread of attachment, or to get rid of the clinging remora.

11.5. It is a matter for deep sorrow that, while God has bestowed on them the power to break other stronger cords of attachment to sins and vanities, they fail to attain so much good because they do not become detached from some childish thing that God has asked them to conquer out of love for him and that amounts to no more than a thread or hair. What is worse, not only do they fail to advance, but they turn back because of their small attachment, losing what they gained on their journey at the cost of so much time and effort. Everyone knows that not to go forward on this road is to turn back, and not to gain ground is to lose. This is what our Lord wanted to teach when he said: The one who is not with me is against me, and the one who does not gather with me scatters [Mt. 12:30].

11.5.(2). If one small crack in a pitcher goes unrepaired, the damage will be enough to

cause all the liquid to leak out. The Book of Ecclesiasticus gives clear teaching of this when it says: One who despises small things will fall little by little [Ecclus. 19:1]. For as it teaches elsewhere: A great fire is occasioned by a tiny spark [Ecclus. 11:32]. Accordingly, one imperfection leads to another, and these to still more. You will scarcely ever find a person negligent in the conquering of one appetite who will not have many others flowing from the identical weakness and imperfection caused by this one appetite. Such persons, consequently, are ever faltering along the road. We have witnessed many persons, whom God was favoring with much progress in detachment and freedom, fall from happiness and stability in their spiritual exercises and end up losing everything merely because they began to indulge in some slight attachment to conversation and friendship under the appearance of good. For by this attachment they gradually emptied themselves of both holy solitude and the spirit and joy of God. All this happened because they did not put a stop to their initial satisfaction and sensitive pleasure, and preserve themselves for God in solitude.<sup>3</sup>

11.6. The attainment of our goal demands that we never stop on this road, which means we must continually get rid of our wants rather than indulging them. For if we do not get rid of them all completely, we will not wholly reach our goal. A log of wood cannot be transformed into the fire if even a single degree of heat is lacking to its preparation for this.<sup>4</sup> The soul, similarly, will not be transformed in God even if it has only one imperfection. As we shall explain in speaking of the night of faith, a person has only one will and if that is encumbered or occupied by anything, the person will not possess the freedom, solitude, and purity requisite for divine transformation.

11.7. We have a figure of this in the Book of Judges. It narrates that the angel announced to the children of Israel that because they had not completely destroyed their enemies but made a pact with some of them, these enemies would be left in their midst to be an occasion of their fall and perdition [Jgs. 2:1-3]. God does precisely this with some souls. He has withdrawn them from the world, slain the giants, which are their sins, and destroyed the multitude of their enemies (the occasions of sin encountered in the world) solely so that they can enter with greater freedom into the promised land of divine union. Nevertheless, in spite of all this, they fraternize and make pacts with the insignificant people - their imperfections - by not mortifying them completely. And God in his anger allows them to go from bad to worse in their appetites.

11.8. We find another figure of this in the Book of Joshua. There we read that God commanded Joshua, who was about to enter into possession of the promised land, to destroy everything in the city of Jericho without leaving anything alive, neither men nor women, young nor old, nor any animals. God ordered him not to covet or seize any of the booty [Jos. 6:18-19, 21]. The lesson here is that all objects living in the soul - whether they be many or few, large or small - must die in order that the soul enter divine union, and it must bear no desire for them but remain detached as though they were nonexistent to it, and it to them. St. Paul teaches this clearly in Corinthians: What I tell you, brothers, is that the time is short; what remains and suits you is that those with wives should act as though they had none, and those who weep for the things of this world as though they were not weeping, and those who rejoice as though not rejoicing, and the buyers as

though they did not possess, and the users of the world should behave as though they made no use of it [1 Cor. 7:29-31]. In this text the Apostle teaches us how detached our souls must be from all things in order to go to God.



## CHAPTER 12

12. The answer to another question. An explanation of the kinds of appetites that can bring this harm on a soul.

12.1. We could explain this night of sense at greater length by mentioning everything relevant to the kind of damage the appetites cause, for they injure not merely in the ways described but in many others as well. What we have explained, however, is sufficient for our purpose. It has probably been understood how the mortification of the appetites can be called night and how suitable it is for people to enter this night in their approach to God. The only point that remains before we treat, in conclusion, the method of entering this night is to settle a doubt that may occur to the reader concerning this matter.<sup>1</sup>

12.2. First, can any appetite produce and cause the two evils mentioned above, namely: the privative, which removes God's grace from the soul; and the positive, which causes the five principal kinds of harm we explained?

12.2.(2). Second, is any appetite, however slight or of whatever kind, enough to produce all these types of harm together, or does each cause only a particular kind, in that one may produce torment, another weariness, another darkness, and so on?

12.3. To the first query, I answer that relevant to the privative evil, the loss of grace, only the voluntary appetites involving a matter of mortal sin can cause this completely, for they deprive the soul of grace in this life and of glory, the possession of God, in the next.

12.3.(2). To the second, my answer is that all these positive evils are together occasioned in the soul by each of these appetites. This is true whether the appetites concern mortal sin, venial sin, or imperfection. We call these evils positive, though in a certain fashion they are privative, because they correspond to a conversion to the creature, just as the privative evils correspond to the aversion from God.

12.3.(3). Yet there is this difference: The appetites for mortal sin produce total blindness, torment, filth, weakness, and so on; the others do not cause these kinds of harm to a complete and absolute degree. For they do not deprive the soul of grace - a privation that would give them full possession, since the death of grace means life for the appetites. But these smaller appetites do cause this damage in a lesser degree according to the loss of grace they occasion. The extent of the torment, blindness, and defilement corresponds to the weakening of grace brought on by the appetites.

12.4. It is noteworthy, however, that, though each appetite causes all these kinds of positive harm, it will cause one kind principally and directly, and the others indirectly. For though it is true that a sensual appetite breeds all these kinds of evil, it principally and properly speaking defiles the soul and body. And an appetite of avarice produces them all too, yet principally and directly it causes afflictions. One of vainglory similarly causes them all, yet principally and directly it darkens and blinds. And whereas an appetite of gluttony begets all the evils, it chiefly produces lukewarmness in virtue. And so on with the others.

12.5. The reason any act of a voluntary appetite produces all these evils together is that it directly opposes the acts of virtue that produce the contrary effects. An act of virtue produces and fosters in the soul mildness, peace, comfort, light, purity, and strength, just as an inordinate appetite brings about torment, fatigue, weariness, blindness, and weakness. Through the practice of one virtue all the virtues grow, and similarly, through an increase of one vice, all the vices and their effects grow.

12.5.(2). These evils do not unmask themselves at the moment the appetite is being satisfied, since the pleasure of the moment is an obstacle to this. Yet sooner or later the harmful effects will certainly be felt. A good illustration of this is found in the Apocalypse. An angel commanded St. John to eat the book, which was sweet to the mouth but bitter in the stomach [Rv. 10:9]. When satisfied the appetite seems sweet and pleasant, but eventually the bitter effect is felt. This truth will certainly be clear to those who allow themselves to be carried away by their appetites. I realize, however, that there are some so blind and unaware that they do not experience this bitter effect. Since they do not walk in God, they do not perceive what keeps them from him.

12.6. I am not speaking here of the other natural, involuntary appetites, or of thoughts that do not pass beyond the first movements, or of other temptations in which there is no consent. These things do not give rise to any of the evils previously mentioned. Though the passion and disturbance they momentarily cause make it seem that one is being defiled and blinded, such is not the case; rather, they occasion the opposite good effects. Insofar as one resists them, one wins strength, purity, comfort, and many blessings, as our Lord told St. Paul: Virtue is made perfect in weakness [2 Cor. 12:9].<sup>2</sup>

12.6.(2). But the voluntary appetites bring on all these evils, and even more. That is why the chief concern of spiritual masters with their disciples is the immediate mortification of every appetite. The directors should make them remain empty of what they desire so as to liberate them from so much misery.

## CHAPTER 13

13. The manner and method of entering this night of sense.

13.1. Some counsels are in order now that the individual may both know the way of entering this night and be able to do so. It should be understood, consequently, that a person ordinarily enters this night of sense in two ways: active and passive.

13.1.(2). The active way, which will be the subject of the following counsels, comprises what one can do and does by oneself to enter this night.

13.1.(3). The passive way is that in which one does nothing, but God accomplishes the work in the soul while the soul acts as the recipient. This will be the subject of the fourth book, where we will discuss beginners. Since with God's help I will give many counsels regarding the numerous imperfections beginners ordinarily possess on this road, I will not take the time to offer many here. Nor is this the proper place to give them, since here we are dealing only with the reasons for calling this journey a night, and with the nature and divisions of this night.<sup>1</sup>

13.1.(4). Nevertheless, if we do not offer some immediate remedy or counsel for exercising oneself in this night of the appetites, this part would seem very short and of little help. Therefore I want to set down the following abridged method. And I will do the same at the end of my discussion of each of the next two parts (or reasons for the use of the term "night") which, with God's help, will follow.

13.2. Though these counsels for the conquering of the appetites are brief and few in number, I believe they are as profitable and efficacious as they are concise. A person who sincerely wants to practice them will need no others since all the others are included in these.<sup>2</sup>

13.3. First, have habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with his. You must then study his life in order to know how to imitate him and behave in all events as he would.

13.4. Second, in order to be successful in this imitation, renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God. Do this out of love for Jesus Christ. In his life he had no other gratification, nor desired any other, than the fulfillment of his Father's will, which he called his meat and food [Jn. 4:34].

13.4.(2). For example, if you are offered the satisfaction of hearing things that have no relation to the service and glory of God, do not desire this pleasure or the hearing of these things. When you have an opportunity for the gratification of looking upon objects that will not help you love God more, do not desire this gratification or sight. And if in speaking there is a similar opportunity, act in the same way. And so on with all the senses insofar as you can duly avoid such satisfaction. If you cannot escape the experience of this satisfaction, it will be sufficient to have no desire for it.

13.4.(3). By this method you should endeavor, then, to leave the senses as though in darkness, mortified and empty of that satisfaction. With such vigilance you will gain a great deal in a short time.

13.5. Many blessings flow when the four natural passions (joy, hope, fear, and sorrow) are in harmony and at peace. The following maxims contain a complete method for mortifying and pacifying them. If put into practice these maxims will give rise to abundant merit and great virtues.

13.6. Endeavor to be inclined always:  
not to the easiest, but to the most difficult;  
not to the most delightful, but to the most distasteful;  
not to the most gratifying, but to the less pleasant;  
not to what means rest for you, but to hard work;  
not to the consoling, but to the unconsoling;  
not to the most, but to the least;  
not to the highest and most precious,  
but to the lowest and most despised;  
not to wanting something,  
but to wanting nothing.

Do not go about looking for the best of temporal things, but for the worst, and, for Christ, desire to enter into complete nakedness, emptiness, and poverty in everything in the world.

13.7. You should embrace these practices earnestly and try to overcome the repugnance of your will toward them. If you sincerely put them into practice with order and discretion, you will discover in them great delight and consolation.

13.8. These counsels if truly carried out are sufficient for entry into the night of senses. But, to ensure that we give abundant enough counsel, here is another exercise that teaches mortification of concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, and pride of life, which, as St. John says, reign in the world and give rise to all the other appetites [1 Jn. 2:16].

13.9. First, try to act with contempt for yourself and desire that all others do likewise.

13.9.(2). Second, endeavor to speak in contempt of yourself and desire all others to do so.

13.9.(3). Third, try to think lowly and contemptuously of yourself and desire that all others do the same.

13.10. As a conclusion to these counsels and rules it would be appropriate to repeat the verses in The Ascent of the Mount [the drawing at the beginning of the book], which are instructions for climbing to the summit, the high state of union. Although in the drawing we admittedly refer to the spiritual and interior aspect, we also deal with the spirit of

imperfection existent in the sensory and exterior part of the soul, as is evident by the two ways, one on each side of that path that leads to perfection. Consequently these verses will here bear reference to the sensory part. Afterward, in the second division of this night, they may be interpreted in relationship to the spiritual part.<sup>4</sup>

13.11. The verses are:

To reach satisfaction in all  
desire satisfaction in nothing.

To come to possess all  
desire the possession of nothing.

To arrive at being all  
desire to be nothing.

To come to the knowledge of all  
desire the knowledge of nothing.

To come to enjoy what you have not  
you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.

To come to the knowledge you have not  
you must go by a way in which you know not.

To come to the possession you have not  
you must go by a way in which you possess not.

To come to be what you are not  
you must go by a way in which you are not.

A Method to Avoid Impeding the All

13.12. When you delay in something you cease to rush toward the all. For to go from the all to the all you must deny yourself of all in all. And when you come to the possession of the all you must possess it without wanting anything. Because if you desire to have something in all your treasure in God is not purely your all.

13.13. In this nakedness the spirit finds its quietude and rest. For in coveting nothing, nothing tires it by pulling it up and nothing oppresses it by pushing it down, because it is in the center of its humility. When it covets something, by this very fact it tires itself.

## CHAPTER 14

14. An explanation of verse 2 of the first stanza.

fired with love's urgent longings

14.1. Now that we have explained the first verse of this stanza, which treats of the night of sense, and have discussed the nature of this night, the reason for calling it night, and the method of actively entering it, we should, in due order, continue with an explanation of the admirable properties and effects contained in the remaining verses of this stanza. I will explain these verses, as promised in the prologue, by merely touching on them, and then proceed to Book Two, a treatise on the remaining, or spiritual, part of this night. 1

14.2. The soul, then, states that "fired with love's urgent longings" it passed through this night of sense to union with the Beloved. A love of pleasure, and attachment to it, usually fires the will toward the enjoyment of things that give pleasure. A more intense enkindling of another, better love (love of the soul's Bridegroom) is necessary for the vanquishing of the appetites and the denial of this pleasure. By finding satisfaction and strength in this love, it will have the courage and constancy to readily deny all other appetites. The love of its Bridegroom is not the only requisite for conquering the strength of the sensitive appetites; an enkindling with urgent longings of love is also necessary. For the sensory appetites are moved and attracted toward sensory objects with such cravings that if the spiritual part of the soul is not fired with other, more urgent longings for spiritual things, the soul will be able neither to overcome the yoke of nature nor to enter the night of sense; nor will it have the courage to live in the darkness of all things by denying its appetites for them. 2

14.3. This is not the appropriate section for a description - nor would this be possible - of the nature of these longings of love or of the numerous ways they occur at the outset of the journey to union. Neither is it the place for a discussion of the diligence and ingenuity of persons in departing from their house (self-will) into the night of the mortification of their senses, or of how easy, sweet, and delightful these longings for their Bridegroom make all the trials and dangers of this night seem. It is better to experience all of this and meditate on it than to write of it. We will proceed, consequently, to the next chapter and explain the remaining verses.

## CHAPTER 15

15. An exposition of the remaining verses of the first stanza.

- Ah, the sheer grace! -  
I went out unseen,  
my house being now all stilled.

15.1. The soul uses as a metaphor the wretched state of captivity. It is a sheer grace to be released from this prison without hindrance from the jailers.<sup>1</sup> The soul through original sin is a captive in the mortal body, subject to passions and natural appetites; when liberated from this bondage and submission, it considers its escape, in which it is unnoticed, unimpeded, and unapprehended by its passions and appetites, a sheer grace.

15.2. To achieve this liberation it was advantageous for the soul to depart in the dark night, that is, in the privation of all satisfactions and in the mortification of all appetites, as we mentioned. "My house being now all stilled" means that the house of all the appetites, the sensitive part of the soul, is now stilled, and the desires conquered and lulled to sleep. Until slumber comes to the appetites through the mortification of sensuality, and until this very sensuality is stilled in such a way that the appetites do not war against the spirit, the soul will not go out to genuine freedom, to the enjoyment of union with its Beloved.

The End of the First Book

## **BOOK TWO**

1. This book is a treatise on faith, the proximate means of ascent to union with God. It consequently considers the second part of this night, the night of spirit to which the following stanza refers.



## CHAPTER 1

The Second Stanza:

In darkness and secure,  
by the secret ladder, disguised,  
- ah, the sheer grace! -  
in darkness and concealment,  
my house being now all stilled.

1.1. This second stanza tells in song of the sheer grace that was the soul's in divesting the spirit of all imperfections and appetites for spiritual possessions. The good fortune is far greater here because of the greater hardship involved in quieting the house that is one's spiritual nature and entering this interior darkness (the spiritual nakedness of all sensory and immaterial things), leaning on pure faith alone, in an ascent by it to God.

1.1(2). The secret ladder represents faith, because all the rungs or articles of faith are secret to and hidden from both the senses and the intellect. Accordingly the soul lived in darkness, without any light from the senses and intellect, and went out beyond every natural and rational boundary to climb the divine ladder of faith that leads up to and penetrates the deep things of God [1 Cor. 2:10].

1.1.(3). The soul declares that it was disguised because in the ascent through faith its garments, apparel, and capacities were changed from natural to divine. On account of this disguise, neither temporal nor rational things nor the devil recognized or detained it. None of these can do harm to the one who walks in faith.

1.1.(4). The soul's advance, moreover, was so concealed, hidden, and withdrawn from all the wiles of the devil that it indeed involved darkness and concealment. That is, the soul was hidden from the devil, to whom the light of faith is worse than darkness. We can say as a result that a person who walks in faith walks concealed and hidden from the devil; this will be more evident as we proceed.

1.2. The soul, consequently, affirms that it departed "in darkness, and secure." For anyone fortunate enough to possess the ability to journey in the obscurity of faith, as do the blind with their guide, and depart from all natural phantasms and intellectual reasonings, walks securely.

1.2.(2). The soul also asserts that it departed in this spiritual night because its house was now all stilled. That is, the spiritual and rational part of the soul was stilled, because once the soul attains union with God, the natural faculties and the impulses and anxieties of the spiritual part remain at rest. The poem does not proclaim that the soul went out with urgent longings, as it does of the first night of sense. To enter the night of sense and denude itself of sensible things, the soul needed the longings of sensitive love. But all that is required for complete pacification of the spiritual house is the negation through pure faith of all the spiritual faculties and gratifications and appetites. This achieved, the soul will be joined with the Beloved in a union of simplicity and purity and love and likeness.

1.3. It is noteworthy that the first stanza of the poem, in speaking of the senses, asserts that the soul departed on a dark night, and this second stanza, in speaking of the spirit, says that the soul went out in darkness. The obscurity of the spirit is far more intense, just as "in darkness" indicates thicker obscurity than "dark night." For however dark a night may be, some objects are still visible, but in total darkness nothing at all can be seen. In the night of sense there is yet some light, because the intellect and reason remain and suffer no blindness. But this spiritual night, which is faith, removes everything, both in the intellect and in the senses. As a result the soul declares in this stanza that it departed in darkness and secure, which it did not assert in the former. For the less a soul works with its own abilities, the more securely it proceeds because its progress in faith is greater.

1.3.(2). This darkness of faith will be the subject matter of Book Two, and we shall discuss it at length. The devout reader, consequently, must proceed thoughtfully, because our explanation will be most important for persons of genuine spirituality. Though these truths are somewhat obscure, they so shed light on one another that I believe they will all be clearly understood.

## **CHAPTER 2**

2. Faith, the second cause or part of this night. Two proofs of why it is darker than the first and third parts.

2.1. Faith, the second part of this night, is our next subject for discussion. Faith is that admirable means of advancing to God, our goal. And God, we said, is also for the soul naturally a part, or the third cause, of this night.<sup>1</sup>

2.1.(2). Faith, the means, is comparable to midnight. We can affirm, then, that it is darker for a person than the first part of the night and, in a certain way, darker than the third. The first part, pertinent to the senses, resembles twilight, the time sensible objects begin to fade from sight. Accordingly, it is not a time so far removed from all light as is midnight.

2.1.(3). The third part, that period before dawn, approximates the light of day. The darkness is not like that of midnight, since in this third period of the night we approach the illumination of day. And this daylight we compare to God. Although naturally speaking God is indeed as dark a night to the soul as is faith, it can be affirmed that he is less dark. For when these three parts of the night - which are night to the soul from a natural viewpoint - have passed, God supernaturally illumines the soul with the ray of his divine light. This light is the principle of the perfect union that follows after the third night.

2.2. The first night pertains to the lower, sensory part of human nature and is consequently more external. As a result the second night is darker. The second, darker night of faith belongs to the rational, superior part; it is darker and more interior because it deprives this part of its rational light, or better, blinds it. Accordingly, it is indeed comparable to midnight, the innermost and darkest period of night.

2.3. We must prove, now, how this second part, faith, is night to the spirit just as the first part is to the senses. Then we will also discuss the factors in opposition to this night and how a person actively prepares to enter it. In its proper place we shall speak of passivity, that is, of God's work - without the soul - in effecting this night. I plan to discuss this matter in the third book.<sup>2</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

3. Arguments, passages, and figures from Scripture in proof that faith is a dark night for the soul.

3.1. Faith, the theologians say, is a certain and obscure habit of soul.<sup>1</sup> It is an obscure habit because it brings us to believe divinely revealed truths that transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding. As a result the excessive light of faith bestowed on a soul is darkness for it; a brighter light will eclipse and suppress a dimmer one. The sun so obscures all other lights that they do not seem to be lights at all when it is shining, and instead of affording vision to the eyes, it overwhelms, blinds, and deprives them of vision since its light is excessive and unproportioned to the visual faculty. Similarly, the light of faith in its abundance suppresses and overwhelms that of the intellect. For the intellect, by its own power, extends only to natural knowledge, though it has the potency to be raised to a supernatural act whenever our Lord wishes.

3.2. The intellect knows only in the natural way, that is, by means of the senses. If one is to know in this natural way, the phantasms and species of objects will have to be present either in themselves or in their likenesses; otherwise one will be incapable of knowing naturally. As the scholastic philosophers say: *Ab ojecto et potentia paritur notitia* (Knowledge arises in the soul from both the faculty and the object at hand).<sup>2</sup> If we were told of objects we had never known or seen resemblances of, we would in the end have no more knowledge than before.

3.2.(2). For example, if we were informed that on a certain island there was an animal whose like or kind we had never seen, we would then have no more idea or image of that animal in our mind than previously, no matter how much we were told.

3.2.(3). Another clearer example will shed more light on this subject: If those born blind were told about the nature of the colors white or yellow, they would understand absolutely nothing no matter how much instruction they received. Since they never saw these colors nor others like them, they would not have the means to form a judgment about them. Only the names of these colors would be grasped since the names are perceptible through hearing; but never their form or image, because these colors were never seen by those born blind.<sup>3</sup>

3.3. Such is faith to the soul; it informs us of matters we have never seen or known, either in themselves or in their likenesses. In fact, nothing like them exists. The light of natural knowledge does not show us the object of faith, since this object is unproportioned to any of the senses. Yet we come to know it through hearing, by believing what faith teaches us, blinding our natural light and bringing it into submission. St. Paul states: *Fides ex auditu* [Rom. 10:17]. This amounts to saying that faith is not a knowledge derived from the senses but an assent of the soul to what enters through hearing.

3.4. Faith, moreover, far exceeds what these examples teach us. Not only does it fail to produce knowledge and science but, as we said,<sup>4</sup> it deprives and blinds people of any other knowledge by which they may judge it. Other knowledge is acquired by the light of

the intellect, but not the knowledge of faith. Faith nullifies the light of the intellect; and if this light is not darkened, the knowledge of faith is lost. Accordingly, Isaiah said: *Si no credideritis, non intelligetis* (If you do not believe, you will not understand) [Is. 7:9].

3.4.(2). Faith, manifestly, is a dark night for souls, but in this way it gives them light. The more darkness it brings on them, the more light it sheds. For by blinding, it illumines them, according to those words of Isaiah that if you do not believe you will not understand; that is, you will not have light [Is. 7:9].

3.4.(3). Faith was foreshadowed in that cloud that separated the children of Israel, just before their entry into the Red Sea, from the Egyptians [Ex. 14:19-20]. Scripture says of the cloud: *Erat nubes tenebrosa et illuminans noctem* (The cloud was dark and illuminated the night) [Ex. 14:20].

3.5. How wonderful it was: A cloud, dark in itself, could illumine the night! This was related to illustrate how faith, a dark and obscure cloud to souls (also a night in that it blinds and deprives them of their natural light), illumines and pours light into their darkness by means of its own darkness. This is fitting so that the disciple may be like the master.

3.5.(2). A person in darkness does not receive adequate enlightenment save by another darkness, according to David's teaching: *Dies diei eructat verbum et nox nocti indicat scientiam* (The day brims over and breathes speech to the day, and the night manifests knowledge to the night) [Ps. 19:3]. Expressed more clearly, this means: The day, which is God (in bliss where it is day), communicates and pronounces the Word, his Son, to the angels and blessed souls, who are now day; and this he does that they may have knowledge and enjoyment of him. And the night, which is the faith, present in the Church Militant where it is still night, manifests knowledge to the Church and, consequently, to every soul. This knowledge is night to souls because they do not yet possess the clear beatific wisdom, and because faith blinds them as to their own natural light.

3.6. Our deduction is that since faith is a dark night, it illumines the soul that is in darkness. We verify, then, David's assertion on this matter: *Et nox illuminatio in deliciis meis* (Night will be my illumination in the midst of my delights) [Ps. 139:12]. This amounts to saying: The night of faith will be my guide in the delights of my pure contemplation and union with God. By this passage David clearly informs us of the darkness demanded on this road if a soul is to receive light.

## CHAPTER 4

4. A general discussion of how the soul with respect to its own efforts must remain in darkness so as to be well guided by faith to supreme contemplation.

4.1. I believe you are learning how faith is a dark night for the soul and how the soul as well must be dark - or in darkness as to its own light - that it may allow itself to be guided by faith to this high goal of union. But for knowledge of how to do this, a somewhat more detailed explanation of the darkness required for entering this abyss of faith will be beneficial. In this chapter I will deal with this darkness in a general way. Further on I will explain, with God's help, more in particular about the behavior necessary for obviating error in faith and any encumbrance to its guidance.

4.2. I affirm, then, that if people take faith as a good guide to this state, not only must they live in darkness in the sensory and lower part of their nature (concerning creatures and temporal things), which we have already discussed, but they must also darken and blind themselves in that part of their nature that bears relation to God and spiritual things. This latter part, which we are now discussing, is the rational and higher part of their nature. Attaining supernatural transformation manifestly demands a darkening of the soul and an elevation above all the sensory and rational parts of nature, for the word "supernatural" indicates that which is above nature; nature, consequently, remains beneath.

4.1.(2). Since this transformation and union is something that does not fall within the reach of the senses and of human capability, the soul must perfectly and voluntarily empty itself - I mean in its affection and will - of all the earthly and heavenly things it can grasp. It must do this insofar as it can. As for God, who will stop him from accomplishing his desires in the soul that is resigned, annihilated, and despoiled?

4.1.(3). But people must empty themselves of all, insofar as they can, so that however many supernatural communications they receive, they will continually live as though denuded of them and in darkness. Like the blind, they must lean on dark faith, accept it for their guide and light, and rest on nothing of what they understand, taste, feel, or imagine. All these perceptions are darkness that will lead them astray. Faith lies beyond all this understanding, taste, feeling, and imagining. If they do not blind themselves in these things and abide in total darkness, they will not reach what is greater: the teaching of faith.

4.3. Those who are not yet entirely blind will not allow a good guide to lead them. Still able to perceive a little, they think that the road they see is the best, for they are unable to see other and better ones. And because these individuals themselves are the ones giving the orders, they will consequently lead astray their young guide who has better vision. Similarly, if the soul in traveling this road leans on any elements of its own knowledge or of its experience or knowledge of God, it will easily go astray or be detained because it did not desire to abide in complete blindness, in the faith that is its guide. However impressive may be one's knowledge or experience of God, that knowledge or experience will have no resemblance to God and amount to very little.

4.4. St. Paul also meant this in his assertion: *Accedentem ad Deum oportet credere quod est* (Whoever would approach union with God should believe in His existence) [Heb. 11:6]. This is like saying: Those who want to reach union with God should advance neither by understanding, nor by the support of their own experience, nor by feeling or imagination, but by belief in God's being. For God's being cannot be grasped by the intellect, appetite, imagination, or any other sense; nor can it be known in this life. The most that can be felt and tasted of God in this life is infinitely distant from God and the pure possession of him. Isaiah and St. Paul affirm: *Nec oculus videt, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit quae praeparavit Deus iis qui diligunt illum* (No eye has ever seen, nor ear heard, nor has the human heart or thought ever grasped what God has prepared for those who love him) [Is. 64:4; 1 Cor. 2:9].

4.4.(2). Now souls in this life may be seeking to unite themselves perfectly through grace with what they will be united to in the next through glory (with what St. Paul says eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the human, fleshly heart grasped). But, manifestly, the perfect union in this life through grace and love demands that they live in darkness to all the objects of sight, hearing, and imagination, and to everything comprehensible to the heart, which signifies the soul.

4.4.(3). Those are decidedly hindered, then, from attainment of this high state of union with God who are attached to any understanding, feeling, imagining, opinion, desire, or way of their own, or to any other of their works or affairs, and know not how to detach and denude themselves of these impediments. Their goal, as we said, transcends all of this, even the loftiest object that can be known or experienced. Consequently they must pass beyond everything to unknowing.

4.5. As regards this road to union, entering on the road means leaving one's own road; or better, moving on to the goal. And turning from one's own mode implies entry into what has no mode, that is, God. Individuals who reach this state no longer have any modes or methods, still less are they attached to them, nor can they be. I am referring to modes of understanding, tasting, and feeling. Within themselves, though, they possess all methods, like one who though having nothing yet possesses all things [2 Cor. 6:10]. By being courageous enough to pass beyond the interior and exterior limits of their own nature, they enter into supernatural bounds - bounds that have no mode, yet in substance possess all modes. To reach these supernatural bounds, souls must depart from their natural bounds - and leave self far off in respect to both bounds - in order to mount from a low state to the highest.

4.6. Passing beyond all that is naturally and spiritually intelligible or comprehensible, souls ought to desire with all their might to attain what in this life could never be known or enter the human heart. And parting company with all they can or do taste and feel, temporally and spiritually, they must ardently long to acquire what surpasses all taste and feeling. To be empty and free for the achievement of this, they should by no means seize on what they receive spiritually or sensitively (as we shall explain in our particular discussion of this matter), but consider it of little import. The higher the rank and esteem

they give to all this knowledge, experience, and imagining (whether spiritual or not), the more they subtract from the Supreme Good and the more they delay in their journey toward him. And the less they esteem what they can possess - however estimable it may be relative to the Supreme Good - the more they value and prize him, and, consequently, the closer they come to him. In this way, in obscurity, souls approach union swiftly by means of faith, which is also dark. And in this way faith gives them wondrous light. Obviously, if they should desire to see, they would be in darkness as regards God more quickly than anyone who looks to see the blinding brightness of the sun.

4.7. By blinding one's faculties along this road, one will see light, as the Savior proclaims in the Gospel: *In iudicium veni in hunc mundum: ut qui non vident videant, et qui vident caeci fiant* (I have come into this world for judgment, that they who see not, may see, and that they who see may become blind) [Jn. 9:39]. In reference to the spiritual road, these words should be understood literally, that is: Those who both live in darkness and blind themselves to all their natural lights will have supernatural vision, and those who want to lean on some light of their own will become blind and be held back on this road leading to union.

4.8. That we may continue with less confusion, I believe it will be necessary in the following chapter to explain this reality we call union with God. Since an understanding of the nature of union will shed more light on the subsequent doctrine, I think this is the suitable place for a discussion of it. Although our thread of thought will be interrupted, we will not be digressing, because an explanation of this union will serve to illustrate the matter we are treating. The following chapter will be like a parenthesis within the same enthymeme, since in this second night we plan to treat of the relationship of the three faculties of the soul to the three theological virtues.



## CHAPTER 5

5. Explanation of the nature of union with God. An illustration.

5.1. In our previous discussion, we have already given some indication of the meaning of the phrase "union of the soul with God." Thus our teaching here about the nature of this union will be more understandable.

5.1.(2). It is not my intention now to discuss the divisions and parts of this union. Indeed, I would never finish were I to begin explaining the union of the intellect, or that of the will or the memory, or trying to expound the nature of the transitory and the permanent union in each of these faculties, or the significance of the total, the transitory, or the permanent union wrought in these three faculties together. We will discuss all this frequently in the course of our treatise. But such an exposition is unnecessary for an understanding of what we now wish to state about these different unions. A better explanation of them will be given in sections dealing with the subject, and then we shall have a concrete example to go with the actual teaching. In those sections the reader will note and understand the union being discussed and will form a better judgment of it.

5.2. Here I intend to discuss only this total and permanent union in the substance and faculties of the soul. And I shall be speaking of the obscure habit of union, for we will explain later, with God's help, how a permanent actual union of the faculties in this life is impossible; such a union can only be transitory.<sup>1</sup>

5.3. To understand the nature of this union, one should first know that God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially, even though it may be that of the greatest sinner in the world. This union between God and creatures always exists. By it he conserves their being so that if the union should end they would immediately be annihilated and cease to exist. Consequently, in discussing union with God we are not discussing the substantial union that always exists, but the soul's union with and transformation in God that does not always exist, except when there is likeness of love. We will call it the union of likeness; and the former, the essential or substantial union. The union of likeness is supernatural; the other, natural. The supernatural union exists when God's will and the soul's are in conformity, so that nothing in the one is repugnant to the other. When the soul rids itself completely of what is repugnant and unconformed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God through love.

5.4. Ridding oneself of what is repugnant to God's will should be understood not only of one's acts but of one's habits as well. Not only must actual voluntary imperfections cease, but habitual imperfections must be annihilated too.

5.4.(2). No creature, none of its actions and abilities, can reach or encompass God's nature. Consequently, a soul must strip itself of everything pertaining to creatures and of its actions and abilities (of its understanding, satisfaction, and feeling), so that when everything unlike and unconformed to God is cast out, it may receive the likeness of God. And the soul will receive this likeness because nothing contrary to the will of God will be left in it. Thus it will be transformed in God.

5.4.(3). It is true that God is ever present in the soul, as we said, and thereby bestows and preserves its natural being by his sustaining presence. Yet he does not always communicate supernatural being to it. He communicates supernatural being only through love and grace, which not all souls possess. And those who do, do not possess them in the same degree. Some have attained higher degrees of love, others remain in lower degrees. To the soul that is more advanced in love, more conformed to the divine will, God communicates himself more. A person who has reached complete conformity and likeness of will has attained total supernatural union and transformation in God.

5.4.(4). Manifestly, then, the more that individuals through attachment and habit are clothed with their own abilities and with creatures, the less disposed they are for this union. For they do not afford God full opportunity to transform their souls into the supernatural. As a result, individuals have nothing more to do than to strip their souls of these natural contraries and dissimilarities so that God, who is naturally communicating himself to them through nature, may do so supernaturally through grace.

5.5. This is what St. John meant when he said: *Qui non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate carnis, neque ex voluntate viri, sed ex Deo nati sunt* [Jn. 1:13], which can be interpreted: He gives power for becoming the children of God (for being transformed in God) only to those who are not born of blood (combinations of the natural humors), or of the will of the flesh (the free will included in one's natural aptitude and capacity), or even less of the human will (which includes every mode and manner by which the intellect judges and understands). To none of these has he conferred the power of becoming the children of God; only to those who are born of God (those who, in their rebirth through grace and death to everything of the old self [Eph. 4:22], rise above themselves to the supernatural and receive from God this rebirth and relationship as his children, which transcends everything imaginable).

5.5.(2). St. John affirms elsewhere: *Nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et spiritu Sancto non potest videre regnum Dei* (The one who is not reborn in the Holy Spirit will be unable to see the kingdom of God, which is the state of perfection) [Jn.3:5]. To be reborn in the Holy Spirit during this life is to become most like God in purity, without any mixture of imperfection. Accordingly, pure transformation can be effected - although not essentially - through the participation of union.

5.6. Here is an example that will provide a better understanding of this explanation. A ray of sunlight shining on a smudgy window is unable to illumine that window completely and transform it into its own light. It could do this if the window were cleaned and polished. The less the film and stain are wiped away, the less the window will be illumined; and the cleaner the window is, the brighter will be its illumination. The extent of illumination is not dependent on the ray of sunlight but on the window. If the window is totally clean and pure, the sunlight will so transform and illumine it that to all appearances the window will be identical with the ray of sunlight and shine just as the sun's ray. Although obviously the nature of the window is distinct from that of the sun's ray (even if the two seem identical), we can assert that the window is the ray or light of

the sun by participation. The soul on which the divine light of God's being is ever shining, or better, in which it is ever dwelling by nature, is like this window, as we have affirmed.

5.7. A soul makes room for God by wiping away all the smudges and smears of creatures, by uniting its will perfectly to God's; for to love is to labor to divest and deprive oneself for God of all that is not God. When this is done the soul will be illumined by and transformed in God. And God will so communicate his supernatural being to the soul that it will appear to be God himself and will possess what God himself possesses.

5.7.(2). When God grants this supernatural favor to the soul, so great a union is caused that all the things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Indeed, it is God by participation. Yet truly, its being (even though transformed) is naturally as distinct from God's as it was before, just as the window, although illumined by the ray, has being distinct from the ray's.

5.8. Consequently, we understand with greater clarity that the preparation for this union, as we said,<sup>2</sup> is not an understanding by the soul, nor the taste, feeling, or imagining of God or of any other object, but purity and love, the stripping off and perfect renunciation of all such experiences for God alone. Also we clearly see how perfect transformation is impossible without perfect purity, and how the illumination of the soul and its union with God correspond to the measure of its purity. The illumination will not be perfect until the soul is entirely cleansed, clear, and perfect.

5.9. The following example will also shed light on the nature of this union. Let us imagine a perfect painting with many finely wrought details and delicate, subtle adornments, including some so delicate and subtle that they are not wholly discernible. Now one whose sense of sight is not too clear and refined will discover less detail and delicacy in the painting; one whose vision is somewhat purer will discover more details and perfections; and another with yet clearer vision will find still more perfection; finally, the one who possesses the clearest faculty will discern the greatest number of excellent qualities and perfections. There is so much to behold in the painting that no matter how much one sees in it, still more remains unseen.

5.10. We can make the same application to souls in their relationship with God in this illumination and transformation. Although individuals may have truly reached union, this union will be proportioned to their lesser or greater capacity, for not all souls attain an identical degree of union. This depends on what the Lord wishes to grant each one. Here we have a resemblance to the saints' vision of God in heaven: Some see more, others less, but all see him and are happy because, whatever their capacity, it is fully satisfied.

5.11. In this life we may encounter individuals who are in the state of perfection and enjoy equal peace and tranquility, and the capacity of each will be satisfied, yet one may be many degrees higher than the other. Those who do not reach purity in the measure of their capacity never reach true peace and satisfaction; they have not attained in their

faculties the nakedness and emptiness that are required for the simple union.

## CHAPTER 6

6. The theological virtues perfect the faculties of the soul and produce emptiness and darkness in them.

6.1. We must discuss the method of leading the three faculties (intellect, memory, and will) into this spiritual night, the means to divine union. But we must first explain how the theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity (related to these faculties as their proper supernatural objects), through which the soul is united with God, cause the same emptiness and darkness in their respective faculties: faith in the intellect, hope in the memory, and charity in the will. Then we shall explain how in order to journey to God the intellect must be perfected in the darkness of faith, the memory in the emptiness of hope, and the will in the nakedness and absence of every affection.

6.1.(2). As a result it will be seen how necessary it is for the soul, if it is to walk securely, to journey through this dark night with the support of these three virtues. They darken and empty it of all things. As we said,<sup>1</sup> the soul is not united with God in this life through understanding, or through enjoyment, or through imagination, or through any other sense; but only faith, hope, and charity (according to the intellect, memory, and will) can unite the soul with God in this life.

6.2. These virtues, as we said, void the faculties: Faith causes darkness and a void of understanding in the intellect, hope begets an emptiness of possessions in the memory, and charity produces the nakedness and emptiness of affection and joy in all that is not God.

6.2.(2). Faith, we saw, affirms what cannot be understood by the intellect. St. Paul refers to it ad Hebraeos in this way: *Fides est sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium* [Heb. 11:1]. In relation to our discussion here, this means that faith is the substance of things to be hoped for and that these things are not manifest to the intellect, even though its consent to them is firm and certain. If they were manifest, there would be no faith. For though faith brings certitude to the intellect, it does not produce clarity, but only darkness.

6.3. Hope, also, undoubtedly puts the memory in darkness and emptiness as regards all earthly and heavenly objects. Hope always pertains to the unpossessed object. If something were possessed there could no longer be hope for it. St. Paul says ad Romanos: *Spes quae videtur, non est spes; nam quod videt quis, quid sperat?* (Hope that is seen is not hope, for how does a person hope for what is seen - that is, what is possessed?) [Rom. 8:24]. As a result this virtue also occasions emptiness, since it is concerned with unpossessed things and not with the possessed object.

6.4. Charity, too, causes a void in the will regarding all things since it obliges us to love God above everything. We have to withdraw our affection from all in order to center it wholly upon God. Christ says through St. Luke: *Qui non renuntiat omnibus quae possidet, non potest meus esse discipulus* (Whoever does not renounce all that the will possesses cannot be my disciple) [Lk. 14:33]. Consequently, these three virtues place a

soul in darkness and emptiness in respect to all things.

6.5. That parable our Redeemer told in the 11th chapter of St. Luke is noteworthy here [Lk. 11:5]. He related that one friend went to another at midnight to ask for three loaves (which signify these three virtues). And he asserted that the friend asked for them at midnight to indicate that the soul must acquire these three virtues by a darkness in its faculties regarding all things, and must perfect itself in these virtues by means of this night.

6.5.(2). In the sixth chapter of Isaiah we read that the prophet saw a seraph at each side of God, and that they each had six wings: with two wings they covered their feet, which signified the blinding and quenching of the affections of the will for God; with two they covered their faces, which signified the darkness of the intellect in God's presence; and with the two remaining wings they flew, so as to indicate the flight of hope toward things that are not possessed, an elevation above everything outside of God that can be possessed, earthly or heavenly [Is. 6:2].

6.6. We must lead the faculties of the soul, then, to these three virtues and inform each faculty with one of them by stripping and darkening it of everything that is not conformable to these virtues. Doing this refers to the spiritual night that we above called active,<sup>3</sup> because one does what lies in one's own power to enter this night. As we outlined for the sensory night a method of emptying the sense faculties, with regard to the appetite, of their visible objects so that the soul might leave the point of departure for the mean, which is faith, so for this spiritual night we will present, with divine help, a way to empty and purify the spiritual faculties of all that is not God. By this method these faculties can abide in the darkness of these three virtues, which are the means and preparation, as we said, for the soul's union with God.

6.7. This method provides complete security against the cunning of the devil and the power of self-love in all its ramifications. Usually self-love subtly deceives and hinders the journey of spiritual persons along this road, because they do not know how to denude and govern themselves by means of these three virtues. They never succeed, therefore, in finding the substance and purity of spiritual good; neither do they journey by as straight and short a road as they might.

6.8. Remember that I am now especially addressing those who have begun to enter the state of contemplation; with regard to beginners this journey should be discussed in somewhat more detail. We will do this with God's help in the second book when we deal with the characteristics of beginners.<sup>4</sup>

## CHAPTER 7

7. The extreme narrowness of the path leading to eternal life. The denudation and freedom required of those who tread it. The nakedness of the intellect.

7. 1. I would need greater knowledge and spirituality than I possess to treat of the denudation and purity of the three faculties of the soul. For I desire to give clear instructions to spiritual persons on the narrowness of the way leading to life - that narrowness of which our Savior spoke - so that convinced of this they will not marvel at the emptiness and nakedness in which we must leave the faculties of the soul in this night.

7.2. We ought to note carefully our Savior's words in St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter seven, about this road: *Quam angusta porta et arcta via est quae ducit ad vitam! Et pauci sunt qui inveniunt eam* (How narrow is the gate and constricting the way that leads to life! And few there are who find it) [Mt. 7:14]. We should note particularly in this passage the exaggeration and hyperbole conveyed by the word *quam*. This is like saying: Indeed the gate is very narrow, more so than you think.

7.2.(2). We must also note that first he says the gate is narrow to teach that entrance through this gate of Christ (the beginning of the journey) involves a divestment and narrowing of the will in relation to all sensible and temporal objects by loving God more than all of them. This task belongs to the night of sense, as we have said.<sup>1</sup>

7.3. Next he asserts that the way (that is, of perfection) is constricting in order to teach that the journey along this way involves not only entering through the narrow gate, a void of sense objects, but also constricting oneself through dispossession and the removal of obstacles in matters relating to the spiritual part of the soul.

7.3.(2). We can apply, then, what Christ says about the narrow gate to the sensitive part of the human person, and what he says about the constricting way to the spiritual or rational part. Since he proclaims that few find it, we ought to note the cause: Few there are with the knowledge and desire to enter into this supreme nakedness and emptiness of spirit. As this path on the high mount of perfection is narrow and steep, it demands travelers who are neither weighed down by the lower part of their nature nor burdened in the higher part. This is a venture in which God alone is sought and gained; thus only God ought to be sought and gained.

7.4. Obviously one's journey must not merely exclude the hindrance of creatures but also embody a dispossession and annihilation in the spiritual part of one's nature. Our Lord, for our instruction and guidance along this road, imparted that wonderful teaching - I think it is possible to affirm that the more necessary the doctrine the less it is practiced by spiritual persons - that I will quote fully and explain in its genuine and spiritual sense because of its importance and relevance to our subject. He states in the eighth chapter of St. Mark: *Si quis vult me sequi, deneget semetipsum et tollat crucem suam et sequatur me. Qui enim voluerit animam suam salvam facere, perdet eam; qui autem perdidit animam suam propter me ... salvam faciet eam* (If anyone wishes to follow my way, let

him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his soul will lose it, but whoever loses it for me will gain it) [Mk. 8:34-35].

7.5. Oh, who can make this counsel of our Savior on self-denial understandable, and practicable, and attractive, that spiritual persons might become aware of the difference between the method many of them think is good and the one that ought to be used in traveling this road! They are of the opinion that any kind of withdrawal from the world, or reformation of life, suffices. Some are content with a certain degree of virtue, perseverance in prayer, and mortification, but never achieve the nakedness, poverty, selflessness, or spiritual purity (which are all the same) about which the Lord counsels us here. For they still feed and clothe their natural selves with spiritual feelings and consolations instead of divesting and denying themselves of these for God's sake. They think denial of self in worldly matters is sufficient without annihilation and purification in the spiritual domain. It happens that, when some of this solid, perfect food (the annihilation of all sweetness in God - the pure spiritual cross and nakedness of Christ's poverty of spirit) is offered them in dryness, distaste, and trial, they run from it as from death and wander about in search only of sweetness and delightful communications from God. Such an attitude is not the hallmark of self-denial and nakedness of spirit but the indication of a spiritual sweet tooth. Through this kind of conduct they become, spiritually speaking, enemies of the cross of Christ [Phil. 3:18].

7.5.(2). A genuine spirit seeks rather the distasteful in God than the delectable, leans more toward suffering than toward consolation, more toward going without everything for God than toward possession, and toward dryness and affliction than toward sweet consolation. It knows that this is the significance of following Christ and denying self, that the other method is perhaps a seeking of self in God - something entirely contrary to love. Seeking oneself in God is the same as looking for the caresses and consolations of God. Seeking God in oneself entails not only the desire to do without these consolations for God's sake, but also the inclination to choose for love of Christ all that is most distasteful whether in God or in the world; and this is what loving God means.

7.6. Oh, who can explain the extent of the denial our Lord wishes of us! This negation must be similar to a temporal, natural, and spiritual death in all things; that is, with regard to the esteem the will has for them. It is in the will that all negation takes place. Our Savior referred to this when he declared: Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it (Those who want to possess something, or seek it for self, will lose it); and whoever loses his soul for my sake will gain it [Mt. 16:25; Lk. 9:24]. This latter means: Those who renounce for Christ all that their wills can both desire and enjoy by choosing what bears closer resemblance to the cross - which in St. John our Lord terms hating one's own soul [Jn. 12:25] - these same will gain it.

7.6.(2). His Majesty taught this to those two disciples who came to ask him for places at his right and left. Without responding to their request for glory, he offered them the chalice he was about to drink as something safer and more precious on this earth than enjoyment [Mt. 20:22].



7.7. This chalice means death to one's natural self through denudation and annihilation. By this means one is able to walk along the narrow path in the sensitive part of the soul, as we said,<sup>2</sup> and in the spiritual part (as we will now say), in one's understanding, joy, and feeling. Accordingly, a person can attain to dispossession in both parts of the soul. Not only this, but even in the spirit one will be unhindered in one's journey on the narrow road. For on this road there is room only for self-denial (as our Savior asserts) and the cross. The cross is a supporting staff and greatly lightens and eases the journey.

7.7.(2). Our Lord proclaimed through St. Matthew: My yoke is sweet and my burden light [Mt. 11:30], the burden being the cross. If individuals resolutely submit to the carrying of the cross, if they decidedly want to find and endure trial in all things for God, they will discover in all of them great relief and sweetness. This will be so because they will be traveling the road denuded of all and with no desire for anything. If they aim after the possession of something, from God or elsewhere, their journey will not be one of nakedness and detachment from all things, and consequently there will be no room for them on this narrow path nor will they be able to climb it.

7.8. I should like to persuade spiritual persons that the road leading to God does not entail a multiplicity of considerations, methods, manners, and experiences - though in their own way these may be a requirement for beginners - but demands only the one thing necessary: true self-denial, exterior and interior, through surrender of self both to suffering for Christ and to annihilation in all things. In the exercise of this self-denial everything else, and even more, is discovered and accomplished. If one fails in this exercise, the root and sum total of all the virtues, the other methods would amount to no more than going around in circles without getting anywhere, even were one to enjoy considerations and communications as lofty as those of the angels.

7.8.(2). A person makes progress only by imitating Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one goes to the Father but through him, as he states himself in St. John [Jn. 14:6]. Elsewhere he says: I am the door; anyone who enters by me shall be saved [Jn. 10:9]. Accordingly, I would not consider any spirituality worthwhile that wants to walk in sweetness and ease and run from the imitation of Christ.

7.9. Because I have said that Christ is the way and that this way is a death to our natural selves in the sensory and spiritual parts of the soul, I would like to demonstrate how this death is patterned on Christ's, for he is our model and light.

7.10. First, during his life he certainly died spiritually to the sensitive part, and at his death he died naturally. He proclaimed during his life that he had no place whereon to lay his head [Mt. 8:20]. And at his death he had less.

7.11. Second, at the moment of his death he was certainly annihilated in his soul, without any consolation or relief, since the Father had left him that way in innermost aridity in the lower part. He was thereby compelled to cry out: My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? [Mt. 27:46]. This was the most extreme abandonment, sensitively, that he had suffered in his life. And by it he accomplished the most marvelous work of his whole

life, surpassing all the works and deeds and miracles that he had ever performed on earth or in heaven. That is, he brought about the reconciliation and union of the human race with God through grace. The Lord achieved this, as I say, at the moment in which he was most annihilated in all things: in his reputation before people, since in watching him die they mocked him instead of esteeming him; in his human nature, by dying; and in spiritual help and consolation from his Father, for he was forsaken by his Father at that time, annihilated and reduced to nothing, so as to pay the debt fully and bring people to union with God. David says of him: *Ad nihilum redactus sum et nescivi* [Ps. 73:22], that those who are truly spiritual might understand the mystery of the door and way (which is Christ) leading to union with God, and that they might realize that their union with God and the greatness of the work they accomplish will be measured by their annihilation of themselves for God in the sensory and spiritual parts of their souls. When they are reduced to nothing, the highest degree of humility, the spiritual union between their souls and God will be an accomplished fact. This union is the most noble and sublime state attainable in this life. The journey, then, does not consist in consolations, delights, and spiritual feelings, but in the living death of the cross, sensory and spiritual, exterior and interior.

7.12. I will not enlarge on this, though I would like to continue discussing the matter because from my observations Christ is little known by those who consider themselves his friends. For we see them going about seeking in him their own consolations and satisfactions, loving themselves very much, but not loving him very much by seeking his bitter trials and deaths.

7.12.(2). I am referring to those who believe themselves his friends, not to those who live withdrawn and far away from him, people of extensive learning and high repute, and many others living elsewhere in the world, anxious about their pretensions and rank. These people, we can affirm, do not know Christ. However prosperous the end of their lives may seem, it will be in fact most bitter to them. On judgment day they will be spoken of, for they are the ones to whom we should first speak this word of God [Acts 13:46]. Because of their learning and higher state, they are the ones whom God intended as the target for this doctrine.

7.13. Let us address the intellects of spiritual people, particularly of those whom God has favored with the state of contemplation, for as I asserted,<sup>3</sup> I am now speaking especially to these people. We will discuss the direction of self to God through faith and the purification of what is contrary to faith, so that by constricting itself the soul may enter on the narrow path of obscure contemplation.

## CHAPTER 8

8. No creature or knowledge comprehensible to the intellect can serve it as a proximate means for divine union with God.

8.1. Before dealing with faith, the proper and adequate means of union with God, we should prove how nothing created or imagined can serve the intellect as a proper means for union with God, and how all that can be grasped by the intellect would serve as an obstacle rather than a means if a person were to become attached to it.

8.1.(2). This chapter will contain a general proof of this; afterward we will discuss in particular all the knowledge that the intellect can receive through the interior or exterior senses. We will also deal with the difficulty and harm occasioned by these exterior and interior ideas, for because of them the intellect does not advance with the support of faith, which is the proper means.

8.2. Let it be recalled, then, that according to a philosophical axiom all means must be proportionate to their end.<sup>1</sup> That is, they must manifest a certain accord with and likeness to the end so that through them the desired end may be attained.

8.2.(2). Here is an example: Those who want to reach a city must necessarily take the road, the means, that leads to the city. Another example: If fire is to be united with a log of wood, it is necessary for heat, the means, to prepare the log first, through so many degrees of heat, with a certain likeness and proportion to the fire. Now if anyone wanted to prepare the log by a means other than the proper one, which is fire, a means such as air, water, or earth, there would be no possibility of union between the log and the fire, just as it would be impossible to reach the city without taking the proper road that connects with it. If the intellect, then, is to reach union with God in this life, insofar as is possible, it must take the means that bears a proximate likeness to God and unites with him.

8.3. It is noteworthy that among all creatures, both superior and inferior, none bears a likeness to God's being or unites proximately with him. Although truly, as theologians say, all creatures carry with them a certain relation to God and a trace of him (greater or less according to the perfection of their being), yet God has no relation or essential likeness to them.<sup>2</sup> Rather the difference that lies between his divine being and their being is infinite. Consequently, intellectual comprehension of God through heavenly or earthly creatures is impossible; there is no proportion of likeness.

8.3.(2). David proclaims in reference to heavenly creatures: There is none among the gods like you, O Lord! [Ps. 86:8], calling the angels and saints gods. And elsewhere he declares: O God, your way is in the holy place, what great God is there like our God? [Ps. 77:13]. This was equivalent to saying that the way of approach to you, O God, is a holy way, namely, purity of faith. For what god can be great enough (that is, what angel so elevated in being, or saint in glory) to serve as an adequate and sufficient approach to you?

8.3.(3). David also proclaims of earthly and heavenly things: The Lord is high up and looks at low things, and the high things he knows from afar [Ps. 138:6]. In other words: High in his own being, he looks at the being of objects here below as exceedingly low in comparison with his high being; and the high things, the heavenly creatures, he knows to be far distant from his own being. Thus no creature can serve the intellect as a proportionate means to the attainment of God.

8.4. Nothing in this life that could be imagined or received and understood by the intellect can be a proximate means of union with God. In our natural way of knowing, the intellect can grasp an object only through the forms and phantasms of things perceived by the bodily senses. Since, as we said,<sup>3</sup> these things cannot serve as a means, the intellect cannot profit from its natural knowing.

8.4.(2). If we speak of supernatural knowing, insofar as one can in this life, we must say that the intellect of its ordinary power, while in the prison of this body, is neither capable of nor prepared for the reception of the clear knowledge of God. Such knowledge does not belong to our earthly state; either one must die or go without this knowledge.

8.4.(3). God told Moses, who had asked for this clear knowledge, that no one would be able to see him: No one shall see me and remain alive [Ex. 33:20]. St. John says: No one has ever seen God or anything like him [Jn. 1:18]. And St. Paul with Isaiah says: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the human heart [1Cor. 2:9; Is. 64:4]. This is why Moses, as affirmed in the Acts of the Apostles, did not dare to look at the bush while God was present. He knew that his intellect was powerless to consider God in an appropriate way, a way that conformed to what he felt about him [Acts 7: 30-32]. It is told of our Father Elijah<sup>4</sup> that on the mount he covered his face (blinded his intellect) in the presence of God [1Kgs. 19:11-13]. He did this because, in his lowliness, he did not dare to gaze on something so lofty, and he clearly realized that anything he might behold or understand particularly would be far distant from God and most unlike him.

8.5. In this mortal life no supernatural knowledge or apprehension can serve as a proximate means for high union with God through love. Everything the intellect can understand, the will enjoy, and the imagination picture is most unlike and disproportioned to God, as we have said.<sup>5</sup>

8.5.(2). Isaiah brought this out admirably in a noteworthy passage: To what have you been able to liken God? Or what image will you fashion like to him? Will the ironsmith by chance be able to cast a statue? Or will the goldsmith be able to mold him out of gold, or the silversmith with plates of silver? [Is. 40:18-19].

8.5.(3). The ironsmith signifies the intellect whose work is to form the concept by removing the iron of sensible species and phantasms. The goldsmith signifies the will, which is capable of receiving the figure and form of delight caused by the gold of love. The silversmith, who was unable to fashion him from plates of silver, signifies both the memory and the imagination. The concepts and images that these powers mold and construct can easily be likened to plates of silver. It is as if Isaiah had said that the

intellect will be unable through its ideas to understand anything like God, the will unable to experience a delight and sweetness resembling him, and the memory unable to place in the imagination remembrances and images representing him.

8.5.(4). Manifestly, then, none of these ideas can serve the intellect as a proximate means leading to God. In order to draw nearer the divine ray, the intellect must advance by unknowing rather than by the desire to know, and by blinding itself and remaining in darkness rather than by opening its eyes.

8.6. Contemplation, consequently, by which the intellect has a higher knowledge of God, is called mystical theology, meaning the secret wisdom of God. For this wisdom is secret to the very intellect that receives it. St. Dionysius on this account refers to contemplation as a ray of darkness.<sup>6</sup> The prophet Baruch declares of this wisdom: There is no one who knows her way or can think of her paths [Bar. 3:23]. To reach union with God the intellect must obviously blind itself to all the paths along which it can travel. Aristotle teaches that just as the sun is total darkness to the eyes of a bat, so the brightest light in God is total darkness to our intellect. And he teaches in addition that the loftier and clearer the things of God are in themselves, the more unknown and obscure they are to us.<sup>7</sup> The Apostle also affirms this teaching, saying that what is highest in God is least known by humans [Rom. 11:33].

8.7. We would never finish if we continued to quote authorities and present arguments as proof that there is no ladder among all created, knowable things by which the intellect can reach this high Lord. Rather, it should be known that if the intellect desired to use all or any of these objects as a proximate means to this union, it would be encumbered by them. Not only this, but they would become an occasion of many errors and delusions in the ascent of this mount.

## CHAPTER 9

9. Faith is the proximate and proportionate means to the intellect for the attainment of the divine union of love. Proofs from passages and figures of Sacred Scripture.

9.1. We can gather from what has been said that to be prepared for this divine union the intellect must be cleansed and emptied of everything relating to sense, divested and liberated of everything clearly intelligible, inwardly pacified and silenced, and supported by faith alone, which is the only proximate and proportionate means to union with God. For the likeness between faith and God is so close that no other difference exists than that between believing in God and seeing him. Just as God is infinite, faith proposes him to us as infinite. Just as there are three Persons in one God, it presents him to us in this way. And just as God is darkness to our intellect, so faith dazzles and blinds us. Only by means of faith, in divine light exceeding all understanding, does God manifest himself to the soul. The greater one's faith the closer is one's union with God.

9.1.(2). St. Paul indicated this in the passage cited above: The one who would be united with God must believe [Heb. 11:6]. This means that people must walk by faith in their journey to God. The intellect must be blind and dark and abide in faith alone, because it is joined with God under this cloud. And as David proclaims, God is hidden under the cloud: He set darkness under his feet. And he rose above the cherubim and flew on the wings of the wind. He made darkness and the dark water his hiding place [Ps. 18:10-11].

9.2. This darkness under God's feet and of his hiding place and the dark water of his dwelling denote the obscurity of faith in which he is enclosed. The verse stating that he rose above the cherubim and flew on the wings of the wind alludes to how God soars above all understanding. The cherubim refer to those who understand or contemplate; the wings of the wind signify the subtle ideas and lofty concepts of the spirit. Above these is his being, which no one can reach through human effort.

9.3. In Scripture we read figuratively of this that when Solomon had completed the temple, God descended in darkness and filled it so that the children of Israel were unable to see. Solomon then said: The Lord has promised to dwell in darkness [1Kgs. 8:12]. God was also covered with darkness when he appeared to Moses on the mount [Ex. 24:16]. And as often as God communicated at length with someone, he appeared in darkness. This is evident in the Book of Job, where Scripture asserts that God spoke to Job from the dark air [Jb. 38:1; 40:1].

9.3.(2). All of this darkness signifies the obscurity of faith with which the divinity is clothed while communicating itself to the soul. This darkness will be dispelled when, as St. Paul states, that which is in part (this darkness of faith) is taken away, and that which is perfect (the divine light) comes [1 Cor. 13:10]. We also find a fairly good figure of this obscurity of faith in the scriptural narration about the militia of Gideon. According to that account, all the soldiers held lamps in their hands, yet did not see the light because the lamps were hidden in darkness within earthenware jars. But when these jars were broken, the light appeared [Jgs. 7:16-20]. Faith, represented by those clay jars, contains the divine light. When faith reaches its end and is shattered by the ending and breaking of this

mortal life, the glory and light of the divinity, the content of faith, will at once appear.

9.4. Clearly, then, union with God in this life, and direct communication with him, demands that we be united with the darkness in which, as Solomon said [1Kgs. 8:12], God promised to dwell, and that we approach the dark air in which God was pleased to reveal his secrets to Job. Individuals must take in darkness the earthenware jars of Gideon and hold in their hands (the works of their wills) the lamp (the union of love, though in the darkness of faith), so that when the clay jar of this life, which is all that impedes the light of faith, is broken, they may see God face to face in glory.

9.5. We must discuss now in particular all the concepts and apprehensions of the intellect, the hindrance and harm that can be suffered along this road of faith, and the conduct that is proper for the soul. We do this so that the soul may profit from both sensory and spiritual apprehensions rather than undergo harm.

## **CHAPTER 10**

10. A division of all apprehensions and ideas comprehensible to the intellect.

10.1. To discuss in particular both the advantage and the harm that intellectual concepts and apprehensions cause to the soul's faith, which is the means to divine union, we need to set up a division of all the natural and supernatural apprehensions of the intellect. Later, then, in a more logical order we shall be able to guide the intellect through them into the night and darkness of faith. Our division will be as concise as possible.

10.2. It is noteworthy that the intellect can get ideas and concepts in two ways, naturally and supernaturally. Natural knowledge includes everything the intellect can understand by way of the bodily senses or through reflection. Supernatural knowledge comprises everything imparted to the intellect in a way transcending the intellect's natural ability and capacity.

10.3. This supernatural knowledge is subdivided into corporeal and spiritual. The corporeal is made up of two kinds: knowledge received from the exterior bodily senses, and knowledge received from the interior bodily senses, including all that the imagination can apprehend, form, or fashion.

10.4. The spiritual is also made up of two kinds: One is distinct and particular knowledge; the other, vague, dark, and general knowledge. The particular knowledge includes four kinds of distinct apprehensions communicated to the spirit without the means of the bodily senses: visions, revelations, locutions, and spiritual feelings.

10.4.(2). The dark and general knowledge (contemplation, which is imparted in faith) is of one kind only. We have to lead the soul to this contemplation by guiding it through all these other apprehensions and divesting it of them, beginning with the first.



## CHAPTER 11

11. The impediment and harm caused by intellectual apprehensions arising from objects supernaturally represented to the exterior senses. The proper conduct of the soul in their regard.

11.1. The first kind of knowledge referred to in the preceding chapter is that which originates naturally. Since we already discussed this kind of knowledge in the first book where we guided the soul through the night of sense, we will have nothing to say of it here. There we presented appropriate doctrine about this knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

11.1.(2). Our discussion in this chapter will deal only with the supernatural knowledge that reaches the intellect by way of the exterior bodily senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). Through these senses, spiritual persons can, and usually do, perceive supernatural representations and objects.

11.1.(3). As for sight, they are wont to have visions of images and persons from the other life: of saints, of the good and bad angels, and of unusual lights and splendors.

11.1.(4). Through hearing they apprehend certain extraordinary words, sometimes from the vision, and at other times without seeing the one who speaks.

11.1.(5). With the sense of smell they sometimes notice sensibly the sweetest fragrances without knowledge of their origin.

11.1.(6). Also it happens with regard to taste that they experience very exquisite savors. And concerning touch they feel extreme delight, at times so intense that all the bones and marrow rejoice, flourish, and bathe in it. This delight is usually termed spiritual unction because in pure souls it passes from the spirit to the senses. The experience is common with spiritual persons. It is an overflow from the affection and devotion of the sensible spirit, which individuals receive in their own way.

11.2. It must be known that even though these apprehensions can come to the bodily senses from God, one must never rely on them or accept them. A person should rather flee from them completely and have no desire to examine whether they be good or bad. The more exterior and corporeal these things are, the less certain is their divine origin. God's self-communication is more commonly and appropriately given to the spirit, in which there is greater security and profit for the soul, than to the senses, where ordinarily there is extreme danger and room for deception. Thinking that spiritual things are identical with what is felt, the bodily sense usually sets itself up as arbiter and judge over them. But spiritual things are as different from what is sensed as is the body from the soul and sensibility from reason. The bodily sense is as ignorant of spiritual matters as a beast is of rational matters, and even more.

11.3. Individuals who esteem these apprehensions are in serious error and extreme danger of being deceived. Or at least they will hinder their spiritual growth because, as we mentioned,<sup>2</sup> these corporeal perceptions bear no proportion to what is spiritual. Such

manifestations ought always to be considered as more surely from the devil than from God, for the devil possesses greater leeway in influencing the exterior and corporeal part of human nature. He can deceive the soul more readily through this action than through a more interior and spiritual kind.

11.4. The more exterior these corporeal objects and forms, the less profitable they are to the interior and spiritual part of the soul. This is due to the extreme distance and the lack of proportion between the corporeal and the spiritual. Even though some spirituality results from these corporeal communications - which is always the case when they are from God - it is far less than when the communications are more spiritual and interior. As a result they are a ready occasion for the breeding of error, presumption, and vanity in the soul. Palpable, tangible, and material as they are, they strongly affect the senses so that in one's judgment they seem more worthwhile on account of their being more sensible. A person, then, forsaking faith, will follow after these communications, believing that their light is the guide and means to the goal, which is union with God. But the more importance one gives to these communications the further one strays from faith, the way and means.

11.5. Furthermore, persons receiving these apprehensions often develop secretly a special opinion of themselves - that now they are important in God's eyes. Such a view is contrary to humility.

11.5.(2). The devil too is adept at suggesting to individuals a secret self-satisfaction that becomes truly obvious at times. He often purveys objects to the senses, presenting to the sense of sight images of saints and most beautiful lights, and to the hearing, dissembled words, and to the sense of smell, fragrant odors; in the mouth, sweetness, and in the sense of touch, delight. He does all of this so that by enticing persons through these sensory objects he may induce them into many evils.

11.5.(3). Such representations and feelings, consequently, must always be rejected. Even though some may be from God, this rejection is no affront to him. Nor will one, by rejecting and not wanting them, fail to receive the effect and fruit God wishes to produce through them.

11.6. The reason is that if the corporeal vision or feeling in the senses has a divine origin it produces its effect in the spirit at the very moment of its perception, without allowing any deliberation about wanting or not wanting it. This is likewise so with the more interior communications. Since God grants these favors without the individual's own ability and effort, he causes the desired effect of these favors without this ability and effort since he produces the effect passively in the spirit. The good effect, accordingly, does not depend on one's wanting or not wanting the communication. Were fire to come into immediate contact with a person's flesh, that person's desire not to get burned would hardly be helpful, for the fire produces its effect necessarily. So too with good visions and sensible communications. Even if a person doesn't want them, they produce their effect, and first and foremost in the soul rather than in the body.

11.6.(2). Also, those from the devil, even though the soul does not desire them, cause in the spirit agitation, or dryness, or vanity, or presumption. Yet diabolical communications are not as efficacious in doing harm as God's communications are in doing good. For the diabolical communications can only arouse the first movements without being able to move the will any further if it is unwilling to be moved. The unrest caused by them will not last long, unless the individual's lack of courage and caution becomes the occasion for the unrest to continue.

11.6.(3). The communications from God, however, penetrate the soul, move the will to love, and leave their effect within. The soul, even if it wants to, can no more resist their effect than can a window withstand the sunlight shining on it.

11.7. A soul should never dare to want to accept these communications, even though, as I say, they are from God. If it does, six kinds of harm will result.

11.7.(2). First, faith will gradually diminish, for sensible experiences greatly detract from it. Faith, as we said,<sup>3</sup> transcends all sense. By not closing the eyes of the soul to all these sensory apprehensions, a person strays from the means to union with God.

11.7.(3). Second, if left unrejected these sensory things are an impediment to the spirit because they detain the soul and prevent the spirit from soaring to the invisible. This is one of the reasons our Lord told the disciples that it was fitting for him to go so that the Holy Spirit might come [Jn. 16:7]. And so that Mary Magdalene would ground herself in faith, he refused to allow her to touch his feet after his resurrection [Jn. 20:17].

11.7.(4). Third, the soul begins to develop a possessive attitude toward these communications and fails to continue on its journey to genuine renunciation and nakedness of spirit.

11.7.(5). Fourth, individuals gradually lose the effect of these communications and the interior spirituality they produce because the individuals set their eyes on the sensible aspect, which is the least part of the communications. As a consequence these persons do not receive so copiously the spirituality caused by them. This spirituality is preserved and more deeply impressed in the soul if the sensible element, which is far different from pure spirituality, is denied.

11.7.(6). Fifth, individuals gradually lose God's favors because they receive these favors as something belonging to themselves and do not profit well by them. Taking them as one's own and failing to profit by them is the same as desiring to receive them. God does not bestow them so that the recipient may desire to receive them, for a person must never absolutely believe that they are from God.

11.7.(7). Sixth, in desiring to accept them one opens the door to the devil. The devil can then deceive one by other communications expertly feigned and disguised as genuine. In the words of the Apostle, he can transform himself into an angel of light [2 Cor. 11:14]. We shall discuss this matter, with God's help, in the third book, in the chapter on spiritual

gluttony.4

11.8. Regardless of the cause of these apprehensions, it is always good for people to reject them with closed eyes. If they fail to do so, they will make room for diabolical representations. And when the devil is given such a free hand, his representations multiply while God's representations gradually cease, so that eventually all these apprehensions will come from the devil and none at all from God. This has happened with many incautious and uninstructed people who in their sureness concerning the reception of these communications met with real difficulty in returning to God through purity of faith. Many have been unable to return because of the deep roots the devil has taken in them. Consequently, it is expedient to be closed to these communications and to deny them all, for in this way diabolical errors coming from the bad apprehensions are eliminated, the hindrance to faith occasioned by the good communications is avoided, and the spirit gathers the fruit.

11.8.(2). If these communications are allowed to enter, God will gradually withdraw them. By considering them one's own, one fails to receive the due profit. The devil then inserts and increases his communications, since he finds an opening for them. So too, on the other hand, when a humble and dispossessed soul renounces and opposes these representations, God will augment his favors and give better ones. He will set this soul over many things as in the case of the servant who was faithful in a few things [Mt. 25:21].

11.9. If individuals remain both faithful and retiring in the midst of these favors, the Lord will not cease raising them degree by degree until they reach divine union and transformation. Our Lord proves and elevates the soul by first bestowing graces that are exterior, lowly, and proportioned to the small capacity of sense. If the person reacts well by taking these first morsels with moderation for strength and nourishment, God will bestow a more abundant and higher quality of food. If individuals are victorious over the devil in the first degree, they will pass on to the second; and if so in the second, they will go to the third; and likewise through all the seven mansions (the seven degrees of love) until the Bridegroom puts them in the wine cellar of perfect charity [Sg. 2:4].

11.10. Happy the person who knows how to carry on the fight against the beast of the Apocalypse and its seven heads that are in opposition to these seven degrees of love [Rv. 12:3; 13:1]. With each of its heads the beast wars against one of these degrees, and by doing so it wages battle with the soul in each of these mansions. And in every mansion the soul is exercising the love of God and winning another degree. Those who fight faithfully and conquer in each mansion will doubtless merit advancing from degree to degree and from mansion to mansion unto the ultimate where the seven heads of the beast against which the furious war is fought will have been cut off. This war is so violent that St. John says the beast was permitted to fight against the saints, and was victorious in each of these degrees of love by using arms and abundant munitions [Rv. 13:7].

11.10.(2). It is most regrettable that many, on entering this battle against the beast, are even incapable of severing the first head through denial of the sensible objects of the

world. Some make the effort and cut it off, but then fail to sever the second, which consists of the sensory visions we are discussing. What is most lamentable is that after some have cut off not only the first and second but the third also (in regard to the interior senses, by passing out of the state of meditation and advancing further), at the moment of their entrance into purity of spirit they are conquered by this spiritual beast that revives and rises up against them even unto the first head. In their fall the last state becomes worse than the first since the beast takes with it seven other spirits worse than itself [Lk. 11:26].

11.11. Spiritual persons ought to deny all apprehensions and the temporal delights of the exterior senses if they desire to cut off the first and second heads of the beast and thereby enter the first room of love and the second of living faith. They should not want to grasp for sensory communications or weigh themselves down with these, since doing so is what most derogates from faith.

11.12. Manifestly, these sensory visions and apprehensions cannot serve as a means for union since they bear no proportion to God. This was one of the reasons for Christ's not wanting Mary Magdalene or St. Thomas to touch him [Jn. 20:17, 27-29]. The devil is most pleased when he sees that people desire to accept revelations and are inclined toward them. For then he has an excellent opportunity to inject errors and disparage faith as much as possible. As I have declared,<sup>5</sup> people desiring these apprehensions become coarse in their faith and even expose themselves to many temptations and follies.

11.13. I have treated of these exterior apprehensions somewhat at length to shed more light in preparation for our discussion of the other apprehensions. There is so much to say, however, on this subject that I doubt whether I would ever finish. And I think I was too brief in only explaining that a person should be careful never to accept them - unless in some rare case and with extremely competent advice, and then without any desire for them. But I think what I said is sufficient.

## CHAPTER 12

12. The nature of natural imaginative apprehensions. Proofs that they are inadequate means for the attainment of union with God. The harm caused from attachment to them.

12.1. Before discussing the imaginative visions, which are usually imparted supernaturally to the interior sense (imaginative power and phantasy), a discussion of the natural apprehensions of this interior corporeal sense is appropriate. As a result we can proceed with order, progressing from the lesser to the greater and from the more exterior to the more interior until reaching the intimate recollection in which the soul is united with God. We have been following this very order: First we discussed divesting the exterior senses of their natural apprehensions, and, consequently, of the natural strength of the appetites. This we did in the first book when we spoke of the night of sense. Then, in the preceding chapter, we began to divest these senses of the supernatural exterior apprehensions so as to lead the soul into the night of the spirit.

12.2. The first point to consider in this second book concerns the interior corporeal sense (the imaginative power and phantasy). We must also empty this sense of every imaginative form and apprehension that can be naturally grasped by it and demonstrate the impossibility of union with God before the activity relating to these apprehensions ceases. Such apprehensions are incapable of being the proper and proximate means of this union.

12.3. We are speaking of two interior bodily senses: imagination and phantasy. They are of service to each other in due order because one is discursive with images and the other forms them. For our discussion there will be no need to differentiate between them. This should be remembered if we do not mention them both explicitly.<sup>1</sup>

12.3.(2). All that these senses, then, can receive and construct are termed imaginations and phantasms. These are forms represented to the interior senses through material images and figures.

12.3.(3). There are two kinds: supernatural and natural. The supernatural are represented passively without the work of the senses. These we call supernatural imaginative visions; we will discuss them afterward. The natural are those the soul can actively construct by its own power through forms, figures, and images.

12.3.(4). Meditation is the work of these two faculties since it is a discursive act built on forms, figures, and images, imagined and fashioned by these senses. For example: imagining Christ crucified or at the pillar or in some other scene; or God seated on a throne with resplendent majesty; or imagining and considering glory as a beautiful light, and so on; or, in similar fashion, any other human or divine object imaginable.

12.3.(5). The soul will have to empty itself of these images and leave this sense in darkness if it is to reach divine union. For these images, just as the corporeal objects of the exterior senses, cannot be an adequate, proximate means to God.<sup>2</sup>

12.4. The reason for this is that the imagination cannot fashion or imagine anything beyond what it has experienced through the exterior senses, that is, seen with the eyes, heard with the ears, and so on. At the most it can compose resemblances of these objects that are seen, heard, or felt. But such imitations do not reach a greater being or even as much being as that of the objects of the external senses. Even though individuals may imagine palaces of pearls and mountains of gold - for they have seen gold and pearls - all that is imagined will indeed be less than the essence of a little gold or a pearl. And this is true, even though in the imagination there is a larger quantity and more excellent structure. Since created things, as has been said, have no proportion to God's being, all imaginings fashioned from the likenesses of creatures are incapable of serving as proximate means toward union with God. Rather, as we said,<sup>3</sup> they serve for much less.

12.5. Those who imagine God through some of these figures (as an imposing fire or as brightness, or through any other forms) and think that he is somewhat like them are very far from him. These considerations, forms, and methods of meditation are necessary to beginners that the soul may be enamored and fed through the senses, as we shall point out later.<sup>4</sup> They are suitable as the remote means to union with God, which souls must ordinarily use to attain their goal and the abode of spiritual repose. Yet these means must not be so used that one always employs them and never advances, for then one would never achieve the goal, which is unlike the remote means and unproportioned to it - just as none of the steps on a flight of stairs has any resemblance to the goal at the top toward which they are the means. If in climbing them we do not leave each one behind until there are no more, or if we want to stay on one of them, we would never reach the level and peaceful room at the top.

12.5.(2). Consequently, a person who wants to arrive at union with the Supreme Repose and Good in this life must climb all the steps, which are considerations, forms, and concepts, and leave them behind, since they are dissimilar and unproportioned to the goal toward which they lead. And this goal is God. Accordingly, St. Paul teaches in the Acts of the Apostles: *Non debemus aestimare auro vel argento, aut lapidi sculpturae artis, et cogitationis hominis divinum esse simile* (We should not consider or esteem the divinity to be like gold or silver, or stone sculptured by the artist, or like anything a person can fashion with the imagination) [Acts 17:29].

12.6. Many spiritual persons, after having exercised themselves in approaching God through images, forms, and meditations suitable for beginners, err greatly if they do not determine, dare, or know how to detach themselves from these palpable methods to which they are accustomed. For God then wishes to lead them to more spiritual, interior, and invisible graces by removing the gratification derived from discursive meditation. They still try to hold on to these methods, desiring to travel the road of consideration and meditation, using images as before. They think they must always act in this way. Striving hard to meditate, they draw out little satisfaction or none at all. Rather, aridity, fatigue, and restlessness of soul increase in the measure they strive through meditation for that former sweetness, now unobtainable. They will no longer taste that sensible food, as we said, but rather will enjoy another food, more delicate, interior, and spiritual. Not by working with the imagination will they acquire this spiritual nourishment but by

pacifying the soul, by leaving it to its more spiritual quiet and repose.

12.6.(2). The more spiritual they are, the more they discontinue trying to make particular acts with their faculties, for they become more engrossed in one general, pure act. Once the faculties reach the end of their journey, they cease to work, just as we cease to walk when we reach the end of our journey. If everything consisted in going, one would never arrive; and if everywhere we found means, when and where could we enjoy the end and goal?

12.7. It is sad to see many disturb their soul when it desires to abide in this calm and repose of interior quietude, where it is filled with God's peace and refreshment. Desiring to make it retrace its steps and turn back from the goal in which it now reposes, they draw their soul out to more exterior activity, to considerations, which are the means. They do this with strong repugnance and reluctance in the soul. The soul wants to remain in that peace, which it does not understand, as in its rightful place. People suffer if, after laboring to reach their place of rest, they are forced to return to their labors.

12.7.(2). Since these individuals do not understand the mystery of this new experience, they imagine themselves to be idle and doing nothing. Thus in their struggle with considerations and discursive meditations they disturb their quietude. They become filled with aridity and trial because of efforts to get satisfaction by means no longer apt. We can say that the more intense their efforts, the less will be their gain. The more they persist at meditation, the worse their state becomes because they drag the soul further away from spiritual peace. They resemble one who abandons the greater for the lesser, turns back on a road already covered and wants to redo what is already done.

12.8. The proper advice for these individuals is that they must learn to abide in that quietude with a loving attentiveness to God and pay no heed to the imagination and its work. At this stage, as was said, the faculties are at rest and do not work actively but passively, by receiving what God is effecting in them. If at times the soul puts the faculties to work, it should not use excessive efforts or studied reasonings, but it should proceed with gentleness of love, moved more by God than by its own abilities, as we will explain later.<sup>5</sup>

12.8.(2). This explanation should be sufficient at present for those who want to make progress. They will understand the appropriateness and necessity of detaching oneself at the required time and season from all these methods, ways, and uses of the imagination.

12.9. To explain just when this practice must be employed, we will describe in the following chapter some signs that spiritual persons must notice in themselves. These signs will indicate that the time and season has come when they can freely make use of that loving attentiveness and discontinue their journey along the way of reasoning and imagination.



## CHAPTER 13

13. The signs for recognizing in spiritual persons when they should discontinue discursive meditation and pass on to the state of contemplation.

13.1. To avoid obscurity in this doctrine it will be opportune to point out in this chapter when one ought to discontinue discursive meditation (work through images, forms, and figures) so that the practice will not be abandoned sooner or later than required by the spirit. At the proper time one should abandon this imaginative meditation so that the journey to God may not be hindered, but, so that there is no regression, one should not abandon it before the due time. For though the apprehensions of these faculties are not a proximate means to union for proficient, they are a remote means for beginners. By these sensitive means beginners dispose their spirit and habituate it to spiritual things, and at the same time they void their senses of all other base, temporal, secular, and natural forms and images.

13.1.(2). Hence we will delineate some signs and indications by which one can judge whether it is the opportune time for the spiritual person to discontinue meditation.

13.2. The first is the realization that one cannot make discursive meditation or receive satisfaction from it as before. Dryness is now the outcome of fixing the senses on subjects that formerly provided satisfaction. However, as long as one can make discursive meditation and draw out satisfaction, one must not abandon this method. Meditation must be discontinued only when the soul is placed in that peace and quietude to be spoken of in the third sign.

13.3. The second sign is an awareness of a disinclination to fix the imagination or sense faculties on other particular objects, exterior or interior. I am not affirming that the imagination will cease to come and go - even in deep recollection it usually wanders freely - but that the person does not want to fix it purposely on extraneous things.<sup>1</sup>

13.4. The third and surest sign is that a person likes to remain alone in loving awareness of God, without particular considerations, in interior peace and quiet and repose, and without the acts and exercises (at least discursive, those in which one progresses from point to point) of the intellect, memory and will. Such a one prefers to remain only in the general loving awareness and knowledge we mentioned, without any particular knowledge or understanding.

13.5. To leave safely the state of meditation and sense and enter that of contemplation and spirit, spiritual persons must observe within themselves at least these three signs together.<sup>2</sup>

13.6. It is insufficient to possess the first without the second. It could be that the inability to imagine and meditate derives from one's dissipation and lack of diligence. The second sign, disinclination and absence of desire to think about extraneous things, must be present. When this inability to concentrate the imagination and sense faculties on the things of God proceeds from dissipation and tepidity, there is yearning to dwell on other

things and an inclination to give up meditation.

13.6.(2). Neither is the realization of the first and second sign sufficient if the third sign is not observed with them. When one is incapable of making discursive meditation on the things of God and disinclined to consider subjects extraneous to God, the cause could be melancholia or some other kind of humor<sup>3</sup> in the heart or brain capable of producing a certain stupefaction and suspension of the sense faculties. This anomaly would be the explanation for want of thought or of desire and inclination for thought. It would foster in a person the desire to remain in the delightful ravishing. Because of this danger, the third sign, the loving knowledge and awareness in peace, and so on, is necessary.

13.7. Actually, at the beginning of this state the loving knowledge is almost unnoticeable. There are two reasons for this: First, the loving knowledge initially is likely to be extremely subtle and delicate, almost imperceptible; second, a person who is habituated to the exercise of meditation, which is wholly sensible, hardly perceives or feels this new insensible, purely spiritual experience. This is especially so when through failure to understand it one does not permit oneself to rest in it but strives after the other, more sensory experience. Although the interior peace is more abundant, the individual allows no room to experience and enjoy it. But the more habituated persons become to this calm, the more their experience of this general loving knowledge of God will increase. This knowledge is more enjoyable than all other things because without the soul's labor it affords peace, rest, savor, and delight.

13.8. For greater clarity we will expound in the following chapter some reasons showing the necessity for these three signs in order to journey on the road of spirit.

## CHAPTER 14

14. Proves the appropriateness of these three signs and explains why their presence is necessary for one to advance.

14.1. As for the first sign, it should be known that there are two reasons almost comprised in one for requiring spiritual persons to give up the imaginative way, or sensory meditation, when they are unable to meditate or derive satisfaction from it, and enter the way of the spirit, which is the contemplative way.

14.1.(2). First, because these persons have been granted all the spiritual good obtainable through discursive meditation on the things of God. An indication of this is their inability to make discursive meditation as before or derive from it any new satisfaction or pleasure. For previously they had not yet arrived at the spirituality that was in store for them.

14.1.(3). Ordinarily, as often as individuals receive some profitable grace, they experience - at least spiritually - gratification in the means through which the grace is obtained. If this is not received, there will rarely be profit; neither will they find in the cause of that former gratification the support and satisfaction they did before when they received grace through that means. This agrees with what the philosophers hold: *Quod sapit, nutrit* (What is savory nourishes and fattens).<sup>1</sup> Hence holy Job asks: *Numquid poterit comedi insulsum, quod non est sale conditum?* (Could one perchance eat the unsavory that is not seasoned with salt?) [Jb. 6:6]. Here we have the cause of the person's inability to consider and meditate as before: the lack of savor and benefit derived by the spirit from this exercise.

14.2. The second reason is that these persons have now acquired, substantially and habitually, the spirit of meditation. It should be known that the purpose of discursive meditation on divine subjects is the acquisition of some knowledge and love of God. Each time individuals procure through meditation some of this knowledge and love they do so by an act. Many acts, in no matter what area, will engender a habit. Similarly, through many particular acts of this loving knowledge a person reaches the point at which a habit is formed in the soul. God, too, is wont to effect this habit in many souls, placing them in contemplation without these acts as means, or at least without many of them.

14.2.(2). What the soul, therefore, was gradually acquiring through the labor of meditation on particular ideas has now, as we said, been converted into habitual and substantial, general loving knowledge. This knowledge is neither distinct nor particular, as was the previous knowledge. Accordingly the moment prayer begins, the soul, as one with a store of water, drinks peaceably without the labor and the need to fetch the water through the channels of past considerations, forms, and figures. The moment it recollects itself in the presence of God it enters into an act of general, loving, peaceful, and tranquil knowledge, drinking wisdom and love and delight.

14.3. This is why people experience difficulty and displeasure when, despite their being in this calm, they meet others who want to make them meditate and work with particular

concepts. Their experience resembles that of a suckling child who finds that the breast is taken away just when it is beginning to taste the milk that was gathered there for it. As a result it is forced to renew its efforts of grasping and squeezing. Or their experience is like that of a person who, while enjoying the substance of the fruit, once the rind is peeled is forced to stop and begin again to remove the rind from the fruit even though the fruit has already been peeled. In such an instance the person would fail to find the rind and cease enjoying the substance of the fruit that is at hand. Or this is like turning away from a captured prey to go hunting for another.

14.4. Many behave similarly at the beginning of this state. They think that the whole matter consists in understanding particular ideas and in reasoning through images and forms (the rind of the spirit). Since they do not encounter these images in that loving, substantial quietude where nothing is understood particularly and in which they like to rest, they believe they are wasting time and straying from the right road; and they turn back to search for the rind of images and reasoning. They are unsuccessful in their search because the rind has already been removed. There is no enjoyment of the substance nor ability to meditate, and they become disturbed with the thought of backsliding and going astray. They are indeed getting lost, but not in the way they imagine, for they are losing the exercise of their own senses and first mode of experience. This loss indicates that they are approaching the spirit being imparted to them, in which the less they understand the further they penetrate into the night of the spirit - the subject of this book. They must pass through this night to a union with God beyond all knowing.

14.5. There is little to be said about the second sign, for it is obvious that these persons at this time necessarily find worldly images dissatisfying. Even those that concern God, which are more conformable to their state, fail to satisfy them, as we explained. Nevertheless, as we mentioned above,<sup>2</sup> the imagination usually wanders back and forth during this recollection. But these individuals do not desire or find delight in this; rather, they are troubled about it because of the disturbance it brings to that gratifying peace.

14.6. Nor do I believe it is necessary to indicate here why the third sign (the loving general knowledge or awareness of God) is a requirement for discontinuing meditation. Some doctrine has already been expounded about this sign in our explanation of the first one, and afterward in the proper place we will have a special discussion of this when dealing with the general, obscure knowledge. This matter will be taken up after our treatise on the distinct, intellectual apprehensions. We will, however, state one reason that manifests how this loving general knowledge and awareness of God in the soul is required before discontinuing discursive meditation.

14.6.(2). Were individuals not to have this knowledge or attentiveness to God, they would, as a consequence, be neither doing anything nor receiving anything. Having left the discursive meditation of the sensitive faculties and still lacking contemplation (the general knowledge in which the spiritual faculties - memory, intellect, and will - are actuated and united in this passive, prepared knowledge), they would have no activity whatsoever relative to God. For a person can neither conceive nor receive knowledge already prepared save through either the sensitive or spiritual faculties. With the sensory

faculties, as we affirmed, one can make discursive meditation, seek out and form knowledge from the objects; and with the spiritual faculties one can enjoy the knowledge received without any further activity of the senses.

14.7. The difference between the functions of these two groups of faculties resembles that existing between toil and the enjoyment of the fruits of this toil; between the drudgery of the journey and the rest and quiet gladdening at its end; or again, between cooking a meal and eating without effort what has already been cooked and prepared; it is like the difference between receiving a gift and profiting by it. If the sensitive faculties are idle as to their work of discursive meditation, and the spiritual faculties as to the contemplation and knowledge received and formed in them, there is no basis for asserting that the soul is occupied. This knowledge is necessary, then, in order to leave the way of discursive meditation.

14.8. It is noteworthy that this general knowledge is at times so recondite and delicate (especially when purer, simpler, and more perfect), spiritual and interior that the soul does not perceive or feel it even though the soul is employed with it. This is especially so when, as we affirmed,<sup>3</sup> this knowledge is clearer, simpler and more perfect. And then this knowledge is still less perceptible when it shines on a purer soul, one freer from the particular ideas and concepts apprehensible by the senses or intellect. Since one lacks the feelings of the sensitive part of the soul, by not possessing these particular ideas and concepts that the senses and intellect are accustomed to act on, one does not perceive this knowledge.

14.8.(2). For this reason the purer, simpler, and more perfect the general knowledge is, the darker it seems to be and the less the intellect perceives. On the other hand, the less pure and simple the knowledge is in itself, although it enlightens the intellect, the clearer and more important it appears to the individual, since it is clothed, wrapped, or commingled with some intelligible forms apprehensible to the intellect or the senses.

14.9. The following example is a clear illustration of this. In observing a ray of sunlight stream through the window, we notice that the more it is pervaded with particles of dust, the clearer and more palpable and sensible it appears to the senses. Yet obviously the sun ray in itself is less pure, clear, simple, and perfect in that it is full of so many specks of dust. We also notice that when it is more purified of these specks of dust it seems more obscure and impalpable to the material eye. And the purer it is, the more obscure and inapprehensible it seems to be. If the ray of sunlight should be entirely cleansed and purified of all dust particles, even the most minute, it would appear totally obscure and incomprehensible to the eye since visible things, the object of the sense of sight, would be absent. Thus the eye would find no images on which to rest, because light is not the proper object of sight but only the means by which visible things are seen. If there is nothing visible off which the ray of light can reflect, nothing will be seen. If the ray, then, were to enter through one window and go out another without striking any quantitative object, it would be invisible. Yet the ray of sunlight would be purer and cleaner than when it is more manifestly perceived because it is filled with visible objects.

14.10. The spiritual light has a similar relationship to the intellect, the eye of the soul. This supernatural general knowledge and light shines so purely and simply in the intellect and is so divested and freed of all intelligible forms (the objects of the intellect) that it is imperceptible to the soul. This knowledge, when purer, is even at times the cause of darkness because it dispossesses the intellect of its customary lights, forms, and phantasies and effects a noticeable darkness.

14.10.(2). When this divine light does not strike so forcibly, individuals apprehend neither darkness, nor light, nor anything at all from heavenly or earthly sources. Thus they sometimes remain in deep oblivion and afterward will not realize where they were, or what occurred, or how the time passed. As a result it can and does happen that a person will spend many hours in this oblivion, yet on returning to self think that only a moment or no time at all has passed.

14.11. The purity and simplicity of the knowledge is the cause of this oblivion. While occupying a person's soul it renders that soul simple, pure, and clear of all the apprehensions and forms through which the senses and memory were acting when conscious of time. And thus it leaves the soul in oblivion and unaware of time.

14.11.(2). Although, as we asserted, the prayer lasts a long while, it seems of short duration to these souls since they have been united with pure knowledge, which is independent of time. This is the short prayer that, it is said, pierces the heavens [Ecclus. 35:17]. It is short because it is not in time, and it pierces the heavens because the soul is united with heavenly knowledge. When these persons return to themselves they observe the effects this knowledge produced in them without their having been aware of it. These effects are: an elevation of the mind to heavenly knowledge and a withdrawal and abstraction from all objects, forms, and figures and from the remembrance of them.

14.11.(3). David declares that such was his experience on returning to himself after this oblivion: *Vigilavi, et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto* (I became conscious and discovered that I was like the solitary sparrow on the housetop) [Ps. 102:8]. By solitary he refers to the withdrawal and abstraction from all things; by the housetop, to the mind elevated on high. The soul remains, in consequence, as though ignorant of all things since it only knows God without knowing how it knows him. For this reason the bride in the Song of Songs, when she states that she went down to him, numbers unknowing among the effects this sleep and oblivion produced in her, saying: *Nescivi* (I knew not) [Sg. 6:12].<sup>4</sup>

14.11.(4). As we mentioned,<sup>5</sup> it seems to individuals when occupied with this knowledge that they are idle because they are not working with their senses or faculties. Nevertheless they must believe that they are not wasting time, for even though the harmonious interaction of their sensory and spiritual faculties ceases, the intellect is occupied with knowledge in the way we explained.<sup>6</sup> This is why, also, in the Song of Songs, the wise bride responded to one of her doubts: *Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat* [Sg. 5:2]. This was like saying: Though I sleep, according to what I am naturally, by ceasing to work, my heart watches, supernaturally elevated to supernatural knowledge.

14.12. But one should not think this knowledge, if it is to be all we said it was, will necessarily cause oblivion. This forgetfulness occurs only when the knowledge abstracts the soul from the exercise of all the natural and spiritual faculties. Because such knowledge does not always occupy the entire soul, this forgetfulness is less frequent. The knowledge we are discussing only requires abstraction of the intellect from all particular knowledge, be it of temporal or spiritual things, and an unwillingness to think on these things, as we have said.<sup>7</sup> For then we have a sign that the soul is occupied.

14.12.(2). This sign is necessary for recognizing this knowledge when it is communicated only to the intellect. For that is what happens when it is sometimes imperceptible to the soul. When, however, there is also a communication to the will, as there almost always is, people will not fail to understand more or less their being occupied with this knowledge if they want to discern the matter. For they will be aware of the delight of love, without particular knowledge of what they love. As a result they will call it a general loving knowledge.

14.12.(3). This communication, consequently, is called a general loving knowledge, for just as it is imparted obscurely to the intellect, so too a vague delight and love are given to the will without any distinct knowing of what is loved.

14.13. This explanation is sufficient at present to understand the need for this knowledge before leaving the way of discursive meditation and for the assurance that, despite its apparent idleness, the soul is well employed if these three signs are noticeable. It is also sufficient for an understanding of how the representation of this light in a more comprehensible and palpable way is not a sign of its greater purity, sublimity, and clarity, as was demonstrated<sup>8</sup> through the example of the ray of sunlight permeated with dust particles and thereby perceptible to the eye. Evidently, as Aristotle and the theologians assert, the higher and more sublime the divine light, the darker it is to our intellect.<sup>9</sup>

14.14. A great deal can be said about this divine knowledge, both as to its nature and the effects it produces in the soul. We are reserving this discussion for its proper place.<sup>10</sup> There was no reason for such a lengthy treatment of it here, except that we did not want to leave this doctrine any more obscure than it is. Certainly, I admit, it is very obscure. To the fact that this knowledge is a subject seldom dealt with in this style, in word or in writing, since in itself it is extraordinary and obscure, can be added that of my unpolished style and lack of knowledge. Doubtful of my ability to explain it, I am often aware of exceeding the limits required by that part of the doctrine with which I am dealing. I confess that I sometimes do so intentionally because what is not understandable with one reason may become so by others. Also I think that such a procedure will give more clarification to later explanations.

14.15. In conclusion, I think a question concerning the duration of this knowledge should be answered. I will do so briefly in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 15

15. Proficients, at the beginning of their entry into this general knowledge of contemplation, must at times practice discursive meditation and work with the natural faculties.

15.1. A question may arise about our teaching. Are proficients (those whom God begins to place in this supernatural knowledge of contemplation), because they are beginning to experience contemplation, never again to practice discursive meditation and work with natural forms?

15.1.(2). In answer to this, we did not mean that those beginning to have this general loving knowledge should never again try to meditate. In the beginning of this state the habit of contemplation is not so perfect that one can at will enter into this act, neither is one so remote from discursive meditation as to be always incapable of it. One can at times in a natural way meditate discursively as before and discover something new in this. Indeed, at the outset, on judging through the signs mentioned above that the soul is not occupied in repose and knowledge, individuals will need to make use of meditation. This need will continue until they acquire the habit of contemplation to a certain perfect degree. The indication of this will be that every time they intend to meditate they immediately notice this knowledge and peace as well as their own lack of power or desire to meditate, as we said.<sup>1</sup> Until reaching this stage (of those already proficient in contemplation), people will sometimes meditate and sometimes be in contemplation.

15.2. They will often find themselves in this loving or peaceful awareness without having first engaged in any active work (regarding particular acts) with their faculties; they will not be working actively but only receiving. But on the other hand they will frequently find it necessary to aid themselves gently and moderately with meditation in order to enter this state.

15.2.(2). But once they have been placed in it, as we already pointed out, they do not work with the faculties. It is more exact to say that then the work is done in the soul and the knowledge and delight are already produced, than that the soul does anything besides attentively loving God and refraining from the desire to feel or see anything. In this loving awareness the soul receives God's self-communication passively, just as people receive light passively without doing anything else but keeping their eyes open. This reception of the light infused supernaturally into the soul is passive knowing. It is affirmed that these individuals do nothing, not because they fail to understand but because they understand with no effort other than receiving what is bestowed. This is what happens when God bestows illuminations and inspirations, although here the person freely receives this general obscure knowledge.

15.3. One should not commingle other, more palpable lights of forms, concepts, or figures of meditative discourse if one wants to receive this divine light in greater simplicity and abundance, for none of these tangible lights are like that serene, limpid light. If individuals were to desire to consider and understand particular things, however spiritual these things may be, they would hinder the general, limpid, and simple light of



the spirit. They would be interfering by their cloudy thoughts. When an obstruction is placed in front of the eye, you are impeded from seeing the light and the view before you.

15.4. What clearly follows is that when individuals have finished purifying and voiding themselves of all forms and apprehensible images, they will abide in this pure and simple light and be perfectly transformed in it. This light is never lacking to the soul, but because of creature forms and veils that weigh on it and cover it, the light is never infused. If individuals would eliminate these impediments and veils and live in pure nakedness and poverty of spirit, as we will explain later, their soul in its simplicity and purity would then be immediately transformed into simple and pure Wisdom, the Son of God. As soon as natural things are driven out of the enamored soul, the divine are naturally and supernaturally infused since there can be no void in nature.<sup>2</sup>

15.5. When spiritual persons cannot meditate, they should learn to remain in God's presence with a loving attention and a tranquil intellect, even though they seem to themselves to be idle. For little by little and very soon the divine calm and peace with a wondrous, sublime knowledge of God, enveloped in divine love, will be infused into their souls. They should not interfere with forms or discursive meditations and imaginings. Otherwise the soul will be disquieted and drawn out of its peaceful contentment to distaste and repugnance. And if, as we said, scruples about their inactivity arise, they should remember that pacification of the soul (making it calm and peaceful, inactive and desireless) is no small accomplishment. This, indeed, is what our Lord asks of us through David: *Vacate et videte quoniam ego sum Deus* [Ps. 46:11]. This would be like saying: Learn to be empty of all things - interiorly and exteriorly - and you will behold that I am God.<sup>3</sup>

## CHAPTER 16

16. The imaginative apprehensions represented supernaturally to the phantasy are incapable of serving as a proximate means to union with God.

16.1. After our having discussed the natural apprehensions that the phantasy and imagination receive and work with through discursive meditation, it is appropriate that we discuss the supernatural apprehensions that are called imaginative visions. These visions pertain to the phantasy just as natural apprehensions do because they belong to the category of image, form, and figure.

16.2. You should know that by this term "imaginative vision" we are referring to everything supernaturally represented to the imagination under the category of image, form, figure, and species. All the apprehensions and species represented naturally to the soul through the five bodily senses and impressed upon it can be represented to it supernaturally without the intervention of the exterior senses.

16.2.(2). This interior sense, the phantasy, together with the memory, is for the intellect the archives or receptacle in which all the intelligible forms and images are received. Like a mirror, this faculty contains them within itself, whether they come to it from the five bodily senses or supernaturally. It in turn presents them to the intellect, and there the intellect considers and makes a judgment about them. Not only is the phantasy capable of this, but it can even compose and imagine other objects resembling those known.

16.3. It is noteworthy that as the five exterior senses send the images and species of their objects to these interior senses, so God and the devil can supernaturally represent to these faculties - without the exterior senses - the same images and species; indeed, much more beautiful and perfect ones. God often represents many things to individuals through these images, and teaches them great wisdom, as is obvious throughout Scripture. For example: Isaiah beheld God in his glory under the form of smoke covering the temple and under the form of the seraphim covering their faces and feet with their wings [Is. 6:2-4]; Jeremiah saw the rod keeping watch [Jer. 1:11]; and Daniel, a multitude of visions [Dan. 7:10]; and so on.

16.3.(2). The devil, too, attempts with his seemingly good visions to deceive a person. An example of this is found in the Book of Kings, where we read that he deceived all of Ahab's prophets by representing to their imaginations the horns with which, he claimed, Ahab was to destroy the Assyrians. This was a lie [1 Kgs. 22:11-12, 21-22]. And then there are the visions Pilate's wife had about not condemning Christ [Mt. 27:19]; and many others.

16.3.(3). It is understandable, therefore, how in this mirror of the proficient's phantasy these imaginative visions are received more frequently than are the corporeal visions in the exterior senses. As far as image and species are concerned these visions do not differ from those coming through the exterior senses. But as for their perfection and the effect produced, there is a great difference, for since they are supernatural and more interior they are more subtle and effective in the soul. Yet this does not mean that some of the

exterior corporeal visions may not be more effective, since after all God gives his communications as he pleases. But we are dealing with these visions insofar as they are in themselves more spiritual.

16.4. The devil ordinarily comes with his wiles, natural or supernatural, to this sense, the imagination and phantasy, for it is the gate and entry to the soul. Here the intellect comes as though to a seaport or market to buy and sell provisions. As a result, God - and the devil too - comes here with the jewels of images and supernatural forms to offer them to the intellect. Yet God does not depend on this means alone for instructing the soul. He dwells in it substantially and can impart knowledge to it by himself or by other means.

16.5. There is no reason to delay in giving signs for the discernment of good visions from bad ones, nor in enumerating the various kinds. My sole intention here is to instruct the intellect about them so that it may not be hindered and impeded from union with divine wisdom by the good ones, nor deceived by the false ones.

16.6. I say, then, that since these imaginative apprehensions, visions, and other forms or species are presented through some image or particular idea, individuals should neither feed upon nor encumber themselves with them. And this is true whether these visions be false and diabolical or if they be recognized as authentic and from God. Neither should people desire to accept them or keep them. Thus these persons can remain detached, divested, pure, simple, and without any mode or method as the union demands.

16.7. The reason is that in being apprehended these forms are always represented, as we said,<sup>1</sup> in some limited mode or manner. But God's wisdom, to which the intellect must be united, has neither mode nor manner, neither does it have limits nor does it pertain to distinct and particular knowledge, because it is totally pure and simple. That the two extremes, the soul and divine Wisdom, may be united, they will have to come to accord by means of a certain likeness. As a result the soul must also be pure and simple, unlimited and unattached to any particular knowledge, and unmodified by the boundaries of form, species, and image. Since God cannot be encompassed by any image, form, or particular knowledge, in order to be united with him the soul should not be limited by any particular form or knowledge.

16.8. The Holy Spirit in Deuteronomy clearly manifests that God has no form or likeness: *Vocem verborum ejus audistis, et formam penitus non vidistis* (You heard the voice of his words, and you saw absolutely no form in God) [Dt. 4:12]. But he affirms that darkness, the cloud, and obscurity (that vague, dark knowledge, we mentioned,<sup>2</sup> in which the soul is united to God) were present. Then further on he adds: *Non vidistis aliquam similitudinem in die qua locutus est vobis Dominus in Horeb de medio ignis* (You did not see God in any image that day on Mount Horeb when he spoke with you from the midst of the fire) [Dt. 4:15].

16.9. The Holy Spirit also asserts in the Book of Numbers that the soul cannot reach God's height, insofar as is possible in this life, by means of any forms or figures. For God reproves Aaron and Miriam for murmuring against their brother Moses and thus lets them

know the high state of union and friendship in which he had placed Moses: *Si quis inter vos fuerit propheta Domini, in visiones apparebo ei, vel per somnium loquar ad illum. At non talis servus meus Moyses, qui in omni domo mea fidelissimus est: ore enim ad os loquor ei, palam, et non per aenigmata, et figuras Dominum videt* (If there is any prophet of the Lord among you, I will appear to him in some vision or form, or speak with him in his dreams. But no one is like my servant Moses, the most faithful one in all my house, and I speak with him mouth to mouth, and he does not see God through comparisons, likenesses, and figures) [Nm. 12:6-8].

16.9.(2). Manifestly, in this high state of union God does not communicate himself to the soul - nor is this possible - through the disguise of any imaginative vision, likeness, or figure, but mouth to mouth: the pure and naked essence of God (the mouth of God in love) with the pure and naked essence of the soul (the mouth of the soul in the love of God).

16.10. To reach this essential union of love of God, a person must be careful not to lean upon imaginative visions, forms, figures, or particular ideas, since they cannot serve as a proportionate and proximate means for such an effect; they would be a hindrance instead. As a result a person should renounce them and endeavor to avoid them. The only reason to admit and value them would be the profit and good effect the genuine ones bring to the soul. But admitting them is unnecessary to obtain this good effect; for the sake of progress, rather, one should always deny them.

16.10.(2). As with the exterior corporeal visions, the good these imaginative visions can communicate to the soul is either knowledge, or love, or sweetness. But in order for them to do this it is not necessary for a person to have the desire to accept them. As we pointed out,<sup>3</sup> at the very moment they are present in the imagination they are also in the soul and infuse knowledge and love, or sweetness, or whatever God wants them to cause.

16.10.(3). They are present to the imagination and the soul together, but their effects may not be simultaneous. They produce their main effect in the soul passively, without its being able to hinder this, even though it may desire to do so. It was similarly powerless to know how to acquire the effect - although it did know how to become disposed. As a window is unable to hinder the ray of sunlight shining upon it and is disposed through its cleanness to be illumined passively without active effort, so too, however much individuals may want to reject these visions they cannot but receive the influences and communications of those figures. A negative will, humbly and lovingly resigned, cannot resist the supernatural infusions. Only imperfection and impurity of soul hinder these communications, just as stains on a window impede the bright sunlight.

16.11. Obviously, in the measure that individuals divest themselves of willful attachments to the apprehensions of those stain-like figures, forms, and images - the wrappings of spiritual communications - these persons will prepare themselves for the goods and communications that are caused by them. Leaving aside all those apprehensions, which are like curtains and veils covering the spiritual goods they contain, the individuals will receive these goods in greater abundance, clarity, freedom of spirit, and simplicity. If the

soul desires to feed upon them, the spirit and senses will be so occupied that a free and simple communication of spirituality will be impossible. For, obviously, if it is occupied with the rind, the intellect will have no freedom to receive those spiritual communications.

16.11.(2). Should individuals desire to admit and pay attention to these apprehensions, they would be setting up an encumbrance and remaining content with the least important - the form, image, and particular knowledge, which is the only kind of knowledge they can get from these visions. For people are unable to apprehend or understand the more important factor, the spirituality infused in the soul; neither do they know the way they receive this spirituality nor how they may speak about it, since it is purely spiritual. According to their own way of knowing, the only knowledge they can have about these visions concerns the less important element, the forms apprehended through the senses. I affirm, consequently, that the unintelligible or unimaginable element in these visions is communicated passively, exclusive of any effort of the soul to understand. A person would not even know how to go about making this effort.

16.12. The eyes of the soul, then, should be ever withdrawn from distinct, visible, and intelligible apprehensions. Such elements are pertinent to sense and provide no security or foundation for faith. Its eyes should be fixed on the invisible, on what belongs not to sense but to spirit, and on what, as it is not contained in a sensible figure, brings the soul to union with God in faith, the proper means, as was said.<sup>4</sup> These visions will be substantially advantageous to the soul insofar as faith is concerned if it knows clearly how to reject their sensible and intelligible aspect and make good use of the purpose for which God gives them. As we pointed out,<sup>5</sup> God does not bestow corporeal visions so that a person will desire and become attached to them.

16.13. A question, though, may arise concerning this subject: If it is true that God in giving supernatural visions does not want one thereby to desire, lean upon, or pay attention to them, why does he give them at all? Through them a person can fall into numerous dangers and errors, or at least encounter the many impediments to further progress described here. Furthermore, why would God do this if he can communicate to the soul substantially and spiritually what he bestows upon it through the sensible communication of these visions and forms?

16.14. We will explain our answer to this question in the following chapter. There we will present for spiritual persons and their teachers doctrine that, in my opinion, is both important and necessary. We will expound God's method and purpose in bestowing these visions. As a result of their ignorance about visions, many are unenlightened on how to behave and how to guide themselves or others through them to union. They think that, because of their awareness of the genuineness and divine origin of these visions, it is good to admit and trust them. They do not reflect that, as with worldly goods, failure to deny them can be a hindrance, and cause attachment and possessiveness concerning them. They consider it beneficial to admit some visions as true and reject others as false. In this way they subject themselves and other souls to the considerable labor and danger of discerning the truth or falsity of these visions. God does not impose this task upon

them, nor does he desire the exposure of simple and unlearned people to this dangerous endeavor, for these persons have faith, a sound and safe doctrine, the means by which they are to journey.

16.15. One cannot advance in faith without closing one's eyes to everything pertaining to the senses and to clear, particular knowledge. Though St. Peter was truly certain of his vision of Christ's glory in the transfiguration, yet after relating the fact in his second canonical epistle [2 Pt. 1:16-18] he did not want anyone to take this as the chief testimony for certitude. But leading them on to faith he declared: *Et habemus firmiorem propheticum sermonem: cui benefacitis attendentes, quasi lucernae lucenti in caliginoso loco, donec dies elucescat* (We have a more certain testimony than this vision of Tabor: the sayings and words of the prophets bearing testimony to Christ which you must make good use of, as a candle shining in a dark place). [2 Pt. 1:19]

16.15.(2). Reflecting on this comparison, we discover the doctrine we are teaching here. Telling us to behold the faith spoken of by the prophets as we would a candle shining in a dark place, he asserts that we should live in darkness, with our eyes closed to all other lights, and that in this darkness faith alone - which is dark also - should be the light we use. If we want to employ these other bright lights of distinct knowledge, we cease to make use of faith, the dark light, and we cease to be enlightened in the dark place mentioned by St. Peter. This place (the intellect - the holder on which the candle of faith is placed) must remain in darkness until the day, in the next life, when the clear vision of God dawns upon the soul; and in this life, until the daybreak of transformation in and union with God, the goal of a person's journey.

## CHAPTER 17

17. An answer to the proposed question. God's procedure and purpose in communicating spiritual goods by means of the senses.

17. 1. A great deal may be said about God's intention (the elevation of a soul from its low state to divine union) and method of procedure in bestowing these goods. All spiritual books deal with these points, and in our explanation we will also consider them.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, in this chapter I will do no more than offer a sufficient solution to our question, which is: Since there is so much danger and hindrance to progress in these supernatural visions, as we said,<sup>2</sup> why does God, who is all wise and in favor of removing obstacles and snares, communicate them?

17.2. An answer to this requires the establishment of three fundamental principles. The first comes from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: *Quae autem sunt, a Deo ordinata sunt* (The works that are done are well-ordered by God) [Rom. 13:1].

17.2.(2). The second comes from the Holy Spirit in the Book of Wisdom: *Disponit omnia suaviter*. This is similar to stating: The Wisdom of God, though she touches from one end to the other (from one extreme to the other), disposes all things gently [Wis. 8:1].

17.2.(3). The third comes from the theologians who say: *Omnia movet secundum modum eorum* (God moves each thing according to its mode).

17.3. In order that God lift the soul from the extreme of its low state to the other extreme of the high state of divine union, he must obviously, in view of these fundamental principles, do so with order, gently, and according to the mode of the soul. Since the order followed in the process of knowing involves the forms and images of created things, and since knowledge is acquired through the senses, God, to achieve his work gently and to lift the soul to supreme knowledge, must begin by touching the low state and extreme of the senses. And from there he must gradually bring the soul after its own manner to the other end, spiritual wisdom, which is incomprehensible to the senses. Thus, naturally or supernaturally, he brings people to his supreme spirit by first instructing them through discursive meditation and through forms, images, and sensible means, according to their own manner of coming to understand.

17.4. This is the reason God gives a person visions, forms, images, and other sensitive and spiritual knowledge - not because he does not desire to give spiritual wisdom immediately, in the first act. He would do this if the two extremes (human and divine, sense and spirit) could through the ordinary process be united by only one act, and if he could exclude the many preparatory acts that are so connected in gentle and orderly fashion that, as is the case with natural agents, each is the foundation and preparation for the next. The first preparative acts serve the second; the second serve the third, and so on. Therefore God perfects people gradually, according to their human nature, and proceeds from the lowest and most exterior to the highest and most interior.

17.4.(2). He first perfects the corporeal senses, moving one to make use of natural

exterior objects that are good, such as hearing sermons and Masses, seeing holy objects, mortifying the palate at meals, and disciplining the sense of touch through penance and holy rigor.

17.4.(3). When these senses are somewhat disposed, he is wont to perfect them more by granting some supernatural favors and gifts to confirm them further in good. These supernatural communications are, for example, corporeal visions of saints or holy things, very sweet odors, locutions, and extreme delight in the sense of touch. The senses are greatly confirmed in virtue through these communications and the appetites withdrawn from evil objects.

17.4.(4). Besides this, the interior bodily senses with which we are dealing, such as the imagination and phantasy, are gradually perfected and accustomed to good through considerations, meditations, and holy reasonings; and through all this the spirit is instructed.

17.4.(5). When through this natural exercise these interior senses are prepared, God is wont to enlighten and spiritualize them further with some supernatural imaginative visions from which the spirit profits notably at the same time, as we affirmed. This natural and supernatural exercise of the interior sense gradually reforms and refines the spirit.

17.4.(6). This is God's method to bring a soul step by step to the innermost good, although it may not always be necessary for him to keep so mathematically to this order, for sometimes God bestows one kind of communication without the other, or a less interior one by means of a more interior one, or both together. The process depends on what God judges expedient for the soul, or on how he wants to grant it favors. But his ordinary procedure conforms with our explanation.

17.5. By this method, then, God instructs people and makes them spiritual. He begins by communicating spirituality to them, in accord with their littleness or small capacity, through elements that are exterior, palpable, and accommodated to sense. He does this so that by means of the rind of those sensible things, in themselves good, the spirit, making progress in particular acts and receiving morsels of spiritual communication, may form a habit in spiritual things and reach the actual substance of spirit foreign to all sense. Individuals obtain this only little by little, after their own manner, and by means of the senses to which they have always been attached.

17.5.(2). In the measure that souls approach spirit in their dealings with God, they divest and empty themselves of the ways of the senses, of discursive and imaginative meditation. When they have completely attained spiritual communion with God they will be void of all sensory apprehensions concerning God. The more an object approaches one extreme, the further it retreats from the other; on complete attainment of one extreme it will be wholly separated from the other. There is a frequently quoted spiritual axiom that runs: *Gustato spiritu, desipit omnis caro* (Once the taste and savor of the spirit is experienced, everything carnal is insipid). The ways of the flesh (which refer to the use of



the senses in spiritual things) afford neither profit nor delight. This is obvious. If something is spiritual it is incomprehensible to the senses; but if the senses can grasp it, it is no longer purely spiritual. The more knowledge the senses and natural apprehensions have about it, the less spiritual and supernatural it will be, as we explained above.<sup>3</sup>

17.6. As a result the perfect spirit pays no attention to the senses. It neither receives anything through them, nor uses them principally, nor judges them to be requisite in its relationship with God, as it did before its spiritual growth.

17.6.(2). A passage from St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians bears this meaning: *Cum essem parvulus, loquebar ut parvulus, sapiebam ut parvulus, cogitabam ut parvulus. Quando autem factus sum vir, evacuavi quae erant parvuli* (When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I knew as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things) [1 Cor. 13:11].

17.6.(3). We have already explained how sensible things and the knowledge the spirit can abstract from them are the work of a child. Those who are always attached to them, and never become detached, will never stop being like a little child, or speaking of God as a child, or knowing and thinking of God as a child. In their attachment to the rind of sense (the child), they will never reach the substance of spirit (the perfect person). For the sake of their own spiritual growth, therefore, persons should not admit these revelations, even though God is the author of them, just as a child must be weaned in order to accustom its palate to a hardier and more substantial diet.

17.7. Is it necessary, you ask, for the soul while it is a child to accept these sensible things and then set them aside when grown, just as an infant must be nourished at the breast until, when it has grown older, it can be weaned?

17.7.(2). I reply in regard to discursive meditation, in which individuals begin their quest for God, that it is true that they must not turn away from the breast of the senses for their nourishment until they arrive at the time and season suitable for so doing - that is, when God brings the soul to a more spiritual converse, to contemplation, of which we spoke in chapter 13 of this book.

17.7.(3). But when there is a question of imaginative visions or other supernatural communications apprehensible by the senses and independent of one's free will, I affirm that at whatever time or season they occur (in the state of perfection or one less perfect) individuals must have no desire to admit them even though they come from God. And this for two reasons:

17.7.(4). First, because God, as we said,<sup>4</sup> produces his effect in the soul without its being able to hinder this, although it can impede the vision - which often happens. Consequently, the effect to be communicated becomes more substantial even though it is given differently. As we said, people cannot hinder the goods God desires to impart, nor in fact do they do so except by some imperfection or possessiveness. And there is no imperfection or possessiveness if they renounce these apprehensions with humility and

misgivings.

17.7.(5). Second, by so doing individuals free themselves from the task and danger of discerning the true visions from the false ones and deciding whether their visions come from an angel of light or of darkness. Such an effort is profitless, a waste of time, a hindrance to the soul, an occasion of many imperfections as well as of spiritual stagnancy since a person is not then employed with the more important things and disencumbered of the trifles of particular apprehensions and knowledge. This was mentioned regarding the corporeal visions, and it will be asserted further on in respect to imaginative visions.

17.8. One can be sure that if our Lord did not have to lead a soul according to its own manner of being, he would never communicate the abundance of his Spirit through these aqueducts of forms, figures, and particular knowledge by which he sustains the soul with crumbs. This is why David said: *Mittit crystallum suam sicut bucellas*, which is as much as to say, he sent his wisdom to souls in morsels [Ps. 147:17]. It is regrettable that a soul, having as it were an infinite capacity, should be fed, because of its limited spirituality and sensory incapacity, with morsels for the senses.

17.8.(2). St. Paul, too, when writing to the Corinthians grieved over this littleness and limited preparation for the reception of spirituality: "When I came to you, brethren, I could not speak as to spiritual persons, but only as to carnal, because you were unable to receive it, nor can you now." *Tamquam parvulis in Christo lac potum vobis dedi, non escam* (As to infants in Christ I gave you milk to drink and not solid food to eat) [1 Cor. 3:1-2].

17.9. In conclusion, individuals must not fix the eyes of their souls on that rind of the figure and object supernaturally accorded to the exterior senses, such as locutions and words to the sense of hearing; visions of saints and beautifully resplendent lights to the sense of sight; fragrance to the sense of smell; delicious and sweet tastes to the palate; and other delights, usually derived from the spirit, to the sense of touch, as is more commonly the case with spiritual persons. Neither must they place their eyes on interior imaginative visions. They must instead renounce all these things.

17.9.(2). They must fix the eyes of their souls only on the valuable spirituality these experiences cause, and endeavor to preserve it by putting into practice and properly carrying out whatever is for the service of God, and pay no attention to those representations, nor desire any sensible gratification.

17.9.(3). With this attitude, individuals take from these apprehensions only what God wants them to take, that is, the spirit of devotion, since God gives these sense experiences for no other principal reason. And they reject the sensory element, which would not have been imparted had they possessed the capacity to receive spirituality without the apprehensions and exercises of the senses.

## CHAPTER 18

18. The harm caused by some spiritual masters in not giving souls adequate guidance with regard to the visions mentioned. An explanation of how both can be misled even by visions that have a divine origin.

18.1. We are unable to be as brief on this subject of visions as we would like because of the amount of material to be covered. Although we have presented the substance of a suitable explanation of what spiritual persons should do about these visions and how their masters should guide and deal with them, yet it will not be superfluous to particularize a little more on this doctrine and shed some light on the harm that can arise. Even if the visions are from God, spiritual persons and their masters can suffer harm if they are very credulous about them.

18.2. The reason motivating me to enlarge somewhat on this subject is the want of discretion that I have noticed - from what I can understand - in some spiritual masters. Trusting these supernatural apprehensions, counting them to be authentic and of divine origin, these directors together with their penitents have gone astray and become bewildered, realizing in themselves the words of our Savior: *Si caecus caeco ducatum praestet, ambo in foveam cadunt* (If one blind person leads another, both fall into the pit) [Mt. 15:14]. He does not say they will fall, but that they do fall. It is not necessary to wait until they fall into error in order for them to fall. The mere fact that the one blind person dares to be guided by the other is already an error; and thus the first, though less serious, fall is taken.

18.2.(2). The method of some directors is sufficient to encumber souls receiving these visions, or even to lead them astray. They do not guide them along the paths of humility, and they give them a free hand in this matter, which causes a want of the true spirit of faith. Neither do these directors ground their disciples in faith, for they frequently make these visions a topic of conversation. Consequently, the individuals get the idea that their directors are setting store by their visions, and as a result they do the same and stay attached to them, instead of being built up in faith, detached, emptied, and divested of apprehensions so as to soar to the heights of dark faith.

18.2.(3). All this arises from the attitude and language the individuals observe in their directors in these matters. This is so true that - I know not how - these persons with immeasurable ease, and an inability to do otherwise, beget a high esteem for these visions - even to the point of withdrawing their eyes from the abyss of faith.

18.3. The reason souls become so readily engrossed in visions must be the sensible aspect toward which humans have a natural bent. And since individuals are already attracted and disposed through their apprehensions of those distinct and sensible things, it is enough for them to see in their director, or any other person, some esteem for these visions, and they will acquire the same. Not only this but their desire for these visions is also stimulated, and they feed upon them and become more inclined and attached to them without being aware of it.

18.3.(2). Numerous imperfections consequently arise, because these individuals lose humility, at least. They think their visions are significant, that they possess something profitable, and that God is giving them prominence. They go about feeling pleased and somewhat satisfied with themselves, which is against humility. Although these persons are unaware of it, the devil then secretly augments this feeling and begins to suggest thoughts about others: whether others receive these visions or not, or if their visions are authentic or not. Such thoughts are contrary to holy simplicity and spiritual solitude.

18.4. Let us bring to a close for now our discussion of these kinds of harm and of how there is no growth in faith unless souls turn from these visions. There are other, more subtle kinds of harm, more hateful in God's eyes, that may not be as noticeable as these, but that do result from this attitude. The source of these other kinds of harm lies in a failure to walk wholly on the road of nakedness. We will discuss all this when we treat of spiritual gluttony and the other six vices. Then, God willing, we will expound many points about these subtle and delicate stains that, because the director does not guide souls along the way of denudation, adhere to the spirit.<sup>1</sup>

18.5. Let us now say something about the attitude of some confessors who give their penitents poor instructions. Assuredly, I wish I knew how to speak of this because I think it is difficult to explain how the spirit of the disciple is secretly fashioned after that of the spiritual father. This subject involves such prolixity that it is wearisome to me, for it seems one factor cannot be explained without explaining another, since in these spiritual matters things are interrelated.

18.6. But to cover the matter sufficiently here, I might point out that it seems to me - and indeed it is so - that if the spiritual father has such a bent toward revelations that they produce in his soul some effect, pleasure, or complete satisfaction, he cannot avoid - even though unaware - affecting his disciples with this attitude and pleasure if they are not more advanced than he. And even if they are more advanced, the director can do serious harm by continuing to give direction. From the inclination the spiritual father has toward these visions and the gratification he finds in them there rises a certain esteem for them, and unless he is on his guard he will manifest indications of this to the persons he is directing. And if those persons have the same inclination, there cannot be between them, as far as I can see, anything but a communication of esteem for these matters.

18.7. To be less demanding, let us speak of the confessor who, inclined or not toward these visions, does not use the necessary care to disencumber and divest his disciple of desire for them, but rather makes the vision the topic of conversation and the main theme of his spiritual colloquies giving instruction on the signs for the discernment of good visions from bad ones.

18.7.(2). Although knowledge of these signs is worthwhile, there is no reason to burden the soul with this labor, solicitude, and danger; by refusing to pay attention to these visions, one escapes all this effort of discernment and does what one ought. But these confessors do not stop here. Observing that their disciples receive these manifestations from God, they ask them to request of him a revelation about some matter pertaining to

themselves or to others, and the foolish souls do so in the belief that this method of gaining knowledge is lawful. Merely because God, in the way or for the motive he wishes, grants a supernatural revelation, they think it is licit to desire that he grant it and they even petition him to do so.

18.8. If in response to their request God reveals the matter to them, they become more self-confident, thinking that God is pleased with their petition and desires it, whereas in reality he is displeased with such an entreaty and does not desire it. They often act or believe in accordance with the answer or revelation, for since they are attached to this manner of dealing with God, their will becomes adapted to these revelations and firmly rooted in them. They find natural satisfaction in them and fit them naturally into their own way of thinking. They often err exceedingly, and are then taken aback when something turns out differently than they had expected. Then doubts come to the fore concerning the divine origin of these revelations since events do not come to pass as they were led to believe.

18.8.(2). They presupposed two things: First, that the revelations were from God since from the beginning they firmly adhered to them. Yet that adherence was probably due to their natural inclination toward them, as we asserted. Second, that since the revelations were from God, events would occur according to what they themselves understood or thought about these revelations.

18.9. This belief was a gross delusion, for God's revelations or locutions do not always turn out according to people's understanding of them or according to what seems to be the meaning of the words. One should neither find assurance in them nor believe them blindly, even though one knows they are God's revelations, responses, or words. Though they may in themselves be certain and true, they are not always so in their causes or in our way of understanding them. We will prove this in the next chapter. We will also prove that, even though God answers questions supernaturally, he is not pleased to do so, but is even sometimes angered.

## CHAPTER 19

19. Even though visions and locutions from God are true, we can be misled by them. Proofs from Sacred Scripture.

19.1. We mentioned two reasons why, although, God's visions and locutions are true and certain in themselves, they are not always so for us. The first reason is that our manner of understanding them is defective, and the second is that their basic causes are sometimes variable. We will give proof for both with scriptural texts.

19.1.(2). Clearly, in regard to the first, not all revelations turn out according to what we understand by the words. The cause is that, since God is immense and profound, he usually includes in his prophecies, locutions, and revelations other ways, concepts, and ideas remarkably different from the meaning we generally find in them. And the surer and more truthful these latter are, the less they seem so to us.

19.1.(3). We see this at every step in Sacred Scripture. With a number of ancients, many of God's prophecies and locutions did not turn out as had been expected, because they understood them in their own way, in another very literal manner. This is apparent in the following texts.

19.2. In Genesis, God told Abraham when he had brought him into the land of the Canaanites: *Tibi dabo terram hanc* (I will give you this land) [Gn. 15:7]. And since God had promised this frequently, Abraham, already old and still receiving the promise, questioned God: *Domine unde scire possum quod possesurus sum eam?* (Lord, how, or by what sign, am I to know that I will possess it?) [Gn. 15:8]. Then God revealed to him that he was not going to possess it at all but that his offspring would after 400 years [Gn. 15:13]. Thus Abraham finally understood the promise, which in itself was true because, in bestowing the land on his offspring out of love for him, God gave it to him. Consequently Abraham was misled in his understanding of the prophecy. If he had acted according to his understanding he would have erred decidedly since the possession of this land was not to come about during his life. And those who saw him die without having received the promise of the prophecy, after having heard that God was going to grant the land to him, would have been baffled and left with the notion that the prophecy was false.

19.3. While Abraham's grandson Jacob was on his journey to Egypt at the time Joseph, his son, had ordered him to come because of the famine in Canaan, God appeared to Jacob and said: *Jacob, Jacob, noli timere, descende in Aegyptum, quia in gentem magnam faciam te ibi. Ego descendam tecum illuc, et inde adducam te revertentem* (Jacob, do not fear, go down to Egypt and I will go with you; and when you depart from there, I will lead you out and be your guide) [Gn. 46:1-4].

19.3.(2). These words were not fulfilled according to what we would understand from the way they sounded, for we know that saintly old Jacob died in Egypt and never returned from there alive [Gn 49:32]. But the prophecy was to be fulfilled in his offspring whom God, acting himself as guide along the way, delivered from Egypt years later. Manifestly, then, anyone knowing of God's promise to Jacob would have thought that Jacob, who

through God's favor and command had entered Egypt in person and alive, would unquestionably make his exit alive and in person, since God had promised this and the help to achieve it. Such a one would have been misled, and filled with wonder over Jacob's death in Egypt because God would not have thereby fulfilled his promise as expected. Although God's promise in itself was true, there could have been much delusion concerning it.

19.4. In the Book of Judges we also read that when all the tribes of Israel united for war to punish Benjamin's tribe for a certain iniquity, they were positive of victory because God had appointed them a captain of war. So certain were they that, when defeat came and 22,000 of their men were slain, they were amazed and baffled before God and they wept the entire day, ignorant of the cause of their downfall, for they had understood that victory would be theirs.

19.4.(2). And when they asked God if they should return to battle, he told them to return. Convinced that now victory was theirs, they set out with remarkable daring, and they were defeated the second time with a loss of 18,000 men. As a result they were extremely bewildered. They did not know what to do, because God had commanded them to wage war and yet they were always vanquished, but especially because they surpassed their enemy in number and strength: 400,000 to 25,700.

19.4.(3). They were deluded in their interpretation of God's words, which in themselves were not deceptive. He did not say they would conquer but that they should fight, for in these defeats God wished to punish a certain neglect and presumption of theirs and thus humble them. But when finally he replied that victory would be theirs, it was, though not without much strategy and hardship on their part [Jgs. 20:11-48].

19.5. In this and many other ways souls are misled by understanding God's locutions and revelations according to the letter, according to the outer rind. As has been explained, God's chief objective in conferring these revelations is to express and impart the spirit that is enclosed within the outer rind. This spirit is difficult to understand, much richer and more plentiful, very extraordinary and far beyond the boundaries of the letter.

19.5.(2). Anyone bound to the letter, locution, form, or figure apprehensible in the vision cannot avoid serious error and will later become confused for having been led according to the senses and not having made room for the spirit stripped of the letter. *Littera, enim, occidit, spiritus autem vivificat* (The letter kills and the spirit gives life) [2 Cor. 3:6]. The soul should renounce, then, the literal sense in these cases, and live in the darkness of faith, for faith is the spirit that is incomprehensible to the senses.

19.6. Because many of the children of Israel understood the words of the prophets very much according to the letter and because these prophecies did not turn out as expected, they began to disregard and distrust them. Hence a saying was born, becoming almost a proverb among them, by which they scoffed at the prophets. Isaiah complains of this in the following passage: *Quem docebit Dominus scientiam? Et quem intelligere faciet auditum? Ablactatos a lacte, avulsos ab uberibus. Quia manda remanda, manda remanda,*

expecta, reexpecta, expecta, reexpecta; modicum ibi, modicum ibi. In loquela enim labii, et lingua altera loquetur ad populum istum (Whom will God instruct? And to whom will he explain his word and prophecy? Only to those who are weaned and fresh from their mother's breast. For everyone is saying - concerning the prophets - promise and promise again, wait and wait some more, wait and wait some more, a word with you here, a word with you there. For with words from his lips, but in another tongue, he will speak to this people) [Is. 28:9-11].

19.6.(2). In this passage Isaiah clearly demonstrates the mockery these people made of the prophets and the derision repeated in the proverb, "wait and wait some more." He indicates that the prophecies were never fulfilled because the people were bound to the letter (the milk of infants) and to the senses (the breasts), which run contrary to the knowledge of the spirit. Because of this he says: To whom shall he teach the wisdom of his prophecies? And to whom shall he explain his doctrine, if not to those who are already weaned from the milk of the letter and the breasts of the senses? And because these people are not so weaned, they understand only according to the milk of the rind and letter, or according to the breasts of the senses, for they exclaim: promise and promise again, wait and wait some more, and so on. God must speak doctrine to them from his own mouth, and not theirs, and in a tongue other than theirs.

19.7. We must not consider a prophecy from the perspective of our perception and language, for God's language is another one, according to the spirit, very different from what we understand, and difficult. This is so true that even Jeremiah, a prophet himself, observing that the ideas in God's words were so different from the meaning people would ordinarily find in them, seems to be beguiled and defends the people: Heu, heu, heu, Domine Deus, ergone decipisti populum istum et Jerusalem, dicens: Pax erit vobis, et ecce pervenit gladius usque ad animam? (Alas, alas, alas, Lord God, have you perchance deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying: Peace will come to you; and behold the sword reaches even to the soul?) [Jer. 4:10].

19.7.(2). The reason for the misunderstanding was that the promised peace was to be effected between God and humans through the Messiah who was to be sent to them, whereas they took the words to mean temporal peace. Consequently, when wars and trials came upon them, it seemed God was deceiving them because everything was turning out contrary to their expectations. Thus they proclaimed as Jeremiah also did: Expectavimus pacem, et non est bonum (We had hoped for peace, and there is no blessing of peace) [Jer. 8:15]. Guiding themselves, then, by the literal sense it was impossible for them to avoid deception.

19.7.(3). Who will not be perplexed and misled if bound to the letter of all David's prophecies about Christ in the 71st psalm? Et dominabitur a mari usque ad mare; et a flumine usque ad terminos orbis terrarum (He shall reign from sea to sea; and from the river unto the ends of the earth) [Ps. 71:8]; and also, Liberabit pauperem a potente, et pauperem cui non erat adjutor (He will liberate the poor one from the power of the mighty, and the poor one who has no helper) [Ps. 71:12]. For afterward, Christ is born in an humble state, lives in poverty, and dies in misery; and not only did he fail to reign



temporally upon the earth, but he was subject to a lowly people until he died under Pontius Pilate's rule. He did not merely fail to liberate his poor disciples from the hands of the temporally powerful, but allowed them to be persecuted and slain for his name's sake.

19.8. These prophecies about Christ should have been understood in their spiritual sense, in which they were most true. Since Christ was God he was Lord not solely of the earth but of heaven too. And not merely was he to redeem the poor, who were to be his followers, and free them from the power of the devil (the mighty one against whom they had no helper), but he was also to make them heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

19.8.(2). In prophesying about Christ and his followers, God was speaking of the more important factors (the eternal kingdom and eternal freedom), and in their interpretation of these words the people dwelt on matters of slight importance (temporal dominion and temporal freedom) to which God pays little heed, since in his eyes freedom and a temporal dominion are neither freedom nor a kingdom.

19.8.(3). Blinded by the baseness of the letter and ignorant of the spirit and truth behind it, they killed their Lord and God, as St. Paul exclaimed: *Qui enim habitabant Jerusalem, et principes ejus hunc ignorantes, et voces prophetarum, quae per omne Sabbatum leguntur, judicantes impleverunt* (The inhabitants of Jerusalem, and its rulers, ignorant of who he was, and misunderstanding the sayings of the prophets recited each Sabbath, after judging him, put him to death) [Acts 13:27].

19.9. This difficulty in giving a suitable interpretation to God's words reached such a point that even Christ's very disciples, who went about with him, were deceived. For example: those two who after his death were journeying to the town of Emmaus, sad and distrustful, saying: *Nos autem sperabamus quod ipse esset redempturus Israel* (We were expecting that he would redeem Israel) [Lk. 24:21]. They also were of the opinion that his would be a temporal liberation and reign. But Christ our Redeemer, appearing to them, reproved them for being foolish, dull, and slow of heart to believe the things foretold by the prophets [Lk. 24:25].

19.9.(2). Even when he was about to ascend into heaven, some still maintained that dullness and queried of him: *Domine, si in tempore hoc restitues regnum Israel* (Lord, let us know if at this time you will restore the kingdom of Israel) [Acts 1:6].

19.9.(3). The Holy Spirit causes many things to be said in which he has a meaning different from that understood by humans. This is seen by what he brought Caiaphas to say of Christ: It is better that one man die than that the whole nation perish [Jn. 11:50]. Caiaphas did not say these words on his own, and he expressed and understood them in one way while the Holy Spirit did so in another.

19.10. Evidently, then, even though the words and revelations are from God we cannot find assurance in them, since in our understanding of them we can easily be deluded, and very much so. They embody an abyss and depth of spirit, and to want to limit them to our

interpretation and to what our senses can apprehend is like wanting to grasp a handful of air that will escape the hand entirely, leaving only a particle of dust.

19.11. Thus, the spiritual master should try to see to it that his disciples are not detained by the desire to pay heed to supernatural apprehensions (which are no more than small particles of spirit and the only thing the disciples will be left with), and he should turn them away from all visions and locutions and teach them to remain in freedom and the darkness of faith, in which liberty and abundance of spirit are received and, consequently, the wisdom and understanding proper to God's words.

19.11.(2). It is impossible for someone unspiritual to judge and understand the things of God correctly; and one is not spiritual if one judges them according to the senses. And thus even though these things are clothed in what is of the senses, they are not understood. This is what St. Paul really asserts: *Animalis autem homo non percipit ea quae sunt spiritus Dei; stultitia enim est illi, et non potest intelligere, quia de spiritualibus examinatur. Spiritualis autem iudicat omnia* (The animal person fails to perceive the things that are of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is unable to understand them because they are spiritual. Yet the spiritual person judges all things) [1 Cor. 2:14-15]. "The animal person" refers to those who use only the senses; "the spiritual person" to those who are neither bound to nor guided by the senses. It is therefore rash to dare communicate with God by means of supernatural, sensory apprehensions, or to allow anyone to do so.

19.12. For the sake of greater clarity here are some examples: Suppose God says to a saintly man who is deeply afflicted because of persecution by his enemies: "I will free you from your enemies." This prophecy could be true; nonetheless the man's enemies will prevail and kill him. Anyone who had given these words a temporal interpretation would have been deceived because God had been speaking of the true and principal freedom and victory - salvation, in which the soul is free and victorious over all its enemies much more truly and loftily than if liberated from them here below. This prophecy had greater truth and richness than was understandable through an interpretation that related the freedom to this life. By his words, God always refers to the more important and profitable meaning, whereas humans will refer the words to a less important sense, in their own way and for their own purpose, and thus be deceived.

19.12.(2). We see this in David's messianic prophecy: *Reges eos in virga ferrea, et tamquam vas figuli confringes eos* (You shall rule all nations with an iron rod, and dash them to pieces like a vessel of clay) [Ps. 2:9]. In this prophecy God referred to the principal and perfect dominion, which is the eternal one that did come to pass; not to the least important, temporal dominion, which did not come to pass during Christ's entire life on earth.

19.13. Here is another example: A soul has intense desires to be a martyr. God answers, "You shall be a martyr" and bestows deep interior consolation and confidence in the truth of this promise. Regardless of the promise, this person in the end does not die a martyr; yet the promise will have been true. Why, then, was there no fulfillment of the promise?

Because it will be fulfilled in its chief, essential meaning: the bestowal of the essential love and reward of a martyr. God truly grants the soul what it formally desired and what he promised it because the formal desire of the soul was not a manner of death but the service of God through martyrdom and the exercise of a martyr's love for him. Death through martyrdom in itself is of no value without this love, and God bestows martyrdom's love and reward perfectly by other means. Even though the soul does not die a martyr, it is profoundly satisfied since God has fulfilled its desire.

19.13.(2). When these aspirations and other similar ones born of love are unfulfilled in the way one imagined and understood them, they are fulfilled in another, far better way, and render more honor to God than was thought of in making the request. David proclaims: *Desiderium pauperum exaudivit Dominus* (The Lord has granted the poor their desire) [Ps. 10:17]. And in Proverbs, divine Wisdom affirms: *Desiderium suum justis dabitur* (The desire of the just shall be answered) [Prv. 10:24]. Since numerous saints desired various particular favors from God yet did not receive them in this life, it is a matter of faith that since their desire was just and good it was granted them perfectly in heaven. Consequently, if God promises them in this life, "Your desire shall be fulfilled," it shall be, even though it may be done in a way different from what they had in mind.

19.14. God's words and visions in this and other ways may be true and certain, yet they can mislead us if we do not know how to understand them in a lofty manner and principally according to the purpose and the meaning God has in giving them. The safest and most suitable method of procedure is to oblige souls to flee prudently from these supernatural things, and to accustom them, as we pointed out,<sup>1</sup> to purity of spirit in dark faith - the means toward union.

## CHAPTER 20

20. Proofs from Sacred Scripture of how God's words, although always true, are not always certain. The certainty of them depends on the causes of the pronouncements. 20.1. We must prove now the second reason<sup>1</sup> God's visions and locutions, although always true in themselves, are not always certain for us. This uncertainty is due to the causes on which they are founded.

20.1.(2). God's affirmations are frequently founded upon creatures and their effects, which are liable to change and failure; consequently, words based on these creatures can also change and fail. If one factor upon which another is dependent fails, the other fails too. For example, if God were to say that in a year he would send a plague upon a kingdom because of an offense committed against him there, and if the offense were to cease or change, the punishment could be withheld. Yet the warning would have been true since it was based on the actual fault, and if the fault were to have continued the threatened punishment would have been executed.

20.2. This happened in the city of Nineveh when God proclaimed: *Adhuc quadraginta diebus et Ninive subvertetur* (Forty days from now Nineveh will be razed) [Jon. 3:4]. This did not happen because the cause of the threat, their sins, ceased because of the penance that was done [Jon. 3:5-10]. But if they had not done penance the warning would have been carried out. We also read in the Third Book of Kings that when King Ahab had committed a very serious sin, God, through our holy father Elijah, sent him a message threatening severe punishment on his person, his house, and his kingdom [1 Kgs. 21:17-22]. And because Ahab rent his garments with grief, put on a hair shirt, fasted, slept in sackcloth, and went about sad and humbled, God once more sent this prophet to him with these words: *Quia igitur humiliatus est mei causa, non inducam malum in diebus ejus, sed in diebus filii sui* (Insofar as Ahab has humbled himself for love of me I will not in his days send the evil I spoke of, but in those of his son) [1 Kgs. 21:27-29]. Evidently, then, because Ahab changed his conduct and disposition, God also altered his sentence.

20.3. We can thus deduce for our purpose here that, although God may have revealed or affirmed something to a person (whether it be good or bad, concern this person or another), it can change, becoming greater or less, vary, or be taken away entirely according to a change or variation in this person's tendencies or in the cause on which it is based. Thus the event may not turn out as expected, and frequently no one but God knows why. God usually affirms, teaches, and promises many things, not so there will be an immediate understanding of them, but so that afterward at the proper time, or when the effect is produced, one may receive light about them.

20.3.(2). Christ acted this way with his disciples. He told them many parables and maxims the wisdom of which they did not understand until the time for preaching had come, when the Holy Spirit descended on them. The Holy Spirit was to explain to them, as Christ affirmed, all that he had taught them during his life [Jn. 14:26]. St. John, speaking of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem, states: *Haec non cognoverunt discipuli ejus primum: sed quando glorificatus est Jesus, tunc recordati sunt quia haec erant scripta de eo*<sup>2</sup> [Jn. 12:16]. As a result many particular works of God can come to pass in a soul that

neither the soul nor its director can understand until the opportune time.

20.4. In the First Book of Kings we also read that God, angered because Eli the priest of Israel failed to punish his sons for their sins, sent Samuel to him with, among other messages, the following one: *Loquens locutus sum, ut domus tua, et domus patris tui, ministraret in conspectu meo, usque in sempiternum. Verumtamen absit hoc a me* (Certainly I have said before that your house and the house of your father will continually minister to me in the priesthood and in my presence forever. Yet this proposal is very far from me; I shall not bring it about) [1 Sm. 2:30]. Since the ministry of the priesthood is based on rendering honor and glory to God, God promised it to Eli's father forever. When Eli lacked zeal for the honor of God because, as God himself complained, he gave more honor to his sons than to God, dissimulating their sins so as not to reprove them, the promise also failed [1 Sm. 3:13]. It would have been kept forever if their good service and zeal had been enduring.

20.4.(2). We should not think, therefore, that because revelations and locutions come from God - especially if they are dependent on human, changeable causes - they will infallibly and literally come to pass.

20.5. Although God knows when these locutions and revelations are dependent on human causes, he does not always manifest it, but in his communication of the locution or revelation he will remain silent about the condition. Such was the case when he told the Ninevites definitely that they would be destroyed after 40 days [Jon. 3:4]. At other times he declares, as he did to Rehoboam: If you keep my commandments as my servant David did, I will also be with you as I was with him, and I will build you a house as I did my servant David [1 Kgs. 11:38].

20.5.(2). Whether God discloses the conditional element or not, individuals cannot find assurance in their own interpretation, because they are incapable of comprehending the secret truths and the diverse meanings contained in God's sayings. God is above the heavens and speaks from the depths of eternity; we on this earth are blind and understand only the ways of the flesh and of time. This, I believe, is why the Wise Man said: God is above the heavens and you upon the earth; therefore do not be prolix or careless in speech [Ecl. 5:1].

20.6. You will perchance ask: If we are not to understand or get involved with these locutions and revelations, why does God communicate them?

20.6.(2). I have already mentioned that by order of him who spoke, everything will be understood at the opportune time; and he whom God wills shall understand clearly, so it was fitting, since God does nothing without cause and truth. But, believe me, people cannot completely grasp the meaning of God's locutions and deeds; nor, without much error and confusion, can they determine this meaning by what appears to be so.

20.6.(3). The prophets, entrusted with the word of God, were well aware of this. Prophecy for them was a severe trial because, as we affirmed, the people observed that a

good portion of the prophecy did not come about in accord with the letter of what was said to them. As a result the people laughed at the prophets and made much fun of them. It reached such a point that Jeremiah exclaimed: They mock me all day long, everyone scoffs at and despises me because for a long time now I have cried out against iniquity and promised them destruction, and the Lord's word has become a reproach to me and a mockery all the time. And I said: I do not have to remember him or speak any more in his name [Jer. 20:7-9].

20.6.(4). Although the holy prophet spoke with resignation and in the semblance of a weak man unable to suffer the changing ways of God, he herein teaches us the difference between the fulfillment of the divine locutions and the common meaning given the words. The prophets were considered seducers, and they endured such suffering because of their prophecies that Jeremiah also proclaims in another place: *Formido et laqueus facta est nobis vaticinatio et contritio* (Prophecy has become for us fear, snares, and contradiction of spirit) [Lam. 3:47].

20.7. When sent by God as the preacher of the destruction of Nineveh, Jonah fled because of his knowledge of the diverse meanings and causes behind God's locutions [Jon. 1:1-3]. Lest the people should make fun of him when his prophecy was unfulfilled, he fled from prophesying and waited outside the city for the entire 40 days to see if his prophecy would be fulfilled [Jon. 4:5]. Since it was not, he became extremely afflicted - to such an extent that he said to God: *Obsecro, Domine, numquid non hoc est verbum meum, cum adhuc essem in terra mea? Propter hoc praeoccupavi, ut fugerem in Tharsis* (I beseech You, Lord, was not this perhaps what I said when in my country? On this account I was contradictory and fled into Tharsis) [Jon. 4:2]. And the saint became angry and petitioned God to take away his life [Jon. 4:1,3].

20.8. Why, then, should we be surprised if God's locutions and revelations do not materialize as expected? Suppose God affirms or represents to an individual some promise (good or bad, pertaining to that person or to another). If this promise is based on certain causes (devotion or service rendered to God, or offense committed against him at that time, by that person or another) and these causes remain, the promise will be accomplished. But since it is uncertain how long these causes will continue, the fulfillment of the promise is uncertain too. One should seek assurance, therefore, not in one's understanding but in faith.

## CHAPTER 21

21. God's displeasure at requests for revelations and locutions, even though he sometimes answers them. Proofs of how he is frequently angered in spite of his condescension and response.

21.1. Some spiritual persons, as we said,<sup>1</sup> convince themselves that their curiosity to know certain things through supernatural means is good. They think this conduct is good and pleasing to God because he responds to their urgent request. Yet the truth is that, regardless of his reply, such behavior is neither good nor pleasing to God. Rather he is displeased; not only displeased but frequently angered and deeply offended.

21.1.(2). The reason is that no creature may licitly go beyond the boundaries naturally ordained by God for its governance. He has fixed natural and rational limits by which humans are to be ruled. A desire to transcend them, hence, is unlawful, and to desire to investigate and arrive at knowledge in a supernatural way is to go beyond the natural limits. It is unlawful, consequently, and God who is offended by everything illicit is displeased.

21.1.(3). King Ahab knew this well. For although Isaiah told him to ask in God's name for some sign, he was unwilling to do so: *Non petam, et non tentabo Dominum* (I will not ask for such a thing, nor shall I tempt God) [Is. 7:12]. For to tempt God is to desire communication with him in extraordinary ways, supernatural ways.

21.2. You will say: If it is true that God is displeased, why does he sometimes answer? I reply: Sometimes the devil answers; but when God answers, he does so because of the weakness of the individual who desires to advance in that way. Such persons could become sad and turn back, or imagine that God is unhappy with them, and become overwhelmed. Or there may be other motives known to God, prompted by the weaknesses of these persons. And, as a result, God sees the appropriateness of condescending with such an answer.

21.2.(2). God also does this in the singularly sensory communion that many weak and tender souls have with him, as was mentioned above.<sup>2</sup> But he does not act thus because he is desirous or pleased that communication with him be carried on in such a manner. Rather, he gives according to each one's mode, as we have said.<sup>3</sup> He is like a fountain from which people draw as much water as the jug they carry will hold. Sometimes he lets them draw water through these extraordinary spouts, but it does not follow that the desire to draw water in this way is lawful, for it belongs only to God to bestow water in this manner, when, how, and to whomever he wills, and for whatever reason he desires, and without any right on the part of the soul. Accordingly, as we asserted, he sometimes condescends to the petition of certain individuals, for they are good and simple, and he does not want to let their petition go unanswered lest they become sad. But the fact that he answers them does not mean he is pleased with this practice.

21.3. Here is an example to better illustrate this truth. A father of a family provides at table many different kinds of food, some better than others. One of his children will ask

for a dish not of the better food, but of the first that meets the eye, and the child will do so because it knows how to eat this kind of food better than the other. Now when the father observes that his child refuses to eat the food offered to it and wants and likes only that first dish, he gives it to his child sadly so that it will not go without its meal and be unhappy.

21.3.(2). This is the way God acted with the children of Israel when they asked him for a king. He gave them one regretfully because their having one was not good for them. Thus he said to Samuel: *Audi vocem populi in omnibus quae loquuntur tibi: non enim te abjecerunt, sed me* (I heard the voice of this people and granted them the king they requested, for they have not rejected you but have rejected me, that I might not reign over them) [1 Sm. 8:7]. God accordingly condescends to some souls, granting what is not the best for them, because they are ignorant of how to journey by any other way. Some souls obtain sensible or spiritual sweetness from God because they are incapable of eating the stronger and more solid food of the trials of the cross of his Son. He would desire them to take the cross more than any other thing.

21.4. I consider a desire to know things through supernatural means far worse than a desire for spiritual gratifications in the sensitive part of the soul. I fail to see how a person who tries to get knowledge in this supernatural way - as well as the one who commands this or gives consent - can help but sin, at least venially, no matter how excellent the motives or advanced in perfection that person may be. There is no necessity for any of this kind of knowledge since one can get sufficient guidance from natural reason and from the law and doctrine of the Gospel. There is no difficulty or necessity that cannot be solved or remedied by these means, which are very pleasing to God and profitable to souls.

21.4.(2). We should make such use of reason and the law of the Gospel that, even though - whether we desire it or not - some supernatural truths are told to us, we accept only what is in harmony with reason and the Gospel law. And then we should receive this truth, not because it is privately revealed to us, but because it is reasonable, and we should brush aside all feelings about the revelation. We ought, in fact, to consider and examine the reasonableness of the truth when it is revealed even more than when it is not, since in order to delude souls the devil says much that is true, conformed to reason, and will come to pass.

21.5. In all our necessities, trials, and difficulties, no better or safer aid exists for us than prayer and hope that God will provide for us by the means he desires. Scripture counsels this where we read that King Jehosaphat, deeply afflicted and surrounded by his enemies [2 Chron. 20:1-4], began to pray to God: *Cum ignoramus quod facere debeamus, hoc solum habemus residui, ut oculos nostros dirigamus ad te* (When means are lacking and reason cannot find a way of providing for our necessities, we have only to raise our eyes to you that you may provide in the manner most pleasing to you) [2 Chron. 20:12].

21.6. Even though God sometimes responds to these requests, he is angered. This was explained, yet some proofs from Scripture will be helpful.



21.6.(2). In the First Book of Kings we read that while King Saul was requesting a locution from the prophet Samuel, who was already dead, this prophet appeared; yet God was angered, because Samuel immediately reproved Saul for having made such a plea: Quare inquietasti me, ut suscitarer? (Why have you disturbed me by making me revive?) [1 Sam. 28:15].

21.6.(3). We are also well aware that, though God answered the children of Israel by providing the requested flesh meat, he was nonetheless seriously angered. According to the Pentateuch and David's account he immediately sent fire from heaven as a chastisement: Adhuc escae eorum erant in ore ipsorum et ira Dei descendit super eos (While the morsels were yet in their mouths, the anger of God descended upon them) [Ps. 78:30-31; Nm. 11:18-33].

21.6.(4). We read, too, in the Book of Numbers that because the prophet Balaam went to the Midianites at the beckon of King Balak, God was extremely provoked with him. Although God told Balaam to go, because he had wanted to go and asked God, an angel carrying a sword appeared to him while he was on his way, desirous of killing him, and saying: Perversa est via tua mihi que contraria (Your way is perverse and contrary to me). Because of this perversity the angel desired to kill Balaam [Nm. 22:15-33].

21.7. God, though angered, condescends in this and many other ways to the desires of souls. Scripture provides many testimonies and examples of this, but it is unnecessary to cite them since the matter is so clear.

21.7.(2). I only say that the desire to communicate with God in this way is extremely dangerous - more so than I can say. The person attached to such ways will go far astray and often become greatly bewildered. Anyone who has esteemed them will understand through experience what I mean.

21.7.(3). Besides the hardship of avoiding any error that might result from God's locutions and visions, there is also the fact that among locutions and visions there are usually many that come from the devil. For he commonly deals with the soul in the same manner as God does, imparting communications so similar to God's that, disguised among the flock like the wolf in sheep's clothing, his meddling may be hardly discernible [Mt. 7:15]. Since he says many things that are true and reasonable and turn out as predicted, people can be easily misled, thinking that the revelation must be from God since what was predicted truly comes about. These people do not realize how easy it is for someone with clear natural light to know many past or future events through their causes. Since the devil possesses this light so vividly, he can most easily deduce a particular effect from a specific cause. Yet the effect does not always materialize according to his deduction, since all causes depend upon God's will.

21.8. Here is an example: The devil perceives that when the earth, air, and sun have reached a certain interrelationship, they will necessarily at that time become corrupted and thereby cause a pestilence. He is also cognizant of the areas in which the pestilence

will be grave and those in which it will be mild. The example, then, is that of a pestilence known in its causes. Is it a wonder, then, that the devil's prediction about a pestilence, due within six months or a year, comes true? Yet it is a prophecy of the devil. Similarly, observing that the cavities of the earth are being filled with air, he can foresee earthquakes and predict that at a particular time there will be an earthquake. This is natural knowledge for which an intellect free of the passions is sufficient, as Boethius teaches: *Si vis claro lumine cernere verum, gaudia, pelle, timorem, spemque fugato, nec dolor adsit* (If you want to know truths with natural clarity, cast aside joy, fear, hope, and sorrow).<sup>4</sup>

21.9. Supernatural events can also be known in their causes, since divine Providence responds most certainly and justly to what the good or bad causes arising from the children of the earth demand. One can know naturally that a particular person or city, or some other factor, will reach such a point that God in his providence and justice must respond in conformity with the punishment or reward that the cause warrants. With this knowledge one can say: at this particular time God will certainly give this, or do that, or that some other event will ensue.

21.9.(2). The holy Judith made Holofernes aware of this when, in order to persuade him that the children of Israel would be destroyed without fail, she first related their numerous sins and evil conduct, and then added: *Et quoniam haec faciunt, certum est quod in perditionem dabuntur* (Because they do these things, it is certain they will be destroyed) [Jdt. 11:7-12]. This represents knowledge of the punishment through its causes. It is like saying: Surely such sins must occasion certain punishments from the most just God. And divine Wisdom says: *Per quae quis peccat, per haec et torquetur* (Each one is punished in, or through, that by which the sin is committed) [Wis. 11:17].

21.10. The devil can know this not only in a natural way but also from having observed God do similar things, and he can consequently predict something and be right.

21.10.(2). The holy Tobias also knew through its cause the coming chastisement of the city of Nineveh. He warned his son: Behold, son, when your mother and I are dead depart from this land because it will no longer remain. *Video enim quia iniquitas ejus finem dabit ei* (I see that its very evil will be the cause of its punishment, the end and destruction of everything) [Tb. 14:12-13]. Tobias and the devil were able to come to this knowledge not merely through the wickedness of the city but through experience, in observing that the Ninevites committed the sins that occasioned the destruction of both the world by the flood and the Sodomites by fire [Gn. 6:12-13; 13:13; 19:24]. Tobias, however, also knew this through divine inspiration.

21.11. The devil can learn and foretell that Peter's life will naturally last only a certain number of years. And he can determine many other events through such various ways that we would never finish recounting them all, nor could we even begin to explain many because of their intricacy and the devil's craftiness in inserting lies. One cannot be liberated from him without fleeing from all revelations, visions, and supernatural communications.

21.11.(2). God is rightly angered with anyone who admits them, for he sees the rashness of exposing oneself to this danger, presumption, curiosity, and pride, to the root and foundation of vainglory, to contempt for the things of God, and to the beginning of the numerous evils into which many fall.

21.11.(3). God becomes so angry with these individuals that he purposely allows them to go astray, experience delusion, suffer spiritual darkness, and abandon the established ways of life, by delivering themselves over to their vanities and fancies. Isaiah affirms: *Dominus miscuit in medio ejus spiritum vertiginis* [Is. 19:14]. This is like saying: The Lord has mingled in their midst the spirit of dissension and confusion, which in plain words means the spirit of misunderstanding. Isaiah manifestly says this in accord with our teaching because he refers to those who are striving for supernatural knowledge of future events. As a result he asserts that God mingled in their midst a spirit of misconstruing everything, not because God desired this or really gave them this spirit of error, but because they were desirous of knowing what was naturally unattainable. Provoked by this, God allowed them to go astray and gave no enlightenment concerning this matter in which he did not want them to meddle. Thus Isaiah proclaims that by way of privation God commingled in their midst that spirit of dissension. Accordingly, God is the cause of that harm; that is, the privative cause, which consists in his withdrawing his light and favor to such an extent that they necessarily fall into error.

21.12. In this way God permits the devil to blind and delude many who merit this by their sins and audacities. The devil is able and successful to the extent that others believe what he says and consider him a good spirit. So firm is their belief that it is impossible for anyone who tries to persuade them of the diabolic origin. For with God's permission they have already been affected by the spirit of misunderstanding. We read that this happened to the prophets of King Ahab whom God allowed to be deluded by the lying spirit. He permitted the devil to lie, saying: *Decipies, et praevaleris; egredere, et fac ita* (You shall prevail with your lie and deceive them; go out and do it thus) [1 Kgs. 22:22]. The devil deceived the prophets and king so successfully that they were unwilling to believe the prophet Micaiah who spoke the truth, which was very much the opposite of what the others had prophesied. That God allowed them to be blinded is the explanation of their unbelief, for in their attachment they wanted events to happen and God to answer according to their own desires and appetites. This was the surest means and preparation for God to abandon them to blindness and deception.

21.13. Ezekiel prophesied about this in God's name. He censured the curious one who in vanity of spirit desires knowledge in a divine way: When this man asks the prophet to inquire of me for him, I myself, the Lord, shall answer, and I will set my angry countenance upon that man. And when the prophet shall err in his reply, *Ego Dominus decepi prophetam illum* (I the Lord have deceived that prophet) [Ez. 14:7-9]. This signifies that God does not concur with his help to prevent that man's deception; such is the meaning of the words: I, the Lord, angered, will myself answer (withdraw my grace and favor from such a man). Deception necessarily follows when one is forsaken by God. The devil then intervenes, answering in harmony with that person's desire and pleasure;

and since the devil's replies and communications are pleasing and satisfactory, that man will let himself become seriously deluded.

21.14. We have seemingly wandered somewhat from the matter proposed in the title of this chapter: proofs that although God answers he sometimes is unhappy about it. Nonetheless, if everything we mentioned is thoroughly considered, it will contribute to the proof of our assertion. For in all this it is seen that God is displeased with the desire for these visions because he permits souls to be deceived in so many ways.

## CHAPTER 22

22. Resolving a doubt about why in the law of grace it is not permitted to question God through supernatural means as it was in the old law. Proof from St. Paul.

22.1. Questions keep springing up so that we are unable to make the rapid progress we would like. Since we raise them, we necessarily have the obligation to answer them so the truth of the doctrine will remain clear and vigorous. These questions have this advantage that, although they slow up our progress, they are still an aid to greater clarity and to further explanations about our subject. Such is the case with this question.<sup>1</sup>

22.2. In the last chapter we affirmed that it was not God's will that souls desire supernatural communication of distinct knowledge from visions and locutions, and so on. On the other hand, in the testimonies from Scripture, we saw that this kind of communication with God was lawful and made use of in the old law. Not only was this licit, but God commanded it. When the people did not comply, God reprovved them. An example of this is seen in Isaiah when the children of Israel desired to descend into Egypt without first asking God; and he thus reprehended them: *Et os meum non interrogastis* (You did not first ask from my mouth what was suitable) [Is. 30:2]. We also read in Joshua that when the children of Israel were deceived by the Gibeonites, the Holy Spirit reminded them of this fault: *Susceperunt ergo de cibariis eorum, et os Domini non interrogaverunt* (They took their food without consulting the mouth of the Lord) [Jos. 9:2-14].

22.2.(2). We observe in Sacred Scripture that Moses, King David, and the kings of Israel, in their wars and necessities, and the priests and ancients always questioned God, and that he replied and spoke to them without becoming angry. And they had done well if they questioned him, but if they failed to do so they were at fault. This is true. Why, then, in the new law of grace is it different than it was previously?

22.3. In answer to this, the chief reason in the old law that the inquiries made of God were licit, and the prophets and priests appropriately desired visions and revelations from him, was that at that time faith was not yet perfectly grounded, nor was the Gospel law established. It was necessary for them to question God, and for him to respond sometimes by words, sometimes through visions and revelations, now in figures and likenesses, now through many other kinds of signs. All his answers, locutions, and revelations concerned mysteries of our faith or matters touching on or leading up to it. Since the truths of faith are not derived from other humans but from the mouth of God (for he speaks them through his own mouth), it was required of them to seek an answer from the mouth of God. He therefore reprovved them because in their affairs they did not seek counsel from his mouth, that he might answer and direct them toward the unknown and as yet unfounded faith.

22.3.(2). But in this era of grace, now that the faith is established through Christ and the Gospel law made manifest, there is no reason for inquiring of him in this way, or expecting him to answer as before. In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word - and he has no more to say.

22.4. This is the meaning of that passage where St. Paul tries to persuade the Hebrews to turn from communion with God through the old ways of the Mosaic law and instead fix their eyes on Christ: *Multifariam multisque modis olim Deus loquens patribus in prophetis: novissime autem diebus istis locutus est nobis in Filio* (That which God formerly spoke to our fathers through the prophets in many ways and manners, now, finally, in these days he has spoken to us all at once in his Son) [Heb. 1:1-2]. The Apostle indicates that God has become as it were mute, with no more to say, because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All, who is his Son.

22.5. Those who now desire to question God or receive some vision or revelation are guilty not only of foolish behavior but also of offending him by not fixing their eyes entirely on Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty.

22.5.(2). God could answer as follows: If I have already told you all things in my Word, my Son, and if I have no other word, what answer or revelation can I now make that would surpass this? Fasten your eyes on him alone because in him I have spoken and revealed all and in him you will discover even more than you ask for and desire. You are making an appeal for locutions and revelations that are incomplete, but if you turn your eyes to him you will find them complete. For he is my entire locution and response, vision and revelation, which I have already spoken, answered, manifested, and revealed to you by giving him to you as a brother, companion, master, ransom, and reward.<sup>2</sup> On that day when I descended on him with my Spirit on Mount Tabor proclaiming: *Hic est filius meus dilectus in quo mihi bene complacui, ipsum audite* (This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear him) [Mt. 17:5], I gave up these methods of answering and teaching and presented them to him. Hear him because I have no more faith to reveal or truths to manifest. If I spoke before, it was to promise Christ. If they questioned me, their inquiries were related to their petitions and longings for Christ in whom they were to obtain every good, as is now explained in all the doctrine of the evangelists and apostles. But now those who might ask me in that way and desire that I speak and reveal something to them would somehow be requesting Christ again and more faith, yet they would be failing in faith because it has already been given in Christ. Accordingly, they would offend my beloved Son deeply because they would not merely be failing him in faith, but obliging him to become incarnate and undergo his life and death again. You will not find anything to ask or desire of me through revelations and visions. Behold him well, for in him you will uncover all of these already made and given, and many more.

22.6. If you desire me to answer with a word of comfort, behold my Son subject to me and to others out of love for me, and afflicted, and you will see how much he answers you. If you desire me to declare some secret truths or events to you, fix your eyes only on him and you will discern hidden in him the most secret mysteries, and wisdom, and wonders of God, as my Apostle proclaims: *In quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae Dei absconditi* (In the Son of God are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God) [Col. 2:3]. These treasures of wisdom and knowledge will be for you far more sublime, delightful, and advantageous than what you want to know.<sup>3</sup> The

Apostle, therefore, gloried, affirming that he had acted as though he knew no other than Jesus Christ and him crucified [1 Cor. 2:2]. And if you should seek other divine or corporeal visions and revelations, behold him, become human, and you will find more than you imagine. For the Apostle also says: *In ipso habitat omnis plenitudo Divinitatis corporealiter* (In Christ all the fullness of the divinity dwells bodily) [Col. 2:9].

22.7. One should not, then, inquire of God in this manner, nor is it necessary for God to speak any more. Since he has finished revealing the faith through Christ, there is no more faith to reveal, nor will there ever be. Anyone wanting to get something in a supernatural way, as we stated,<sup>4</sup> would as it were be accusing God of not having given us in his Son all that is required. Although in having these desires one presupposes the faith and believes in it, still, that curiosity displays a lack of faith. Hence there is no reason to hope for doctrine or anything else through supernatural means.

22.7.(2). When Christ dying on the cross exclaimed: *Consummatum est* (It is consummated) [Jn. 19:30], he consummated not these ways alone, but all the other ceremonies and rites of the old law. Thus we must be guided humanly and visibly in all by the law of Christ, who is human, and that of his Church and of his ministers. This is the way to remedy our spiritual ignorances and weaknesses. Here we shall find abundant medicine for them all. Any departure from this road is not only curiosity but extraordinary boldness. One should not believe anything coming in a supernatural way, but believe only the teaching of Christ who is human, as I say, and of his ministers who are human. So true is this that St. Paul insists: *Quod si angelus de coelo evangelizaverit, praeterquam quod evangelizavimus vobis, anathema sit* (If an angel from heaven should preach to you any Gospel other than that which we humans have preached, let him be accursed and excommunicated) [Gal. 1:8].

22.8. Since it is true that one must ever adhere to Christ's teaching, and that everything unconformed to it is nothing and worthy of disbelief, anyone who desires to commune with God after the manner of old law is walking in vain.

22.8.(2). We see even more how true this is when we recall that it was not lawful at that time for just anyone to question God; nor did God give an answer to just anyone, but only to the priests and prophets from whom the multitude were to learn the law and doctrine. Those eager to know something from God did not ask themselves but through a prophet or priest. If David sometimes asked himself, it was because he was a prophet. But even then he did not do so without being clothed in priestly vestments, as is evident in the First Book of Kings when he said to Ahimelech the priest: *Applica ad me Ephod* [1 Sm. 23:9]. The ephod was the most dignified of the priest's vestments, and David wore it for consultation with God. At other times he consulted God through the prophet Nathan or through other prophets. And through the mouth of these prophets and priests the people were to believe that God spoke to them, not through their own opinion.

22.9. What God said at that time did not have the authority or force to induce complete belief unless approved by the priests and prophets. God is so pleased that the rule and direction of humans be through other humans and that a person be governed by natural

reason that he definitely does not want us to bestow entire credence on his supernatural communications, or be confirmed in their strength and security, until they pass through this human channel of the mouth of another human person. As often as he reveals something to individuals, he confers on them a kind of inclination to manifest this to the appropriate person. Until people do this they usually go without complete satisfaction, for they have not received this knowledge from another human like themselves.

22.9.(2). In Judges we see that this happened to the captain Gideon. Though God had often told him that he would be conqueror of the Midianites, Gideon nonetheless remained doubtful and cowardly since God left him in that weakness until he had heard through the mouth of other humans what God had revealed to him. Since God saw that Gideon was weak, God declared: Rise up and go down to the camp; ...et cum audieris quid loquantur, tunc confortabuntur manus tuae, et securior ad hostium castra descendes (when you hear what the men are saying there, you shall get strength from what I have told you, and you will descend more securely to the enemy host) [Jgs. 7:9-11]. And it happened that when Gideon heard of a Midianite's dream about the future victory, he was deeply strengthened; and full of gladness he prepared for the battle [Jgs. 7:13-15]. Evidently, then, God did not want Gideon to receive assurance through supernatural means alone, for until Gideon had certitude through natural means, God did not bestow on him a feeling of security.

22.10. And still more wondrous is what happened in a similar instance to Moses. Even though God had commanded him with many persuasive arguments to go and bring about the liberation of the children of Israel, and had confirmed these arguments with signs from the rod that was changed into a serpent and from the leprous hand [Ex. 4:2-4, 6-10], he was so weak and doubtful about this mission that, in spite of God's anger [Ex. 4:14], he did not possess the courage to give strong credence to the mission until heartened by God through his brother Aaron: Aaron frater tuus Levites, scio quod eloquens sit: Ecce ipse egredietur in occursum tuum, vidensque te, laetabitur corde. Loquere ad eum, et pone verba mea in ore ejus, et ego ero in ore tuo, et in ore illius (I know that your brother Aaron is an eloquent man: Behold, he will go to meet you and at sight of you sincerely rejoice. Speak and tell him all my words, and I will be in your mouth and in his so that each of you will receive certitude through the mouth of the other) [Ex. 4:14-15].

22.11. At these words Moses was immediately encouraged in the hope of the comfort he was to obtain from his brother's counsel [Ex. 4:18]. This is the trait of humble people: They do not dare deal with God independently, nor can they be completely satisfied without human counsel and direction. God wants this, for to declare and strengthen truth on the basis of natural reason, he draws near those who come together in an endeavor to know it. He indicated this by asserting that he would be in the mouth of both Aaron and Moses when they were together for consultation.

22.11.(2). This is why he also affirmed in the Gospel: Ubi fuerint duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum ego in medio eorum (Where two or three are gathered to consider what is for the greater honor and glory of my name, there I am in the midst of them - that is, clarifying and confirming truths in their hearts) [Mt. 18:20]. It is noteworthy that he



did not say: Where there is one alone, there I am; rather, he said: Where there are at least two. Thus God announces that he does not want the soul to believe only by itself the communications it thinks are of divine origin, or for anyone to be assured or confirmed in them without the Church or her ministers. God will not bring clarification and confirmation of the truth to the heart of one who is alone. Such a person would remain weak and cold in regard to truth.

22.12. This is what Ecclesiastes extols: *Vae soli, quia cum ceciderit, non habet sublevantem se. Si dormierint duo, favebuntur mutuo: Unus quomodo calefiet? et si quispiam praevaluerit contra unum, duo resistent ei* [Eccl. 4:10-12]. This means: Woe to those who are alone, for when they fall they have no one to lift them up. If two sleep together, the one shall give warmth (the warmth of God who is in their midst) to the other; how shall one alone be warm? How shall one alone stop being cold in the things of God? And if one prevails and overcomes the other (that is, if the devil prevails and overcomes anyone who may desire to remain alone in the things of God), two together will resist the devil. And these are the disciple and the master who come together to know the truth and practice it. Until consulting another, one will usually experience only tepidity and weakness in the truth, no matter how much may have been heard from God. This is so true that even after St. Paul had been preaching the Gospel, which he heard not from humans but from God [Gal. 1:12] for a long time, he could not resist going and conferring about it with St. Peter and the apostles: *ne forte in vanum currerem aut cucurrissem* (lest he should run or might have run in vain) [Gal. 2:2]. He did not feel secure until he had received assurance from other people. This, then, seems remarkable, O Paul! Could not he who revealed the Gospel to you also give security from any error you might make in preaching its truth?

22.13. This text clearly teaches that there is no assurance in God's revelations save through the means we are describing. Even though individuals have certitude that the revelation is of divine origin - as St. Paul had of his Gospel, since he had already begun to preach it - they can still err in regard to the object of the revelation or its circumstances. Even though God reveals one factor, he does not always manifest the other. Often he will reveal something without telling how to accomplish it. He usually does not effect or reveal to people what can be arrived at through human effort or counsel, even though he may frequently and affably commune with them. St. Paul understood this clearly since, as we are saying, he went to confer about the Gospel in spite of his knowledge that it was divinely revealed.

22.13.(2). This is evident, too, in Exodus. Even though God conversed familiarly with Moses, he never gave him that salutary counsel that Moses received from his father-in-law Jethro: that he select other judges as helpers so the people would not be waiting from morning till night [Ex. 18:13-23]. God approved this advice. But he did not give it, because human reason and judgment were sufficient means for solving this problem. Usually God does not manifest such matters through visions, revelations, and locutions, because he is ever desirous that insofar as possible people take advantage of their own reasoning powers. All matters must be regulated by reason save those of faith, which though not contrary to reason transcend it.

22.14. People should not imagine that just because God and the saints converse amiably with them on many subjects, they will be told their particular faults, for they can come to the knowledge of these through other means. Hence there is no motive for assurance, for we read in the Acts of the Apostles what happened to St. Peter. Though he was a prince of the Church and received immediate instruction from God, he was mistaken about a certain ceremony practiced among the Gentiles. And God was so silent that St. Paul reproved Peter: *Cum vidissem, quod non recte ad veritatem Evangelii ambularent, dixi coram omnibus: Si tu judaeus cum sis, gentiliter vivis, quomodo gentes cogis judaizare?* (As I noticed that the disciples were not walking rightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all: If you being a Jew, as you are, live as a Gentile, why do you force the Gentiles to live as the Jews?) [Gal. 2:14]. God did not himself inform St. Peter of this fault, because that simulation was rationally discernible.

22.15. On judgment day God will punish the faults and sins of many with whom he communed familiarly here below and to whom he imparted much light and power, for they neglected their obligations and trusted in their converse with him and the power he bestowed on them. As Christ declares in the Gospel, they will then be surprised and plead: *Domine, Domine, nonne in nomine tuo prophetavimus et in nomine tuo daemonia ejecimus, et in nomine tuo virtutes multas fecimus?* (Lord, Lord, did we not speak in your name the prophecies you spoke to us, and did we not cast out devils in your name and perform many miracles and prodigies?) [Mt. 7:22]. And the Lord states that his reply will be: *Et tunc confitebor illis, quia numquam novi vos: discedite a me omnes qui operamini iniquitatem* (Depart from me, workers of iniquity, for I have never known you) [Mt. 7:23].

22.15.(2). Among the workers of iniquity were the prophet Balaam and others like him. Although God spoke with them and bestowed favors on them, they were sinners [Num. 22-24]. But the Lord will also in due proportion, because of their faults and neglects, reprove his friends and chosen ones with whom he conversed familiarly here on earth. It was unnecessary for God himself to inform them of these faults, since he had already done so through the natural law and the reasoning powers he had bestowed on them.

22.16. I deduce in concluding this part that whatever is received through supernatural means (in whatever manner) should immediately be told clearly, integrally, and simply to one's spiritual master. It may appear that there is no reason for a manifestation to one's spiritual director, or that doing so would be a waste of time since, as we pointed out,<sup>5</sup> one is safe by not wanting these communications, by rejecting and paying no attention to them. This seems especially so in this matter of visions or revelations or other supernatural communications, since either they are clear or it matters little if they are not. Yet it is always necessary to manifest the entire communication even though there is no apparent reason for so doing. This requirement is based on three reasons:

22.16.(2). First, the effect, light, strength, and security of many divine communications are not completely confirmed in a soul, as we stated,<sup>6</sup> until it discusses them with one whom God has destined to be spiritual judge over it, who has power to bind, loose,

approve, and reprove. We have established this principle through the texts cited above, and through experience we see it verified each day. We witness humble recipients of these experiences obtain new satisfaction, strength, light, and security after consulting about them with the proper person. This is so true that to some it seems that these communications neither take root nor belong to them until they confer about them and that the communications are then seemingly imparted anew.

22.17. Second, a soul ordinarily needs instruction pertinent to its experience in order to be guided through the dark night to spiritual denudation and poverty. Without this instruction a person, even without wanting such things, would unknowingly become hardened in the way of the spirit and habituated to that of the senses, in which these communications are partly experienced.

22.18. Third, for the sake of humility, submission, and mortification, individuals should give a complete account to their director, even if the director disregards or shows no esteem for these communications. Because such communications seem to these individuals to be of little importance, or because of concern about the director's possible reaction, some may dread to tell their director about them. This indicates a lack of humility, and for that very reason one should submit to the ordeal. Others feel abashed about manifesting these favors lest they appear to be saints on account of these experiences, and because of other difficulties they feel in speaking about them. They think that because they themselves pay no attention to these experiences, relating them to their director is unnecessary. But because of this very hardship they ought to mortify themselves and tell their director, and thereby become humble, simple, meek, and prompt in relating these communications. And from then on they will always do so easily.

22.19. It ought to be noted in this regard that, even though we have greatly stressed rejection of these communications and the duty of confessors to forbid souls from making them a topic of conversation, spiritual fathers should not show severity, displeasure, or scorn in dealing with these souls. With such an attitude they would make them cower and shrink from a manifestation of these experiences, would close the door to these souls, and cause them many difficulties. Since God is leading them by this means, there is no reason to oppose it or become frightened or scandalized over it. The spiritual father should instead proceed with much kindness and calm. He should give these souls encouragement and the opportunity to speak about their experiences, and, if necessary, oblige them to do so, for at times everything is needful on account of the hardship some find in discussing these matters.

22.19.(2). Spiritual directors should guide them in the way of faith by giving them good instructions on how to turn their eyes from all these things and on their obligation to denude their appetite and spirit of these communications in order to advance. They should explain how one act done in charity is more precious in God's sight than all the visions and communications possible - since these imply neither merit nor demerit - and how it is that many individuals who have not received these experiences are incomparably more advanced than others who have received many.<sup>7</sup>

## CHAPTER 23

23. Begins the discussion of the intellectual apprehensions that come in a purely spiritual way. Tells what they are.

23.1. Though our doctrine on the intellectual apprehensions that come from the senses is somewhat brief in comparison with what it ought to be, I have not wanted to enlarge on the matter any more. I believe, rather, that my explanation has been longer than necessary in view of the goal I have in mind, which is to liberate the intellect from these apprehensions and direct it to the night of faith.

23.1.(2). Now we will embark on a discussion of those other four kinds of intellectual apprehensions: visions, revelations, locutions, and spiritual feelings. In chapter 10 we called these apprehensions purely spiritual because they are not communicated to the intellect through the corporeal senses as are imaginative corporeal visions. They are clearly, distinctly, and supernaturally imparted to the intellect without any of the exterior or interior bodily senses serving as means; and this is done passively, that is, without the soul's positing any act, at least through its own effort.

23.2. Let it be known that in a broad sense these four kinds of apprehensions can all be titled visions of the soul because we also call the understanding of the soul its vision. And insofar as all these apprehensions are intelligible, they are called spiritually visible.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the understanding formed from them in the intellect can be termed intellectual vision. The objects of the other senses (of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) are objects of the intellect insofar as they bear relation to truth or falsehood. And just as all that is corporeally visible to the material eye causes corporeal vision, so all that is intelligible to the intellect, the spiritual eye of the soul, causes spiritual vision. For, as we said, understanding an object is seeing it. Thus, speaking generally, we can call these four apprehensions visions. This could not be done with the other senses, because none of them is capable of perceiving the object as such of any of the others.

23.3. But since these apprehensions reach the soul in ways similar to those of the other senses, we can, properly and specifically speaking, apply the term vision to whatever the intellect receives in a manner resembling sight, because the intellect can see objects spiritually just as the eyes can corporeally. And what the intellect receives as though by learning and understanding something new (just as the ears do on hearing what has never before been heard) we call revelation. And what it receives in a way similar to hearing we call a locution. And what it receives after the manner of the other senses, such as the knowledge of a sweet spiritual fragrance, spiritual savor, or spiritual delight that the soul can enjoy supernaturally, we call spiritual feelings. The intellect derives knowledge or spiritual vision from all these communications, without the apprehension of any form, image, or figure of the natural imagination or phantasy. For these experiences are bestowed immediately upon the soul by a supernatural work and by a supernatural means.

23.4. As was the case with the imaginative corporeal apprehensions, we must disencumber the intellect of these spiritual apprehensions by guiding and directing it past them into the spiritual night of faith, to divine and substantial union with God, lest the

solitude and denudation concerning all things, which is a requisite for this union, be impeded by the hindrance and weakness these apprehensions occasion. These apprehensions are nobler, safer, and more advantageous than the imaginative corporeal visions because they are already interior, purely spiritual, and less exposed to the devil's meddling. They are more purely and delicately communicated to the soul and involve none of its own work or imagination - at least not active work. Nonetheless, through lack of caution and by treading such a path, the intellect might be not merely encumbered but highly deceived.

23.5. As a general conclusion, we could give the same counsel for these four kinds of apprehensions that we accorded for the others: they should be the object of neither our aims nor our desires. Yet it can be worthwhile to discuss these apprehensions in particular in order to explain some points about each of them and shed more light on the practice of this counsel. And so we will deal with the first kind, the spiritual or intellectual visions.

## CHAPTER 24

24. Two kinds of supernatural, spiritual visions.

24.1. Speaking properly, now, of spiritual visions (those that exclude the bodily senses), I find that there are two kinds relating to the intellect: those of corporeal substances, and those of separate or incorporeal substances.

24.1.(2). The corporeal visions deal with the material things of heaven and earth. The soul, even while in the body, can see these objects by means of a certain supernatural light derived from God that bestows the power of seeing all heavenly and earthly objects that are absent. We read of such a vision in chapter 21 of the Apocalypse where St. John relates the description and excellence of the heavenly Jerusalem that he beheld as it descended from heaven. We also read that St. Benedict viewed the entire world in a spiritual vision. St. Thomas in the first Quodlibetum affirms that this vision was received through a light from above, as we stated.<sup>1</sup>

24.2. The other visions, those of incorporeal substances, cannot be seen by means of this light derived from God, but by another, higher light, called the light of glory. These visions of incorporeal substances (angels and souls) do not occur in this life, nor can we while in this mortal body view such substances. If God should desire to let the soul see these substances essentially (as they are in themselves), it would immediately depart from the body and be loosed from this mortal life.

24.2.(2). God, when asked to show his essence, proclaimed to Moses: *Non videbit me homo, et vivet* (No human person can see me and be able to remain alive) [Ex. 33:20]. When the children of Israel thought they were going to see God, or that they had seen him or some angel, they were afraid of dying. We read of this in Exodus where they fearfully exclaimed: *Non loquatur nobis Dominus, ne forte moriamur* (May God not openly communicate himself to us, lest we die) [Ex. 20:19]. In the Book of Judges we read also that Manoah, Samson's father, thinking he and his wife had seen in its essence the angel that had appeared to them as a most handsome man, declared to his wife: *Morte moriemur, quia vidimus Dominum* (We shall die because we have seen the Lord) [Jgs. 13:22].

24.3. These visions do not occur in this life, unless in some rare cases and in a transient way. In such an instance, through a dispensation of the natural law, God preserves the nature and life of the individual, abstracts the spirit entirely, and by his own power supplies the natural functions of the soul toward the body.

24.3.(2). When, as is the opinion, St. Paul saw them (the separated substances in the third heaven), he accordingly declared: *Sive in corpore, sive extra corpus nescio; Deus scit* (that he was carried up to them, and he does not know if he saw them while in the body or out of the body, God knows) [2 Cor. 12:2,4]. Clearly he was transported above the ways of our natural life through the intervention of God. Also when God, as is believed, revealed his essence to Moses, he declared he would place Moses in the cleft of the rock and cover him with his right hand to protect him from death when the divine glory passed

by. This passing indicates both God's transitory manifestation of himself and the concomitant preservation, with his right hand, of Moses' natural life [Ex. 33:22].

24.3.(3). Such substantial visions as those of St. Paul, Moses, and our Father Elijah (when he covered his face at the whistling of the gentle breeze of God) [1 Kgs. 19:11-13], even though transitory, occur rarely or hardly ever, and to only a few. For God imparts this kind of vision only to those who are very strong in the spirit of the Church and God's law, as were these three.

24.4. Though these spiritual substances cannot be unclothed and seen clearly in this life by the intellect, they can nonetheless be felt in the substance of the soul by the most delightful touches and conjunctions. These pertain to the category of spiritual feelings, which with God's help we will discuss later.<sup>2</sup>

24.4.(2). For we are directing and guiding our pen toward these, that is, to the divine conjunction and union of the soul with the divine substance. We will speak about this when dealing with the vague or dark mystical knowledge (yet to be expounded) and treating of how, by means of this loving and obscure knowledge, God joins himself to the soul in a high and divine degree. In a way this dark loving knowledge, which is faith, serves as a means for divine union in this life, as does the light of glory for the clear vision of God in the next.<sup>3</sup>

24.5. Let us discuss now the visions of corporeal substances received spiritually in the soul in a way similar to that of bodily visions. As the eyes behold corporeal objects by means of natural light, so the intellect through supernatural light, as we said,<sup>4</sup> sees interiorly these same objects and others too according to God's wishes. The difference between the two kinds of visions lies in the mode and manner.

24.5.(2). Spiritual and intellectual visions are far clearer and more delicate than corporeal ones, for when God desires to bestow this favor upon a soul, he communicates that supernatural light we mentioned so that through it the soul may behold with greater facility and clarity the earthly and heavenly objects he desires it to see. The absence or presence of these objects, then, is of no importance, nor does this hinder the vision. The vision takes place at times as though a door were opened and the soul could see as it would if a flash of lightning were to illumine the dark night and momentarily make objects clearly and distinctly visible, only to leave them all in darkness again, although the forms and images of these objects would remain in the phantasy. This illumination takes place far more perfectly in the soul, for the objects seen in that light are so impressed on it that as often as it adverts to them it beholds them as it did before, just as the forms reflected in a mirror are seen as often as one looks in it. And those objects of the soul's vision are impressed so strongly that they are never entirely removed, although in the course of time they do become somewhat more remote.

24.6. The effects these visions produce in the soul are: quietude, illumination, happiness resembling that of glory, delight, purity, love, humility, and an elevation and inclination toward God. Sometimes these effects are more intense, sometimes less; sometimes one

effect predominates, at other times another. This diversity is due to the spirit that receives them and to God's wishes.

24.7. Through spiritual suggestion and by means of a certain natural light, the devil can also cause these visions in the soul, whether the objects be present or absent. The account in St. Matthew that tells of the devil showing Christ *omnia regna mundi et gloriam eorum* (all the kingdoms of the world and their glory) [Mt. 4:8] is explained by some doctors as an example of spiritual suggestion by the devil because it would have been impossible for him to make Christ see with his bodily eyes all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

24.7.(2). A great difference lies between diabolical and divine visions, for the effects of diabolical visions are unlike those produced by the divine. The devil's visions produce spiritual dryness in one's communion with God and an inclination to self-esteem, to admitting them and considering them important. In no way do they cause the mildness of humility and the love of God. Neither are the forms of these diabolical visions impressed with a delicate clarity upon the soul, as are the others. These impressed forms are not lasting, but are soon obliterated from the soul, except when its esteem causes a natural remembrance of them. But the memory of them is considerably arid, and does not produce the love and humility caused by the remembrance of the good visions.

24.8. These visions cannot serve the intellect as a proximate means for union with God because they deal with creatures, which bear no proportion or essential conformity to God. Consequently, to advance by the proximate means, which is faith, a person should behave in a purely negative way as with the other visions we mentioned. Souls should not store up or treasure the forms of these visions impressed within, neither should they have the desire to cling to them. In doing so they would impede themselves by what dwells within them (those forms, images, and figures of persons), and they would not journey to God through the negation of all things. Though these forms remain impressed within the soul, they are not a great impediment if one is unwilling to pay heed to them. Even if the remembrance of these visions really does stir the soul to some contemplation and love of God, denudation, pure faith, and darkness regarding them will stir and elevate it much more, and without its knowing how or whence this elevation comes.

24.8.(2). It will happen that a person will be enkindled with anxieties of very pure love without knowing their origin or foundation. The reason for this is that just as faith is infused and rooted more deeply in the soul by means of that emptiness, darkness, and nakedness regarding all things, or by spiritual poverty (which are all the same), so too the charity of God is simultaneously infused and deeply rooted in the soul. The more individuals desire darkness and annihilation of themselves regarding all visions, exteriorly or interiorly receivable, the greater will be the infusion of faith and consequently of love and hope, since these three theological virtues increase together.

24.9. But a person does not always grasp or feel this love, because it does not reside with tenderness in the senses, but resides in the soul with properties of strength and of greater courage and daring than before, though at times it overflows into the senses, imparting a gentle, tender feeling. Accordingly, to attain that love, happiness, and joy caused and



produced in the soul by these visions, individuals should possess fortitude, mortification, and love so as to remain in emptiness and darkness regarding all creatures. They should base their love and joy on what they neither see nor feel (nor are capable of seeing or feeling), that is, upon God who is incomprehensible and transcendent. This is why it behooves us to go to God through the negation of all. Even if individuals are so shrewd, humble, and strong that the devil is unable to deceive them by these visions or make them (as he usually does) fall into any presumption, the visions will be an obstacle to their advancement if they fail to practice this denial, since visions are an impediment to spiritual nakedness, poverty of spirit, and emptiness in faith; these are the requisites for union with God.

24.10. Since the same doctrine we taught about supernatural sensory visions and apprehensions in chapters 19 and 20 is valid also for these visions, we will not spend any more time here in their discussion.<sup>5</sup>

## **CHAPTER 25**

25. The nature and kinds of revelation.

25.1. Logically, our next discussion should deal with the second kind of spiritual apprehensions, which are termed revelations and, properly speaking, belong to the spirit of prophecy.

25.1.(2). First it should be understood that a revelation is nothing else than the disclosure of some hidden truth, or the manifestation of some secret or mystery, as when God imparts understanding of some truth to the intellect, or discloses to the soul something that he did, is doing, or is thinking of doing.<sup>1</sup>

25.2. We can affirm, therefore, the existence of two kinds of revelation: first, the disclosure of truths to the intellect (these are properly called intellectual notions or concepts); second, the manifestation of secrets. The term revelation is more properly applied to these latter than to the former. The first kind cannot strictly speaking be called revelations, since in them God bestows clear and manifest understanding of naked truths, not only of temporal but of spiritual objects as well. I desire to discuss these under the heading of revelations because of their close alliance and affinity with them, and to avoid a multiplication of divisions.

25.3. As a result we can divide revelations into two classes of apprehensions: One we shall call intellectual knowledge, and the other, manifestation of God's secrets and hidden mysteries. Beginning with intellectual knowledge, we will deal with these as briefly as possible in the following two chapters.

## CHAPTER 26

26. The two kinds of knowledge of naked truths. The proper conduct of the soul in their regard.

26.1. For an adequate exposition of this subject (the knowledge of naked truths), God would have to move my hand and pen. For you should know, beloved reader, that what they in themselves are for the soul is beyond words. Since, however, my purpose in speaking of these is only to impart instruction and guide the soul through them to divine union, let me discuss them in a brief and restricted way, which will be sufficient for our purpose.<sup>1</sup>

26.2. This kind of vision (knowledge of naked truths) is far different from the kind we just dealt with in chapter 24. This intellectual vision is not like the vision of corporeal objects, but rather consists of an intellectual understanding and vision of truths about God, or a vision of present, past, or future events that bears great resemblance to the spirit of prophecy, as we shall perhaps explain later.<sup>2</sup>

26.3. This type of knowledge is divided into two kinds: The object of one kind is the Creator; and that of the other is the creature, as we said.<sup>3</sup> Both kinds bring intense delight to the soul. Yet those of God produce an incomparable delight. There are no words or terms to describe them, for they are God's own knowledge and God's own delight. And as David says: there is nothing like unto him [Ps. 40:5]. God is the direct object of this knowledge in that one of his attributes (his omnipotence, fortitude, goodness, sweetness, and so on) is sublimely experienced. And as often as this experience occurs, it remains fixed in the soul. Since this communication is pure contemplation, the soul clearly understands that it is ineffable. Individuals are capable of describing it only through general expressions - expressions caused by the abundance of the delight and good of these experiences. But they realize the impossibility of explaining with these expressions what they tasted and felt in this communication.<sup>4</sup>

26.4. After David received a similar experience he spoke in these general terms: *Judicia Domini vera, justificata in semetipsa. Desiderabilia super aurum et lapidem pretiosum multum, et dulciora super mel et favum* (God's judgments - the virtues and attributes we experience in God - are true, in themselves justified, more desirable than gold and extremely precious stone, and sweeter than the honey and the honeycomb) [Ps. 19:10].

26.4.(2). We read that Moses spoke only in general terms of the lofty knowledge God once gave him while passing by. And it happened that when the Lord passed before him in that knowledge, Moses quickly prostrated himself, crying: *Dominator Domine Deus, misericors et clemens, patiens, et multae miserationis, ac verax. Qui custodis misericordiam in millia*, and so on. (Sovereign Lord God, merciful and clement, patient, and of great compassion, and true. You guard the mercy that you promise to thousands) [Ex. 34:6-7]. Evidently, since Moses could not express with one concept what he knew in God, he did so through an overflow of words.

26.4.(3). Although at times individuals use words in reference to this knowledge, they

clearly realize that they have said nothing of what they experienced, for no term can give adequate expression to it. And thus when St. Paul experienced that lofty knowledge of God, he did not care to say anything else than that it was not licit for humans to speak of it [2 Cor. 12:4].<sup>5</sup>

26.5. This divine knowledge of God never deals with particular things, since its object is the Supreme Principle. Consequently one cannot express it in particular terms unless a truth about something less than God is seen together with this knowledge of him. But in no way can anything be said of that divine knowledge.

26.5.(2). This sublime knowledge can be received only by a person who has arrived at union with God, for it is itself that very union. It consists in a certain touch of the divinity produced in the soul, and thus it is God himself who is experienced and tasted there. Although the touch of knowledge and delight that penetrates the substance of the soul is not manifest and clear, as in glory, it is so sublime and lofty that the devil is unable to meddle or produce anything similar (for there is no experience similar or comparable to it), or infuse a savor and delight like it. This knowledge tastes of the divine essence and of eternal life, and the devil cannot counterfeit anything so lofty.

26.6. He could, nevertheless, ape that experience by presenting to the soul some very sensible feelings of grandeur and fulfillment, trying to persuade it that these are from God. But this attempt of the devil does not enter the substance of the soul and suddenly renew and fill it with love as does a divine touch. Some of these divine touches produced in the substance of the soul are so enriching that one of them would be sufficient not only to remove definitively all the imperfections that the soul would have been unable to eradicate throughout its entire life but also to fill it with virtues and blessings from God.

26.7. These touches engender such sweetness and intimate delight in the soul that one of them would more than compensate for all the trials suffered in life, even though innumerable. Through these touches individuals become so courageous and so resolved to suffer many things for Christ that they find it a special suffering to observe that they do not suffer.

26.8. People are incapable of reaching this sublime knowledge through any comparison or imagining of their own, because it transcends what is naturally attainable. Thus God effects in the soul what it is incapable of acquiring. God usually grants these divine touches, which cause certain remembrances of him, at times when the soul is least expecting or thinking of them. Sometimes they are produced suddenly through some remembrance that may concern only some slight detail. They are so sensible that they sometimes cause not only the soul but also the body to tremble. Yet at other times with a sudden feeling of spiritual delight and refreshment, and without any trembling, they occur very tranquilly in the spirit.<sup>6</sup>

26.9. Or again they may occur on the uttering or hearing of a word from Sacred Scripture or from some other source.<sup>7</sup> These touches do not always have the same efficacy, nor are they always felt so forcefully, because they are often very weak. Yet no matter how weak

they may be, one of these divine awakenings and touches is worth more to the soul than numberless other thoughts and ideas about God's creatures and works.

26.9.(2). Since this knowledge is imparted to the soul suddenly, without the exercise of free will, individuals do not have to be concerned about desiring it or not. They should simply remain humble and resigned about it, for God will do his work at the time and in the manner he wishes.

26.10. I do not say that people should behave negatively regarding this knowledge, as they should with the other apprehensions, because this knowledge is an aspect of the union toward which we are directing the soul and which is the reason for our doctrine about denudation and detachment from all other apprehensions. God's means for granting such a grace are humility, suffering for love of him, and resignation as to all recompense. God does not bestow these favors on a possessive soul since he gives them out of a very special love for the recipient. The individual receiving them is one who loves with great detachment. The Son of God meant this when he stated through St. John: Qui autem diligit me, diligitur a Patre meo, et ego diligam eum et manifestabo ei meipsum (Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and manifest myself to them) [Jn. 14:21]. This manifestation includes the knowledge and touches that God imparts to a person who has reached him and truly loves him.

26.11. The second kind of knowledge, or vision, of interior truths is far different from the type we have just explained because it deals with things inferior to God. This class embodies knowledge of the truth of things in themselves and of human deeds and events. When bestowed, this kind of knowledge is so embedded in the soul - without anyone telling it anything - that if someone were to assert the opposite it would be unable to give interior assent even by force, for it has a spiritual knowledge of this truth that resembles clear vision. This knowledge pertains to the spirit of prophecy and to the grace St. Paul terms the discernment of spirits [1 Cor. 12:10].

26.11.(2). Although individuals may consider their knowledge certain and true, as we mentioned, and be unable to cast off that passive interior assent, they must not, because of this conviction, fail to believe and give the assent of reason to the instructions and commands of their spiritual director, even though these may be extremely contrary to what they feel. In this way they will be led by faith to divine union, for a soul must journey to it more by believing than by understanding.

26.12. We have clear testimonies in Sacred Scripture of both these kinds of knowledge. As for spiritual knowledge of things the Wise Man declares: Ipse dedit mihi horum quae sunt scientiam veram, ut sciam dispositionem orbis terrarum, et virtutes elementorum, initium et consummationes temporum, vicissitudinum permutationes, et consummationes temporum et morum mutationes, divisiones temporum, et anni cursus, et stellarum dispositiones, naturas animalium et iras bestiarum vim ventorum, et cogitationes hominum, differentias virgultorum, et virtutes radicum, et quaecumque sunt abscondita, et improvisa didici: Omnium enim artifex docuit me sapientia (God gave me true knowledge of existing things: to know the disposition of the earthly globe and the virtues

of the elements, the beginning, ending, and midst of the times, the various vicissitudes and changes of the seasons, the change of customs, the divisions of time, the courses of the year, and the position of the stars, the natures of animals, and the rages of beasts, the power and strength of the winds, the thoughts of people, the diversities of plants and trees, and the healing power of roots; and I learned all hidden and unforeseen things, for Wisdom, the maker of all, taught me) [Wis. 7:17-21].

26.12.(2). Although this knowledge of all things, which the Wise Man avows was given to him by God, was infused and general, this passage offers sufficient proof about all the particular knowledge God infuses supernaturally in souls when he desires. It does so not because God gives souls the general habit of knowledge as he did to Solomon, but because he sometimes reveals to them certain truths about the things enumerated here by the Wise Man.

26.12.(3). Indeed, our Lord infuses habits about different truths in many souls, although never as general a habit as was Solomon's. These habits are like those different kinds of gifts distributed by God that St. Paul enumerates. Among them he includes wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy, discernment or recognition of spirits, knowledge of tongues, interpretation of words, and so on [1 Cor. 12:8-10]. All these kinds of knowledge are infused habits that God grants naturally or supernaturally to whomsoever he wills: naturally, as in the case of Balaam, other idolatrous prophets, and many sibyls, to whom he imparted the spirit of prophecy; and supernaturally, as to the holy prophets, apostles, and other saints.

26.13. Yet prescindendo from these habits or *graces gratis datae*, we affirm that those who have reached perfection or are already close to it usually do possess light and knowledge about events happening in their presence or absence. This knowledge derives from their illumined and purified spirits. That passage from Proverbs can be interpreted as referring to this ability: *Quomodo in aquis resplendent vultus prospicientium, sic corda hominum manifesta sunt prudentibus* (As the faces of those who look in the water are reflected there, so are human hearts manifest to the prudent) [Prv. 27:19]. These prudent ones are those who possess the wisdom of the saints that Sacred Scripture calls prudence [Prv. 9:10]. Through this ability these persons also come now and then to the knowledge of other truths, although not whenever they desire, for such facility would be proper only to those who have the habit. And even those who possess the habit do not always have this facility in regard to everything, for that would depend on the assistance God wishes to give them.

26.14. It is worthy of note, though, that individuals whose spirit is purified can naturally perceive - some more than others - the inclinations and talents of other persons and what lies in the heart or interior spirit. They derive this knowledge through exterior indications (even though extremely slight) such as words, gestures, and other signs. Just as the devil, because he is a spirit, is endowed with this skill, so is the spiritual person, according to the Apostle: *Spiritualis autem iudicat omnia* (The spiritual person judges all things) [1 Cor. 2:15]. And again he declares: *Spiritus enim omnia scrutatur, etiam profunda Dei* (The spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God) [1 Cor. 2:10].

26.14.(2). Although spiritual persons cannot know naturally the thoughts of others or their interior state, they can know this clearly through supernatural enlightenment or through exterior indications. And though they can often be deceived in the knowledge deduced from these indications, they are more often correct in their surmise. But they must not put trust in knowledge acquired through either of these two ways, because, as we will point out,<sup>8</sup> the devil is a notorious and subtle meddler in this area. Consequently they should always renounce such knowledge.

26.15. We have an example and testimony in the Fourth Book of Kings of how spiritual persons, even when absent, can also possess knowledge of human deeds and events. When Gehazi, the servant of our Father Elisha,<sup>9</sup> desired to hide the money received from Naaman, Elisha said: *Nonne cor meum in praesenti erat, quando reversus est homo de curru suo in occursum tui?* (Was not my heart perchance present when Naaman turned from his chariot and went to meet you?) [2 Kgs. 5:25-26]. This took place spiritually in such a way that the spirit beheld the event as if it had happened right before it. We find another proof of this in the same book where we read that Elisha told the king of Israel everything that the king of Syria discussed with his counselors in his private chamber, and thus these meetings bore no fruit. When the king of Syria realized that their decisions were no longer secret, he complained to his counselors: Why do you not tell me who among you is betraying me to the King of Israel? And then one of his counselors exclaimed: *Nequaquam, domine mi rex, sed Elisha propheta, qui est in Israel indicat regi Israel omnia verba quaecumque locutus fueris in conclavi tuo* (Not so, my lord king, but Elisha the prophet who is in Israel reveals to the king everything you say in your private chamber) [2 Kgs. 6:11-12].

26.16. These kinds of knowledge of things<sup>10</sup> as well as the other kinds come to the soul passively, without it doing anything on its own. For it will happen that, while a person is distracted and inattentive, a keen understanding of what is being heard or read will be implanted in the spirit, an understanding far clearer than that conveyed through the sound of the words. And although sometimes individuals fail to grasp the sense of the words - as when expressed in Latin, a language unknown to them - this meaning is revealed without their understanding the words themselves.<sup>11</sup>

26.17. We could expound a great deal on the deceptions the devil can and does cause with regard to this kind of knowledge and understanding, for his deceits are gross and singularly concealed. He can through suggestion ingrain many intellectual ideas so deeply in the soul that they will seem to be true; and if the soul is not humble and distrustful he will doubtless bring it to believe a thousand lies.

26.17.(2). At times the suggestion produces so strong an impression on individuals - especially when the soul shares somewhat in the weakness of the senses - and embeds the knowledge in them with such power, persuasion, and conviction that they then need a great deal of prayer and strength in order to discard it. Sometimes the devil represents clearly, but falsely, the sins of others, evil consciences, and evil souls in order to calumniate. And he wants these things to be published abroad so that many sins may be

committed, and he imparts zeal to these individuals by convincing them that the reason for all of this is so prayer may be offered to God for these people. Now it is true that God sometimes shows holy souls their neighbors' needs so that they might pray for them or provide a remedy. We read, for example, that he revealed to Jeremiah the weakness of the prophet Baruch so that he could instruct Baruch about it [Jer. 45:3]. Nevertheless, the devil does this very frequently and falsely, so as to occasion calumnies, sins, and distress; and of this we have much experience. And again at other times the devil will implant deeply in souls other knowledge, and make them believe it.

26.18. Regardless of whether this knowledge is from God, it will be of little profit to persons in their advance toward union if they are attached to it. If they are careless about denying themselves this knowledge, it will be not only an obstacle but the occasion of serious harm and error. All the dangers and difficulties that we said arise from supernatural apprehensions, which we have discussed up to this point, and even more, can result from this knowledge.

26.18.(2). I will not enlarge on this subject any more since we have given sufficient instruction in previous chapters. I only point out that people should be extremely careful always to reject this knowledge, and they should desire to journey to God by unknowing, and always give an account of these revelations to their confessor or spiritual master and abide by his counsel. The director should allow the soul to relate this experience briefly, but should not make it the main factor in the soul's journey toward union with God. The effect God desires to produce through these passive communications will be fixed in the soul without need for efforts of its own.

26.18.(3). It seems to me there is no reason, then, to discuss the different effects caused by true and false knowledge, for this would be wearisome and unending. These effects could not be condensed to a few words because the quantity and variety of this knowledge causes a quantity and variety of effects - the good knowledge causing good effects and evil knowledge causing evil effects, and so on. It is sufficient to insist on rejection of all this knowledge as a control against any error.



## CHAPTER 27

27. The second kind of revelation: the disclosure of secrets and hidden mysteries. The ways in which this knowledge can be either a contribution or a hindrance toward union with God. How the devil can greatly deceive souls in this matter.

27.1. We stated that the second kind of revelation is the disclosure of secrets and hidden mysteries.<sup>1</sup> It can be divided into two further categories:

27.1.(2). The first concerns God himself, which includes the revelation of the mystery of the most holy Trinity and unity of God.

27.1.(3). The second concerns God in his works. This comprises the remaining articles of our Catholic faith and the propositions of truths that can be explicitly formed about his works. These propositions embody a large number of revelatory prophecies, of promises and threats from God, and of other past and future events in regard to this matter of faith.

27.1.(4). We can include in this second category many other particular facts revealed ordinarily by God about the universe in general and, in particular, about kingdoms, provinces, states, families, and individuals.

27.4.(5). We have numerous examples of these manifestations, both general and particular, in the divine Scriptures, especially in the writings of the prophets in which all these kinds of revelations are found. Since this assertion is clear and evident, I do not want to spend time here quoting scriptural passages. I merely want to affirm that these revelations are not given by word only, for God bestows them in a variety of ways and manners: sometimes by word alone; at other times only by signs, figures, images, and likenesses; and sometimes by both together, as is seen in the writings of the prophets. This is particularly evident throughout the Apocalypse where we find examples of all these various kinds of revelations and also of the different ways they are imparted.

27.2. Even in our time God grants revelations of this second category to whom he wills. He will reveal to some the number of days they have to live, or the trials they will have to endure, or something that will befall a particular person or kingdom, and so on. Even with regard to the mysteries of our faith, he will uncover and declare to the spirit truths concerning them, although properly speaking this would not be a revelation since they are already revealed. It would be instead a manifestation or declaration of the already revealed mysteries.

27.3. The devil can be a great meddler with this kind of revelation. Since the truths are imparted through words, figures, likenesses, and so on, he can make counterfeits more easily than when the revelations are given solely to the spirit. If, in these two categories we mentioned, some new truth about our faith is revealed, or something at variance with it, we must by no means give assent, even though we may have evidence that it was spoken by an angel from heaven. Thus St. Paul states: *Licet nos, aut angelus de coelo evangelizet vobis praeterquam quod evangelizavimus vobis, anathema sit* (If we, or an angel from heaven, declare or preach something other than what we have preached, let

him be anathema) [Gal 1:8].

27.4. Since there are no more articles to be revealed to the Church about the substance of our faith, people must not merely reject new revelations about the faith, but out of caution repudiate other kinds of knowledge mingled with them. In order to preserve the appropriate purity of faith, a person should not believe already revealed truths because they are again revealed but because they were already sufficiently revealed to the Church. Closing one's mind to them, one should rest simply on the doctrine of the Church and its faith that, as St. Paul says, enters through hearing [Rom. 10:17]. And if individuals want to escape delusion they should not adapt their credence and understanding to those truths of faith revealed again, no matter how true and conformed to the faith they may seem. To deceive and introduce lies the devil first lures a person with truths and verisimilitudes that give assurance; then he proceeds with his beguilement. These truths of his are like the bristle used in sewing leather: It is put through the holes first in order to pull the soft thread along after it; without the bristle the thread would never pass through.

27.5. Let this be kept in mind: Even if there is actually no danger of deception to the soul, it greatly behooves souls not to want to understand the truths of faith clearly, so that they may thereby conserve pure and entire the merit of faith and also pass through this night of intellect to the divine light of union.

27.5.(2). Closing the eyes to any new revelation and focusing them on former prophecies is so important that even though St. Peter in some way saw the glory of the Son of God on Mount Tabor, he declared in his Second Epistle: *Et habemus firmiorem propheticum sermonem, cui benefacitis attendentes*, etc. (Although our vision of Christ on the mount was true, the word of the prophecy revealed to us is more certain and unshaken, and you do well by resting your soul on it) [2 Pt. 1:19].

27.6. If it is true for the reasons already mentioned that one should close one's eyes to these revelations about the propositions of faith, how much greater need is there to repel and disbelieve other revelations about different things and in which the devil usually meddles! Because of the apparent truth and convincing quality with which the devil clothes them, I consider it impossible for a person who is not striving to reject them to go undeceived. For to make people believe, the devil joins together so many apparent and appropriate facts, and implants them so firmly in the imagination and senses, that it seems the events will undoubtedly occur. And he causes the soul to be so convinced and tenacious about them that if it has no humility it will hardly be torn from its opinion and made to believe the contrary.

27.6.(2). The pure, cautious, simple, and humble soul should resist and reject revelations and other visions with as much effort and care as it would extremely dangerous temptations, for in order to reach the union of love there is need not to desire them but to reject them. Solomon meant this when he exclaimed: *What need has one to desire and seek what is above one's natural capacity?* [Eccl. 6:11].<sup>2</sup> This means that to be perfect there is no need to desire to receive goods in a way that is supernatural and beyond one's capacity.

27.7. Any objection that could be made against these instructions has already been answered in chapters 19 and 20 of this book.<sup>3</sup> Referring to the doctrine given there, I say only that individuals should be on their guard against these revelations so that through the night of faith they may journey to union purely and without error.

## CHAPTER 28

28. The nature and kinds of supernatural locutions received by the spirit.

28.1. The discreet reader must always keep in mind my intention and goal in this book: to guide the soul in purity of faith through all its natural and supernatural apprehensions, in freedom from deception and every obstacle, to divine union with God. One should understand that though I am not giving abundant instruction about these apprehensions of the soul, nor examining the divisions and subject matter as minutely as may be necessary, I am not being brief on this topic either. For I think I have imparted sufficient advice, light, and instruction on the prudent behavior required for advancement in the midst of these exterior and interior apprehensions.

28.1.(2). This is why I discussed prophetic apprehensions so briefly, as I also did the others. There is so much to expound about each of these kinds of prophecy (about their difference and their ways and modes of being received) that I think one would never know it all fully. I am content that, in my opinion, the substantial part of the doctrine has been pointed out, as well as the caution that is necessary in dealing with these apprehensions or anything resembling them.

28. 2. I will now follow the same method with the third kind of apprehension, which we said<sup>1</sup> were the supernatural locutions. These are usually produced in a person's spirit without the use of the bodily senses as means. Although there are many classes, I find they can be reduced to three: successive, formal, and substantial locutions.

28.2.(2). Successive locutions are the words and reasonings that the spirit of itself usually forms and deduces while recollected.

28.2.(3). Formal locutions are certain distinct and formal words that the spirit receives, whether or not recollected, not from itself but from another.

28.2.(4). Substantial locutions are other words that are also produced formally in the spirit, regardless of whether one is recollected, and that cause in the substance of the soul the power and very substance they signify.

28.2.(5). We will discuss all these in due order.

## CHAPTER 29

29. The first kind of locution the recollected spirit sometimes forms. A discussion of its origin and of the profit or harm it may occasion.

29.1. Successive words always occur when the spirit is recollected and attentively absorbed in some consideration. Individuals will reason about their subject, proceeding thought by thought, forming precise words and judgments, deducing and discovering such unknown truths with so much ease and clarity that it will seem to them they are doing nothing and another person is interiorly reasoning, answering, and teaching them.

29.1.(2). Indeed, there is every reason for thinking this, since they reason with themselves and reply as if carrying on a dialogue. In a way they really are speaking with another for, though they reason by using their intellect as the instrument, the Holy Spirit frequently helps them to form true concepts, words, and judgments, and thus they utter them to themselves as though to another person. Since their intellect is recollected and united with the truth, which is the subject of their thought, and the Holy Spirit is also united with them in that truth - for he is in every truth - it results that, while their intellect is thus communing with the divine Spirit by means of that truth, it simultaneously forms interiorly and successively other truths about its subject while the Holy Spirit, the Teacher, leads the way and gives light. This is one of the Holy Spirit's methods of teaching.<sup>1</sup>

29.2. Thus the intellect, understanding those truths communicated to it from elsewhere, and enlightened and taught by this Master, forms statements by itself about them. Accordingly we could say that the voice is of Jacob, but the hands of Esau [Gn. 27:22]. Anyone having this experience cannot help but think that these statements or words come from another. They do not know about the ease with which the intellect, in dealing with concepts and truths communicated by another, can form words for itself that also seem to come from another.

29.3. Though in that communication or illumination itself there is actually no deception of the intellect, yet there can be and frequently is deception in the formal words and statements the intellect deduces from it. The light is often so delicate and spiritual that the intellect does not succeed in being completely informed by it; and it is the intellect that forms the statements of its own power, as we stated. Consequently the statements are often false, or only apparent, or defective. Since the intellect afterward joins its own lowly capacity and awkwardness to the thread of truth it had already begun to grasp, it can easily change the truth in accordance with this lowly capacity, and all as though another person were speaking to it.

29.4. I knew a person who in experiencing these successive locutions formed, among some very true and solid ones about the Blessed Sacrament, others that were outright heresies.

29.4.(2). I greatly fear what is happening in these times of ours: If any soul whatever after a few pennies worth of reflection experiences one of these locutions in some recollection,

it will immediately baptize all as coming from God and, supposing this, say, "God told me," "God answered me." Yet this will not be true but, as we pointed out, these persons will themselves more often be the ones who speak the words.<sup>2</sup>

29.5. Furthermore, the desire for such locutions and attachment to them will cause these persons to answer themselves and think that God is responding and speaking to them. They will commit serious blunders if they do not practice great restraint and if their directors do not oblige them to renounce such discursive methods. For through these methods they usually derive more vanity of speech and impurity of soul than humility and mortification of spirit. They think something extraordinary has occurred and that God has spoken, whereas in reality little more than nothing will have happened, or nothing at all, or even less than nothing. For whatever does not engender humility, charity, mortification, holy simplicity, silence, and so on, of what value is it?

29.5.(2). I say, therefore, that these locutions can be a serious obstacle to souls in their journey toward divine union because by paying attention to them souls are drawn far from the abyss of faith. The intellect should remain in obscurity and journey by love in darkness of faith and not by much reasoning.

29.6. If you ask me why the intellect must be deprived of those truths since the Spirit of God illumines it through them and thus they are not bad, I answer: The Holy Spirit illumines the recollected intellect, and illumines it according to the mode of its recollection; the intellect can find no better recollection than in faith, and thus the Holy Spirit will not illumine it in any other recollection more than in faith. The purer and more refined a soul is in faith, the more infused charity it has. And the more charity it has the more the Holy Spirit illumines it and communicates his gifts because charity is the means by which they are communicated.<sup>3</sup>

29.6.(2). Although in that illumination of truths the Holy Spirit does communicate some light to the soul, the light given in faith - in which there is no clear understanding - is qualitatively as different from the other as is the purest gold from the basest metal, and quantitatively as is the sea from a drop of water. In the first kind of illumination, wisdom concerning one, two, or three truths, and so on, is communicated; in the second kind, all of God's Wisdom is communicated in general, that is, the Son of God, who communicates himself to the soul in faith.

29.7. Should you tell me that everything will be all right since the first kind of illumination is no obstacle to the second, I would reply that it is a serious obstacle if the soul pays attention to it. For this would involve attention to clear things, things of little importance and enough to hinder the communication of the abyss of faith. In this faith God supernaturally and secretly teaches the soul and raises it up in virtues and gifts in a way unknown to it.

29.7.(2). The benefit to be gained from a successive locution will not come from focusing one's attention on it. Rather, doing so would drive away the communication, for Wisdom says to the soul in the Song of Songs: Withdraw your eyes from me, for they make me fly

away [Sg. 6:4], that is, they make me fly far from you and ascend higher. The benefit will be received by refusing to focus the intellect on what is communicated supernaturally and simply centering the will on God with love. For it is in love that these goods are communicated, and indeed more abundantly than before.

29.7.(3). If the natural intellect and the other faculties intervene actively in these supernatural and passive communications, they will not attain these heights because of their own mode and obtuseness. Thus they will be forced to modify the communications according to their mode, and consequently change them. The intellect, then, will necessarily err and form judgments of its own that will be neither supernatural nor similar to the supernatural, but singularly natural, erroneous, and base.

29.8. Yet some intellects are so lively and subtle that, while recollected in meditation, they reason naturally and easily about some concepts, and form locutions and statements very vividly, and think that these are indeed from God. But that notion is false, for an intellect somewhat freed from the operation of the senses has the capacity to do this and even more with its own natural light and without any other supernatural help. Such an occurrence is frequent. And many are deluded by it into thinking that theirs is the enjoyment of a high degree of prayer and communication from God; consequently they either write the words down themselves or have others do so. But it comes about that the experience amounts to nothing, nothing substantial in the line of virtue comes from it, and it serves for no more than to induce vainglory.

29.9. These people should learn to give importance to nothing other than sincere effort, the establishment of their wills in humble love, and suffering in imitation of the life and mortifications of the Son of God. This is the road to the attainment of every spiritual good, and not that other one of profuse interior discourse.<sup>4</sup>

29.10. The devil too meddles a great deal in this kind of interior locution, especially with persons who have a particular attachment to them. When such people begin recollecting themselves, the devil usually offers ample matter for digression by supplying, through suggestion, ideas or words for the intellect. Subtly deceiving them with verisimilitudes, he gradually brings about their ruin. This is one of his ways of communicating with those who have made a tacit or express pact with him, or of informing heretics - or especially heresiarchs - about extremely subtle, false, and erroneous ideas and arguments.

29.11. Manifestly, then, these successive locutions can originate in the intellect from any of three causes: the divine Spirit, who moves and illumines the intellect; the natural light of the intellect; and the devil, who can speak to it through suggestion.

29.11.(2). It would be a difficult task now to discuss completely all the signs for the discernment of the cause from which these locutions proceed, although we can easily give some general ones. They are:

29.11.(3). When together with the words and concepts the soul is loving God and simultaneously experiencing this love with humility and reverence, we have an indication

that the Holy Spirit is at work within it. Whenever he bestows favors he clothes them with this love. When the locutions originate from the vivacity and light of the intellect, the cause of everything is the intellect and there is no accompanying activity of the virtues. The will can love naturally in the knowledge and light of those truths, yet after the meditation it will remain dry. But the soul will have no inclination toward vanity unless the devil again tempts it about its experience. In the locutions arising from the good spirit this aridity is not felt, because after the locution the will is ordinarily attached to God and inclined toward good. Yet sometimes the will is arid afterward even if the communication is from the good spirit, for God so ordains for reasons that are beneficial to the soul. At other times the soul will not have much experience of the operations or movements of those virtues; nevertheless the locution will be good. This is the reason it is sometimes difficult to discern the cause of these locutions through their varied effects. The effects already referred to are the common ones, though at times they are more abundant and at other times less.

29.11.(4). Even locutions caused by the devil are sometimes difficult to discern and recognize. Ordinarily, indeed, they leave the will in dryness as to the love of God, and the intellect inclined toward vanity and self-esteem or complacency; still, they can bring about a false humility and a fervent tendency of the will rooted in self-love. A person in consequence will have to be very spiritual to recognize this. The devil effects these false virtues in order to be more hidden. That he might fix in souls the attachments he desires them to have, he is expert at inducing the flow of tears from the feelings he introduces. He always endeavors to move the will toward an esteem for these interior communications and to get people to place much importance on them so that they will devote and occupy themselves with things that are not virtuous but an occasion for the loss of what virtue there is.

29.12. Let us conclude then with this precaution necessary for the avoidance of any delusion or hindrance from these variously caused locutions: We should pay no heed to them, but be only interested in directing the will, with fortitude, toward God; we should carry out his law and holy counsels with perfection - for such is the wisdom of the saints - content with knowing the mysteries and truths in the simplicity and verity with which the Church proposes them. An attitude of this kind is sufficient for a vigorous enkindling of the will. Hence we do not have to pry into profundities and curiosities in which there is seldom a lack of danger. St. Paul in regard to this conduct states: One should not have more knowledge than is fitting [Rom. 12:3]. What was said should be enough on the subject of successive words.



## CHAPTER 30

30. Interior words formally and supernaturally produced in the spirit. A warning about their danger and a necessary precaution against delusion.

30.1. The second kind of interior locution is called formal and is produced supernaturally in the spirit without the use of the senses. It comes independently of whether the spirit is recollected or not. I give it the name "formal locution" because another person formally utters it to the spirit without intervention of the soul. It is consequently far different from the successive locution. It differs not only by the fact that the spirit itself is not involved in the cause but also, as I say, in that it occurs sometimes when there is no recollection and the soul is far from any thought of what is spoken. In successive locutions such is not the case, for they always have to do with the subject of one's reflection.

30.2. Sometimes these words are very explicit and at other times not. They are often like ideas spoken to the spirit, either as a reply to something or in another manner. At times only one word is spoken, and then again more than one; sometimes the locutions are successive, like the others, for they may endure while the soul is being taught or while something is being discussed. All these words come without any intervention of the spirit because they are received as though one person were speaking to another. Daniel experienced this when, as he says, the angel spoke to him. The angel reasoned formally and successively in his spirit and also declared that he had come to teach him [Dn. 9:22].

30.3. When these words are no more than formal they bear little effect. Ordinarily they are given merely for the purpose of teaching or shedding light upon some truth. Accordingly the efficacy of their effect need be no more than required to attain their purpose. When God is the cause of the locution this effect is always produced in the soul, for it gives the soul both readiness to accomplish the command and clarity in understanding it. Yet these locutions do not always remove repugnance and difficulty, rather they sometimes augment it. God does this for the further instruction, humility, and good of the soul. God more frequently allows this repugnance when he orders something pertinent to a prelacy or to some other factor that will bring honor to the soul. And in matters of humility and lowliness he imparts more facility and readiness. We read in Exodus that when God ordered Moses to go to Pharaoh and obtain liberation for the people, Moses felt such repugnance that God had to command him three times and show him signs. Yet none of this was of any avail until God gave him Aaron to share in the honor [Ex. 3:10-22; 4:1-18].

30.4. On the other hand, when the locutions and communications are from the devil, it will happen that both ease and readiness will be given in matters involving prestige, whereas only repugnance will be felt for lowly tasks. God surely abhors the sight of souls inclined toward prelacies. Even when he gives a command in this regard and puts souls in office, he does not want them to be eager to govern. Formal locutions differ from the successive ones with respect to this readiness that God usually bestows. Successive locutions do not move the spirit as much as formal ones do, because the latter are more formal and the intellect does less on its own. Yet this does not prevent the successive locutions from sometimes producing a greater effect because of a greater communication

between the divine Spirit and the human spirit. However, there is considerable difference in the manner in which the effect is produced. The soul has no reason for doubting that these locutions come from another, since it is clearly aware that it does not form them itself, especially because it is not thinking on what is said to it. Even if it does happen to be pondering over this, it still experiences very clearly and distinctly that the locution is from another source.

30.5. A person should pay no more attention to all these formal locutions than to the other kind, for besides occupying the spirit with matters irrelevant to faith, the legitimate and proximate means to union with God, they will make one an easy victim for the devil's deceits. At times one can hardly discern the locutions spoken by a good spirit or those coming from a bad one. Since these locutions do not produce much effect, they can hardly be discerned by the effect. Sometimes those of the devil will be more effective in imperfect souls than the others will be in spiritual ones. Individuals should not do what these words tell them, nor should they pay attention to them - whether they be from a good or bad spirit. Nevertheless, these locutions should be manifested to a mature confessor or to a discreet and wise person who will give instructions and counsel and consider the appropriate thing to do. But a person's attitude toward them ought to be one of resignation and negation. If such an expert person cannot be found, it is better not to speak of these locutions to anyone, but simply pay no attention to them, for a soul can easily fall into the hands of some persons who will tear it down rather than build it up. Souls should not discuss these locutions with just anyone, since in so serious a matter being right or wrong is of such importance.

30.6. It should be kept in mind that individuals must never follow their own opinion about these locutions or do or admit anything told through them without ample advice and counsel from another. For in this matter of locutions strange and subtle deceits will occur - so much so that I believe a person who is not opposed to experiencing such things cannot help but be deceived in many of them.

30.7. Since I intentionally discussed these delusions and dangers, and the necessary precautions concerning them, in chapters 17 to 20 of this book - to which I refer the reader - I will not enlarge any more upon them here. I only repeat that my main teaching is to pay no heed whatever to them.

## CHAPTER 31

31. Substantial locutions produced in the spirit. How these differ from formal locutions, the benefit that comes from them, and the resignation and respect that should be had in their regard.

31.1. The third kind of interior locution, we said,<sup>1</sup> is the substantial locution. Although these locutions are also formal, since they are impressed very formally in the soul, they nevertheless are different in that their effect is vital and substantial, which is not the case with formal locutions. Although every substantial word is formal, it does not follow that every formal word is substantial - only the word that impresses its significance substantially on the soul. For example, if our Lord should say formally to the soul, "Be good," it would immediately be substantially good; or if he should say, "Love me," it would at once have and experience within itself the substance of the love of God; or if he should say to a soul in much fear, "Do not fear," it would without delay feel great fortitude and tranquility. For as the Wise Man declares, God's word and utterance is full of power [Eccl. 8:4], and thus it produces substantially in the soul what is said. David meant this when he stated: Behold, he will give his voice the voice of power [Ps. 68:33]. God did this to Abraham. When he said: Walk in my presence and be perfect [Gn. 17:1], Abraham immediately became perfect and always proceeded with reverence for God. We note this power of God's word in the Gospel when with a mere expression he healed the sick, raised the dead, and so on.

31.1.(2). In this fashion he bestows substantial locutions on certain souls. These locutions are as important and valuable as are the life, virtue, and incomparable blessings they impart to the soul. A locution of this sort does more good for a person than a whole lifetime of deeds.<sup>31.2.</sup> As for these locutions, the soul has nothing to do, desire, refrain from desiring, reject, or fear.

31.2.(2). There is nothing to be done, because God never grants them for that purpose, but he bestows them in order to bring about what they express. For this reason they differ from the formal and successive locutions. And there is nothing for the soul to desire or refrain from desiring. A desire for these locutions is not necessary for God to grant them, nor would not wanting them hinder their effect. The soul should rather be resigned and humble about them.

31.2.(3). A person has nothing to reject because the effect of these locutions remains substantiated in the soul and replete with God's blessings. Since the soul receives this passively, its activity would be entirely superfluous.

31.2.(4). It need not fear any deception because neither the intellect nor the devil can intervene in this communication. The devil is incapable of passively producing the substantial effect of his locution on the soul unless, as it may happen, the soul has surrendered itself to him by a voluntary pact. Thus the devil, dwelling in it as its lord, would produce such effects - not good, but evil ones. Since this soul would already be united with him in voluntary wickedness, he could easily impress in it the evil effects of his locutions and words. From experience we observe that in many matters he has great

power through suggestion even with good souls, making these locutions extremely efficacious for them. If these souls were evil, then, he could produce the effect in them completely. But he is unable to produce effects similar to those arising from God's locutions, for there is no comparison between God's words and the devil's. In comparison with God's locutions and their effect, those of the devil and their effect are nothing. God affirms this through Jeremiah: What has the chaff to do with the wheat? Are not my words perhaps like fire and the hammer that breaks rocks? [Jer. 23:28-29].<sup>2</sup>

31.2.(5). Consequently these substantial locutions are a great aid to union with God. And the more interior and substantial they are, the more advantageous for the soul. Happy the soul to whom God speaks these substantial words. Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening [1 Sm. 3:10].

## CHAPTER 32

32. The intellectual apprehensions of the spiritual feelings supernaturally imparted to the soul. The cause of these interior feelings and the attitude necessary to avoid hindering the journey toward union with God.

32.1. It is time now for a discussion of the fourth and last kind of intellectual apprehension. This kind, we said, the intellect receives from the spiritual feelings that are often granted supernaturally to spiritual persons. We count these spiritual feelings among the distinct apprehensions of the intellect.<sup>1</sup>

32.2. These distinct spiritual feelings are of two kinds: The first comprises feelings in the affection of the will; the second, feelings in the substance of the soul. The two can take place in many ways.

32.2.(2). Those in the will are very sublime when from God, but the feelings in the substance of the soul are the loftiest and are exceptionally advantageous and good. Neither the soul nor its director can know their origin or the works for which God bestows them.

32.2.(3). These favors are not dependent on the works or reflections of the soul, though these exercises do dispose it well to receive such gifts, for God grants them to whom he wills and for the reason he wills. It can happen that someone will have done many works, and yet God will not bestow these touches; and another will have accomplished far fewer works and nevertheless receive an abundance of the most sublime touches. Accordingly, though it may be a better preparation, it is not necessary for a soul to be actually employed and occupied in spiritual matters for God to grant the touches from which it experiences these feelings. Most of the time this favor is given when it is farthest from the mind.

32.2.(4). Some of these touches are distinct and of short duration, others are not so distinct and last longer.

32.3. These feelings, as such, are not allied to the intellect but to the will. Thus it is not my purpose to discuss them here. This I will do in the following book while dealing with the night and purgation of the attachments of the will.<sup>2</sup>

32.3.(2). Yet because most of the time the apprehension, knowledge, and understanding of them overflows into the intellect, we ought to mention them here.

32.3.(3). It is noteworthy that from these feelings the apprehension of knowledge or understanding frequently overflows, as I say, into the intellect. This is true with both the touches in the will and those in the substance of the soul, whether they be sudden touches or lasting and successive. This apprehension is usually an exceptionally sublime and delightful experience of God in the intellect. It cannot be given a name, nor can the feeling from which it overflows. This knowledge is now of one kind and then again of another. According to the touches produced by God (that cause the feelings from which

the knowledge is derived), and according to the property of these touches, this knowledge is sometimes more sublime and clear than at other times.

32.4. There is no need to waste many words here in cautioning the intellect and directing it through this knowledge to union with God in faith. The feelings we mentioned are produced passively in individuals without their doing anything effectively to receive them. So too the knowledge of these feelings is received passively in the intellect (which philosophers call "possible") without anything being actively done by these individuals. To avoid error as a result of these feelings, and any impediment to the profit coming from them, the intellect should do nothing about them other than behave passively and refrain from meddling through the use of its natural capacity. For as in the case of successive locutions, the intellect by its own activity easily disturbs and undoes that delicate knowledge, a delightful, supernatural knowing unattainable through one's natural capacity.<sup>3</sup> Nor does the intellect by its own activity find this knowledge comprehensible, but comprehends it only by receiving it.

32.4.(2). Thus a person should not strive after this knowledge or want it, lest the intellect begin to form other knowledge on its own, or the devil find an entrance for his varied and false knowledge. The devil can easily effect false knowledge, either by means of these feelings or by others he himself can bestow on the soul that is attached to this knowledge. A person should be resigned, humble, and passive with respect to it. For since it is received passively from God, it will be received when he is pleased to grant it and when he sees that the soul is humble and unpossessive. In this way one will not hinder the tremendous benefit lying in this knowledge with respect to divine union, for all these feelings are touches of union; and the union is produced passively in the soul.

32.5. The doctrine expounded is sufficient, for in the divisions we gave the soul will find precautions and instructions for any of its intellectual apprehensions. Even though seemingly different or unincorporated, there is no intellectual apprehension that cannot be reduced to one of these kinds. A person can therefore obtain the proper instructions by referring to my discussion of it.

### **BOOK THREE**

This book treats of purgation in the active night of the memory and the will. It presents doctrine about the attitude required in the apprehensions of these two faculties so that a soul may reach union with God in perfect hope and charity.

## **CHAPTER 1**

1.1. We have already given instructions for the intellect, the first faculty of the soul, so that in all its apprehensions it may be united with God through pure faith, the first theological virtue. The same has to be done for the other two faculties, memory and will. They must undergo a purification of their respective apprehensions in order to reach union with God in perfect hope and charity.

1.1.(2). Our exposition in this third book will be brief. It is not necessary to enlarge so much in our treatise on these faculties, since in the instructions given for the intellect (the receptacle in its own way of all the other objects) we have covered a great portion of the matter. If spiritual persons direct their intellects in faith according to the doctrine given them, it is impossible for them not to instruct their other two faculties simultaneously in the other two virtues, for these faculties depend on one another in their operations.

1.1.2. To continue the method we have been using and for the sake of clarity, we will discuss each point particularly and list the proper apprehensions of each faculty. We begin with those of the memory and here give a division of them that should suffice for our purpose. We form this division from the three different objects of the memory: natural, imaginative, and spiritual. In accord with these objects the knowledge of the memory is also of three kinds: natural, supernatural imaginative, and spiritual.

1.3. With God's help we will discuss these three here, beginning with natural knowledge that arises from a more exterior object. Afterward we will deal with the affections of the will, and thereby this third book of the active spiritual night will be brought to a close.



## CHAPTER 2

2. The natural apprehensions of the memory. How to become empty of them in order to reach union with God through this faculty.

2.1. In each of these books readers must keep in mind the intention we have in writing. Failure to do so will give rise to many doubts about what they read. They may already have them concerning the instructions given for the intellect, or they may experience them on reading what we say about the memory and the will.

2.1.(2). Observing how we annihilate the faculties in their operations, it will perhaps seem that we are tearing down rather than building up the way of spiritual exercise. This would be true if our doctrine here were destined merely for beginners who need to prepare themselves by means of these discursive apprehensions.

2.2. But we are imparting instructions here for advancing in contemplation to union with God. All these sensory means and exercises of the faculties must consequently be left behind and in silence so that God himself may effect divine union in the soul. As a result one has to follow this method of disencumbering, emptying, and depriving the faculties of their natural authority and operations to make room for the inflow and illumination of the supernatural. Those who do not turn their eyes from their natural capacity will not attain to so lofty a communication; rather they will hinder it.

2.3. Thus, if it is true - as indeed it is - that the soul must journey by knowing God through what he is not rather than through what he is, it must journey, insofar as possible, by way of the denial and rejection of natural and supernatural apprehensions. This is our task now with the memory. We must draw it away from its natural props and boundaries and raise it above itself (above all distinct knowledge and apprehensible possession) to supreme hope in the incomprehensible God.

2.4. To begin with natural knowledge in the memory, I include under this heading all that can be formed from the objects of the five corporeal senses (hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch), and everything like this sensory knowledge that the memory can evoke and fashion. It must strip and empty itself of all this knowledge and these forms and strive to lose the imaginative apprehension of them. It should do this in such a way that no knowledge or trace of them remains in it; rather it should be bare and clear, as though nothing passed through it, forgetful of all and suspended.

2.4.(2). There is no way to union with God without annihilating the memory as to all forms. This union cannot be wrought without a complete separation of the memory from all forms that are not God. As we mentioned in the night of the intellect, God cannot be encompassed by any form or distinct knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Since, as Christ affirms, no one can serve two masters [Mt. 6:24], and since the memory cannot at the same time be united with God and with forms and distinct knowledge, and since God has no form or image comprehensible to the memory, the memory is without form and without figure when united with God. Its imagination being lost in great forgetfulness without the remembrance of anything, it is absorbed in a supreme good. This is noted every day

through experience. That divine union empties and sweeps the phantasy of all forms and knowledge, and elevates it to the supernatural.

2.5. It is worthwhile noting what sometimes takes place in this state. When God on occasion produces these touches of union in the memory, a sudden jolt is experienced in the brain (where the memory has its seat), so sensible that it seems the whole head swoons and consciousness and sensibility are lost.<sup>2</sup> This is sometimes more perceptible, sometimes less, according to the force of the touch. Then, owing to the union, the memory is emptied and purged of all knowledge, as I say, and remains in oblivion, at times in such great oblivion that it must occasionally force itself and struggle in order to remember something.

2.6. Sometimes this forgetfulness of the memory and suspension of the imagination reaches such a degree - because the memory is united with God - that a long time passes without awareness or knowledge of what has happened. Even though others may inflict pain on a person in this state, it is not felt, since the imaginative power is in suspension, and without the imagination there is no feeling. So God may produce these touches of union, the soul must disunite the memory from all apprehensible knowledge. These suspensions, it should be noted, occur at the beginning of union and thus are not found in souls who have reached perfection, because the union is then perfect.

2.7. Someone may object that this doctrine seems good, but it results in destruction of the natural activity and use of the faculties, so a human person would then be living in oblivion like an animal and, even worse, without remembering natural needs and functions; and in addition, that God does not destroy but perfects nature,<sup>3</sup> and the destruction of nature necessarily follows from this doctrine. For according to these instructions, carrying out natural operations and moral and rational acts would be forgotten. None of this could be remembered, because of the privation of concepts and forms, the means of reminiscence.

2.8. I answer that this is actually so. The more the memory is united with God, the more the distinct knowledge is perfected, until the memory loses it entirely; that is, when the soul is perfect and has reached the state of union. Thus in the beginning, when this union is in the process of being perfected, a person cannot but experience great forgetfulness of all things since forms and knowledge are gradually being erased from the memory. Owing to the absorption of the memory in God, a person will show many deficiencies in exterior behavior and customs, forgetting to eat and drink or failing to remember if some task was done, or a particular object seen, or something said.

2.8.(2). Yet once the habit of union - which is a supreme good - is attained one no longer experiences these lapses of memory in matters concerning the moral and natural life. Rather, such persons will possess greater perfection in actions that are necessary and fitting. These operations, however, are no longer produced through forms and knowledge in the memory, for by possessing habitual union, which is now a supernatural state, the memory and other faculties fail entirely in their natural operations and pass from these natural boundaries to those of God, which are supernatural. Thus, when the memory is

transformed in God, the knowledge and forms of things cannot be impressed on it.

2.8.(3). As a result all the operations of the memory and other faculties in this state are divine. God now possesses the faculties as their complete lord, because of their transformation in him. And consequently it is he who divinely moves and commands them according to his divine spirit and will. As a result the operations are not different from those of God; but those the soul performs are of God and are divine operations. Since the one who is united with God is one spirit with him, as St. Paul says [1 Cor. 6:17], the operations of the soul united with God are of the divine Spirit and are divine.

2.9. These souls, consequently, perform only fitting and reasonable works, and none that are not so. For God's Spirit makes them know what must be known and ignore what must be ignored, remember what ought to be remembered - with or without forms - and forget what ought to be forgotten, and makes them love what they ought to love, and keeps them from loving what is not in God. Accordingly, all the first movements and operations of these faculties are divine. There is no reason to wonder about these movements and operations being divine, since they are transformed into divine being.<sup>4</sup>

2.10. Here are some examples of these divine operations. A person will ask a soul in this state for prayers. The soul will not remember to carry out this request through any form or idea of that person remaining in the memory. If it is expedient to pray for this one (that is, if God wants to receive prayer for that person), God will move the soul's will and impart a desire to do so; at times God will give it a desire to pray for others whom it has never known or heard of.

2.10.(2). The reason is that God alone moves these souls toward those works that are in harmony with his will and ordinance, and they cannot be moved toward others. Thus the works and prayer of these souls always produce their effect.

2.10.(3). Such was the prayer and work of our Lady, the most glorious Virgin. Raised from the beginning to this high state, she never had the form of any creature impressed in her soul, nor was she moved by any, for she was always moved by the Holy Spirit.

2.11. Another example: At a particular time one will have to attend to a necessary business matter. There will be no remembrance through any form, but, without one's knowing how, the time and suitable way of attending to it will be impressed on the soul without fail.

2.12. The Holy Spirit illumines such souls not merely in these matters but in many other present or future matters and about many events, even distant ones. Although he sometimes accomplishes this through intellectual forms, he often does so without them so that these souls are unaware of how they come by this knowledge. But its origin is divine Wisdom. Since these souls are practiced in not knowing or understanding anything with the faculties, they generally attain, as we mentioned in the drawing of the Mount,<sup>5</sup> to the knowledge of everything; as the Wise Man states: The artificer of all, who is Wisdom, taught me all things [Wis. 7:21].

2.13. You may object, perhaps, that the soul cannot so void and deprive the memory of all forms and phantasies as to be able to reach so high a state. In your view there will be two difficulties insurmountable by human strength and capacity: banishment of the natural through one's natural strength, which is impossible, and contact and union with the supernatural, which is far more difficult and, to be truthful, impossible by one's natural ability alone.

2.13.(2). I reply that, indeed, God must place the soul in this supernatural state. Nevertheless, individuals must insofar as possible prepare themselves. This they can do naturally, especially with God's help. In the measure that they enter into this negation and emptiness of forms through their own efforts, they will receive from God the possession of union. God effects this union in them passively, as we will explain, *Deo dante*, in the passive night of the soul. Thus God will give the habit of perfect divine union when he is pleased to do so and in accordance with the individual's preparation.<sup>6</sup>

2.14. We will not discuss in this active night and purgation the divine effects that union, when perfect, produces in the intellect, memory, and will, because divine union is not perfected by this night alone. But we will speak of them in the passive night, for it is by means of this passive night that union with God is wrought.

2.14.(2). I will treat here only of the manner in which, through the spiritual person's own efforts, the memory must be brought into this night and purgation. In short, the spiritual person should ordinarily take this precaution: Do not store objects of hearing, sight, smell, taste, or touch in the memory, but leave them immediately and forget them, and endeavor, if necessary, to be as successful in forgetting them as others are in remembering them. This should be practiced in such a way that no form or figure of any of these objects remains in the memory, as though one were not in the world at all. The memory, as though it were nonexistent, should be left free and disencumbered and unattached to any earthly or heavenly consideration. It should be freely left in oblivion, as though it were a hindrance, since everything natural is an obstacle rather than a help to anyone who would desire to use it in the supernatural.

2.15. If the doubts and objections should arise that we discussed in dealing with the intellect, that is, that nothing is accomplished, time is lost, and the soul is deprived of the spiritual goods receivable through the memory, the answers to them are all in that part.<sup>7</sup> We will also refer to these objections further on, in the passive night. Accordingly there is no reason for delay with them here.

2.15.(2). It is only proper to advise here that although at times spiritual persons do not experience the benefit of this suspension of knowledge and forms, they should not grow weary, for God will not fail to come to their aid at a suitable time. And it greatly behooves one to endure and suffer patiently and hopefully for so remarkable a blessing.

2.16. Although it is true that a soul will hardly be found whose union with God is so continuous that the faculties, without any form, are always divinely moved, nevertheless

there are those who are habitually moved by God and not by themselves in their operations, as St. Paul says: The children of God (those who are transformed in God and united to him) are moved by the Spirit of God (that is, moved to divine works in their faculties) [Rom. 8:14]. It is no marvel that the operations are divine, since the union of the soul with God is divine.

### CHAPTER 3

3. Three kinds of harm received by the soul from not darkening the memory in regard to knowledge and discursive reflection. A discussion of the first kind.

3.1. Spiritual persons who still wish to make use of natural knowledge and discursive reflection in their journey to God, or for anything else, are subject to three kinds of harm and difficulty. Two are positive and one privative. The first kind arises from things of the world, the second from the devil. The third kind, the privative, is the impediment and hindrance to divine union that this knowledge causes.<sup>1</sup>

3.2. The first, coming from the world, involves subjection to many evils arising from this knowledge and reflection, such as: falsehoods, imperfections, appetites, judgments, loss of time, and numerous other evils engendering many impurities in the soul.

3.2.(2). Clearly, spiritual persons allowing themselves this knowledge and reflection will necessarily fall victim to many falsehoods. Often the true will appear false, and the certain doubtful, and vice versa, since we can hardly have complete knowledge of a truth. These persons free themselves of this if they darken their memory to all knowledge and reflection.

3.2 Imperfections meet them at every step, if they turn their memory to the objects of hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste. By so doing some emotion will cling to them, whether it be sorrow, or fear, or hatred, vain hope, vain joy, or vainglory, and so on. All these are at least imperfections, and sometimes real venial sins. They subtly contaminate the soul with impurity even when the knowledge and reflection concern God.

3.2.(2). And it is also clear that appetites will be engendered since they naturally arise from this knowledge and reflection. And the mere desire for this knowledge and reflection is already an appetite.

3.2.(3). Obviously people also encounter many occasions to judge others, since by using their memory they cannot help but stumble on good or evil deeds of others. And at times evil seems good and good, evil. I am of the opinion that no one can really get free from all these evils without blinding and darkening the memory as to all things.

3.4. You may say that humans are easily capable of conquering all these dangers when they come upon them. I reply that it is simply impossible to achieve this completely if one pays attention to this knowledge, for intermingled with it are a thousand imperfections and fancies, some so subtle and slight that without one's being aware they stick to the soul just as pitch does to anyone who touches it. These imperfections are better overcome all at once through complete denial of the memory.

3.4.(2). You may also object that the soul will suffer the loss of numerous holy thoughts and considerations about God that are helpful toward the reception of favors from him. I answer that purity of soul is more helpful toward this, for purity of soul consists in not having any attachment to creatures - or any temporal things that cling to one - and in not

paying attention to them. I think this attachment cannot but adhere to the soul a great deal because of the imperfections the faculties have of themselves in their operations. It is better to learn to silence and quiet the faculties so that God may speak. For in this state, as we pointed out,<sup>2</sup> the natural operations must fade from sight. This is realized when the soul arrives at solitude in these faculties, and God speaks to its heart, as the prophet asserts [Hos. 2:14].

3.5. If you still insist, claiming that a person will obtain no benefits if the memory does not consider and reflect about God, and that many distractions and weaknesses will gradually find entrance, I answer that this is impossible. If the memory is recollected as to both heavenly and earthly things, there is no entry for evils, distractions, fancies, or vices - all of which enter through the wandering of the memory. Distractions would result if, on closing the door to reflections and discursive meditation, we opened it to thoughts about earthly matters. But in our case we close the memory to all things - from which distractions and evils arise - by rendering it silent and mute, and listening to God in silence with the hearing of the spirit, saying with the prophet: Speak Lord, for your servant is listening [1 Kgs. 3:10]. The Bridegroom in the Song of Songs proclaimed that this was to be the attitude of the bride: My sister is a garden enclosed and a fountain sealed up [Sg. 4:12], that is to all the things that can enter it.

3.6. The soul should remain closed, then, without cares or afflictions, for he who entered the room of his disciples bodily while the doors were closed and gave them peace, without their knowing how this was possible [Jn. 20:19-20], will enter the soul spiritually without its knowing how or using any effort of its own, once it has closed the doors of its intellect, memory, and will to all apprehensions. And he will fill them with peace, descending on them, as the prophet says, like a river of peace [Is. 66:12]. In this peace he will remove all the misgivings, suspicions, disturbances, and darkneses that made the soul fear it had gone astray. The soul should persevere in prayer and should hope in the midst of nakedness and emptiness, for its blessings will not be long in coming.

## CHAPTER 4

4. The second kind of harm, which comes from the devil through the natural apprehensions of the memory.

4.1. The second kind of positive harm possible from knowledge in the memory is due to the devil. He has tremendous influence in the soul by this means, for he can add to its knowledge other forms, ideas, and reasonings, and by means of them move it to pride, avarice, anger, envy, and so on, and insert unjust hatred, vain love, and many kinds of delusions. Moreover, he usually so impresses images on the phantasy that the false ones seem true and the true ones false. And finally, all the greatest delusions and evils he produces in the soul enter through the ideas and discursive acts of the memory. If the memory is darkened as to all this knowledge and annihilated through oblivion, the door is closed entirely to this kind of diabolical harm and the soul is liberated from these things, and that is a wonderful blessing.

4.1.(2). The devil is unable to do anything in the soul save through the operations of its faculties and principally by means of its knowledge, because almost all the activity of the soul's other faculties depends on its knowledge. If the memory is annihilated concerning this knowledge, the devil is powerless, for he finds no means of getting his grip on the soul and consequently can do nothing.

4.2. I should like spiritual persons to have full realization of how many evils the devils cause in souls that make much use of their memories; of how much sadness, affliction, vain and evil joy from both spiritual and worldly thoughts these devils occasion; and of the number of impurities they leave rooted in the spirit. They also seriously distract these souls from the highest recollection, a recollection that consists in concentrating all the faculties on the incomprehensible Good and withdrawing them from all apprehensible things, for these apprehensible things are not a good that is beyond comprehension.

4.2.(2). Although the good derived from this void is not as excellent as that arising from the application of the soul to God, by the mere fact that such emptiness liberates us from much sorrow, affliction, and sadness - over and above imperfections and sins - it is an exceptional blessing.



## CHAPTER 5

5. The third kind of harm that follows from the natural, distinct knowledge of the memory.

5.1. The third kind of evil engendered by the natural apprehensions of the memory is privative. These apprehensions can be an impediment to moral good and deprive one of spiritual good.

5.1.(2). To explain how these apprehensions are a hindrance to moral good, one must know that moral good consists in bridling the passions and curbing the inordinate appetites. The result for the soul is tranquility, peace, repose, and moral virtue, which is the moral good.

5.1.(3). The soul is incapable of truly acquiring control of the passions and restriction of the inordinate appetites without forgetting and withdrawing from the sources of these emotions. Disturbances never arise in a soul unless through the apprehensions of the memory. When all things are forgotten, nothing disturbs the peace or stirs the appetites. As the saying goes: What the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't want.

5.2. We experience this all the time. We observe that as often as people begin to think about some matter, they are moved and aroused over it, little or much, according to the kind of apprehension. If the apprehension is bothersome and annoying, they feel sadness or hatred, and so on; if agreeable, they experience desire and joy, and so on.

5.2.(2). Accordingly, when the apprehension is changed agitation necessarily results. Thus they will sometimes be joyful, at other times sad, now they will feel hatred, now love. And they are unable to persevere in equanimity, the effect of moral tranquility, unless they endeavor to forget all things. Evidently, then, this knowledge is a serious impediment to possession of the moral virtues.

5.3. That an encumbered memory is also a hindrance to the possession of spiritual good is clearly proved from our remarks. An unsettled soul that has no foundation of moral good is incapable, as such, of receiving spiritual good, for this spiritual good is impressed only on a restrained and peaceful soul.

5.3.(2). Besides, if souls bestow importance and attention on the apprehensions of the memory, they will find it impossible to remain free for the Incomprehensible who is God, for they will be unable to advert to more than one thing. As we have always insisted, souls must go to God by not comprehending rather than by comprehending, and they must exchange the mutable and comprehensible for the Immutable and Incomprehensible.

## CHAPTER 6

6. The benefits derived from forgetting the natural thoughts and knowledge of the memory.

6.1. From the kinds of harm occasioned by the apprehensions of the memory we can also determine the opposite benefits that come from forgetting them; as the philosophers say: The doctrine for one thing serves also for its contrary.<sup>1</sup>

6.1.(2). In contrast to the first kind of harm, spiritual persons enjoy tranquility and peace of soul due to the absence of the disturbance and change arising from thoughts and ideas in the memory, and consequently they possess purity of conscience and soul, which is a greater benefit. As a result they are disposed excellently for human and divine wisdom and virtues.

6.2. In contrast to the second, they are freed from many suggestions, temptations, and movements that the devil inserts in souls through their thoughts and ideas, thereby occasioning many impurities and sins. As David says: They thought and spoke wickedness [Ps. 73:8]. When the thoughts are removed, the devil has nothing naturally with which to wage his war on the spirit.

6.3. Contrary to the third kind of harm, the soul is disposed, by means of this recollection and forgetfulness of all things, to be moved by the Holy Spirit and taught by him. As the Wise Man declares: He withdraws from thoughts that are without reason [Wis. 1:5].

6.3.(2). Even though no other benefit would come through this oblivion and void of the memory than freedom from afflictions and disturbances, it would be an immense advantage and blessing for a person. For the afflictions and disturbances engendered in a soul through adversities are no help in remedying these adversities; rather, distress and worry ordinarily make things worse and even do harm to the soul itself. Thus David proclaimed: Indeed every human being is disturbed in vain [Ps. 39:6]. Clearly, it is always vain to be disturbed, since being disturbed is never any help.

6.3.(3). Thus if the whole world were to crumble and come to an end and all things were to go wrong, it would be useless to get disturbed, for this would do more harm than good. Enduring all with tranquil and peaceful equanimity not only reaps many blessings but also helps the soul so that in these very adversities it may manage better in judging them and employing the proper remedy.

6.4. Solomon, having clear knowledge of this harm and this advantage, exclaimed: I knew there was nothing better for humans than to rejoice and do good in life [Eccl. 3:12]. By this he indicates that in all events, however unfavorable, we ought rather to rejoice than be disturbed, and bear them all with equanimity so as not to lose a blessing greater than all prosperity, which is tranquility of soul and peace in all things, adverse or prosperous. People would never lose this tranquility if they were to forget ideas and lay aside their thoughts and also, insofar as possible, withdraw from dealing with others and from hearing and seeing. Our nature is so unstable and fragile that, even when well

disciplined, the memory will hardly fail to stumble on things that disturb the soul that was living in peace and tranquility through the forgetfulness of all. As a result Jeremiah proclaimed: With the memory I will remember, and my soul will faint in me with sorrow [Lam. 3:20].

## CHAPTER 7

7. The second kind of apprehension, which is of supernatural imaginative knowledge.

7.1. Though in our discussion of the first kind of apprehension, the natural, we also gave doctrine for the natural imaginative apprehensions, we find this division suitable because of the other forms and ideas the memory preserves. These are from supernatural apprehensions, such as visions, revelations, locutions, and spiritual feelings. When these apprehensions occur they usually leave an image, form, figure, or idea impressed either in the soul or in the memory or phantasy. At times this impression is most vivid and efficacious. It is also necessary to give advice about these apprehensions lest they become an encumbrance to the memory and hinder it from union with God in pure and integral hope.

7.2. I declare that to obtain this blessing individuals should never reflect on clear and distinct supernatural apprehensions for the purpose of preserving within themselves these forms, figures, and ideas. We must always bear in mind this presupposition: The more importance given to any clear and distinct apprehension, natural or supernatural, the less capacity and preparedness the soul has for entering the abyss of faith, where all else is absorbed. As we pointed out,<sup>1</sup> none of the supernatural forms and ideas that can be received by the memory is God, and the soul must empty itself of all that is not God in order to go to God. Consequently the memory must likewise dismiss all these forms and ideas in order to reach union with God in hope. Every possession is against hope. As St. Paul says, hope is for that which is not possessed [Heb. 11:1].

7.2.(2). In the measure that the memory becomes dispossessed of things, in that measure it will have hope, and the more hope it has the greater will be its union with God; for in relation to God, the more a soul hopes the more it attains. And it hopes more when, precisely, it is more dispossessed of things; when it has reached perfect dispossession it will remain with perfect possession of God in divine union. But there are many who do not want to go without the sweetness and delight of this knowledge in the memory, and therefore they do not reach supreme possession and complete sweetness. For whoever does not renounce all possessions cannot be Christ's disciple [Lk. 14:33].

## CHAPTER 8

8. The harm caused from reflection on this supernatural knowledge. Tells how many kinds of harm there are.

8.1. Spiritual persons expose themselves to five types of harm if they prize and reflect on the ideas and forms impressed within them through supernatural apprehensions.

8.2. The first is that they will often be deluded in mistaking the natural for the supernatural.

8.2.(2). Second, they put themselves in the occasion of falling into presumption and vanity.

8.2.(3). Third, the devil finds ample power to deceive them through these apprehensions.

8.2.(4). Fourth, doing so would impede union with God in hope.

8.2.(5). Fifth, for the most part they will be judging God in a lowly way.

8.3. As for the first, if spiritual persons reflect on these forms and ideas and assign them importance, they will frequently be deceived in their judgment. Since no one is capable of knowing perfectly the things that pass naturally through the imagination, or of forming an integral and certain judgment about them, how much less is one able to make judgments about supernatural things, which transcend our capacity and occur but rarely.

8.3.(2). Spiritual persons will often think that the apprehensions are from God, whereas they will be only the product of the imagination. And often they think that what is from God is from the devil and what is from the devil is from God. They will frequently receive, among other images, strong impressions about their own or others' goods and evils. And they hold these to be very certain and true, yet they will not be true but utterly false. Other impressions will be true, yet they will judge them false; although this, I believe, is safer because it is usually the outcome of humility.

8.4. If they escape delusion about the truth, they can still suffer a quantitative or qualitative delusion. They will think the small, great, and the great, small. Or as to quality, what is in their imagination and judged by them to be this particular kind will in reality be another kind. They will be taking, as Isaiah says, the darkness for light and the light for darkness, the bitter for the sweet and the sweet for the bitter [Is. 5:20]. Finally, if they are correct in one matter it will be a wonder if they escape error in another. Even if they do not want to make judgments, it is enough for them to place some importance on these apprehensions for a certain harm to cling to them, at least passively. And if it is not this type of harm it will be one of the four other kinds we shall be discussing.

8.5. To avoid this evil of being deceived in their judgments, spiritual persons should be unwilling to make judgments about the nature of their experiences or the kind of visions, knowledge, or feeling they have. They should not desire to know this or attribute

importance to it except for the sake of informing their spiritual father so he may teach them how to void the memory of these apprehensions. Whatever these apprehensions may in themselves be, they are not as great a help toward the love of God as is the least act of living faith and hope made in the emptiness and renunciation of all things.

## CHAPTER 9

9. The second kind of harm, the danger of falling into self-esteem and vain presumption.

9.1. These supernatural apprehensions of the memory, if esteemed, are also for spiritual persons a decided occasion for slipping into some presumption or vanity. Since those who do not receive these apprehensions are liberated from falling into this vice because nothing within them warrants this presumption, so, on the other hand, those who receive them will be exposed to the idea that they themselves are now important because of these supernatural communications. Although it is true that one can attribute them to God and be thankful for them and consider oneself unworthy, yet there usually remains in the spirit a certain hidden satisfaction and an esteem both for the communication and for oneself. Consequently, without one's realizing it, an abundant spiritual pride will be bred.

9.2. This is quite evident from the displeasure and aversion these individuals feel toward anyone who does not laud their spirit or value their communications, and from the affliction they experience on thinking or being told that others receive the same favors or even better ones. All this is born of hidden self-esteem and pride. And these persons are not fully aware that they are steeped in pride. They think that a certain degree of knowledge of one's own misery is sufficient. Yet at the same time they are full of hidden self-esteem and satisfaction, more pleased with their own spirit and spiritual goods than with those of their neighbor. They resemble the pharisee who thanked God that he was not like others and that he had various virtues, and who derived self-satisfaction and presumption from the thought of these virtues [Lk. 18:11-12]. Though they may not express this as the pharisee did, they habitually feel this way in their spirit. Indeed, some become so proud that they are worse than the devil. Since they observe interiorly some apprehensions and devout and sweet feelings that they think are from God, they become self-satisfied to the extent of thinking that they are very close to God and others who do not have these experiences are far beneath them and, like the pharisee, they look down upon these others.

9.3. To avoid this pestiferous evil, abhorrent in the eyes of God, they should consider two truths:

9.3.(2). First, virtue does not consist in apprehensions and feelings of God, however sublime they may be, or in any similar experience. On the contrary, it comprises what they do not experience: that is, deep humility, contempt for themselves and all things (very explicit and conscious to the soul), delight that others feel contempt for them also, and not wanting to be worth anything in the heart of another.

9.4. Second, all heavenly visions, revelations, and feelings - or whatever else one may desire to think on - are not worth as much as the least act of humility. Humility has the effects of charity: It neither esteems nor seeks its own, it thinks no evil save of self, it thinks no good of self but of others. Consequently souls should not look for their happiness in these supernatural apprehensions, but should strive to forget them for the sake of being free.

## CHAPTER 10

10. The third kind of harm stemming from the imaginative apprehensions of the memory, that which comes from the devil.

10.1. It can be deduced and easily understood from all we have said above how much evil can come from the devil by way of these supernatural apprehensions. He can present many false ideas and forms to the memory under the guise of their being true and good. This he does by impressing them on the spirit and the senses through suggestion with much certification and efficacy. They then seem so certain that the soul thinks they cannot be false, but that what it feels is in accord with truth. Since the devil transforms himself into an angel of light [2 Cor. 11:14], he seems to be light to the soul. But this is not all. In true visions from God he can also tempt it in many ways by causing inordinate movements of the spiritual and sensory appetites and affections toward these visions. If the soul is pleased with these apprehensions it is very easy for the devil to bring about an increase of the appetites and affections and a lapse into spiritual gluttony and other harmful things.

10.2. To better accomplish this he usually suggests and places pleasure, savor, and delight in the senses relevant to these things of God so that, sweetened and dazzled by that delight, the soul may become blind and fix its eyes more on the delightful feeling than on the love - or at least not so intensely on the love - and pay more attention to the apprehension than to the nakedness and emptiness that lie in faith, hope, and love. And in so doing the devil deceives the soul little by little and readily makes it believe his falsehoods.

10.2.(2). To a blind soul falsehood no longer seems falsehood, and evil no longer evil, and so on, for the darkness appears to be light, and the light darkness [Is. 5:20]. On this account the soul will fall into a thousand blunders in matters natural, moral, and spiritual; and what was wine will have turned into vinegar. All this comes about because of failure from the beginning to deny the pleasure taken in those supernatural apprehensions. Since this satisfaction is slight, or not so evil, at first, the soul is not careful and allows it to remain so that, like the mustard seed, the evil grows into a large tree [Mt. 13:31-32]. As the saying goes, small mistake in the beginning, great one in the end.

10.3. To flee this gross error of the devil, therefore, it greatly behooves individuals not to want to find satisfaction in these apprehensions, for most certainly this satisfaction will gradually blind them and cause them to fall. Pleasure, delight, and savor blind the soul by their very own nature, without the devil's help. David indicated this when he said: Darkness will perhaps blind me in my delights and I shall have the night for my light [Ps. 139:11].



## **CHAPTER 11**

11. An impediment to union with God, the fourth kind of harm resulting from the distinct supernatural apprehensions of the memory.

11.1. Little remains to be said about this fourth kind of harm since we are explaining it all along in this third book. We have given proof that a soul must renounce all possession of the memory in order to reach union with God in hope, for if hope is to be centered entirely on God, nothing that is not God should reside in the memory.

11.1.(2). And we have also given proof that no form, figure, image, or idea (whether heavenly or earthly, natural or supernatural) that can be grasped by the memory is God or like to him. Accordingly, David teaches: Lord, among the gods no one is like you [Ps. 86:8].

11.1.(3). Consequently, if the memory desires to pay attention to this knowledge it is hindered from union with God: first, because of the encumbrance; second, because the more possessions it has the less hope it has.

11.2. The soul, therefore, must live in nakedness and forgetfulness of distinct forms and knowledge about supernatural apprehensions so as not to impede union of the memory with God through perfect hope.

## CHAPTER 12

12. Base and improper judgments about God, the fifth kind of harm arising from supernatural imaginative forms and apprehensions.

12.1. The fifth kind of harm derived from the desire of preserving in the memory and imagination these forms and images of supernatural communications is no less evil than the others, especially if the soul desires to use these images as means toward divine union. It is extremely easy to judge the being and height of God less worthily and sublimely than befits his incomprehensibility. Though one may not form an explicit idea that God is similar to these apprehensions, nevertheless the very esteem for them - if, in fact, one esteems them - produces in the soul an estimation and opinion of God less elevated than is given in the teaching of faith: that he is incomparable, incomprehensible, and so on.

12.1.(2). In addition to taking all this attention given to creatures away from God, the soul will naturally form in its interior, through esteem for these apprehensions, a certain comparison between them and God. This comparison prevents it from having as lofty a judgment and esteem of God as it ought.

12.1.(3). Creatures, earthly or heavenly, and all distinct ideas and images, natural and supernatural, that can be the objects of a person's faculties, are incomparable and unproportioned to God's being. God does not fall under the classifications of genus and species, whereas, according to theologians, creatures do.<sup>1</sup> And the soul is not capable of receiving clearly and distinctly in this life what does not fall under the classifications of genus and species. Thus St. John affirms that no one has ever seen God [Jn. 1:18]. Isaiah declares that it has not entered the human heart what God is like [Is. 64:4]. And God told Moses: You cannot see me in this life [Ex. 33:20]. Therefore anyone encumbering the memory and the other faculties of the soul with what is comprehensible cannot have a proper esteem or opinion of God.

12.2. Here is a poor example. The more people set their eyes on the king's servants and the more attention they pay to them, the less heed they pay to the king and the less they esteem him. Though this estimation is not in the intellect formally and explicitly, it is there practically; because the more attention they give to the servants, the more they take away from their lord. And then their judgment of the king is not very high since the servants seem to them somewhat important in comparison with the king, their lord. This is what happens in relation to God when a person pays attention to these creatures, although the comparison is very inadequate because, as we have mentioned, the being of God is different from the being of his creatures. God, by his being, is infinitely distant from all of these creatures. The soul should consequently turn its eyes from these creatures so as to focus them on God in faith and hope.

12.3. Those who not only pay heed to these imaginative apprehensions but think God resembles some of them, and that one can journey to union with God through them, are already in great error and will gradually lose the light of faith in their intellect. And it is by means of faith that the intellect is united with God. Furthermore, they will not increase

in the loftiness of hope, the means for union with God in the memory. This union is effected by disuniting oneself from everything imaginative.

## CHAPTER 13

13. The benefits obtained through the rejection of the apprehensions of the imagination. Answers certain objections and explains the difference between the natural and the supernatural imaginative apprehensions.

13.1. Like the observation we made concerning natural forms, the benefits from voiding the imagination of supernatural apprehensions can be ascertained through the five kinds of harm caused in the soul if it desires to possess these forms interiorly.

13.1.(2). But besides these, there are other benefits of deep spiritual repose and quietude. In addition to the tranquility a person naturally enjoys when freed from images and forms, there is a freedom from care about the discernment of good ones from evil, and about how one ought to behave with different kinds. Finally one would be absolved from the drudgery and waste of time that would result from desiring spiritual masters both to discern the good apprehensions from the evil ones and to ascertain the kind of apprehension received. People do not have to know this, since they should not pay attention to any of these apprehensions. The time and energy that would be wasted in trying to discern them can be employed in another, more profitable exercise (the movement of the will toward God), and in solicitude about the search after spiritual and sensory nakedness and poverty (the desire to lack all the consoling support of the apprehensions, both interior and exterior). Individuals practice this latter by desiring and striving after detachment from these forms, since they thereby receive the great gain of approaching God, who has neither image, nor form, nor figure. They will approach God more closely the more they withdraw from all imaginative forms, images, and figures.

13.2. Perhaps your question will be: Why do many spiritual persons counsel souls to strive for profit in the communications and feelings given by God and to desire favors from him in order to have something to give him, since if God gives nothing to us, we shall have nothing to give to him? And you will establish this with a text from St. Paul: Do not extinguish the spirit [1 Thes. 5:19]; also with one from the Song of Songs in which the bridegroom says to the bride: Put me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm [Sg. 8:6], for this seal is a certain apprehension. And all of this, you will say, according to our doctrine, must not only be unsought but rejected and put aside even though God bestows it; and evidently, since God grants this gift, he does so for a good purpose and it will be effective. You will add that we must not throw away pearls and it is a kind of pride to refuse God's gifts as though we were self-sufficient without them.

13.3. In answer to this objection, our explanation in chapters 15 and 16 of Book Two must necessarily be kept in mind.<sup>1</sup> To a great extent the objection is answered there. We stated that the good resulting in the soul from supernatural apprehensions that come from a good source is produced passively, without any operation of the faculties, at the very moment these apprehensions are represented to the senses.

13.3.(2). It is consequently unnecessary for the will to act in order to admit them. As we said, if souls were to desire to act with their faculties, through their base natural operation they would impede the supernatural (which God is producing in them by means of these

apprehensions) rather than derive profit from their own labor. But since the spirit of these imaginative apprehensions is given passively to the soul, they must maintain a passive attitude without application of their interior or exterior actions to anything.

13.3.(3). And this attitude would preserve the spiritual feelings of God, because individuals would not then lose them through their own lowly kind of operation. Nor would they extinguish the spirit. People extinguish the spirit by wanting to conduct themselves in a way different from the way God is leading them. They act this way if they desire, when God gives them the spirit passively - as he does through these apprehensions - to be active by working with the intellect or by desiring something in these apprehensions.

13.3.(4). This is clear, for if the soul would then want to work, its activity would necessarily be no more than natural. On its own it can do no more, since a soul does not move itself to a supernatural work, nor can it, but God moves it and places it in this supernatural activity. If spiritual persons, then, were to desire to make use of their own efforts, they would necessarily impede by their activity the passive communication of God, which is the spirit. They would be engaging in their own work, which is of another and lower kind than that which God is communicating to them. The work of God is passive and supernatural, that of the soul is active and natural. This natural activity is what would extinguish the spirit.

13.4. That this is a more lowly work is also clear, for the faculties of the soul cannot of themselves reflect and work except on some form, figure, and image, which would be the kind and accident of the substance and spirit.

13.4.(2). This substance and spirit is not united with the faculties of the soul in true understanding and love until the operation of the faculties ceases, for the aim of this operation is the reception of substantial understanding and love through those forms. The difference between the active and passive operation and the advantage of one over the other is the same as that between what is being done and what is already done, or what one intends to attain and what has already been attained.

13.4.(3). Thus we also deduce that if individuals were to desire to employ their faculties actively in these supernatural apprehensions by which, as we said, they receive the spirit passively from God, they would be doing nothing less than abandoning what has been accomplished in order to redo it; neither would they be enjoying what was done, nor by their activity doing anything other than impeding God's work. For, as we said, these actions cannot independently attain the spirit God was giving to the soul without them. If the soul pays heed to these imaginative apprehensions, it directly extinguishes the spirit that God infuses by means of them.

13.4.(4). Consequently, a person should abandon these apprehensions and behave passively and negatively because then God moves the soul to what transcends its power and knowledge. The prophet accordingly declared: I will stand on my watch and fix my foot on my tower, and I will contemplate what is said to me [Hb. 2:1]. This is like saying:

I will be raised above the watch of my faculties and take no step forward in my operations; thus I will be able to contemplate what is told me, that is, I will understand and taste what is communicated to me supernaturally.

13.5. The words of the bridegroom that were quoted in the objection should be interpreted as referring to the love he asks of the bride. It is a characteristic of love to assimilate lovers to one another in their spiritual faculties. As a result he tells her to set him as a mark on her heart [Sg. 8:6], there where all the arrows of love (the actions and motives of love) coming from the quiver strike. He does this so that all the arrows might strike him, who is there as their target, and thus all are directed to him. And the soul would become like him through its actions and movements of love until transformed in him. He tells her to set him also as a mark on her arm because the act of love is on the arm, since by the arm the beloved is held and caressed.

13.6. In these apprehensions coming from above (imaginative or any other kind - it matters not if they be visions, locutions, spiritual feelings, or revelations), individuals should only advert to the love of God that is interiorly caused. They should pay no attention to the letter and rind (what is signified, represented, or made known). Thus they should pay heed not to the feelings of delight or sweetness, not to the images, but to the feelings of love that are caused.

13.6.(2). Only for the sake of moving the spirit to love should the soul at times recall the images and apprehensions that produced love. The effect produced by the remembrance of this communication is not as strong as the effect at the time the communication was received, yet when the communication is recalled there is a renewal of love and an elevation of the mind to God. This is especially true when the soul remembers some figures, images, or supernatural feelings. These are usually so imprinted on it that they last a long time; some are never erased from the soul. These apprehensions produce, almost as often as remembered, divine effects of love, sweetness, light, and so on - sometimes in a greater degree, sometimes in a lesser - because God impressed them for this reason. This is consequently a great grace, for those on whom God bestows it possess within themselves a mine of blessings.

13.7. The figures producing such effects are vividly impressed on the soul, for they are not like other images and forms preserved in the phantasy. The soul has no need of recourse to this faculty when it desires to remember them, for it is aware that it has them within itself as an image in a mirror. When a soul possesses these figures formally within itself it can safely recall them to obtain the effect of love I mentioned. They will not be a hindrance to the union of love in faith, providing the soul does not desire to be absorbed with the figure. It must profit from the love by immediately leaving aside the figure. In this way the remembrance will instead be a help to the soul.

13.8. It is difficult to discern when these images are impressed on the soul and when on the phantasy, for those of the phantasy are also quite frequent. Some persons who usually have imaginative visions find that these same visions are very frequently represented in their phantasy, either because they themselves possess a very lively faculty, so that with

little thought the ordinary figure is immediately represented and sketched on it, or because the devil causes these representations, or also because God causes them without impressing them formally in the soul.

13.8.(2). They can be discerned through their effects nonetheless, for those that are of natural or diabolical origin produce no good effect or spiritual renewal in the soul, no matter how often they are remembered. The individual beholds them in dryness. When remembered, however, the imaginative apprehensions from God produce some good effect by means of that which they imparted to the soul the first time. Yet the formal apprehensions - those impressed on the soul - yield some effect almost every time they are recalled.

13.9. Anyone with experience of these will easily be able to tell the difference between the two, for the diversity between them is very clear. I merely assert that those impressed formally on the soul in a lasting way are of rarer occurrence. But whatever may be their kind, it is good for the soul to have no desire to comprehend anything save God alone in hope through faith.

13.9.(2). As for the other point in the objection (that it is apparently pride to reject these apprehensions if they are good), I answer: Rather, it is prudent humility to benefit by them in the best way, as has been mentioned, and be guided along the safest path.

## CHAPTER 14

### 14. Spiritual knowledge in the memory.

14.1. We placed apprehensions of spiritual knowledge in the third class not because they pertain to the corporeal phantasy - for they do not have a corporeal image and form - as the others do, but because they are likewise the object of spiritual reminiscence and memory.<sup>1</sup> After the soul receives knowledge of this sort it can freely bring that knowledge back to memory. It does not remember this through the effigy or image left in the corporeal sense faculty, for since it is a corporeal sense faculty the phantasy has no capacity for spiritual forms. But it remembers intellectually and spiritually through the form impressed on the soul (which is also a formal or spiritual form, idea, or image), or through the effect produced. As a result, I classify these apprehensions among those of the memory, even though they do not belong to those of the phantasy.

14.2. We have given a sufficient explanation in chapter 24 of Book Two,<sup>2</sup> where we discussed intellectual apprehensions, of this kind of knowledge and the attitude toward it required for advancement to union with God. See that chapter, because there we have explained how these apprehensions are of two kinds: one referring to the Creator, and the other to creatures.

14.2.(2). Concerning what has to do with our intention here (which is to explain the way the memory should conduct itself in order to advance to union), I merely state, as I have just explained in the preceding chapter about formal images, to which class this knowledge of creatures belongs, that this knowledge may be remembered when it produces a good effect, not in order to retain it but to awaken the knowledge and love of God. But if the remembrance of this knowledge of creatures produces no good effect, the soul should never desire the memory of it.

14.2.(3). But as for knowledge of the Creator, I declare that a person should strive to remember it as often as possible because it will produce in the soul a notable effect. For, as we affirmed there, the communications of this knowledge are touches and spiritual feelings of union with God, the goal to which we are guiding the soul. The memory does not recall these through any form, image, or figure that may have been impressed on the soul, for those touches and feelings of union with the Creator do not have any. It remembers them through the effect of light, love, delight, spiritual renewal, and so on, produced in it. Something of this effect is renewed as often as the soul recalls them.



## CHAPTER 15

15. A general rule of conduct for spiritual persons in their use of the memory.

15.1. To conclude the discussion of the memory, then, it will be worthwhile to delineate briefly a general method for the use of spiritual persons that they may be united with God according to this sense.<sup>1</sup> Even if clearly understood from what we said, the reader will grasp it more easily in a summary.

15.1.(2). The following must be kept in mind: Our aim is union with God in the memory through hope; the object of hope is something unpossessed; the less other objects are possessed, the more capacity and ability there is to hope for this one object, and consequently the more hope; the greater the possessions, the less capacity and ability for hoping, and consequently so much less of hope; accordingly, in the measure that individuals dispossess their memory of forms and objects, which are not God, they will fix it on God and preserve it empty, so as to hope for the fullness of their memory from him. What souls must do in order to live in perfect and pure hope in God is this: As often as distinct ideas, forms, and images occur to them, they should immediately, without resting in them, turn to God with loving affection, in emptiness of everything rememberable. They should not think or look on these things for longer than is sufficient for the understanding and fulfillment of their obligations, if these refer to this. And then they should consider these ideas without becoming attached or seeking gratification in them, lest the effects of them be left in the soul. Thus people are not required to stop recalling and thinking about what they must do and know, for, if they are not attached to the possession of these thoughts, they will not be harmed. The verses of the Mount in chapter 13 of the first book are helpful in this practice.<sup>2</sup>

15.2. Yet it must be noted here that by our doctrine we are not in agreement, nor do we desire to be, with that of those pestiferous people who, persuaded by the pride and envy of Satan, have sought to remove from the eyes of the faithful the holy and necessary use and renowned cult of images of God and his saints.<sup>3</sup> Our doctrine is far different from theirs. We are not asserting, as they do, that there be no images or veneration of them; we are explaining the difference between these images and God, and how souls should use the painted image in such a way as not to suffer hindrance in their movement toward the living image, and how they should pay no more attention to images than is required for advancing to what is spiritual.

15.2.(2). The means are good and necessary for the attainment of the end, as are images for reminding us of God and the saints. But when people use and dwell on the means as though these were more than mere means, their excessive use of them becomes as much an impediment as anything else. The impediment is even greater in the case of supernatural visions and images, with which I am especially dealing here and which are the cause of many delusions and dangers.

15.2.(3). There is no delusion or danger in the remembrance, veneration, and esteem of images that the Catholic Church proposes to us in a natural manner, since in these images nothing else is esteemed than the person represented. The memory of these images will

not fail to benefit a person, because this remembrance is accompanied with love for whoever is represented. Images will always help individuals toward union with God, provided that no more attention is paid to them than necessary for this love, and that souls allow themselves to soar - when God bestows the favor - from the painted image to the living God, in forgetfulness of all creatures and things pertaining to creatures.

## CHAPTER 16

16. The beginning of the treatise on the dark night of the will. A division of the emotions of the will.

16.1. We would have achieved nothing by purging the intellect and memory in order to ground them in the virtues of faith and hope had we neglected the purification of the will through charity, the third virtue. Through charity works done in faith are living works and have high value; without it they are worth nothing, as St. James affirms: Without works of charity, faith is dead [Jas. 2:20].

16.1.(2). For a treatise on the active night and denudation of this faculty, with the aim of forming and perfecting it in this virtue of the charity of God, I have found no more appropriate passage than the one in chapter 6 of Deuteronomy, where Moses commands: You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength [Dt. 6:5]. This passage contains all that spiritual persons must do and all I must teach them here if they are to reach God by union of the will through charity. In it human beings receive the command to employ all the faculties, appetites, operations, and emotions of their soul in God so that they will use all this ability and strength for nothing else, in accord with David's words: Fortitudinem meam ad te custodiam (I will keep my strength for you) [Ps. 59:10].

16.2. The strength of the soul comprises the faculties, passions, and appetites. All this strength is ruled by the will. When the will directs these faculties, passions, and appetites toward God, turning away from all that is not God, the soul preserves its strength for God, and comes to love him with all its might.<sup>1</sup>

16.2.(2). So a person may do this, we will discuss here purifying the will of all inordinate emotions. These inordinate emotions are the source of unruly appetites, affections, and operations, and the basis for failure to preserve one's strength for God.

16.2.(3). There are four of these emotions or passions: joy, hope, sorrow, and fear. These passions manifestly keep the strength and ability of the soul for God, and direct it toward him, when they are so ruled that a person rejoices only in what is purely for God's honor and glory, hopes for nothing else, feels sorrow only about matters pertaining to this, and fears only God. The more people rejoice over something outside God, the less intense will be their joy in God; and the more their hope goes out toward something else, the less there is of it for God; and so on with the others.<sup>2</sup>

16.3. To give a complete doctrine on this subject, we will, as is our custom, discuss individually these four passions as well as the appetites of the will. The entire matter of reaching union with God consists in purging the will of its appetites and emotions so that from a human and lowly will it may be changed into the divine will, made identical with the will of God.

16.4. The less strongly the will is fixed on God and the more dependent it is on creatures, the more these four passions combat the soul and reign in it. A person then very easily

rejoices in what deserves no rejoicing, hopes for what brings no profit, sorrows over what should perhaps cause rejoicing, and fears where there is no reason for fear.

16.5. When these emotions go unbridled they are the source of all vices and imperfections, but when they are put in order and calmed they give rise to all the virtues.

16.5.(2). It should be known that, in the measure that one of the passions is regulated according to reason, the others are also. These four passions are so interlinked and brotherly that where one goes actually the others go virtually. If one is recollected actually, the other three in the same measure are recollected virtually. If the will rejoices over something, it must consequently in the same degree hope for it, with the virtual inclusion of sorrow and fear. And in the measure that it loses satisfaction in this object, fear, sorrow, and hope will also be lost.

16.5.(3). We find a reference to the will and the four passions in the figure Ezekiel saw: four animals with four faces and only one body, in which the wings of one were bound to those of the other; each one went forward and while going ahead they did not turn back [Ez. 1:6-12]. The feathers of each of these emotions are so connected to those of the others that wherever one actually directs its face (its operations), the others need to go virtually; and when one is lowered, as is affirmed there, all the others must be lowered; and when it is raised, the others are raised too [Ez. 1:19-25]. Where your hope goes, there too will go your joy, fear, and sorrow; and if it turns back, they too will turn back; and so on with each of the other passions.

16.6. Accordingly, you should keep in mind that wherever one of these passions goes the entire soul (the will and the other faculties) will also go, and they will live as prisoners of this passion; and the other three passions will be alive in the one so as to afflict the soul with their chains and prevent it from soaring to the liberty and repose of sweet contemplation and union. As a result Boethius claimed that if you desire a clear understanding of the truth, you must cast from yourself joys, hope, fear, and sorrow.<sup>3</sup> As long as these passions reign in the soul they will not allow it to live in the tranquility and peace necessary for the wisdom it can receive naturally and supernaturally.

## **CHAPTER 17**

17. The first emotion of the will. The nature of joy and a division of the objects of joy.

17.1. The first passion of the soul and emotion of the will is joy. Joy - to give a definition suited to our purpose - is nothing else than a delight of the will in an object esteemed and considered fitting. For the will never rejoices unless in something that is valuable and pleasing to it. We are speaking of active joy, which occurs when a person understands distinctly and clearly the object of its joy and has power either to rejoice or not.

17.1.(2). There is another joy, which is passive. In this kind of joy the will finds itself rejoicing without any clear and distinct understanding of the object of its joy, except at times. It has no power either to possess this joy or not possess it. We will discuss this passive joy afterward.<sup>1</sup> Our topic now is the joy derived from distinct and clear objects, insofar as it is active and voluntary.

17.2. Joy can arise from six kinds of objects or goods: temporal, natural, sensory, moral, supernatural, and spiritual. We must treat of these in their proper order, regulating the will according to reason, lest it fail to concentrate the vigor of its joy on God because it is being hindered by these goods. We must in all of this presuppose a fundamental principle that will be like a staff, a continual support for our journey. It must be kept in mind, because it is the light by which we will find guidance and understanding in this doctrine and direct joy to God amid all these goods. The principle is: The will should rejoice only in what is for the honor and glory of God, and the greatest honor we can give him is to serve him according to evangelical perfection; anything unincorporated in such service is without value to human beings.<sup>2</sup>

## CHAPTER 18

18. Joy in temporal goods. How a person should direct it to God.

18.1. We listed the first kind of goods as temporal.<sup>1</sup> By temporal goods we mean: riches, status, positions, and other things claiming prestige; and children, relatives, marriages, and so on. All these are possible objects of joy for the will.

18.1.(2). But the vanity of rejoicing over riches, titles, status, positions, and other similar goods after which people usually strive is clear. If people were better servants of God by being richer, they would be obliged to rejoice in riches. But riches are rather the occasion of their offending God, as the Wise Man teaches: Son, if you be rich you shall not be free from sin [Ecclus. 11:10]. Though it is true that temporal goods of themselves are not necessarily the cause of sin, yet, because of the weakness of its tendencies, the human heart usually becomes attached to them and fails God, which is sin. Thus the Wise Man says you will not be free from sin.

18.1.(3). This is why the Lord in the Gospel calls them thorns; the one who willfully handles them will be wounded with some sin [Mt. 13:22; Lk. 8:14]. In St. Luke's Gospel the exclamation - which ought to be greatly feared - asserts: How difficult will it be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of heaven (those who have joy in them), and demonstrates clearly a person's obligation not to rejoice in riches, since one is thereby exposed to so much danger [Lk. 18:24]. In order to turn us from this danger, David also taught: If riches abound, do not set your heart on them [Ps. 62:10].

18.2. I do not want to add any more references here on so clear a matter, for I would never finish quoting Scripture. When would I ever get through telling of the evils Solomon attributes to them in Ecclesiastes? A man who had abundant riches, and knowledge of what they are, exclaimed that everything under the sun was vanity of vanities, affliction of spirit, and vain solicitude of soul [Eccl. 1:14]; that the lover of riches will not reap fruit from them [Eccl. 5:9]; and that riches are kept to the harm of their owner [Eccl. 5:12]. This last assertion is evident also in the Gospel, where the man who rejoiced because for many years he had stored away a good portion of the harvest heard these words from heaven: Fool, this night they will seek your soul that you may render an accounting, and whose will be all that you stored away? [Lk. 12:20]. Finally, David imparts the same teaching, that we should not be envious when our neighbor becomes rich, since being rich is without profit for the next life [Ps. 49:16-17]. He indicates thereby that we ought rather to pity our rich neighbor.

18.3. People should not rejoice over riches, neither when they possess them nor when their neighbor possesses them, unless God is served through them. If it is in some way tolerable to rejoice in riches, it is when they are spent and employed in the service of God. This is the only way profit will be drawn from them.

18.3.(2). The same holds true for other temporal goods, titles and positions, and so on. It is vain for people to rejoice in these goods if they do not serve God by them and walk more securely on the road of eternal life. And because they cannot know with certitude

that they are serving God more, it would be vain of them to rejoice over these goods, for such joy cannot be reasonable. As our Lord says, even though one gains the whole world, one can lose one's soul [Mt. 16:26]. The only reason for rejoicing then is the greater service of God.

18.4. As for children, there is no reason to rejoice in them because they are many, or rich, or endowed with natural talents and gifts, or because they are wealthy. One should rejoice in them if they are serving God. Beauty, riches, and lineage were of no help to Absalom, David's son, since he did not serve God [2 Sm. 14:25]. The joy he found, therefore, in these goods was vain.

18.4.(2). It is also vain to desire children, as some do in upsetting and troubling the whole world with their longing for them. For they do not know whether the children will be good and serve God, or whether the expected happiness will instead be sorrow, or the rest and comfort, trial and grief, or the honor, dishonor. And because of the children they might, as many do, offend God more. Christ says of these people that they circle the earth and the sea in order to enrich their children, and they make them children of perdition twice as much as they themselves [Mt. 23:15].

18.5. Even though all things are smiling and succeeding prosperously, people should have misgivings rather than joy, since the occasion and danger of forgetting God thereby increases. This is the motive Solomon gave in Ecclesiastes for taking precaution: I judged laughter an error, and to joy I said: Why are you deceived in vain? [Eccl. 2:2]. This was like saying: When things smiled on me, I considered it error and deceit to be glad over them, for doubtless the error and foolishness of people who are joyous over what apparently brings them prosperity and success is gross, because they do not know whether some eternal good will result or not. The heart of the fool, states the Wise Man, is where there is gladness; but the heart of the wise is where there is sadness [Eccl. 7:4]. Gladness is blinding to the heart and does not allow it to consider and ponder things, while sadness makes people open their eyes and see the advantage or harm in things. Accordingly, the Wise Man also affirms that anger is better than laughter [Eccl. 7:3]. Hence it is better to go to a house of mourning than a house of feasting, for in the former we see the end of all human life, as the Wise Man also says [Eccl. 7:2].

18.6. Indeed, it would also be vanity for a husband and wife to rejoice in their marriage when they are uncertain whether God is being better served by it. They should rather be perplexed, for as St. Paul declares, matrimony is the cause of not centering the heart entirely on God, since the hearts of the couple are set on one another [1 Cor. 7:32-34]. He advises consequently: If you are free from a wife do not seek one, but if you already have one, be as free of heart as if you had none [1 Cor. 7:27, 29]. He teaches us this together with what, as we affirmed, he teaches about temporal goods: This, therefore, that I say to you, brothers, is certain, the time is short; what remains is that those who have wives be as those who have them not; and those who weep as those who do not weep; and those who rejoice as those who do not rejoice; and those who buy as those who do not possess; and those who use this world as those who use it not [1 Cor. 7:29-31].

18.6.(2). The reason he says all this is to explain that nothing but what belongs to the service of God should be the object of our joy. Any other joy would be vain and worthless, for joy that is out of harmony with God is of no value to the soul.



## CHAPTER 19

19. The harm caused from joy in temporal goods.

19.1. We would run out of ink, paper, and time were we to describe the harm that beleaguers the soul because it turns its affection to temporal goods. Something very small can lead into great evils and destroy remarkable blessings, just as an unextinguished spark can kindle immense fires capable of burning up the world.

19.1.(2). All this harm has its origin and root in one main private harm embodied in this joy: withdrawal from God. Just as approaching God through the affection of the will gives rise to every good, so withdrawal from him through creature affection breeds every harm and evil in the soul. The measure of the harm reflects the intensity of the joy and affection with which the will is joined to the creature, for in that proportion does it withdraw from God. Hence the harm incurred will be greater or less and, for the most part, in both an extensive and intensive way, according to the degree of one's withdrawal from God.<sup>1</sup>

19.2. This privative harm, from which the other negative and positive kinds arise, has four degrees, one worse than the other. When individuals reach the fourth they have encountered all the harm and evil that can be described in this matter. Moses notes these four degrees very clearly in Deuteronomy with these words: The beloved was surfeited and hobbled backward; he was surfeited, grew fat, and spread out. He forsook God his Maker, and departed from God his Savior [Dt. 32:15].

19.3. The soul, which was previously beloved, becomes surfeited by engulfing itself in the joy of creatures. The first degree of harm to spring from this joy is backsliding: a blunting of the mind in relation to God, by which God's goods become dark to it, just as a cloud darkens the air and prevents the sun from illumining it.

19.3.(2). By the very fact that spiritual persons rejoice in something and give reign to the appetite in frivolous things, their relationship with God is darkened and their intellect clouded. This is what the divine Spirit teaches in the Book of Wisdom: Contact with vanity and deception, and their use, obscures good things, and the inconstancy of the appetite overturns and perverts the sense and judgment that is without malice [Wis. 4:12]. The Holy Spirit teaches by this that even though the intellect is without the thought of any malice, joy in these vanities and concupiscence for them is alone sufficient to produce the first degree of this harm: dullness of mind and darkness of judgment in understanding truth and judging well of each thing as it is in itself.

19.4. If human beings give way to concupiscence for temporal goods or take joy in them, their sanctity and keen judgment will be insufficient to prevent this injury. God therefore warned us through Moses: Do not receive gifts that blind even the prudent [Ex. 23:8]. This admonition was directed toward those who were to be judges since their judgment must be clear and alert, which would not be the case if they were to covet and rejoice in gifts.

19.4.(2). Similarly, God commanded Moses to appoint as judges those who abhorred avarice so their judgment would not be blunted by the gratification of their passions [Ex. 18:21]. He speaks not merely of a lack of desire but of the abhorrence of avarice. To enjoy perfect protection from the emotion of love, individuals must maintain this abhorrence and defend themselves from one contrary by means of another. As the prophet Samuel asserted in the Book of Kings, the reason he was always so upright and enlightened a judge was that he never accepted a gift from anyone [1 Sm. 12:3].

19.5. The second degree of this privative harm issues from the first. It is disclosed in the passage already quoted: He was surfeited, grew fat, and spread out [Dt. 32:15]. Accordingly, this second degree is a spreading out of the will in temporal things - and in a manner that involves even greater freedom. This consists in making little of joy and pleasure in creatures, in not being afflicted about it nor considering it to be so serious a matter. The root of this injury is the reign that was given to joy in the beginning, for in giving way to it the soul grew fat, as is indicated in Exodus, and that fatness of joy and appetite made the will spread out and extend further to creatures.

19.5.(2). The consequences are many kinds of serious harm, for this second degree causes one to withdraw from spiritual exercises and the things of God, to lack satisfaction in these exercises because of the pleasure found in other things, and to give oneself over to many imperfections, frivolities, joys, and vain pleasures.

19.6. When consummated, this second degree takes away entirely the spiritual practices to which individuals were accustomed, so all their mind and covetousness fix on the secular.

19.6.(2). Those in the second degree not only possess darkened intellects and judgment in understanding truths and justice, as do those in the first, but they are now extremely weak, lukewarm, and careless in knowing and practicing true judgment. Isaiah affirms this in these words: They all love gifts and allow themselves to be carried away by retributions, and they do not judge the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come to them and their attention [Is. 1:23]. This attitude could not exist without their fault, especially when duty was incumbent on them by their office. Those who have reached this degree are not without malice, as are those in the first degree. Thus they gradually turn from justice and virtue because their will reaches out more and more into affection for creatures.

19.6.(3). The trait of those in this second degree is extreme lukewarmness - as well as carelessness - in spiritual matters, observing them through mere formality, force, or habit, rather than through love.

19.7. The third degree of this privative harm is the complete abandoning of God. These individuals don't care about observing God's law, but attend to worldly goods and allow themselves to fall into mortal sins through covetousness. This third degree is indicated in the next assertion of this passage from Exodus: He forsook God his Maker [Dt. 32:15]. This degree includes all who are so engrossed in the things, riches, and affairs of this

world that they care nothing about fulfilling the obligations of God's law. Forgetful and sluggish about matters pertaining to their salvation, they become much more alive and astute in the things of the world - so much so that Christ in the Gospel calls them children of this world. He says they are more prudent and keen in their affairs than the children of light are in theirs [Lk. 16:8]. Thus in the affairs of God they are nothing, and in those of the world they are everything. These, precisely, are the greedy. Their appetite and joy are already so extended and dispersed among creatures - and with such anxiety - that they cannot be satisfied. Rather, their appetite and thirst increase more as they regress further from God, the fount that alone can satisfy them. To these individuals God refers through Jeremiah: They have abandoned me, the fount of living water, and dug for themselves leaking cisterns that cannot hold water [Jer. 2:13]. The reason for this dissatisfaction is that creatures do not slake the thirst of the avaricious, but rather intensify it.

19.7.(2). These greedy persons fall into thousands of kinds of sins out of love for temporal goods, and the harm they suffer is indeterminable. David says of them: Transierunt in affectum cordis [Ps. 73:7].<sup>2</sup>

19.8. The fourth degree of this privative harm is noted in the final statement of the text: and departed from God his Savior [Dt. 32:15]. This is the degree into which the avaricious ones we just mentioned fall. Because of temporal goods, the avaricious do not concern themselves with setting their heart on God's law, and consequently their will, memory, and intellect wander far from God and they forget him, as though he were not their God at all. The reason is that they have made gods for themselves out of money and temporal goods. St. Paul indicates this in declaring that avarice is a form of idolatry [Col. 3:5]. Those who are in this fourth degree forget God and deliberately turn their heart - which ought to be centered on him - to money, as though they had no other God.

19.9. We find in this fourth degree those who do not hesitate to order divine and supernatural things to temporal things as to gods. They should do just the contrary. They should direct the temporal to God, as is right if God is really their God. Wicked Balaam belongs in this category, for he sold the grace God had given him [Nm. 22:32]. Also Simon Magus, who thought of putting a monetary value on God's grace by contriving to buy it [Acts 18:18-19]. He placed a higher value on money, and he thought he could find someone who by selling grace would esteem money more.

19.9.(2). Today many belong in various ways to the category of this fourth degree. Out there in the world, their reason darkened as to spiritual matters through covetousness, they serve money and not God, they are moved by money rather than by God, and they give first consideration to the temporal price and not to the divine value and reward. In countless ways they make money their principal god and goal and give it precedence over God, their ultimate end.

19.10. Also included in the category of this last degree are all those miserable souls who value earthly goods as their god and are so enamored of them that they do not hesitate to sacrifice their lives when they observe that this god of theirs undergoes some temporal loss. They despair and commit suicide for wretched reasons, and demonstrate with their

own hands the miserable reward that comes from such a god. Since there is nothing to hope for from him, he gives despair and death. And those whom he does not pursue right up to death, the ultimate injury, die from living in the affliction of anxieties and many other miseries. He does not permit gladness to enter their hearts or for any earthly good to bring them joy. Insofar as they are afflicted about money, they are always paying the tribute of their hearts to it. They cling to it unto their final calamity of just perdition, as the Wise Man warns: Riches are hoarded to the harm of their owner [Eccl. 5:12].

19.11. Belonging to this fourth degree are those of whom St. Paul says: Tradidit illos in reprobum sensum [Rom. 1:28].<sup>3</sup> For joy in possessions ultimately drags humans down even to these evils.

19.11.(2). But even those to whom less harm comes should be pitied greatly, since, as we affirmed, this joy causes the soul to fall far back in the way of God. As David declares: Do not fear when a man becomes rich (do not be envious, thinking that he has an advantage over you), for when he dies he will take nothing with him, nor will his glory and joy descend with him [Ps. 49:16-17].

## CHAPTER 20

20. Benefits derived through the withdrawal of joy from temporal goods.

20.1. Spiritual persons must exercise care that in their heart and joy they do not become attached to temporal goods. They must fear lest, through a gradual increase, their small attachments become great. Great things can come from little things, and what is small in the beginning can be immense in the end, just as a spark is enough to set a mountain on fire, and even the whole world [Jas. 3:5]. And they should never assure themselves that, since their attachment is small, they will break away from it in the future even if they do not do so immediately. If they do not have the courage to uproot it when it is small and in its first stages, how do they think and presume they will have the ability to do so when it becomes greater and more deeply rooted? Especially since our Lord affirms in the Gospel that the one who is unfaithful in little things will also be unfaithful in great things [Lk. 16:10]. Those who avoid small attachments will not fall into greater ones. But there is serious harm in little matters since through them the harm has already passed beyond the enclosure wall of the heart. And as the saying goes: Once begun, half done. Accordingly, David warns us that even though riches abound we must not set our heart on them [Ps. 62:10].

20.2. Even if human beings do not free their heart of joy in temporal goods for the sake of God and the demands of Christian perfection, they ought to do so because of the resulting temporal advantages, prescinding from the spiritual ones. By liberating themselves from joy in temporal goods, they not only free themselves from the pestiferous kinds of harm we mentioned in the preceding chapters, but in addition acquire the virtue of liberality. Liberality is one of God's principal attributes and can in no way coexist with covetousness.

20.2.(2). Moreover, they acquire liberty of spirit, clarity of reason, rest, tranquility, peaceful confidence in God, and, in their will, the true cult and homage of God.

20.2.(3). They obtain more joy and recreation in creatures through the dispossession of them. They cannot rejoice in them if they behold them with possessiveness, for this is a care that, like a trap, holds the spirit to earth and does not allow wideness of heart [2 Cor. 6:11].

20.2.(4). In detachment from things they acquire a clearer knowledge of them and a better understanding of both natural and supernatural truths concerning them. Their joy, consequently, in these temporal goods is far different from the joy of one who is attached to them, and they receive great benefits and advantages from their joy. They delight in these goods according to the truth of them, but those who are attached delight according to what is false in them; they delight in the best, the attached delight in the worst; they delight in the substance of them, those sensibly attached delight in the accidents. The senses cannot grasp or attain to more than the accidents, whereas the spirit, purged of the clouds and appearances of the accidents, penetrates the truth and value of things, which is the object of the spirit. Joy, then, clouds the judgment like a mist. For there can be no voluntary joy over creatures without voluntary possessiveness, just as there can be no joy,

insofar as it is a passion, unaccompanied by habitual possessiveness of heart. The denial and purgation of such joy leaves the judgment as clear as the air when vapors vanish.

20.3. Those, then, whose joy is unpossessive of things rejoice in them all as though they possessed them all; those others, beholding them with a possessive mind, lose all the delight of them all in general. The former, as St. Paul states, though they have nothing in their heart, possess everything with greater liberty [2 Cor. 6:10]; the others, insofar as they possess things with attachment, neither have nor possess anything. Rather, their heart is held by things and they suffer as a captive. As many as are the joys they long to uncover in creatures, so many will necessarily be the straits and afflictions of their attached and possessed heart.

20.3.(2). Cares do not molest the detached, neither in prayer nor outside it, and thus, losing no time, such people easily store up an abundance of spiritual good. Yet those who are attached spend all their time going to and fro about the snare to which their heart is tied, and even with effort they can hardly free themselves for a short while from this snare of thinking about and finding joy in the object to which their heart is attached.

20.3.(3). At the first movement of joy toward things, the spiritual person ought to curb it, remembering the principle we are here following: There is nothing worthy of a person's joy save the service of God and the procurement of his honor and glory in all things. One should seek this alone in the use of things, turning away from vanity and concern for one's own delight and consolation.

20.4. There is another exceptional and principal benefit of detachment from joy in creatures: freedom of the heart for God. With this the soul is disposed for all the favors God will grant it. Without it, he does not bestow them. The favors are such that for each joy the soul renounces out of love of God and evangelical perfection, it will receive a hundredfold in this life, as promised in the Gospel [Mt. 19:29; Mk. 10:30].

20.4.(2). Even if such gains were not to be had, the spiritual person would have to quell these joys because of the displeasure given to God through them. In the Gospel we see that merely because the rich man rejoiced in having stored up goods for many years God was so angered he told him he must give an account of his soul that very night [Lk. 12:20].

20.4.(3). We should believe, therefore, that as often as we rejoice vainly, God is watching and planning some chastisement and bitter drink according to our merits; for at times the sadness redounding from the joy is a hundred times greater than the joy. What St. John says of Babylon in the Apocalypse is true, that she would receive torment in the measure in which she rejoiced and lived in delights [Rv. 18:7]. Yet the text does not mean that the sadness will not be greater than the joy. It shall be greater, since eternal torments are inflicted for brief pleasures. But it indicates that no fault will escape a particular punishment. For he who will punish the idle word will not pardon vain joy [Mt. 12:36].

## CHAPTER 21

21. The vanity of willful joy in natural goods, and the method of directing oneself through them to God.

21.1. By natural goods we mean: beauty, grace, elegance, bodily constitution, and all other corporeal endowments; also, in the soul, good intelligence, discretion, and other talents belonging to the rational part of humans.

21.1.(2). People are vain and deceitful if they rejoice in these gifts only because they or their relatives have them, without giving thanks to God who grants them in order to be better known and loved. As Solomon says: Grace is deceitful and beauty vain; she who fears the Lord will be praised [Prv. 31:30]. We are taught in this text that human beings should rather have misgivings about these natural gifts since through them they can be easily distracted from the love of God and, being allured, fall into vanity and delusion. This is why he says that bodily grace is deceptive, deludes people along the way, and attracts them to inappropriate things through vain joy and complacency with self or with the possession of this grace. And he declares that beauty is vain because it causes people who esteem and rejoice in it to fall in countless ways. People should rejoice only if they serve God or others through it. They ought rather to be diffident and fearful lest their natural gifts and graces occasion their offending God by turning their eyes to these gifts in vain presumption or excessive attachment.

21.1.(3). Those possessing these endowments should be careful and live cautiously lest through vain ostentation they be the occasion that someone's heart withdraw even one iota from God. These natural graces and gifts are such a provocation and occasion of sin both to the possessor and the beholder that there is scarcely a heart that escapes from this snare or birdlime. We have observed that many spiritual persons with these endowments have, out of fear, prayed God to disfigure them lest these gifts be an occasion to themselves or others for some vain joy or attachment.

21.2. Spiritual persons, then, must purge and darken their will of this vain joy, and bear in mind the following: Beauty and all other natural endowments are but earth, arising from the earth and returning to it; grace and elegance are but the smoke and air of this earth, and should be considered and valued as such for the sake of avoiding a lapse into vanity. Regarding these goods, spiritual people must direct their heart to God in joy and gladness that God is himself all this beauty and grace - eminently and infinitely so, above all creatures. As David affirms, all these things will grow old and pass away like a garment, while God alone will remain immutable forever [Ps. 102:26-27]. Accordingly, if one does not turn one's joy to God in all things, it will always be false and illusory. This is the kind Solomon referred to when he spoke to joy in creatures: To joy I said: Why do you let yourself be deceived in vain? [Eccl. 2:2], that is, when you allow the heart to be allured by creatures.

## CHAPTER 22

22. The harm resulting from joy of will in natural goods.

22.1. A good deal of both the harm and benefit I am describing in each of these kinds of joy is common to them all. Because this harm or benefit is the direct result of either joy or detachment from it, no matter what class the joy belongs to, I am mentioning both in each of these categories since, as I say, this harm or benefit is annexed to all these kinds of joy.

22.1.(2). My main intention, however, is to speak of the particular kinds of harm and benefit arising in the soul by rejoicing or not rejoicing in each of these goods. I refer to them as particular because they are the primary and immediate result of a particular kind of joy. They are only caused by other kinds secondarily and indirectly.

22.1.(3). For example: Tepidity of spirit is the direct outcome of each and every kind of joy, and so this harm is common to all six; yet fornication is a particular evil that follows directly only from joy in natural goods of which we are now speaking.<sup>1</sup>

22.2. The spiritual and bodily harm directly and effectively ensuing from joy in natural goods can be reduced to six principal kinds.

22.2.(2). The first is vainglory, presumption, pride, and disesteem of neighbor, for a person cannot fasten the eyes of esteem on one object without withdrawing them from others. The result is, at least, a material disesteem of other things, since naturally, when the heart values one thing it turns from others because of its concentration on this esteemed object. And through this material contempt it is exceptionally easy in a general or particular way to slip into intentional and voluntary contempt for some of these other things. Such contempt may not only be internal but manifest itself externally through speech: This is not like that, or so and so is not like so and so.

22.2.(3). The second harm is inciting the senses to complacency, sensual delight, and lust.

22.2.(4). The third kind of harm is that this joy induces flattery and vain praises involving deception and vanity, as Isaiah warns: My people, whoever praises you deceives you [Is. 3:12]. The reason is that even though sometimes the truth is told in lauding natural grace and beauty, this praise rarely fails to contain some harm, either by causing the person praised to fall into vain complacency and joy, or by directing one's own imperfect affections and intentions toward the person endowed with this beauty.

22.2.(5). The fourth kind of harm is general, for the reason and judgment of the spirit become very dull, as in the case of joy over temporal goods, and in some ways even duller. Since natural goods are more intimate to a person than temporal goods, joy in them produces its imprint more quickly and effectively and ravishes more forcibly. Thus the reason and judgment do not remain free but are clouded by the emotion of a very intimate joy.



22.2.(6). This gives rise to the fifth harm: distraction of the mind with creatures.

22.2.(7). The next outgrowth is spiritual lukewarmness and weakness. This sixth harm is also general and usually reaches such a point that it causes the soul to find extreme tedium and sadness in the things of God, even to the extent of abhorring them.

22.2.(8). Pure spirit is infallibly lost in this kind of joy, at least in the beginning. If some spirituality is felt it will be very sensible, gross, unspiritual, exterior, and unrecollected. It will comprise sensory pleasure more than strength of spirit. The spirit is so lowly and weak that it does not suppress the habit of this joy, for the possession of this imperfect habit is sufficient to impede pure spirit even though the acts of joy are not consented to. Consequently the soul lives more in the weakness of the senses than in the strength it has when occasions of sin arise. Although I do not deny that many virtues can coexist with many imperfections, yet because of the reign of the flesh, which militates against the spirit [Gal. 5:17], there can be neither a pure nor a savory interior spirit dwelling together with these unquelled joys. And even if the spirit is unaware of any harm, distraction is at least secretly caused.

22.3. Let us go back to that second kind of harm that contains in itself innumerable other indescribable kinds. The extent and enormity of the disaster arising from joy in natural graces and beauty is patent, since on account of this joy we hear every day of many murders, lost reputations, insults, squandered fortunes, rivalries, quarrels, and of so many adulteries, rapes, and fornications, and of fallen saints so numerous that they are compared to the third part of the stars of heaven cast down to earth by the tail of the serpent [Rv. 12:4], to fine gold that has lost its beauty and luster in the mire, and to the illustrious and noble men of Zion clothed with the best gold, yet esteemed as broken clay jars [Lam. 4:1-2].

22.4. Where does this poisonous harm fail to reach? And who fails to drink little or much from the golden chalice of the Babylonian woman of the Apocalypse [Rv. 17:4]?<sup>2</sup> The fact that she is seated on that large beast with seven heads and ten crowns signifies that there is hardly anyone of high rank or low, saint or sinner, who does not drink of her wine, subjecting the heart somewhat. For as is pointed out there, all the kings of the earth were inebriated with the wine of her prostitution [Rv. 17:2]. She reaches out to all states, even to the supreme and illustrious state of the sanctuary and divine priesthood, by setting her abominable cup in the holy places, as Daniel asserts [Dn. 9:27], and she hardly leaves a strong person who has not drunk a small or large quantity of wine from her chalice, which is this kind of vain joy. As a result it is said that all the monarchs of the earth were inebriated by this wine, since so few will be found, no matter how holy, who have not been somewhat ravished and perplexed by this drink of joy and pleasure in natural beauty and graces.

22.5. It is worth remarking that the text says they were inebriated. No matter how small the amount of this wine of joy, it immediately takes hold on the heart and subdues it, producing obscurity in the reason, as happens with those who get drunk from wine. The life of the soul will be in danger if some antidote is not taken immediately, for spiritual

weakness will augment and bring such evil on the soul that it will find itself a captive of its enemies, grinding at the mill like Samson with his eyes plucked out and the hair of his first strength cut. And afterward it will perhaps die the second death as he did together with his enemies [Jgs. 16:19-31]. This is the harm the drink of this joy will cause spiritually, as it did physically to Samson and as it does to many today. The enemies of the soul will come and say to it afterward what the Philistines said to Samson, to his great confusion: Were you not the one who snapped the knotted cords, broke the jaws of the lions, killed the thousand Philistines, pulled out the gates, and freed yourself from all your enemies?

22.6. Let us conclude, then, with necessary instructions for the prevention of this poison. As soon as the heart feels drawn by vain joy in natural goods, it should recall how dangerous and pernicious it is to rejoice in anything other than the service of God. One should consider how harmful it was for the angels to have rejoiced and grown complacent in their natural beauty and goods, since they thereby fell into the ugly abyss; and how many evils come on humans every day because of this very vanity. Therefore take courage and use in time the remedy suggested by the poet for those beginning to grow attached to this joy: "Hurry now in the beginning to apply the remedy, for when evils have had time to increase in the heart, medicine and remedies arrive late."<sup>3</sup> Look not at wine, warns the Wise Man, when its color is scarlet and it shines in the glass; it enters smoothly but bites like a snake and spreads poison like the basilisk [Prv. 23:31].

## CHAPTER 23

23. The benefits the soul acquires from not rejoicing in natural goods.

23.1. Many are the benefits derived through withdrawal of the heart from this joy. Besides preparing the soul for the love of God and for other virtues, it directly paves the way for humility toward self and general charity toward one's neighbor. By not becoming attached to anyone, despite these apparent and deceptive natural goods, a person remains unencumbered and free to love all rationally and spiritually, which is the way God wants them to be loved. As a result one realizes that no one merits love except for virtue. And when one loves with this motive, the love is according to God and exceedingly free. If the love contains some attachment there is greater attachment to God, for as the love of neighbor increases so does the love of God, and as the love of God increases so does the love of neighbor, for what proceeds from God has one and the same reason and cause.

23.2. Another excellent benefit coming from the denial of this kind of joy is the fulfillment of the counsel our Lord gives in the Gospel of St. Matthew, that those who would follow him should deny themselves [Mt. 16:24]. In no way could a soul do this if it were to rejoice in its natural goods, because those who pay some attention to themselves do not deny themselves or follow Christ.

23.3. Another notable benefit of the denial of this kind of joy is that such denial begets deep tranquility of soul, empties one of distractions, and brings recollection to the senses, especially to the eyes. By not wanting this joy, souls do not want to look at or occupy the other senses with these things so they may avoid being attracted or ensnared by them and wasting time or thought. They bear resemblance to the prudent serpent that stops its ears so as not to hear the charmers and receive some impression from them [Ps. 58:4-5]. By guarding the senses, the gates of the soul, one safeguards and increases one's peace and purity of soul.

23.4. There is another benefit of no less importance for those who are already advanced in the mortification of this kind of joy: Obscene objects and ideas do not cause in them the impression and impurity they do in those who still find this joy to their liking. Consequently, from the denial and mortification of this joy, spiritual purity of soul and body (of spirit and sense) arises; a person gradually acquires angelic harmony with God, and the soul and body become a worthy temple of the Holy Spirit. This could not be so were the heart to rejoice in natural goods and graces. It is not necessary that there be consent to some obscene thing or a remembrance of it in order for the soul's purity to become stained, since this kind of joy along with knowledge of the natural good is sufficient to cause impurity of spirit and sense. The Wise Man declares that the Holy Spirit will withdraw from thoughts that are without understanding, that is, without the superior reason ordered to God [Wis. 1:5].

23.5. Another general benefit coming to the soul besides freedom from the above-mentioned evils,<sup>1</sup> is freedom from countless vanities and other kinds of spiritual and temporal harm, and especially from being held in disesteem, which is the lot of those who boast about natural endowments and rejoice in them whether they belong to themselves

or others. Accordingly, those who pay no attention to such things, but are interested in what is pleasing to God, are considered and esteemed to be discreet and wise - and indeed they are.

23.6. The last follows on these, that is, freedom of spirit by which the soul easily conquers temptations, passes through trials, and grows prosperously in virtue. This is an excellent good and very necessary in serving God.

## CHAPTER 24

24. Sensory goods, the third kind of good in which the will can place the emotion of joy. A discussion of their nature and number and of how the will should be directed to God through the purgation of this joy.

24.1. Our next subject is joy in sensory goods, the third kind of good in which the will can rejoice. It should be known that by sensory goods we mean here all the goods apprehensible to the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and to the interior faculty of discursive imagination. They are goods pertinent to the exterior and interior senses.

24.2. To darken and purge the will of joy in these sensory goods and lead it through them to God, we must presuppose a truth. It is, as we have often said, that the senses of the lower part of human nature, with which we are dealing, neither are nor can be capable of the knowledge or comprehension of God as he is in himself. The eye cannot see him or anything like him, nor can the hearing perceive his voice or any sound resembling it, nor can the sense of smell apprehend a fragrance so sweet, nor can the sense of taste relish so sublime and delightful a savor, nor can the sense of touch experience a feeling so delicate and ravishing, or anything similar. Neither is God's form or any figure representing it apprehensible to thought or imagination. Isaiah thus affirms: Eye has not seen him, nor ear heard him, nor has it entered into the human heart [Is. 64:4].<sup>1</sup>

24.3. It is noteworthy that the senses can receive satisfaction or delight either from the spirit, through some communication received interiorly from God, or from exterior things apprehended by them. And, as was said, the sensory part can have knowledge of God through neither the senses nor the spirit. Being incapable of such an attainment, it receives the spiritual in only a sensible and sensorial way. As a result it would be at least vanity for the will to pause to rejoice in the delight caused by any of these apprehensions. And it would be hindered from centering its strength on God, from placing all its joy in him alone. One cannot concentrate one's joy entirely on God save by purging and darkening oneself with regard to joy in this kind of good, as well as the other kinds.

24.4. I purposely said that it would be vanity for the will to pause to rejoice in any of these apprehensions. For when the will, in becoming aware of the delight afforded by an object of sight, hearing, or touch, does not stop with this joy but immediately elevates itself to God, being moved and strengthened for this by that delight, it is doing something very good. The will, then, does not have to avoid such experiences when they produce this devotion and prayer, but it can profit by them, and even ought to for the sake of so holy an exercise. For there are souls who are greatly moved toward God by sensible objects.<sup>2</sup>

24.4.(2). Yet one should be careful in this matter and take into consideration the effects of such experiences. Frequently, spiritual persons use this refreshment of the senses under the pretext of prayer and devotion to God; and they so perform these exercises that we could call it recreation rather than prayer, and pleasing oneself rather than God. Though the intention of these persons is directed to God, the effect they receive is recreation of

the senses, from which they obtain weakness and imperfection more than the quickening of their will and its surrender to God.

24.5. I should like to offer a norm for discerning when this gratification of the senses is beneficial and when not. Whenever spiritual persons, on hearing music or other things, seeing agreeable objects, smelling sweet fragrance, or feeling the delight of certain tastes and delicate touches, immediately at the first movement direct their thought and the affection of their will to God, receiving more satisfaction in the thought of God than in the sensible object that caused it, and find no delight in the senses save for this motive, it is a sign that they are profiting by the senses and the sensory part is a help to the spirit. The senses can then be used because the sensorial objects serve the purpose for which God created them: that he be more known and loved through them.

24.5.(2). It should be understood here that those in whom these sensible objects cause this pure spiritual effect do not on that account have an appetite for them. They care for them hardly at all, even though these objects, by reason of the delight in God they cause, do provide great satisfaction when presented to them. Thus they are not solicitous about these sensible goods; and when, as I say, these goods are offered to them, the will immediately leaves them aside, passing on to God.

24.6. The reason the soul pays no attention to these sensible motives even though they help it go to God is that the spirit, which has this readiness to go to God in and through all things, is so provided for, nourished, and satisfied by God's spirit that it doesn't miss or want anything else. And if it wants something in order to turn to God, it immediately passes beyond this object, forgetting and paying no attention to it.

24.6.(2). Yet anyone who does not feel this freedom of spirit in these objects and sensible delights, but finds that the will pauses in and feeds on them, suffers harm from them and ought to turn from their use. Though according to reason one may want help from them in order to go to God, nonetheless they assuredly prove more a hindrance than a help. They are a harm rather than a benefit in the measure that the appetite delights in them according to the senses; and the effect is always in conformity to the delight. When individuals see that the appetite for these recreations reigns within themselves, they should mortify it, because the stronger their appetite the weaker and more imperfect they are.

24.7. Spiritual persons, then, in whatever sensory gratification comes their way, whether by chance or through their own intention, ought to benefit from it only for the sake of going to God. They do this by raising their joy of soul to him so that this joy may be useful, profitable, and perfect. They should be aware that every joy unaccompanied by this negation and annihilation of all other joys - even when these concern something apparently very elevated - is vain, without profit, and a hindrance to union of the will with God.

## CHAPTER 25

25. The harm incurred by the desire for willful joy in sensory goods.

25.1. In the first place, all the general kinds of harm that are born of other types of joy spring as well from this joy in sensory goods if it is not darkened and quelled through direction to God. These kinds of harm are, for example, obscurity of reason, lukewarmness, spiritual tedium, and so on. But in particular there are many kinds of harm, either spiritual or corporeal and sensory, which can be directly incurred through this joy.

25.2. First, through failure to deny joy in visible objects for the sake of going to God, the following evils result directly: vanity of spirit, mental distraction, inordinate covetousness, indecency, interior and exterior discomposure, impurity in thought, and envy.

25.3. Joy in hearing useless things gives direct rise to distraction of the imagination, gossiping, envy, uncertain judgments, and wandering thoughts, from which flow many other pernicious kinds of harm.

25.4. Joy in sweet fragrance foments disgust for the poor (which is contrary to Christ's doctrine), aversion for servants, unsubmitiveness of heart in humble things, and spiritual insensitivity, at least in the measure of the appetite.

25.5. Joy in the delights of food directly engenders gluttony and drunkenness, anger, discord, and lack of charity toward one's neighbor and the poor, as toward Lazarus on the part of the rich man who ate sumptuously each day [Lk. 16:19-21]. Accordingly, there arise bodily disorders, infirmities, and impure movements from increasing lustful incentives. A decided spiritual torpor is directly engendered and the desire for spiritual things is so spoiled that one finds no satisfaction in them and is unable to discuss or take part in them. Distraction of the other senses and of the heart and discontent over many things also arise from this joy.

25.6. Enjoyment in the touch of soft objects foments more numerous and pernicious kinds of harm, and by it the senses more quickly pervert the spirit and extinguish its strength and vigor. The consequence is the abominable vice of effeminacy or incentives toward it in proportion to this kind of joy. This joy foments lust; it makes the spirit cowardly and timid and the senses flattering, honey-mouthed, disposed toward sin and causing harm. It pours vain gladness and mirth into the heart, engenders license of the tongue and freedom of the eyes, and ravishes and stupefies the other senses according to the intensity of the appetite. It confounds the judgment, nurturing it on spiritual incipience and stupidity, and morally engenders cowardice and inconstancy. And by this darkness of soul and weakness of heart it makes one fear where there is no reason for fear.

25.6.(2). This joy sometimes begets a spirit of confusion and unresponsiveness of conscience and spirit, since it seriously debilitates reason and reduces it to such a state

that one does not know how to take counsel or to give it, and it leaves the soul incapable of moral and spiritual blessings, as useless as a broken jar.

25.7. All these evils are caused by this kind of joy according to the intensity of the joy and also according to the disposition, weakness, or inconstancy of the individual. Some temperaments receive more detriment from one small occasion than others do from many.

25.8. Finally from this kind of rejoicing in the sense of touch one can fall into much evil and harm from natural goods, as we pointed out. Since I discussed this harm in speaking of those goods,<sup>1</sup> I will not refer to it here. Neither will I speak of many other kinds of harm caused, such as a decrease in spiritual exercises and corporeal penances, and lukewarmness and lack of devotion in the use of the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist.



## CHAPTER 26

26. The spiritual and temporal benefits resulting from the denial of joy in sensory goods.

26.1. The benefits acquired from the negation of this joy are admirable; some are spiritual, others temporal.

26.2. First, by withdrawing their joy from sensible things, individuals are restored from the distraction into which they had fallen through excessive use of their senses. They become recollected in God and conserve the spirit and virtues they had acquired. These virtues increase and the soul advances.

26.3. The second spiritual benefit people procure from not desiring joy in sensible things is excellent; we can truthfully say that from being sensual they become spiritual, and from animal, rational, and even that from what is human in them they advance to the angelic, and from earthly and human they become heavenly and divine. Since human beings who look for gratification and enjoyment in sensible objects deserve no other title than these we mentioned (sensual, animal, earthly, and so on), they deserve all those other titles (spiritual, heavenly, and so on), when they elevate their joy above these sensible goods.

26.4. This is obviously true. Since the exercise of the senses and the strength of sensuality are, as the Apostle says, contrary to spiritual exercise and vigor [Gal. 5:17], it follows that at the enervation of one of these forces the other, contrary one, unaugmentable because of this impediment, must grow and increase. Thus in perfecting the spirit (the superior portion of the soul, which refers to God and communicates with him), individuals merit all these attributes because they are being perfected in the spiritual and heavenly goods and gifts of God.

26.4.(2). St. Paul proves both instances. He calls the sensual person (that is, one who occupies the will with sensory things) the animal person, one who does not perceive the things of God; and the other, who raises the will to God, he calls the spiritual person, and this is the one who penetrates and judges all things, even the deep things of God [1 Cor. 2:10-15]. Consequently the soul possesses here the admirable benefit of a great preparedness for God's spiritual goods and gifts.

26.5. But the third benefit is that the satisfaction and joy of the will is temporally and exceedingly increased, since, as the Savior says, in this life for one joy they will receive a hundredfold [Mt. 19:29; Mk. 10:29-30]. If you deny one joy, the Lord will give you a hundredfold, spiritually and temporally in this life, as also from one joy taken in these sensible goods, grief and distress will be yours a hundredfold.

26.5.(2). Spiritual joy directed to God at the sight of all divine or profane things follows from the eye already purged of enjoyment in seeing things. Resulting from the purgation of enjoyment in hearing things is a most spiritual joy, a hundred times greater, directed to God in all that is heard, divine or profane; and so on with the other senses already purged. In the state of innocence all that our first parents saw, spoke of, and ate in the garden of

paradise served them for more abundant delight in contemplation, since the sensory part of their souls was truly subjected and ordered to reason. The person whose sense is purged of sensible objects and ordered to reason procures from the first movements the delight of savory contemplation and awareness of God.

26.6. In the pure, therefore, all things, high and low, engender greater good and purity. In like manner the impure soul usually derives impurity from things, whether high or low. But anyone who fails to conquer the joy of appetite will fail to experience the serenity of habitual joy in God by means of his creatures and works.

26.6.(2). The one who does not live according to the senses directs all the operations of the senses and faculties to divine contemplation. Indeed, in good philosophy, the operation of each thing corresponds to its being or life.<sup>2</sup> If the soul through mortification of the animal life lives a spiritual life, it must obviously, without contradiction, go to God in all things, since all its spiritual actions and movements will flow from the spiritual life. Consequently this person, now of pure heart, finds in all things a joyful, pleasant, chaste, pure, spiritual, glad, and loving knowledge of God.

26.7. I deduce the following doctrine from all that was said: Until individuals are so habituated to the purgation of sensible joy that at the first movement of this joy they gain the benefit spoken of (that these goods turn them immediately to God), they must necessarily deny their joy and satisfaction in sensible goods in order to draw the soul away from the sensory life. Since they are not spiritual, they should be fearful lest through the use of these goods they may perhaps get more satisfaction and strength for the senses than for the spirit. The sensory forces would then have predominance in their activity, increase sensuality, and sustain and nourish it. Our Savior declares: That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit [Jn. 3:6].

26.7.(2). And this we should consider carefully, for it is really true. Those who have not yet mortified the delight they find in sensory things should not dare try to gain much through the activity and energy of their senses with the belief that the spirit will be helped by these things. For the soul will find that if it quells its appetite for these sensible things and its joy in them, its energies will increase more.

26.8. It is unnecessary to discuss the goods of glory that come in the next life through the negation of this joy. Besides the fact that the bodily endowments of glory, such as agility and clarity, will be far more excellent in those who denied themselves than in others who did not, there will be an increase in essential glory in the soul that responds to the love of God and denies sensible goods for him.<sup>3</sup> For every momentary and perishable joy souls deny, as St. Paul states, there will be worked in them eternally an immense weight of glory [2 Cor. 4:17].

26.8.(2). Now I do not want to refer here to the additional benefits (moral, temporal, and spiritual) derived from this night regarding joy, for they are the same as those mentioned in dealing with the other kinds of joy. But here they are of a more eminent degree since the sensible joys denied are more closely conjoined with one's nature, and therefore a

more intimate purity is acquired through their negation.

## CHAPTER 27

27. The nature of moral goods, the fourth kind of goods, and the permissible manner of rejoicing in them.

27.1. Moral goods are the fourth kind in which the will can rejoice. By moral goods we mean: the virtues and their habits insofar as they are moral; the exercise of any of the virtues; the practice of the works of mercy; the observance of God's law; political prudence,<sup>1</sup> and all the practices of good manners.

27.2. When possessed and practiced, these moral goods perhaps merit more joy of will than any of the other three kinds spoken of. For either of two reasons, or for both together, a person can rejoice in these goods; that is, because of what they are in themselves, or because of the good effected through their instrumentality.

27.2.(2). We discovered that possessing the three kinds of good already mentioned deserves no joy of will. Of themselves, as was said, they neither have any good nor do they produce any in people, because they are so perishable and frail. Rather, as was also pointed out, they engender pain, sorrow, and affliction of spirit. Though they merit some joy for the second reason, that is, when people make use of them to go to God, this benefit is so uncertain that, as we commonly observe, a person contracts harm from them more than help.

27.2.(3). But even for the first reason (for what they are in themselves), moral goods merit some rejoicing by their possessor. For they bring along with them peace, tranquility, a right and ordered use of reason, and actions resulting from mature deliberation. Humanly speaking, a person cannot have any nobler possession in this life.

27.3. Because virtues in themselves merit love and esteem from a human viewpoint, and because of their nature and the good they humanly and temporally effect, a person can well rejoice in the practice and possession of them. Under this aspect and for this reason philosophers, wise men, and ancient rulers esteemed, praised, and endeavored to acquire and practice them.<sup>2</sup> Although they were pagans who only cared for these goods in a temporal way, because of the temporal, corporeal, and natural benefits they knew would result, they did not merely acquire these goods and the renown sought through them. But in addition God, who loves every good, even in the barbarian and gentile, and does not hinder any good work from being accomplished, as the Wise Man says [Wis. 7:22], bestowed on them an increase of life, honor, dominion, and peace. He did this with the Romans because of their just laws. He subjected almost the entire world to them, paying them temporally for their commendable customs since, because of their paganism,<sup>3</sup> they were incapable of eternal reward.

27.3.(2). God so loves these moral goods that he was exceedingly pleased merely because Solomon asked for wisdom in order to instruct his people, govern them justly, and teach them worthwhile customs. And he told Solomon that he had given it to him and moreover had granted him what had not been asked for, that is, riches and honor, in such a way that no king in the past or future was like him [1 Kgs. 3:11-13].

27.4. Though Christians ought to rejoice in the moral goods and works they perform temporally, insofar as these are the cause of the temporal goods we spoke of, they ought not stop there as did the gentiles, who with the eyes of their soul did not go beyond the things of this mortal life. Since Christians have the light of faith in which they hope for eternal life and without which nothing from above or below will have any value, they ought to rejoice in the possession and exercise of these moral goods only and chiefly in the second manner: that insofar as they perform these works for the love of God, these works procure eternal life for them.

27.4.(2). Thus, through their good customs and virtues they should fix their eyes only on the service and honor of God. Without this aspect the virtues are worth nothing in God's sight. This is evident in the Gospel in the case of the ten virgins. They had all preserved their virginity and done good works, yet because five of them had not rejoiced in this second way (by directing their joy in these works to God), but rather in the first, rejoicing vainly in the possession of these works, they were rejected from heaven and left without any gratitude or reward from their spouse [Mt. 25:1-13]. Also many of the ancients possessed numerous virtues and engaged in good works, and many Christians have them today and accomplish wonderful deeds; but such works are of no profit for eternal life because of failure to seek only the honor and glory of God.

27.4.(3). Christians, then, should rejoice not if they accomplish good works and abide by good customs, but if they do these things out of love for God alone, without any other motive. As those who work only for the service of God will receive a more elevated reward of glory, so those who work for other motives will suffer greater shame when they stand before God.

27.5. For the sake of directing their joy in moral goods to God, Christians should keep in mind that the value of their good works, fasts, alms, penances, and so on, is not based on quantity and quality so much as on the love of God practiced in them; and consequently that these works are of greater excellence in the measure both that the love of God by which they are performed is more pure and entire and that self-interest diminishes with respect to pleasure, comfort, praise, and earthly or heavenly joy. They should not set their heart on the pleasure, comfort, savor, and other elements of self-interest these good works and practices usually entail, but recollect their joy in God and desire to serve him through these means. And through purgation and darkness as to this joy in moral goods they should desire in secret that only God be pleased and joyful over their works. They should have no other interest or satisfaction than the honor and glory of God. Thus all the strength of their will in regard to these moral goods will be recollected in God.

## CHAPTER 28

28. Seven kinds of harm that can result from joy of the will in moral goods.

28.1. I find there are seven kinds of harm that can be incurred through vain joy in one's good works and customs; and because this harm is spiritual it is particularly ruinous.

28.2. The first is vanity, pride, vainglory, and presumption, for one is unable to rejoice over one's works without esteeming them. This gives rise to boasting and so on, as is said of the pharisee in the Gospel: He prayed and sought friendship with God by boasting of his fasting and performance of other good works [Lk. 18:11-12].

28.3. The second is usually linked with the first. It is that people make comparisons judging others to be evil and imperfect, supposing that the deeds and works of others are not as good as their own. Interiorly they have less regard for others, and they sometimes manifest this exteriorly in word. The pharisee also had this defect since he said in his prayer: I give you thanks that I am not like other men: robbers, unjust, and adulterers [Lk. 18:11]. Through one act he incurred the two kinds of harm: self-esteem and contempt for others.

28.3.(2). Many today also do so when they boast: "I am not like so and so, nor do I do anything similar to what this or that one does." Many are even worse than the pharisee. Though the pharisee not only bore contempt for others in general, but even indicated a particular individual in declaring, I am not like this publican [Lk. 18:11], many persons, content with neither of these two attitudes, even become angry and envious in noticing that others receive praise or accomplish more or have greater value than they themselves.

28.4. The third is that, since they look for satisfaction in their works, they usually do not perform them unless they see that some gratification or praise will result from them. As Christ pointed out, they do everything ut videantur ab hominibus (in order to be seen by others) [Mt. 23:5]; and they do not undertake their works only out of love for God.

28.5. The fourth follows from this third; and it is that they will not find their reward in God since they wished to find, in this life, joy, comfort, honor, or some other thing from their works. Referring to such an attitude, the Savior says that they have received their pay in these goods [Mt. 6:2]. Consequently they are both left alone with the labor of their work and confused without any reward.

28.5.(2). There is so much misery among human beings as regards this kind of harm that I believe most of the works publicly achieved are either faulty, worthless, or imperfect in God's sight. The reason is that people are not detached from these human respects and interests. How else can one judge the works performed by some and the memorials constructed at their request, when they do not desire them unless for some honor or human and vain considerations; or when, in the memorials, they perpetuate their own name, lineage, or nobility; or when they even go to the extent of having their coat of arms or heraldry put in the church, as if they want to put themselves there as an image where all may bend the knee?

28.5.(3). It can be said that in these works some adore themselves more than God. And this is true if they undertake such works for these reasons and would not do so without them.<sup>1</sup>

28.5.(4). Aside from these individuals, who are the worst, how many are there who in various ways suffer this harm in their works? Some want praise for their works; others, thanks; others talk about them and are pleased if this person or that or even the whole world knows about them; at times they want their alms, or whatever they are doing, to pass through the hands of another that it may be better known; others desire all these things together. The Savior in the Gospel compares this to sounding the trumpet, which is the practice of vain persons, and he declares that as a result they will not receive a reward from God for their works [Mt. 6:2].

28.6. To avoid this kind of harm, then, these persons must hide their work so that only God might see it, and they should not want anyone to pay attention to it. Not only should they hide it from others, but even from themselves: They should desire neither the complacency of esteeming their work as if it had value, nor the procurement of satisfaction. This is the meaning of our Savior's words: Let not the left hand know what the right hand is doing [Mt. 6:3], which is like saying: Do not esteem with the temporal and carnal eye the spiritual work you do. The strength of the will is thereby recollected in God, and the work bears fruit in his sight. Consequently a person will not lose the work but reap abundant merit from it.

28.6.(2). A passage from Job has this meaning: I have kissed my hand with my mouth, and my heart rejoiced in secret, which is a great iniquity and sin [Jb. 31:27-28]. The hand in this affirmation refers to the work, and the mouth to the complacency of the will in it. And because it is self-complacency, as we said, he adds: My heart rejoiced in secret, which is a great iniquity and denial against God. And this was equivalent to saying that he was neither complacent nor secretly glad in his heart.

28.7. The fifth kind of harm is failure to advance in the way of perfection. As a result of attachment to satisfaction and consolation in their works, some usually become discouraged and lose the spirit of perseverance. This ordinarily happens when God leads them on by giving them hard bread, the bread of the perfect, and takes away the infant's milk so as to prove their strength and purge their weak appetite so they may taste the substantial fare of adults.<sup>2</sup> This is the spiritual interpretation of the Wise Man's words: Dying flies spoil the sweetness of the ointment [Eccl. 10:1]. For when the occasion of practicing some mortification is presented to these persons, they die to their good works by ceasing to accomplish them, and they lose the spirit of perseverance, which would give them spiritual sweetness and interior consolation.

28.8. The sixth is that they are usually deluded by the thought that the exercises and works that give satisfaction are better than those that do not. And they have praise and esteem for the one kind, but disesteem for the other. Yet those works that usually require more mortification from a person (who is not advanced in the way of perfection) are

more acceptable and precious in God's sight because of the self-denial exercised in them, than are those from which one can derive consolation, which very easily leads to self-seeking. Apropos of this, Micah asserts: *Malum manuum suarum dicunt bonum* (What is evil in their works they say is good) [Mi. 7:3]. This evil arises when they seek to please themselves in their works and not God alone.

28.8.(2). An account of how this harmful defect reigns in spiritual persons as well as in ordinary people would only end up in my being prolix, for hardly any will be found who are motivated in their work by God alone, without their grasping for the support of some consolation or satisfaction or other consideration of self.

28.9. The seventh kind of harm is that human beings, insofar as they do not quell vain joy in their moral deeds, become more incapable of taking counsel and receiving reasonable instructions about the works they ought to do. The habitual weakness they have from working with this vain joy so enchains them that they either do not believe that the counsel of another is better, or do not wish to follow it even if in their opinion it is, because they are without the courage to do so. Such people become very slack in charity toward God and neighbor, for the self-love contained in their works makes them grow cold in charity.



## CHAPTER 29

29. Benefits derived through the removal of joy from moral goods.

29.1. Great are the benefits derived from restraining the desire for vain rejoicing in this kind of good.

29.1.(2). As for the first, the soul is freed from falling into many temptations and deceits of the devil concealed in the joy of these good works. This is understandable from what was said in Job: He sleeps under the shadow, in the covert of the reed, and in moist places [Jb. 40:16]. The passage refers to the devil, because in the moisture of joy and the vanity of the reed (of the vain work) he deludes the soul. The devil's hidden deceptiveness in this joy is nothing to marvel at because, prescinding from his suggestion, the vain joy is itself a deception, especially when there is some boastfulness of heart over one's works. As Jeremiah affirms: *Arrogantia tua deceptit te* (Your arrogance has deceived you) [Jer. 49:16]. For what greater deception is there than boasting? The soul is freed from this by purging itself of such joy.

29.2. The second benefit is a more diligent and precise accomplishment of these works. Such is not the case when one takes pleasure in them with the passion of joy. Through this passion of joy the irascible and concupiscible appetites become so strong that they do not allow leeway for the judgment of reason. As a result people usually become inconstant in their practice of good works and resolutions; they leave these aside and take up others, starting and stopping without ever finishing anything. Since they are motivated by satisfaction, which is changeable - and in some temperaments more so than in others - their work ends when the satisfaction does, and their resolution too, even though it may concern an important endeavor. We can say of those for whom the energy and soul of their work is the joy they find in it that when the joy dies out the good work ceases, and they do not persevere.

29.2.(2). Christ spoke of them when he said: They receive the word with joy, and the devil immediately takes it away from them that they may not persevere [Lk. 8:12]. And the reason for this lack of perseverance is that they have no other roots or strength than this joy. Withdrawal of the will from such joy, then, is the cause of perseverance and success. This benefit is great, as is also the contrary harm. A wise person is concerned about the substance and benefit of a work, not about the delight and satisfaction it yields. Thus such a one does not beat the air [1 Cor. 9:26], but procures from the work a stable joy without paying the tribute of displeasure.

29.3. The third is a divine benefit. It is that by extinguishing vain joy in these works a person becomes poor in spirit, which is one of the beatitudes the Son of God mentions: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [Mt. 5:3].

29.4. The fourth benefit is that those who deny this joy will be meek, humble, and prudent in their work. For they will act neither impetuously and hastily, compelled by the concupiscible or irascible aspect of joy; nor presumptuously, affected by their esteem for the work due to the joy it gives; nor uncautiously, blinded by joy.

29.5. The fifth benefit is to become pleasing to both God and other human beings and free of spiritual avarice, gluttony, sloth, envy, and a thousand other vices.

