

**Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange**

**THE THREE WAYS  
OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE**

*This is a MBS Library best viewed by Micro Book Studio.  
You may download it at*

<http://www.microbookstudio.com>

- [THE THREE  
WAYS OF  
THE  
SPIRITUAL  
LIFE](#)

## Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange

# THE THREE WAYS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

### General Index

- [CHAPTER 1: THE LIFE OF GRACE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST CONVERSION](#)
- [CHAPTER 2: THE SECOND CONVERSION: ENTRANCE INTO THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY](#)
- [CHAPTER 3: THE THIRD CONVERSION OR TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUL: ENTRANCE INTO THE UNITIVE WAY](#)
- [CHAPTER 4: THE PROBLEM OF THE THREE STAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE IN ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY](#)
- [CHAPTER 5: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THREE STAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE](#)
- [CHAPTER 6: THE PEACE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD: A PRELUDE TO THE LIFE OF HEAVEN](#)
- [ENDNOTES](#)

---

■ [\*Previous Index\*](#)

## CHAPTER 1

# THE LIFE OF GRACE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST CONVERSION

## Index

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[THE NECESSITY OF THE INTERIOR LIFE.](#)

[THE PRINCIPLE OF THE INTERIOR LIFE.](#)

[THE BEGINNING OF ETERNAL LIFE.](#)

[THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUE CONVERSION.](#)

[THE THREE PERIODS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.](#)

---

▪ [Previous Index](#)

## CHAPTER 2

# THE SECOND CONVERSION: ENTRANCE INTO THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY

## Index

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[THE SECOND CONVERSION OF THE APOSTLES.](#)

[WHAT OUR SECOND CONVERSION OUGHT TO BE.  
THE DEFECTS WHICH RENDER IT NECESSARY.](#)

[THE MOTIVES WHICH MUST INSPIRE THE  
SECOND CONVERSION, AND THE FRUITS THAT  
DERIVE THEREFROM.](#)

---

▪ [Previous Index](#)

## CHAPTER 3

# THE THIRD CONVERSION OR TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUL: ENTRANCE INTO THE UNITIVE WAY

## Index

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST UPON THE APOSTLES.](#)

[THE EFFECTS OF THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST.](#)

[THE PURIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT NECESSARY FOR CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.](#)

[THE NECESSITY OF THE PURIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT.](#)

[HOW DOES GOD PURIFY THE SOUL IN THIS THIRD CONVERSION?](#)

[PRAYER TO THE HOLY GHOST](#)

[PRAYER OF CONSECRATION TO THE HOLY GHOST](#)

---

▪ [Previous Index](#)

## CHAPTER 4

# THE PROBLEM OF THE THREE STAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE IN ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

## Index

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.](#)

[PROPOSED DIVISION OF THE THREE STAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.](#)

[THE TRANSITION FROM ONE STAGE TO ANOTHER IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.](#)

---

▪ [Previous Index](#)

## CHAPTER 5

# CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THREE STAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

## Index

**INTRODUCTION**

**BEGINNERS.**

**PROFICIENTS OR PROGRESSIVES**

**THE PERFECT.**

---

▪ ***Previous Index***

## CHAPTER 6

# THE PEACE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD: A PRELUDE TO THE LIFE OF HEAVEN

## Index

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[THE DIVINE AWAKENING.](#)

[THE LIVING FLAME.](#)

[PAX IN VERITATE.](#)

[NOTE ON THE CALL TO THE INFUSED  
CONTEMPLATION OF THE MYSTERIES OF FAITH](#)

---

▪ [Previous Index](#)

# ENDNOTES

Index

ENDNOTES

- 
- *Previous Index*



# Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange

## THE THREE WAYS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

### CHAPTER 1

## THE LIFE OF GRACE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST CONVERSION

### *INTRODUCTION*

**THE interior life is for all the one thing necessary. It ought to be constantly developing in our souls; more so than what we call our intellectual life, more so than our scientific, artistic or literary life. The interior life is lived in the depths of the soul; it is the life of the whole man, not merely of one or other of his faculties. And our intellectual life would gain immeasurably by appreciating this; it would receive an inestimable advantage if, instead of attempting to supplant the spiritual life, it recognized its necessity and importance, and welcomed its beneficial influence -- the influence of the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. How deeply important our subject is may be seen in the very words we have used: *Intellectuality and Spirituality*. And it is important to us not only as individuals, but also in our social relations, for it is evident that we can exert no real or profound influence upon our fellow-men unless we live a truly interior life ourselves.**

---

▪ *Index*

▪ *Forward*



## **THE NECESSITY OF THE INTERIOR LIFE.**

The pressing need of devoting ourselves to the consideration of the one thing necessary is especially manifest in these days of general chaos and unrest, when so many men and nations, neglecting their true destiny, give themselves up entirely to acquiring earthly possessions, failing to realize how inferior these are to the everlasting riches of the spirit.

And yet St. Augustine's saying is so clearly true, that

*'material  
goods, unlike  
those of the  
spirit, cannot  
belong wholly  
and  
simultaneously  
to more than  
one  
person.'* [1]

The same house, the same land, cannot belong completely to several people at once, nor the same territory to several nations. And herein lies the reason of that unhappy conflict of interests which arises from the feverish quest of these earthly possessions.

On the other hand, as St. Augustine often reminds us, the same spiritual treasure can belong in its entirety to all men, and at the same time to each, without any disturbance of peace between them. Indeed, the more there are to enjoy them in common the more completely do we possess them. The same truth, the same virtue, the same God, can belong to us all in like manner, and yet none of us embarrasses his fellow-possessors. Such are the inexhaustible riches of the spirit that they can be the property of all and yet satisfy the desires of each. Indeed, only then do we possess a truth completely when we teach it to others, when we make others share our contemplation; only then do we truly love a virtue when we wish others to love it also; only then do we wholly love God when we

**desire to make Him loved by all. Give money away, or spend it, and it is no longer yours. But give God to others, and you possess Him more fully for yourself. We may go even further and say that, if we desired only one soul to be deprived of Him, if we excluded only one soul -- even the soul of one who persecutes and calumniates us -- from our own love, then God Himself would be lost to us.**

**This truth, so simple and yet so sublime, gives rise to an illuminating principle: it is that whereas material goods, the more they are sought for their own sake, tend to cause disunion among men, spiritual goods unite men more closely in proportion as they are more greatly loved. This principle helps us to appreciate how necessary is the interior life; and, incidentally, it virtually contains the solution of the social question and of the economic crisis which afflicts the world to-day. The Gospel puts it very simply:**

***'Seek  
ye first  
the  
kingdom  
of God  
and his  
justice,  
and all  
these  
things  
shall be  
added  
unto  
you.'***

**If the world to-day is on its death-bed, it is because it has lost sight of a fundamental truth which for every Christian is elementary.**

**The profoundest truths of all, and the most vital, are in fact those elementary verities which, through long meditation and deep thought, have become the norm of our lives; those truths, in other words, which are the object of our habitual contemplation.**

**God is now showing men what a great mistake they make when they try to do without Him, when they regard earthly enjoyment as their**

highest good, and thus reverse the whole scale of values, or, as the ancient philosophers put it, the subordination of ends. As though in the hope of compensating for the poor quality of earthly goods, men are striving to increase their quantity; they are trying to produce as much as possible in the order of material enjoyment. They are constructing machinery with the object of increasing production at a greater profit. This is the ultimate objective. But what is the consequence? The surplus cannot be disposed of; it is wasted, and unemployment is the result. The worker starves in enforced idleness while others die of surfeit. The present state of the world is called a crisis. But in fact it is more than a crisis; it is a condition of affairs which, if men only had eyes to see, ought to be revealing, it ought to show men that they have sought their last end where it is not to be found, in earthly enjoyment -- instead of God. They are seeking happiness in an abundance of material possessions which are incapable of giving it; possessions which sow discord among those that seek them, and a greater discord according as they are sought with greater avidity.

Do what you will with these material goods: share them out equally, make them the common property of all. It will be no remedy for the evil; for, so long as earthly possessions retain their nature and man retains the nature which is his, he will never find his happiness in them. The remedy is this, and this only: to consider the one thing necessary, and to ask God to give us saints who live only on this thought, saints who will give the world the spirit that it needs. God has always sent us saints in troubled times. We need them especially to-day.

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## ***THE PRINCIPLE OF THE INTERIOR LIFE.***

**It is all the more important to recall the necessity and the true nature of the interior life, because the true conception of it, as given to us in the Gospel, in the Epistles of St. Paul and in the whole of Tradition, has been partially obscured by many false ideas. In particular it is evident that the notion of the interior life is radically corrupted in the Lutheran theory of justification or conversion. According to this theory the mortal sins of the convert are not positively blotted out by the infusion of the new life of grace and charity; they are simply covered over, veiled by faith in the Redeemer, and they cease to be imputed to the person who has committed them. There is no intrinsic justification, no interior renewal of the soul; a man is reputed just merely by the extrinsic imputation of the justice of Christ. According to this view, in order to be just in the eyes of God it is not necessary to possess that infused charity by which we love God supernaturally and our fellowmen for God's sake. Actually, according to this conception, however firmly the just man may believe in Christ the Redeemer, he remains in his sin, in his corruption or spiritual death. [2]**

**This grave misconception concerning our supernatural life, reducing it essentially to faith in Christ and excluding sanctifying grace, charity and meritorious works, was destined to lead gradually to Naturalism; it was to result finally in considering as 'just' the man who, whatever his beliefs, valued and practised those natural virtues which were known even to the pagan philosophers who lived before Christ. [3]**

**In such an outlook, the question which is actually of the first importance does not even arise: Is man capable in his present state, without divine grace, of observing all the precepts of the natural law, including those that relate to God? Is he able without grace to love God the sovereign Good, the author of our nature, and to love Him, not with a merely inoperative affection, but with a truly efficacious love, more than he loves himself and more than he loves anything else? The early Protestants would have answered in the negative, as Catholic theologians have always done. [4] Liberal Protestantism, the offspring of Luther's theology, does not even ask the question; because it does not admit the necessity of grace, the necessity of an infused supernatural life.**

**Nevertheless, the question still recurs under a more general form: Is man able, without some help from on high, to get beyond himself, and truly and efficaciously to love Truth and Goodness more than he loves himself?**

**Clearly, these problems are essentially connected with that of the nature of our interior life; for our interior life is nothing else than a knowledge of the True and a love of the Good; or better, a knowledge and love of God.**

**In order fully to appreciate the lofty conception which the Scriptures, and especially the Gospels, give us of the interior life, it would be necessary to study a theological treatise on justification and sanctifying grace. Nevertheless, we may here emphasize a fundamental truth of the Christian spiritual life, or of Christian mysticism, which has always been taught by the Catholic Church.**

**In the first place it is clear that according to the Scriptures the justification or conversion of the sinner does not merely cover his sins as with a mantle; it blots them out by the infusion of a new life.**

***'Have  
mercy on  
me, O  
God,  
according  
to thy  
great  
mercy,'***

**so the Psalmist implores;**

**'and  
according  
to the  
multitude  
of thy  
tender  
mercies  
blot out  
my  
iniquity.  
Wash me  
yet more  
from my  
iniquity  
and  
cleanse  
me from  
my sin....  
Thou  
shalt  
sprinkle  
me with  
hyssop  
and I  
shall be  
cleansed;  
thou shalt  
wash me  
and I  
shall be  
made  
whiter  
than  
snow....  
Blot out  
all my  
iniquities.  
Create a  
clean  
heart in  
me, O  
God; and  
renew a**

***right  
spirit  
within my  
bowels.  
Cast me  
not away  
from thy  
face, and  
take not  
thy holy  
spirit  
from me.  
Restore  
unto me  
the joy of  
thy  
salvation,  
and  
strengthen  
me with a  
perfect  
spirit.'* [5]**

**The Prophets use similar language. Thus God says, through the prophet Isaias:**

***'I am he  
that blot  
out thy  
iniquities  
for my  
own  
sake.'* [6]**

**And the same expression recurs throughout the Bible: God is not content merely to cover our sins; He blots them out, He takes them away. And therefore, when John the Baptist sees Jesus coming towards him, he says:**

***Behold  
the  
Lamb  
of  
God.  
Behold  
him  
who  
taketh  
away  
the  
sin of  
the  
world!***

**We find the same idea in St. John's first Epistle: [7]**

***'The  
blood of  
Jesus  
Christ...  
cleanseth  
us from  
all sin.'***

**St. Paul writes, similarly, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians :[8]**

**'Not the  
effeminate  
nor the  
impure nor  
thieves nor  
covetous  
nor  
drunkards  
nor railers  
nor  
extortioners  
shall  
possess  
the  
kingdom of  
God. And  
such some  
of you  
were. But  
you are  
washed;  
but you are  
sanctified;  
but you are  
justified; in  
the name  
of our Lord  
Jesus  
Christ and  
the Spirit  
of our  
God.'**

**If it were true that by conversion sins were only veiled, and not blotted out, it would follow that a man is at once both just and ungodly, both justified, and yet still in the state of sin. God would love the sinner as His friend, despite the corruption of his soul, which He is apparently incapable of healing. The Saviour would not have taken away the sins of the world if He had not delivered the just man from the servitude of sin. Again, for the Christian these truths are elementary; the profound understanding of them, the continual and quasi-experimental living of them, is what we call the**

## **contemplation of the saints.**

**The blotting out and remission of sins thus described by the Scriptures can be effected only by the infusion of sanctifying grace and charity -- which is the supernatural love of God and of men for God's sake. Ezechiel, speaking in the name of God, tells us that this is so:**

***'I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness; and I will cleanse you from all your idols. And I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in the midst of you; and I will cause you to walk in my commandments.'* [9]**

**This pure water which regenerates is the water of grace, of which it is said in the Gospel of St. John: [10]**

**'Of his  
fulness  
we have  
all  
received;  
and  
grace  
for  
grace.'**

**'By (our  
Lord  
Jesus  
Christ)  
we  
have  
received  
grace,'**

**we read in the Epistle to the Romans;[[11](#)]...**

**'the  
charity  
of  
God  
is  
poured  
forth  
in our  
hearts,  
by the  
Holy  
Ghost  
who  
is  
given  
to us'**

;**[12]** and in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

*'To every  
one of us  
is given  
grace,  
according  
to the  
measure  
of the  
giving of  
Christ.'*

**[13]**

If it were otherwise, God's uncreated love for the man whom He converts would be merely an idle affection, and not an effective and operative love. But God's uncreated love for us, as St. Thomas shows, is a love which, far from presupposing in us any loveliness, actually produces that loveliness within us. His creative love gives and preserves in us our nature and our existence; but his life-giving love gives and preserves in us the life of grace which makes us lovable in His eyes, and lovable not merely as His servants but as His sons. (I, Q. xx, art. 2).

Sanctifying grace, the principle of our interior life, makes us truly the children of God because it makes us partakers of His nature. We cannot be sons of God by nature, as the Word is; but we are truly sons of God by grace and by adoption. And whereas a man who adopts a child brings about no interior change in him, but simply declares him his heir, God, when He loves us as adoptive sons, transforms us inwardly, giving us a share in His own intimate divine life.

Hence we read in the Gospel of St. John: **[14]**

**'(The  
Word)  
came  
unto  
his  
own,  
and his  
own  
received  
him  
not. But  
as  
many  
as  
received  
him, to  
them  
he gave  
the  
power  
to be  
made  
the  
sons of  
God, to  
them  
that  
believe  
in his  
name.  
Who  
are  
born,  
not of  
blood,  
nor of  
the will  
of the  
flesh,  
nor of  
the will  
of man,  
but of**

**God.'**

**And our Lord Himself said to Nicodemus [15]**

**'Amen,  
amen, I  
say to  
thee,  
unless  
a man  
be born  
again of  
water  
and the  
Holy  
Ghost,  
he  
cannot  
enter  
into the  
kingdom  
of God.  
That  
which  
is born  
of the  
flesh is  
flesh;  
and that  
which  
is born  
of the  
Spirit is  
spirit.  
Wonder  
not that  
I said to  
thee:  
You  
must be  
born**

*again.'*

**St. John himself, moreover, writes in his first Epistle [16]**

*'Whosoever  
is born of  
God  
committeth  
not sin; for  
God's  
seed  
abideth in  
him. And  
he cannot  
sin  
because  
he is born  
of God.'*

**In other words, the seed of God, which is grace -- accompanied by charity, or the love of God -- cannot exist together with mortal sin which turns a man away from God; and, though it can exist together with venial sin, of which St. John had spoken earlier, [17] yet grace is not the source of venial sins; on the contrary, it makes them gradually disappear.**

**Still clearer, if possible, is the language of St. Peter, who writes :[18]**

**'By  
(Christ)  
he hath  
given us  
most  
great  
and  
precious  
promises,  
that by  
these  
you may  
be made  
partakers  
of the  
divine  
nature' ;**

and St. James [[19](#)] thus expresses the same idea:

**'Every  
best gift  
and  
every  
perfect  
gift is  
from  
above,  
coming  
down  
from the  
Father of  
lights,  
with  
whom  
there is  
no  
change  
nor  
shadow  
of**

***alteration.  
For of  
his own  
will hath  
he  
begotten  
us by the  
word of  
truth,  
that we  
might be  
some  
beginning  
of his  
creature.'***

**Truly sanctifying grace is a real and formal participation of the divine nature, for it is the principle of operations which are specifically divine. When in heaven it has reached its full development, and can no longer be lost, it will be the source of operations which will have absolutely the same formal object as the eternal and uncreated operations of God's own inner life; it will make us able to see Him immediately as He sees Himself, and to love Him as He loves Himself:**

***'Dearly  
beloved,'***

**says St. John, [\[20\]](#)**

**'we are  
now the  
sons of  
God;  
and it  
hath not  
yet  
appeared  
what we  
shall be.  
We  
know  
that  
when it  
shall  
appear  
we shall  
be like  
to him,  
for we  
shall  
see him  
as he  
is.'**

**This is what shows us, better than anything else, in what the true nature of sanctifying grace, the true nature of our interior life, consists. We cannot emphasize it too much. It is one of the most consoling truths of our faith; it is one of those vital truths which serve best to encourage us in the midst of the trials of our life on earth.**

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **THE BEGINNING OF ETERNAL LIFE.**

To understand what our interior life is in itself and in its various phases, we must consider it not merely in its seed, but in its full and complete development. Now, if we ask the Gospel what our interior life is, it tells us that the life of grace, given to us in Baptism and nourished by the Eucharist, is the seed or germ of eternal life.

According to St. Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, preached by Christ at the beginning of His ministry, our Lord says to His hearers (and it is the burden of the whole of His discourse):

***'Be ye  
perfect  
as your  
heavenly  
Father  
is  
perfect.'***

He does not say:

***'Be ye  
as  
perfect  
as the  
angels,'***

but

***'as your  
heavenly  
Father is  
perfect.' [21]***

It follows, therefore, that Christ brings to men a principle of life

**which is a participation of the very life of God. Immeasurably above the various kingdoms of nature: the mineral kingdom, the vegetable, the animal kingdom, and even above the kingdom of man and above the natural activity of the angels, is the life of the kingdom of God. And this life in its full development is called, not the future life -- of which even the better among the pre-Christian philosophers spoke -- but eternal life; a life measured, like that of God, not by future time, but by the one instant of motionless eternity.**

**The future life of which the philosophers speak is a natural life, similar almost to the life of the angels; whereas eternal life, of which the Gospel speaks, is essentially supernatural, as much for the angels as for us. It is not merely superhuman, it is superangelic, truly divine. It consists in seeing God immediately as He sees Himself, and in loving Him as He loves Himself. This is the reason why our Lord can say to you:**

***'Be ye  
perfect  
as your  
heavenly  
Father  
is  
perfect' ;***

**because you have received a participation in His inner life.**

**While the Old Testament speaks of eternal life only in figure, under the symbol of the Promised Land, the New Testament, and especially the Gospel of St. John, speaks of it continually; and from that time forth it has become almost impossible to conclude a sermon without mentioning eternal life, as that supreme beatitude to which we are called and destined.**

**But the Gospels, and especially the Gospel of St. John, tell us more about grace; we are told that grace is eternal life already begun.**

**In the fourth Gospel our Lord is recorded as saying no fewer than six times:**

**'He that  
believeth  
in me  
hath  
eternal  
life.'** [22]

**And it is not only in the future that he will have it, if he perseveres; in a sense he possesses it already:**

**'He that  
eateth  
my  
flesh  
and  
drinketh  
my  
blood  
hath  
eternal  
life, and  
I will  
raise  
him up  
in the  
last  
day.'** [23]

**What is the meaning of these words? Our Lord explains them later:**

**'Amen,  
amen, I  
say to  
you: If  
any man  
keep my  
word he  
shall not  
see  
death for  
ever.  
The  
Jews  
therefore  
said:  
Now we  
know  
that thou  
hast a  
devil.  
Abraham  
is dead,  
and the  
prophets;  
and thou  
sayest:  
If any  
man  
keep my  
word he  
shall not  
taste  
death for  
ever....  
Whom  
dost  
thou  
make  
thyself?'**  
**It was  
then that  
Jesus  
said:**

**'Before  
Abraham  
was, I  
am.'** [24]

**What, then, does our Lord mean when He says: 'He that believeth in me hath eternal life'? He means: He that believes in Me with a living faith, that is, with a faith which is united with charity, with the love of God and the love of his neighbour, possesses eternal life already begun. In other words: He who believes in Me has within himself in germ a supernatural life which is fundamentally the same as eternal life. Our spiritual progress cannot tend in the direction of the life of eternity unless it presupposes the seed of it already existing in us, a seed of the same nature as the life towards which we are tending. In the natural order, the germ which is contained in the acorn could never grow into an oak tree unless it were of the same nature as the oak, if it did not contain the life of the oak in a latent state. The little child, likewise, could never become a man if it had not a rational soul, if reason were not already latent within it. In the same way, a Christian on earth could never become one of the blessed in heaven unless he had already received the divine life in Baptism.**

**And just as it is impossible to know the nature of the germ enclosed within the acorn unless we study it in its perfect state in the oak tree, so we cannot know the life of grace unless we consider it in its ultimate development, in that glory which is the consummation of grace.**

**'Grace,'**

**says the whole of Tradition,**

**'is  
the  
seed  
of  
glory.'**

**Fundamentally, it is always the same supernatural life, the same sanctifying grace and the same charity, but with two differences. Here on earth we know God supernaturally, but not in the clearness of vision; we know Him in the obscurity of faith. Moreover, while we hope one day to possess Him finally and definitively, here on earth it is always possible for us to lose Him by a mortal sin. But, in spite of these two differences, relating to faith and hope, it is the same life, the same sanctifying grace, and the same charity. And so our Lord said to the Samaritan woman:**

***'If thou didst know the gift of God and who he is that saith to thee: Give me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.... He that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst for ever. But the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.'* [25]**

**And in the Temple, on the last day of the feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, not merely for the benefit of privileged souls, but for all:**

***'If any  
man thirst  
let him  
come to  
me and  
drink He  
that  
believeth  
in me...  
out of his  
belly shall  
flow  
rivers of  
living  
water.'* [26]**

***'Now  
this  
he  
said,'***

**adds St. John,**

***'of the  
Spirit  
which  
they  
should  
receive  
who  
believed  
in him.'***

**And in fact the Holy Ghost is called fons vivus fons vitae: the living fountain, the fountain of life.**

**Again Jesus says:**

**'If any  
one love  
me he  
will  
keep my  
word  
(faith  
alone,  
then, is  
not  
enough),  
and my  
Father  
will love  
him,  
and we  
will  
come to  
him and  
will  
make  
our  
abode  
with  
him.'** **[27]**

**Who will come? Not only grace, God's created gift, but the divine Persons will come: the Father and the Son, and also the promised Holy Spirit. Thus the Holy Trinity dwells in us, in the obscurity of faith, in very much the same way as It dwells in the souls of the saints in heaven who see It face to face.**

**'He that  
abideth  
in  
charity  
abideth  
in God,  
and God  
in  
him.'** [28]

**It is much more wonderful than any miracle, this supernatural life. A miracle is an exercise of the divine omnipotence by which God signifies that one of His servants speaks in His name, or that he is of eminent sanctity. But even the raising of the dead to life, the miracle by which a corpse is reanimated with its natural life, is almost nothing in comparison with the resurrection of a soul, which has been lying spiritually dead in sin and has now been raised to the essentially supernatural life of grace.**

**Grace, then, is eternal life already begun within us, and this is why Christ says:**

**'The  
kingdom of  
God  
cometh not  
with  
observation.  
Neither  
shall they  
say: Behold  
here or  
behold  
there. For  
lo, the  
kingdom of  
God is  
within  
you.'** [29]

**It is there, hidden within you, like the grain of mustard seed, like the leaven which will cause the whole of the meal to rise, like the treasure hidden in a field, like the source from which gushes a river of water that will never fail.**

**'We  
know,'**

**says St. John,**

**'that we  
have  
passed  
from  
death to  
life,  
because  
we love  
the  
brethren' ;  
[30]**

**and**

**'these  
things I  
write to  
you that  
you may  
know  
that you  
have  
eternal  
life, you  
that  
believe  
in the  
name of  
the Son**

**of  
God.'** [31]

**And Christ, His beloved master, had said:**

**'This is  
eternal  
life: that  
they may  
know  
thee, the  
only true  
God, and  
Jesus  
Christ  
whom  
thou  
hast  
sent.'** [32]

**St. Thomas expresses this doctrine in the brief statement:**

**'Gratia  
nihil  
aliud est  
quam  
quaedam  
inchoatio  
gloriae in  
nobis:  
Grace is  
nothing  
else but  
a certain  
beginning  
of glory  
within  
us.'** [33]

**And Bossuet says the same thing:**

***'Eternal life in  
its beginnings  
consists in  
knowing God  
by faith  
(united with  
charity); in its  
consummation  
eternal life  
consists in  
seeing God  
face to face,  
unveiled.  
Jesus Christ  
gives us both  
the one and  
the other,  
because He  
has merited it  
for us and  
because He is  
the source of  
it in all the  
members to  
which He  
gives  
life.'* [34]**

**And therefore the Liturgy tells us, in the Preface used for the Mass of the Dead.**

**'Tuis enim  
fidelibus,  
Domine, vita  
mutatur,  
non tollitur' :  
'From them  
that believe  
in thee, O  
Lord, life is  
not taken  
away; it is  
changed  
and  
transformed.'**

---

▪ [Back](#)

▪ [Index](#)

▪ [Forward](#)



## **THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUE CONVERSION.**

**We are thus able to appreciate something of the importance of true conversion, by which a man passes from the state of mortal sin to the state of grace. In the former state his energies were dissipated and he was indifferent in regard to God; now he loves God more than he loves himself, more than he loves anything else; at any rate he esteems God beyond all earthly things, even though his love of God may not be free from all selfish motives. The state of sin was a state of spiritual death; a state in which, more or less consciously, he made himself the centre of all his activities and the end of all his desires; in which he was actually the slave of everything, the slave of his passions, of the spirit of the world, of the spirit of evil. The state of grace, on the other hand, is a state of life in which man begins seriously to tend beyond himself and to make God the centre of his activities, loving God more than himself. The state of grace is entrance into the kingdom of God, where the docile soul begins to reign with God over its own passions, over the spirit of the world and the spirit of evil.**

**We may well understand, therefore, how St. Thomas could write:**

***'Bonum  
gratiae  
unius  
majus  
est  
quam  
bonum  
naturae  
totius  
universi'***

**The lowest degree of grace in a soul, for example in that of a small child after its baptism, is of greater value than the natural goodness of the whole universe. This grace alone is worth more than all created natures together, including even the angelic natures. For the angels, too, stood in need, not of redemption, but of the gratuitous gift of grace in order to tend to the supernatural beatitude to which God called them. St. Augustine says that when God created the**

**nature of the angels He also gave them the gift of grace:**

**'Simul  
in eis  
condens  
naturam  
et  
largiens  
gratiam  
';**[\[35\]](#)

**and he maintains that**

**'the  
justification  
of the  
ungodly is  
something  
greater  
than the  
creation of  
heaven  
and earth,  
greater  
even than  
the  
creation of  
the  
angels.'** [\[36\]](#)

**St. Thomas adds:**

***'The justification of the sinner is proportionately more precious than the glorification of the just; because the gift of grace more greatly transcends the state of the sinner, who is deserving of punishment, than the gift of glory transcends the state of the just man, who, by reason of his justification, is worthy of the gift of glory.'* [37]**

**There is a much greater distance between the nature of man, or even between the nature of the highest of the angels, and grace, than there is between grace itself and glory. No created nature, however perfect, is the germ of grace, whereas grace is indeed the germ or the seed of eternal life, semen gloriae. Hence when a sinner is absolved in the confessional, an event occurs which is proportionately of greater importance than the entrance of a just soul into heaven.**

**This doctrine is expressed by Pascal in one of the finest pages of his *Pensees*, a page which summarises the teaching of St. Augustine and St. Thomas on this point:**

**'The infinite  
distance  
which  
separates  
bodies from  
spirits is a  
symbol of  
the infinitely  
more infinite  
distance  
which  
separates  
spirits from  
charity, for  
charity is  
supernatural.**

**[38] The  
whole of the  
material  
creation  
together, the  
firmament,  
the stars,  
the earth  
and its  
kingdoms,  
is inferior to  
the least of  
the spirits;  
for he  
knows all  
this and he  
knows  
himself,  
whereas  
bodies know  
nothing. All  
bodies  
together,  
and all  
spirits  
together,**

***and all that they can produce, are of less value than the smallest act of charity, because this is of an infinitely higher order. From all bodies together it would be impossible to extract a single thought, because a thought is of a higher order than they. From all bodies and all spirits together it would be impossible to extract one single act of true charity, because an act of charity is of the supernatural order.'* [39]**

**Luther erred fundamentally, therefore, when he tried to explain**

**justification, not by the infusion of a grace and charity which remit sin, but merely by faith in Christ, without works and without love; making it consist simply in the extrinsic imputation of the merits of Christ, an imputation which covers sins without destroying them, and thus leaves the sinner in his filth and corruption. According to his view there was no regeneration of the will by the supernatural love of God and men. We have seen, on the contrary, what is the teaching of the Scriptures and of Tradition. Faith and the extrinsic imputation of the justice of Christ are not sufficient for the justification or conversion of the sinner. He must be willing, in addition, to observe the commandments, above all the two great commandments of the love of God and the love of one's neighbour:**

***'If any  
one love  
me he  
will  
keep my  
word,  
and my  
Father  
will love  
him,  
and we  
will  
come to  
him and  
make  
our  
abode  
with  
him.'* [40]**

***'He that  
abideth  
in  
charity  
abideth  
in God,  
and God  
in  
him.'* [41]**

**According to the true teaching of Christ we are in an order far transcending natural morality. Our unaided reason tells us that it is our duty to love God, the author of our nature, and to love Him effectively, that is, by observing His commandments. But even this natural duty we are unable to fulfil without the help of God's grace, so weakened are our wills in consequence of original sin. Still less are we able by our natural powers alone to love God, the author of grace; for this love is of an essentially supernatural order, as supernatural for the angels as it is for us.**

**Such is the supernatural life which we received in Baptism; and this is what constitutes our interior life.**

**This beginning of eternal life, as we have called it, is a complete spiritual organism, which has to grow and develop until we enter heaven. The root principle of this undying organism is sanctifying grace, received in the very essence of the soul; and this grace would last for ever, were it not that sin, a radical disorder in the soul, sometimes destroys it. [42] From sanctifying grace, which is the germ of glory, proceed the infused virtues. First, the theological virtues, the greatest of which, charity, is destined to last for ever.**

***'Charity  
never  
falleth  
away,'***

**says St. Paul, ...**

***'Now there  
remain  
faith, hope  
and  
charity,  
these  
three; but  
the  
greatest of  
these is  
charity.'* [43]**

**Charity will remain for ever, after faith has disappeared to make room for vision; after hope has been displaced by the everlasting possession of God, seen face to face.**

**In addition to the theological virtues there are also the infused moral virtues, which perfect man in his use of the means of salvation, just as the former dispose him rightly in regard to his end. The infused moral virtues are like so many functions admirably adapted one to another, infinitely surpassing in perfection those of our physical organism; they are called- prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance... together with the other virtues which are associated with them.**

**Finally, in order to supply the deficiencies of these virtues which, in the twilight of faith and under the direction of prudence, still act in too human a fashion, we are given the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, who dwells in us. These are like the sails on a ship; they dispose us to receive obediently and promptly the breathing that comes from on high, the special inspirations of God; inspirations which enable us to act, no longer in merely human fashion, but divinely, with that alacrity which we need in order to run in the way of God, undismayed by any obstacles.**

**All these infused virtues and gifts grow with sanctifying grace and charity, says St. Thomas ;[44] they increase together just as the five fingers of the hand, or the organs of our body, develop simultaneously. Thus it is inconceivable that a soul should possess a high degree of charity without possessing at the same time a proportionate degree of the gift of wisdom; whether this exist under**

**a definitely contemplative form, or in a practical guise, more directly adapted to action. The wisdom of a St. Vincent de Paul is unlike that of a St. Augustine; but the one and the other are equally infused.**

**In this way the whole of the spiritual organism develops simultaneously, though it may manifest its activity under various forms. And, from this point of view, since the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith is an act of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, an act which disposes the soul to the beatific vision, must we not admit that such contemplation is in the normal way of sanctity?. -- We merely mention the question here, without insisting further upon it.**

**[45]**

**Let us now examine more closely the full development of our eternal life in heaven, in order that we may better appreciate the value of that sanctifying grace which is its beginning. In particular let us compare it with what would have been our beatitude and our reward if we had been created in a purely natural state.**

**If we had been created in a state of pure nature, with a spiritual and immortal soul, but without the life of grace, even then our intellect would have been made for the knowledge of the True and our will for the love of the Good. Our end would have been to know God, the Sovereign Good, the author of our nature, and to love Him above all things. But we should have known Him only in the reflection of His goodness in creatures, in the same way as the greatest among the pagan philosophers knew Him, though our knowledge would have been more certain than theirs, and free from any admixture of error. God would have been for us the First Cause and the Supreme Intelligence that orders all the things of creation.**

**We should have loved Him as the author of our nature, with that love which a subject has for his superior. It would not have been a love of friendship, but rather a sentiment compounded of admiration, respect and gratitude, yet lacking that happy and simple familiarity which rejoices the hearts of the children of God. We should have been God's servants, but not His children.**

**This natural end is already a sublime destiny. It could never bring satiety, just as the eye never tires of contemplating the blue vault of heaven. Moreover, it is a spiritual end, and therefore, unlike material goods, can be possessed at once by all and by each, without**

**possession on the part of one being prejudicial to possession on the part of another, and thus without causing jealousy or discord.**

**But this abstract and mediate knowledge of God would have left many obscurities in the human mind, especially as regards the mutual compatibility of the divine perfections. We should forever have remained at the stage of counting singly and enumerating these absolute perfections; we should forever have wondered how it was possible to reconcile the almighty goodness of God with His permission that evil should exist; an evil, too, which is sometimes so great as to disconcert the human mind. We should have asked ourselves, moreover, how His infinite mercy could be truly consistent with His infinite justice. Even though we enjoyed this natural beatitude, we should still be urged to say:**

***'If only I  
could see  
this God,  
who is  
the  
source of  
all truth  
and  
goodness;  
if I could  
see Him  
as He  
sees  
Himself!'***

**What the most brilliant of human minds, what even the intelligence of the angels could never have discovered, divine Revelation has disclosed to us. Revelation tells us that our last end is essentially supernatural and that it consists in seeing God immediately, face to face, as He is: sicuti est**

**'(God) has  
predestinated  
(us) to be  
made  
conformable  
to the image  
of his Son;  
that he might  
be the  
firstborn  
among many  
brethren.'** **[46]**

**'Eye  
hath not  
seen,  
nor ear  
heard,  
neither  
hath it  
entered  
into the  
heart of  
man,  
what  
things  
God  
hath  
prepared  
for them  
that  
love  
him.  
[47]**

**We are destined to see God, not merely in the mirror of creatures, however perfect these may be, but to see Him immediately, without the intermediary of any creature, and even without the medium of any created idea; for no created idea, however perfect, could ever represent as He really is One who is Thought itself, infinite Truth, the**

**eternally subsistent brightness of intelligence and the living flame of measureless Love.**

**We are destined to see all the divine perfections concentrated and intimately united in their common source: Deity. We are destined to see how the tenderest Mercy and the most inexorable Justice proceed from the one Love which is infinitely generous and infinitely holy; how this Love, even in its freest choice, is identically one with pure Wisdom, how there is nothing in the divine Love which is not wise, nothing in the divine Wisdom which is not synonymous with Love. We are destined to contemplate the eminent simplicity of God, His absolute purity and sanctity; to see the infinite fecundity of the divine nature in the procession of the Three Persons: to contemplate the eternal generation of the Word, the**

*'brightness of  
(the Father's)  
glory and the  
figure of his  
substance,' [48]*

**to see the ineffable breathing of the Holy Spirit, the issue of the common Love of the Father and the Son, which unites them in the most complete outpouring of themselves. The Good tends naturally to diffuse itself, and the greater the Good the more abundant and intimate is its self-giving.**

**None can tell the joy and the love which this vision will produce in us, a love of God so pure and so strong that nothing will ever be able to destroy or in the slightest degree to diminish it.**

**In no way, therefore, can we express more clearly the preciousness of sanctifying grace, or of the true interior life, than by saying that it is a beginning of eternal life. Here on earth we know God only by faith, and, while we hope one day to possess Him, we are able, unfortunately, to lose Him by sin. But, apart from these two differences, it is fundamentally the same life, the same sanctifying grace and the same charity, which is to last through all eternity.**

**This is the fundamental truth of Christian spirituality. Consequently our interior life must be a life of humility, for we must remember**

always that the principle of that life, sanctifying grace, is a gratuitous gift, and that we need an actual grace for the slightest salutary act, for the shortest step forward in the way of salvation. It must be also a life of mortification; as St. Paul says, we must be

*'always  
bearing  
about in our  
body the  
mortification  
of Jesus,  
that the life  
also of  
Jesus may  
be made  
manifest in  
our  
bodies' ;  
[49]*

that is to say: we must daily more and more die to sin and to the relics that sin leaves in us, so that God may reign more completely in us, even to the depth of the soul. But, above all, our interior life must be a life of faith, hope, charity, and union with God by unceasing prayer; it is above all the life of the three theological virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost which accompany them: the gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, piety, counsel, fortitude and fear of the Lord. In this way we shall enter into the mysteries of faith and relish them more and more. In other words, our whole interior life tends towards the supernatural contemplation of the mysteries of the inner life of God and of the Incarnation and Redemption; it tends, above all, towards a more intimate union with God, a preliminary to that union with Him, ever actual and perpetual, which will be the consummation of eternal life.

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **THE THREE PERIODS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.**

If such is the life of grace, if such is the spiritual organism of the infused virtues and the gifts, it is not surprising to find that the development of the interior life has often been compared to the three periods or stages of physical life: childhood, youth, and manhood. St. Thomas himself has indicated this analogy: and it is an analogy which is worth pursuing, particular attention being paid to the transition from one period to the other.

It is generally admitted that childhood lasts until the age of puberty, about fourteen; though early childhood, or infancy, ceases at the dawn of reason, about the age of seven. Youth, or adolescence, lasts from the age of fourteen to twenty. Then follows manhood, in which we may distinguish the period which precedes full maturity, about the age of thirty-five, and that which follows it, before the decline of old age sets in.

A man's mentality changes with the development of the organism: the activity of the child, it has been said, is not that of a man in miniature, or of a fatigued adult; the dominant element in childhood is different. The child has as yet no discernment, it is unable to organize in a rational manner; it follows the lead of the imagination and the impulses of sense. And even when its reason begins to awaken it still remains to a great extent dependent upon the senses. So, for example, a child asked me one day:

*'What  
are you  
lecturing  
on this  
year?'*

*'On  
man,'*

**I replied.**

***'On  
what  
man?'***

**was the next inquiry. The child's intelligence was as yet unable to grasp the abstract and universal idea of man as such.**

**Most important to be noticed, for the purposes of our present subject, is the transition from childhood to adolescence and from youth to manhood.**

**The period of puberty, which is the end of childhood, about the age of fourteen, is characterized by a transformation which is not only organic but also psychological, intellectual and moral. The youth is no longer content to follow his imagination, as the child was; he begins to reflect on the things of human life, on the need to prepare himself for some career or occupation in the future. He has no longer the child's attitude towards family, social and religious matters; his moral personality begins to take shape, and he acquires the sense of honour and of good repute. Or else, on the contrary, if he passes unsuccessfully through this difficult period, he deteriorates and follows evil courses. The law of nature so ordains that the transition from childhood to youth must follow a normal development; otherwise the subject will assume a positive bias to evil, or else he will remain a half-wit, perhaps even a complete idiot, for the rest of his life.**

***'He who  
makes  
no  
progress  
loses  
ground.'***

**It is at this point that the analogy becomes illuminating for the spiritual life. We shall see that the beginner who fails to become a proficient, either turns to sin or else presents an example of arrested spiritual development. Here, too, it is true that**

***'he who  
makes  
no  
progress  
loses  
ground,'***

as the Fathers of the Church have so often pointed out.

Let us pursue the analogy further. If the physical and moral crisis of puberty is a difficult transition, the same is to be said of another crisis, which we may call the crisis of the first freedom, and which occurs at the stage where the youth enters manhood, about the age of twenty. The young man, having now reached his complete physical development, has to begin to take his place in social life. It will soon be time for him to marry and to become an educator in his turn, unless he has received from God a higher vocation still. Many fail to surmount this crisis of the first freedom, and, like the prodigal son, depart from their father's house and confuse liberty with licence. Here again the law ordains that the transition must be made normally; otherwise the young man either takes the wrong road, or else his development is arrested and he becomes one of those of whom it is said:

***'He  
will  
be a  
child  
for  
the  
whole  
of  
his  
life.'***

The true adult is not merely a young man grown a little older. He has a new mentality; he is preoccupied with wider questions, questions to which the youth does not yet advert. He understands the younger generation, but the younger generation does not understand him; conversation between them on certain subjects, except of a very

**superficial kind, is impossible.**

**There is a somewhat similar relation, in the spiritual life, between the proficient and the perfect. He who is perfect understands the earlier stages through which he has himself already passed; but he cannot expect to be understood by those who are still passing through them.**

**The important thing to be noticed is that, just as there is the crisis of puberty, more or less manifest and more or less successfully surpassed, between childhood and adolescence, so in the spiritual life there is an analogous crisis for the transition from the purgative life of beginners to the illuminative life of proficient. This crisis has been described by several great spiritual writers, in particular by Tauler [50] and especially by St. John of the Cross, under the name of the passive purgation of the senses, [51] and by Pere Lallemand, S. J., [52] and several others under the name of the second conversion.**

**Moreover, just as the youth has to pass through a second crisis, that of the first freedom, in order to reach manhood, so in the transition from the illuminative way of the proficient to the true life of union, there is a second spiritual crisis, mentioned by Tauler, [53] and described by St. John of the Cross under the name of the passive purgation of the spirit. [54] This, likewise, may be called a third conversion, or better, a transformation of the soul.**

**None has better described these crises which mark the transition from one spiritual period to another than St. John of the Cross. It will be noticed that they correspond to the two parts of the human soul, the sensitive and the spiritual. they correspond also to the nature of the divine seed, sanctifying grace, that germ of eternal life which must ever more and more animate all our faculties and inspire all our actions, until the depth of the soul is purged of all egoism and surrendered entirely to God.**

**St. John of the Cross, it is true, describes spiritual progress as it appears especially in contemplatives, and in the most generous among contemplatives, who are striving to reach union with God by the most direct way possible. He therefore shows us what are the higher laws of the spiritual life at their maximum of sublimity. But these laws apply in a lesser degree also to many other souls who do**

**not reach so high a state of perfection, but are nevertheless making devoted progress, and not looking back.**

**In the chapters which follow it will be our object to show that, according to the traditional teaching, beginners in the spiritual life must, after a certain period, undergo a second conversion, similar to the second conversion of the Apostles at the end of our Lord's Passion, and that, still later, before entering upon the life of perfect union, there must be a third conversion or transformation of the soul, similar to that which took place in the souls of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost.**

**This distinction between the three periods or stages of the spiritual life is clearly of great importance, as those who are charged with the direction of souls well know. An old and experienced director who has himself reached the age of the perfect may have read but little of the writings of the mystics, and yet he will be able to answer well and readily the most delicate questions on the most sublime subjects, and he will answer in the words of the Scriptures, perhaps by quoting a passage from the Gospel of the day, without even suspecting for a moment how truly profound his answers are. On the other hand a young and inexperienced priest, himself only at the age of a beginner, will have little more than a book-knowledge and a verbal acquaintance with the spiritual life.**

**The question with which we are concerned is thus in the highest sense a vital question; and it is important that we should consider it from the traditional point of view. If we do so consider it, we shall see how true is the saying of the ancients, that**

***'in the  
way of  
God he  
who  
makes  
no  
progress  
loses  
ground' ;***

**and it will appear also that our interior life must, already here on**

earth, become the normal prelude to the beatific vision. In this deep sense our interior life is, as we have said, eternal life already begun:

**'inchoatio  
vitae  
aeternae.'** [\[55\]](#)

**'Amen,  
amen I  
say to  
you, he  
that  
believeth  
in me  
hath  
eternal  
life, and  
I will  
raise  
him up  
in the  
last  
day.'** [\[56\]](#)

---

▪ [Back](#)

▪ [Index](#)

▪ [Forward](#)



## CHAPTER 2

# THE SECOND CONVERSION: ENTRANCE INTO THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY

### *INTRODUCTION*

**WE** have seen that, comparable with the two crises which mark the transition from childhood to youth and from youth to manhood, there are also in the spiritual life two crises, one by which proficients pass into the illuminative way, and another by which the perfect reach the state of union.

The first of these crises has been called a second conversion, and it is of this that we have now to speak.

The liturgy, especially at periods such as Advent and Lent, speaks often of the need of conversion, even for those who are leading a Christian life. Spiritual writers also refer often to this second conversion, necessary for the Christian who, though he has thought seriously of his salvation and made an effort to walk in the way of God, has nevertheless begun once more to follow the bent of his nature and to fall into a state of tepidity -- like an engrafted plant reverting to its wild state. Some of these writers, such as the Blessed Henry Suso or Tauler, have insisted especially upon the necessity of this second conversion, a necessity which they have learned from their own experience. St. John of the Cross has profoundly pointed out that the entrance into the illuminative way is marked by a passive purgation of the senses, which is a second conversion, and that the entrance into the unitive way is preceded by a passive purgation of the spirit, a further and a deeper conversion affecting the soul in its most intimate depths. Among the writers of the Society of Jesus we may quote Pere Lallemand, who writes:

**'Saints and religious who reach perfection pass ordinarily through two conversions: one by which they devote themselves to the service of God, and another by which they surrender themselves entirely to perfection. We find this in the case of the Apostles, first when our Lord called them, and then when He sent the Holy Ghost upon them; we find it in the case of St. Teresa, of her confessor, P. Alvarez, and of many others. This second conversion is not granted to all religious, and it is due to their negligence.'** **[57]**

**This question is of the greatest interest for every spiritual soul. Among those who dealt with it before St. John of the Cross we must count St. Catherine of Siena, who touches upon the subject repeatedly in her Dialogue and in her Letters. Her treatment, which is very realistic and practical, throws a great light upon the teaching which is commonly received in the Church. [58]**

**Following St. Catherine, we shall speak first of this second conversion as it took place in the Apostles, and then as it should take place in us; we shall say what defects render this conversion necessary, what great motives ought to inspire it, and finally what fruits it should produce in us.**

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **THE SECOND CONVERSION OF THE APOSTLES.**

**St. Catherine of Siena speaks explicitly of the second conversion of the Apostles in the 63rd chapter of her Dialogue.**

**Their first conversion had taken place when Jesus called them, with the words:**

***'I will  
make  
you  
fishers  
of  
men.'***

**They followed our Lord, listened with admiration to His teaching, saw His miracles and took part in His ministry. Three of them saw Him transfigured on Thabor. All were present at the institution of the Eucharist, were ordained priests and received Holy Communion. But when the hour of the Passion arrived, an hour which Jesus had so often foretold, the Apostles abandoned their Master Even Peter, though he loved his Master devotedly; went so far as to deny Him thrice. Our Lord had told Peter after the Supper, in words that recall the prologue of the Book of Job.**

***'Simon,  
Simon,  
behold  
Satan  
hath  
desired  
to have  
you, that  
he may  
sift you  
as  
wheat.  
But I  
have***

***prayed  
for thee  
that thy  
faith fail  
not; and  
thou  
being  
once  
converted  
confirm  
thy  
brethren.'***

**To which Peter replied:**

***'Lord,  
I am  
ready  
to go  
with  
thee  
both  
into  
prison  
and  
to  
death.'***

**But Jesus warned him:**

**'I say to  
thee,  
Peter,  
the  
cock  
shall  
not  
crow  
this  
day till  
thou  
thrice  
deniest  
that  
thou  
knowest  
me.'** [\[59\]](#)

**And, in fact, Peter fell; he denied his Master, swearing that he did not know Him.**

**When did his second conversion begin? Immediately after his triple denial, as we are told in the Gospel of St. Luke [\[60\]](#)**

**'Immediately,  
as he was  
yet  
speaking,  
the cock  
crew. And  
the Lord  
turning,  
looked on  
Peter. And  
Peter  
remembered  
the word of  
the Lord, as  
he had said:  
Before the  
cock crow,**

***thou shalt  
deny me  
thrice. And  
Peter going  
out, wept  
bitterly.'***

**Under the glance of Jesus and the grace which accompanied it, Peter's repentance must have been deep indeed and must have been the beginning of a new life for him**

**In connection with this second conversion of St. Peter it is well to recall the words of St. Thomas: [\[61\]](#)**

***'Even after a  
grave sin, if  
the soul has  
a sorrow  
which is  
truly fervent  
and  
proportionate  
to the  
degree of  
grace which  
it has lost, it  
will recover  
this same  
degree of  
grace; grace  
may even  
revive in the  
soul in a  
higher  
degree, if  
the  
contrition is  
still more  
fervent.  
Thus the  
soul has not***

***to begin  
again  
completely  
from the  
beginning,  
but it  
continues  
from the  
point which  
it had  
reached at  
the moment  
of the fall.'***

**In the same way, the climber who falls when he has reached half-way up the mountain-side, rises immediately and continues his ascent from the point at which he has fallen. [62]**

**Everything leads us to suppose that Peter's repentance was so fervent that he not only recovered the degree of grace which he possessed before, but was raised to a higher degree of supernatural life. Our Lord had allowed him to fall in this way in order to cure him of his presumption, so that he might be more humble and place his confidence in God and not in himself.**

**St. Catherine writes in her Dialogue :[63]**

***'Peter...  
after the sin  
of denying  
My Son,  
began to  
weep. Yet  
his  
lamentations  
were  
imperfect,  
and  
remained  
so until  
after the***

**forty days,  
that is until  
after the  
Ascension.  
(They  
remained  
imperfect in  
spite of the  
appearances  
of our  
Lord.) But  
when my  
Truth  
returned to  
me, in His  
humanity,  
Peter and  
the others  
concealed  
themselves  
in the  
house,  
awaiting the  
coming of  
the Holy  
Spirit which  
my Truth  
had  
promised  
them. They  
remained  
barred in  
through  
fear,  
because the  
soul always  
fears until it  
arrives at  
true love. '**

**It was only at Pentecost that they were truly transformed.**

Yet even before the end of the Passion of Christ there was clearly a second conversion in Peter and the other Apostles, a conversion which was consolidated during the days that followed. After His resurrection our Lord appeared to them several times, enlightening them, as He did when He taught the disciples of Emmaus the understanding of the Scriptures; and in particular, after the miraculous draught of fishes, He made Peter compensate for his threefold denial by a threefold act of love.

*'Simon,  
son of  
John,'*

He says to him,

*'lovest  
thou  
me  
more  
than  
these?  
He  
saith to  
him:  
Yea,  
Lord,  
thou  
knowest  
that I  
love  
thee.  
He  
saith to  
him:  
Feed  
my  
lambs.  
He  
saith to  
him  
again:*

**Simon,  
son of  
John,  
lovest  
thou  
me. He  
saith to  
him:  
Yea,  
Lord,  
thou  
knowest  
that I  
love  
thee.  
He  
saith to  
him:  
Feed  
my  
lambs.  
He said  
to him  
the  
third  
time:  
Simon,  
son of  
John,  
lovest  
thou  
me?  
Peter  
was  
grieved  
because  
he said  
to him  
the  
third  
time:  
Lovest  
thou**

*me?  
And he  
said to  
him:  
Lord,  
thou  
knowest  
all  
things,  
thou  
knowest  
that I  
love  
thee.  
He said  
to him:  
Feed  
my  
sheep.'*

**And then He foretold in veiled terms the martyrdom that Peter would undergo:**

*'When  
thou  
wast  
younger  
thou  
didst  
gird  
thyself  
and  
didst  
walk  
where  
thou  
wouldst.  
But  
when  
thou  
shalt be*

***old,  
thou  
shalt  
stretch  
forth  
thy  
hands  
and  
another  
shall  
gird  
thee  
and  
lead  
thee  
whither  
thou  
wouldst  
not.'* [64]**

**The threefold act of love made reparation for the threefold denial. It was a consolidation of the second conversion, a measure of confirmation in grace before the transformation of Pentecost.**

**For St. John, too, there had been something special just before the death of Christ. John, like the other Apostles, had abandoned his Master when Judas arrived with his band of armed men; but by an invisible and powerful grace Jesus drew the beloved disciple to the foot of the cross, and the second conversion of St. John took place when he heard the seven last words of the dying Saviour.**

---

▪ ***Back***

▪ ***Index***

▪ ***Forward***



## **WHAT OUR SECOND CONVERSION OUGHT TO BE. THE DEFECTS WHICH RENDER IT NECESSARY.**

In the 60th and 63rd chapters of her Dialogue, St. Catherine shows that what happened in the case of the Apostles, our models formed immediately by the Saviour Himself, must happen, after a certain manner, in the case of each one of us. Indeed we may say that if even the Apostles stood in need of a second conversion, then still more do we. The Saint emphasizes especially the faults which make this second conversion necessary, in particular self-love. In varying degrees this egoism survives in all imperfect souls in spite of the state of grace, and it is the source of a multitude of venial sins, of habitual faults which become characteristic features of the soul, rendering necessary a veritable purging even in those who have, as it were, been present on Mount Thabor, or who have often partaken of the Eucharistic banquet, as the Apostles did at the Last Supper.

In her Dialogue [65] St. Catherine of Siena speaks of this self-love, describing it as

*'the  
mercenary  
love of  
the  
imperfect,'*

of those who, without being conscious of it, serve God from self-interest, because they are attached to temporal or spiritual consolations, and who shed tears of self-pity when they are deprived of them.

It is a strange but not uncommon mixture of sincere love of God with an inordinate love of self. [66] The soul loves God more than itself, otherwise it would not be in the state of grace, it would not possess charity; but it still loves itself with an inordinate love. It has not yet reached the stage of loving itself in God and for His sake. Such a state of soul is neither white nor black; it is a light grey, in which there is more white than black. The soul is on the upward path, but it still has a tendency to slip downwards.

**We read in this 60th chapter of the Dialogue (it is God who speaks).**

***'Among  
those who  
have  
become My  
trusted  
servants  
there are  
some who  
serve Me  
with faith,  
without  
servile fear,  
it is not the  
mere fear of  
punishment,  
but love  
which  
attaches  
them to My  
service  
(thus Peter  
before the  
Passion).  
But this love  
is still  
imperfect,  
because  
what they  
seek in My  
service (at  
any rate to a  
great extent)  
is their own  
profit, their  
own  
satisfaction,  
or the  
pleasure  
that they  
find in Me.***

***The same  
imperfection  
is found in  
the love  
which they  
bear  
towards  
their  
neighbour.  
And do you  
know what  
shows the  
imperfection  
of their  
love? It is  
that, as  
soon as  
they are  
deprived of  
the  
consolations  
which they  
find in Me,  
their love  
fails and  
can no  
longer  
survive. It  
becomes  
weak and  
gradually  
cools  
towards Me  
when, in  
order to  
exercise  
them in  
virtue and to  
detach them  
from their  
imperfection,  
I withdraw  
spiritual***

**consolations  
from them  
and send  
them  
difficulties  
and  
afflictions. I  
act in this  
way in order  
to bring  
them to  
perfection,  
to teach  
them to  
know  
themselves,  
to realize  
that they are  
nothing and  
that of  
themselves  
they have  
no grace.**

**[67]**

**Adversity  
should have  
the effect of  
making  
them seek  
refuge in  
Me,  
recognize  
Me as their  
benefactor,  
and become  
attached to  
Me by a true  
humility.... If  
they do not  
recognize  
their  
imperfection  
and desire**

***to become  
perfect, it is  
impossible  
that they  
should not  
turn back.'***

**This is what the Fathers have so often asserted:**

***'In the  
way of  
God he  
who  
makes  
no  
progress  
loses  
ground.'***

**Just as the child who does not grow does not merely remain a child but becomes an idiot, so the beginner who does not enter upon the way of proficients when he ought to, does not merely remain a beginner, but becomes a stunted soul. It would seem, unhappily, that the great majority of souls do not belong to any of these three categories, of beginners, proficients or perfect, but rather to that of stunted souls! At what stage are we ourselves? This is often a very difficult question to answer, and it would perhaps be vain curiosity to inquire at what point we have arrived in our upward path; but at least we must take care not to mistake the road, not to take a path that leads downwards.**

**It is important, therefore, to reach beyond the merely mercenary love, which often we unconsciously retain. We read in this same 60th chapter:**

***'It was with  
this  
imperfect  
love that  
Peter loved  
the good  
and gentle  
Jesus, my  
only-  
begotten  
Son, when  
he  
experienced  
the  
delights of  
sweet  
intimacy  
with Him  
(on Mount  
Thabor).  
But as  
soon as the  
time of  
tribulation  
came all  
his  
courage  
forsook  
him. Not  
only did he  
not have  
the  
strength to  
suffer for  
Him, but at  
the first  
threat of  
danger his  
loyalty was  
overcome  
by the  
most  
servile***

***fear, and  
he denied  
Him three  
times,  
swearing  
that he did  
not know  
Him.'***

**St. Catherine of Siena, in the 63rd chapter of the same Dialogue, shows that the imperfect soul, which loves God with a love which is still mercenary, must do what Peter did after his denial. Not infrequently Providence allows us, too, at this stage to commit some very palpable fault, in order to humiliate us and cause us to take true measure of ourselves.**

***'  
Then,'***

**says the Lord, [[68](#)]**

***'having  
recognized  
the  
grievousness  
of its sin and  
repented of  
it, the soul  
begins to  
weep, for  
fear of  
punishment;  
then it rises  
to the  
consideration  
of my mercy,  
in which it  
finds  
satisfaction  
and comfort.***

***But it is, I  
say, still  
imperfect,  
and in order  
to draw it on  
to  
perfection... I  
withdraw  
from it, not  
in grace but  
in feeling.  
[69]... This I  
do in order  
to humiliate  
that soul,  
and cause it  
to seek Me  
in truth...  
without  
thought of  
self and with  
lively faith  
and with  
hatred of its  
own  
sensuality.'***

**And just as Peter compensated for his threefold denial by three acts of pure and devoted love, so the enlightened soul must do in like manner.**

**St. John of the Cross, following Tauler, gives us three signs which mark this second conversion:**

**'The soul  
finds no  
pleasure or  
consolation in  
the things of  
God, but it  
also fails to  
find it in any  
thing  
created.... The  
second sign...  
is that  
ordinarily the  
memory is  
centred upon  
God, with  
painful care  
and  
solicitude,  
thinking that  
it is not  
serving God,  
but  
backsliding,  
because it  
finds itself  
without  
sweetness in  
the things of  
God.... The  
third sign... is  
that the soul  
can no longer  
meditate or  
reflect in its  
sense of the  
imagination....  
For God now  
begins to  
communicate  
Himself to it,  
no longer  
through**

***sense, as He  
did aforesaid,  
by means of  
reflections  
which joined  
and sundered  
its  
knowledge,  
but by an act  
of simple  
contemplation,  
to which  
neither the  
exterior nor  
the interior  
senses of the  
lower part of  
the soul can  
attain.'* [70]**

**Progressives or proficientes thus enter, according to St. John of the Cross,**

***'upon the  
road and way  
of the spirit,  
which... is  
called the way  
of illumination  
or of infused  
contemplation,  
wherewith  
God Himself  
feeds and  
refreshes the  
soul.'* [71]**

**While St. Catherine of Siena does not give so exact an analysis, she insists particularly upon one of the signs of this state: an experimental knowledge of our poverty and profound imperfection; a**

knowledge which is not precisely acquired, but granted by God, as it was granted to Peter when Jesus looked upon him immediately after his denial. At that moment Peter received a grace of enlightenment; he remembered, and going out he wept bitterly. [72]

At the end of this same 63rd chapter of her Dialogue we find a passage of which St. John of the Cross later gives a full development-

*'I  
withdraw  
from the  
soul,'*

says the Lord,

*'so that it  
may see and  
know its  
defects, so  
that, feeling  
itself  
deprived of  
consolation  
and afflicted  
by pain, it  
may  
recognize its  
own  
weakness,  
and learn  
how  
incapable it  
is of stability  
or  
perseverance,  
thus cutting  
down to the  
very root of  
spiritual self-  
love; for this*

***should be  
the end and  
purpose of  
all its self-  
knowledge,  
to rise above  
itself,  
mounting the  
throne of  
conscience,  
and not  
permitting  
the  
sentiment of  
imperfect  
love to turn  
again in its  
death-  
struggle, but,  
with  
correction  
and reproof,  
digging up  
the root of  
self-love,  
with the knife  
of self-  
hatred and  
the love of  
virtue.'* [73]**

**In this same connection the Saint speaks of the many dangers that lie in wait for a soul that is moved only by a mercenary love, saying that souls which are imperfect desire to follow the Father alone, without passing by the way of Christ crucified, because they have no desire to suffer. [74]**

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



**THE MOTIVES WHICH MUST INSPIRE THE SECOND  
CONVERSION, AND THE FRUITS THAT DERIVE THEREFROM.**

**The first motive is expressed in the greatest commandment, which knows no limits:**

***'Thou  
shalt love  
the Lord  
thy God  
with thy  
whole  
heart and  
with thy  
whole  
soul and  
with all  
thy  
strength  
and with  
all thy  
mind.'* [75]**

**This commandment requires the love of God for His own sake, and not from self-interest or attachment to our own personal satisfaction; it demands, moreover, that we love God with all our strength in the hour of trial, so that we may finally arrive at the stage of loving Him with our whole mind, when our love will be unaffected by the ebb and flow of sensibility and we shall be of those who**

***'adore  
in  
spirit  
and  
in  
truth.'***

**Furthermore, this commandment is absolute and without limits: the**

**end for which all Christians are required to strive is the perfection of charity, each in his own condition and state of life, whether it be in the state of marriage or in the priestly or the religious life.**

**St. Catherine of Siena emphasizes this in the 11th and 47th chapters of her Dialogue, reminding us that we can only perfectly fulfil the commandment of love towards God and our neighbour if we have the spirit of the counsels, that is to say, the spirit of detachment from earthly goods, which, in the words of St. Paul, we must use as though we used them not.**

**The great motive of the second conversion is thus described in the 60th chapter:**

***'Such souls  
should leave  
their  
mercenary  
love and  
become  
sons, and  
serve Me  
irrespective  
of their own  
personal  
advantage. I  
am the  
rewarder of  
every labour,  
and I render  
to every man  
according to  
his condition  
and  
according to  
his works.  
Wherefore, if  
these souls  
do not  
abandon the  
exercise of  
holy prayer  
and their***

***other good works, but continue with perseverance to increase their virtues, they will arrive at the state of filial love, because I respond to them with the same love with which they love Me; so that if they love Me as a servant loves his master, I pay them their wages according to their deserts, but I do not reveal myself to them, because secrets are revealed to a friend who has become one thing with his friend, and not to a servant....***

***' But if My servants, through displeasure at their***

***imperfection  
and through  
love of virtue,  
dig up with  
hatred the  
root of  
spiritual self-  
love, and  
mount to the  
throne of  
conscience,  
reasoning  
with  
themselves  
so as to quell  
the motions  
of servile fear  
in their heart,  
and to  
correct  
mercenary  
love by the  
light of holy  
faith, they  
will be so  
pleasing to  
Me that they  
will attain to  
the love of  
the friend.  
And I will  
manifest  
Myself to  
them, as My  
Truth said in  
these words-  
"He who  
loves me  
shall be one  
thing with me  
and I with  
him, and I  
will manifest***

***myself to him  
and we will  
dwell  
together." [76]***

**These last words refer to the knowledge of Himself which God grants by a special inspiration. This is contemplation, which proceeds from faith enlightened by the gifts, from faith united with love; it is a knowledge which savours mysteries and penetrates into their depths.**

**A second motive which should inspire the second conversion is the price of the blood of the Saviour, which St. Peter failed to realize before the Passion, in spite of the words:**

***'This  
is  
my  
blood  
which  
is  
shed  
for  
you,'***

**which Christ pronounced at the Last Supper. It was only after the Resurrection that he began to comprehend this. We read in the Dialogue 1 on this subject.**

**'My  
creatures  
should  
see and  
know  
that I  
wish  
nothing  
but their  
good,  
through  
the  
Blood of  
My only-  
begotten  
Son, in  
which  
they are  
washed  
from  
their  
iniquities.  
By this  
Blood  
they are  
enabled  
to know  
My truth,  
how in  
order to  
give  
them life  
I created  
them in  
My  
image  
and  
likeness  
and re-  
created  
them to  
grace  
with the**

***Blood of  
My. Son,  
making  
them  
sons of  
adoption.'***

**This is what St. Peter understood after his sin and after the Passion of Christ; it was only then that he appreciated the value of the Precious Blood which had been shed for our salvation, the Blood of Redemption.**

**Here we have a glimpse of the greatness of Peter in his humiliation; he is much greater here than he was on Thabor, for here he has some understanding of his own poverty and of the infinite goodness of the most High. When Jesus for the first time foretold that he must go to Jerusalem to be crucified, Peter took his Master aside and said to Him:**

***'Lord,  
be it  
far  
from  
thee,  
this  
shall  
not  
be  
unto  
thee!'***

**In speaking thus he had, all unconsciously, spoken against the whole economy of Redemption, against the whole plan of Providence, against the very motive of the Incarnation. And that is why Jesus answered him.**

**'Get  
behind  
me,  
Satan;  
thou  
savourest  
not the  
things  
that are  
of God  
but the  
things  
that are  
of men.'**

**But now, after his sin and after his conversion, Peter in his humiliation has an understanding of the Cross, and he sees something of the price of the Precious Blood.**

**And so we can understand why St. Catherine constantly speaks in her Dialogue and in her Letters of the Blood which gives efficacy to Baptism and to the other sacraments. At every Mass, when the priest raises the Precious Blood high above the altar, our faith in its redemptive power and virtue ought to become greater and more intense.**

**A third motive which ought to inspire the second conversion is the love of souls which need to be saved, a love which is inseparable from the love of God, because it is at once the sign and the effect of that love. This love of souls ought in every Christian worthy of the name to become a zeal that inspires all the virtues. In St. Catherine it led her to offer herself as a victim for the salvation of sinners. In the last chapter but one of the Dialogue we read**

**' Thou  
didst ask  
Me to do  
mercy to  
the world...  
Thou didst  
pray for  
the  
mystical  
body of  
Holy  
Church,  
that I  
would  
remove  
darkness  
and  
persecution  
from it, at  
thine own  
desire  
punishing  
in thy  
person the  
iniquities  
of certain  
of its  
ministers....  
I have also  
told thee  
that I wish  
to do  
mercy to  
the world,  
proving to  
thee that  
mercy is  
My special  
attribute,  
for through  
the mercy  
and the  
inestimable**

***love which  
I had for  
man I sent  
into the  
world the  
Word, My  
only-  
begotten  
Son....***

***' I also  
promised  
thee, and  
now again  
I promise  
thee, that  
through  
the long  
endurance  
of My  
servants I  
will reform  
My  
Spouse.  
Wherefore  
I invite  
thee to  
endure,  
Myself  
lamenting  
with thee  
over the  
iniquities  
of some of  
My  
ministers....  
And I have  
spoken to  
thee also  
of the  
virtue of  
them that  
live like***

*angels....  
And now I  
urge thee  
and My  
other  
servants to  
grief, for  
by your  
grief and  
humble  
and  
continual  
prayer I  
will do  
mercy to  
the world.'*

**The fruit of this second conversion, as in the case of Peter, is a beginning of contemplation by a progressive understanding of the great mystery of the Cross and the Redemption, a living appreciation of the infinite value of the Blood which Christ shed for us. This incipient contemplation is accompanied by a union with God less dependent upon the fluctuations of sensibility, a purer, a stronger, a more continuous union. Subsequently, if not joy, at all events peace, takes up its dwelling in the soul even in the midst of adversity. The soul becomes filled, no longer with a merely abstract, theoretical and vague persuasion, but with a concrete and living conviction, that in God's government all things are ordained towards the manifestation of His goodness. [77] At the end of the Dialogue God Himself declares this truth:[78]**

**'Nothing has  
ever  
happened  
and nothing  
happens  
save by the  
plan of My  
divine  
Providence.  
In all things  
that I permit,  
in all things  
that I give  
you, in  
tribulations  
and in  
consolations,  
temporal or  
spiritual, I  
do nothing  
save for  
your good,  
so that you  
may be  
sanctified in  
Me and that  
My Truth be  
fulfilled in  
you.' It is the  
same truth  
which St.  
Paul  
expresses in  
his epistle to  
the Romans:  
'To them  
that love  
God all  
things work  
together  
unto good.'**

**This is the conviction that was born in the soul of Peter and the Apostles after their second conversion, and also in the souls of the disciples of Emmaus when the risen Christ gave them a fuller understanding of the mystery of the Cross:**

**'O  
foolish,'**

**He said to them,**

**'and slow  
of heart to  
believe in  
all things  
which the  
prophets  
have  
spoken.  
Ought not  
Christ to  
have  
suffered  
these  
things and  
so to enter  
into his  
glory?  
And  
beginning  
at Moses  
and all the  
prophets  
he  
expounded  
to them in  
all the  
Scriptures  
the things  
that were  
concerning  
him.'** [79]

**They knew Him in the breaking of bread.**

**What happened to these disciples on the way to Emmaus should happen to us too, if we are faithful, on the way to eternity. If for them and for the Apostles there had to be a second conversion, still more is such a conversion necessary for us. And under the influence of this new grace of God we too shall say:**

***'Was not  
our heart  
burning  
within us  
whilst he  
spoke in  
the way  
and  
opened to  
us the  
Scriptures?'***

**Theology, too, helps us to discover the profound meaning of the Gospel. But the more theology progresses, the more, in a sense, it has to conceal itself; it has to disappear very much as St. John the Baptist disappears after announcing the coming of our Lord. It helps us to discover the deep significance of divine revelation contained in Scripture and Tradition, and when it has rendered this service it should stand aside. In order to restore our cathedrals, to set well-hewn stones into their proper place it is necessary to erect a scaffolding; but when once the stones have been replaced the scaffolding is removed and the cathedral once more appears in all its beauty. In a similar way theology helps us to demonstrate the solidity of the foundations of the doctrinal edifice, the firmness of its construction, the proportion of its parts; but when it has shown us this, it effaces itself to make place for that supernatural contemplation which proceeds from a faith enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, from a faith that penetrates and savours the truths of God, a faith that is united with love. [80]**

**And so it is with the question with which we are dealing, the truly**

## vital question of our interior life in God.

---

▪ [Back](#)

▪ [Index](#)

▪ [Forward](#)



## CHAPTER 3

# THE THIRD CONVERSION OR TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUL: ENTRANCE INTO THE UNITIVE WAY

### *INTRODUCTION*

**WE** have spoken of the second conversion, which is necessary for the soul if it is to leave the way of beginners and enter upon the way of proficients, or the illuminative way. As we have seen, many authors hold that this second conversion took place for the Apostles at the end of the Passion of Christ, and for Peter in particular after his triple denial.

St. Thomas remarks in his commentary on St. Matthew [81] that this repentance of St. Peter came about immediately, as soon as his Master had looked upon him, and that it was efficacious and definitive.

Nevertheless, Peter and the Apostles were slow to believe in the resurrection of Christ, in spite of the account which the holy women gave them of this miracle so often foretold by Jesus Himself. The story they told seemed to them to be madness. [82]

Moreover, slow to believe the resurrection of the Saviour, they were correspondingly anxious, says St. Augustine, [83] to see the complete restoration of the kingdom of Israel such as they imagined would come to pass. This may be seen from the question which they put to our Lord on the very day of the Ascension:

**'Lord  
wilt  
thou at  
this  
time  
again  
restore  
the  
kingdom  
of  
Israel?'**

**But there was still much suffering to be undergone before the restoration of the kingdom; and that restoration would be far superior to anything that they suspected.**

**And so spiritual writers have often spoken of a third conversion or transformation of the Apostles, which took place on the day of Pentecost. Let us see first what this transformation was in them, and then what it ought to be, proportionately, in us.**

**The Apostles were prepared for their third transformation by the fact that from the time of the Ascension they were deprived of the perceptible presence of Jesus Himself. When our Lord deprived His Apostles forever of the sight of His sacred Humanity, they must have suffered a distress to which we do not perhaps sufficiently advert. When we consider that our Lord had become their very life -- as St. Paul says:**

**'Mihi  
vivere  
Christus  
est'**

**-and that they had become daily more and more intimate with Him, they must have had a feeling of the greatest loneliness, like a feeling of desolation, even of death. And their desolation must have been the more intense since our Lord Himself had foretold all the sufferings that were in store. We experience something of the same**

dismay when, after having lived on a higher plane during the time of retreat, under the guidance of a priestly soul full of the spirit of God, we are plunged once again into our everyday life which seems to deprive us suddenly of this fulness. The Apostles stood there with their eyes raised up to heaven. This was no longer merely the crushing of their sensibility, as it was during the time of the Passion; it was a complete blank, which must have seemed to take from them all power of thinking. During the Passion our Lord was still there; now He had been taken away from them, and they seemed to be completely deprived of Him.

It was in the night of the spirit that they were prepared for the outpouring of the graces of Pentecost.

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST UPON THE APOSTLES.**

**"All These Were Persevering In One Mind In Prayer, With The Women And Mary The Mother Of Jesus.**

**The Acts of the Apostles give us an account of the event.**

***' When the  
days of  
Pentecost  
were  
accomplished  
they were all  
together in  
one place.  
And  
suddenly  
there came a  
sound from  
heaven, as of  
a mighty  
wind  
coming; and  
it filled the  
whole house  
where they  
were sitting.  
And there  
appeared to  
them parted  
tongues, as  
it were of  
fire, and it  
sat upon  
every one of  
them. And  
they were all  
filled with the  
Holy Ghost;  
and they  
began to***

***Speak with  
divers  
tongues  
according as  
the Holy  
Ghost gave  
them to  
speak.'* [84]**

**The sound from heaven, like that of a mighty wind, was an external sign of the mysterious and powerful action of the Holy Spirit; and at the same time the tongues of fire which rested upon each of the Apostles symbolized what was to be accomplished in their souls.**

**It happens not infrequently that a great grace is preceded by some striking perceptible sign which arouses us from our inertia; it is like a divine awakening. Here the symbolism is as clear as it can be. As fire purifies, enlightens and gives warmth, so the Holy Ghost in this moment most deeply purified, enlightened and inflamed the souls of the Apostles. This was truly the profound purging of the spirit. [85] And St. Peter explained that this was the fulfilment of what the prophet Joel had foretold:**

***'It shall  
come to  
pass in the  
last days  
(saith the  
Lord) I will  
pour out  
my Spirit  
on all  
flesh; and  
your sons  
and your  
daughters  
shall  
prophesy....  
And it  
shall come  
to pass***

***that  
whosoever  
shall call  
upon the  
name of  
the Lord  
shall be  
saved.'* [86]**

**the Holy Ghost already dwell in the souls of the Apostles, but by this visible mission [87] He came into them to increase the treasures of His grace, of the virtues and the gifts, giving them light and strength in order that they might be capable of witnessing to Christ even to the ends of the earth, and at the peril of their lives. The tongues of fire are a sign that the Holy Spirit enkindled in their souls that living flame of Love of which St. John of the Cross speaks.**

**Then were the words of Christ fulfilled:**

***'The Holy  
Ghost  
whom the  
Father will  
send in my  
name, he  
will teach  
you all  
things,  
and will  
bring to  
your mind  
whatsoever  
I shall  
have said  
to  
you.'* [88]**

**Then the Apostles began to speak**

***'in divers  
tongues  
the  
wonderful  
works of  
God,'***

**so that the foreigners who were witnesses of this marvel,**

***'Parthians  
and Medes,  
Elamites and  
inhabitants  
of  
Mesopotamia,  
Judaea and  
Cappadocia,  
Pontus and  
Asia... Jews,  
Cretes and  
Arabians...  
were all  
amazed and  
wondered,  
saying... We  
have heard  
them speak  
in our own  
tongues.'* [89]**

**It was a sign that they were now to begin to preach the Gospel to the different nations, as our Lord had commanded them**

***'Go ye, and  
teach all  
nations.'* [90]**

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **THE EFFECTS OF THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST.**

The Acts show us what were these effects: the Apostles were enlightened and fortified, and their sanctifying influence transformed the first Christians; there was a transport of intense fervour in the infant Church.

First of all, the Apostles received a much greater enlightenment from the Holy Spirit regarding the price of the Blood of the Saviour, regarding the mystery of Redemption, foretold in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New. They received the fulness of the contemplation of this mystery which they were now to preach to humanity for the salvation of men. St. Thomas says that

*'the preaching of  
the word of God  
must proceed from  
the fulness of  
contemplation.'* [91]

This was most fully verified at that time, as we may see from the first sermons of St. Peter related in the Acts and from that of St. Stephen before his martyrdom. These words of St. Peter and St. Stephen recall the saying of the Psalmist:

*'Thy word  
is  
exceedingly  
refined and  
thy servant  
hath loved  
it.'* [92]

The Apostles and the disciples, men without education, were still asking on the day of the Ascension:

**'Lord,  
wilt  
thou at  
this  
time  
restore  
the  
kingdom  
of  
Israel?'**

**Jesus had answered:**

**'It is not  
for you to  
know the  
times or  
moments  
which the  
Father  
hath put  
in his  
own  
power.  
But you  
shall  
receive  
the power  
of the  
Holy  
Ghost  
coming  
upon  
you, and  
you shall  
be  
witnesses  
unto me  
in  
Jerusalem  
and in all**

***Judaea  
and  
Samaria,  
and even  
to the  
uttermost  
parts of  
the  
earth.'* [93]**

**And now behold Peter. He who before the Passion had trembled at the word of a woman, who had been so slow to believe the resurrection of the Master, now stands before the Jews, saying to them with an authority that can come only from God:**

***'Jesus of  
Nazareth, a  
man  
approved of  
God by  
miracles and  
wonders and  
signs which  
God did by  
him in the  
midst of you...  
this same  
being  
delivered up  
by the  
determinate  
counsel and  
foreknowledge  
[94] of God,  
you by the  
hands of  
wicked men  
have crucified  
and slain.  
Him God hath  
raised up [as***

**David  
foretold]....  
This Jesus  
God hath  
raised again,  
whereof all  
we are  
witnesses...  
he hath  
poured forth  
this which  
you see and  
hear....  
Therefore let  
all the house  
of Israel know  
most  
certainly that  
God hath  
made both  
Lord and  
Christ this  
same Jesus  
whom you  
have  
crucified.' [95]**

**Herein lies the whole mystery of the Redemption. Peter now sees that Jesus was a willing victim, and he contemplates the infinite value of His merits and of the Blood which He shed.**

**The Acts add that those who heard this discourse**

**'had  
compunction  
in their  
heart and  
said to  
Peter: What  
shall we  
do? Peter  
answered.  
Do penance  
and be  
baptized  
every one of  
you in the  
name of  
Jesus  
Christ, for  
the  
remission of  
sins. And  
you shall  
receive the  
gift of the  
Holy Ghost.**

**And so it came to pass, and on that day about three thousand persons were converted and received the sacrament of baptism. [96]**

**Some days later, Peter said to the Jews in the temple, after the cure of a man who had been lame from birth:**

**'The author  
of life you  
killed,  
whom God  
hath raised  
from the  
dead; of  
which we  
are  
witnesses....  
Our Lord  
Jesus  
Christ of  
Nazareth,  
whom you  
crucified...  
this is the  
stone  
which was  
rejected by  
you the  
builders,  
which is  
become the  
head of the  
corner.  
Neither is  
there  
salvation in  
any other.  
For there is  
no other  
name  
under  
heaven  
given to  
men,  
whereby  
we must be  
saved.'** [97]

**In this enumeration of the graces of Pentecost we must notice chiefly, not the gift of tongues or other powers of this kind, but rather that special illumination which enabled the Apostles to enter into the depths of the mystery of the Incarnation, and more particularly of the Passion of Christ. This is the mystery of which Peter could not bear the prediction, when Jesus said that He was to be crucified:**

***'Lord,  
be it  
far  
from  
thee;  
this  
shall  
not  
be  
unto  
thee.'***

**And Jesus answered:**

***'Thou  
savourest  
not the  
things  
that are  
of God,  
but the  
things  
that are  
of  
men.'* [98]**

**Now Peter has an understanding of the things of God, and he contemplates the whole economy of the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation. And it is not only he who is thus enlightened. All the Apostles bear witness in like manner, and the disciples also, and the deacon, St. Stephen, who, before being stoned to death, reminded the Jews of all that God had done for the chosen people in the time of the Patriarchs, in the time of Moses and, since then, until the**

coming of the Saviour. [99]

But the Apostles were not only enlightened on the day of Pentecost, they were also strengthened and confirmed. Jesus had promised them:

*'You  
shall  
receive  
the  
power of  
the Holy  
Ghost  
coming  
upon  
you.'* [100]

Fearful before Pentecost, they are now full of courage, even to the point of martyrdom. Peter and John, arrested and haled before the Sanhedrin, declare that

*'there is  
no  
salvation  
in any  
other'*

than in Jesus Christ. Arrested again, and beaten with rods,

**' they went  
forth from  
the  
presence of  
the council  
rejoicing  
that they  
were  
accounted  
worthy to  
suffer  
reproach  
for the  
name of  
Jesus. And  
every day  
they  
ceased not,  
in the  
temple and  
from house  
to house, to  
teach and  
preach  
Christ  
Jesus.' [101]**

**They all bore testimony to Christ in their blood. Who had given them the strength to do this? The Holy Spirit, by enkindling the living fire of charity in their hearts.**

**Such was their third conversion; it was a complete transformation of their souls. Their first conversion had made them disciples of the Master, attracted by the sublime beauty of His teaching; the second, at the end of the Passion, had enabled them to divine the fecundity of the mystery of the Cross, enlightened as it was by the Resurrection which followed it; the third conversion fills them with the profound conviction of this mystery, a mystery which they will constantly live until their martyrdom.**

**The transformation which the Apostles had undergone is shown also**

**in their sanctifying influence, in the transport of intense fervour which they communicated to the first Christians. As the Acts show, [102] the life of the infant Church was a life of marvellous sanctity;**

***'the  
multitude  
of the  
believers  
had but  
one  
heart  
and one  
soul';***

**they had all things in common, they sold their goods and brought the price of them to the Apostles that they might distribute to each according to his needs. They met together every day to pray, to hear the preaching of the Apostles, and to celebrate the Eucharist. They were often seen assembled together in prayer, and men wondered to see the charity that reigned among them.**

***' By  
this,'***

**our Lord had said,**

***'shall all  
men  
know  
that you  
are my  
disciples.'***

**Bossuet has given an admirable description of the fervour of the first Christians, in his third sermon for the feast of Pentecost.**

**' They are  
strong in  
the face of  
peril, but  
they are  
tender in the  
love of their  
brethren;  
the almighty  
Spirit who  
guides them  
well knows  
the secret of  
reconciling  
the most  
opposite  
tensions....  
He gives  
them a heart  
of flesh...  
made tender  
by charity...  
and He  
makes them  
hard as iron  
or steel in  
the face of  
peril.... He  
strengthens  
and He  
softens, but  
in a manner  
all His own.  
For these  
are the  
same hearts  
of the  
disciples,  
which seem  
as  
diamonds in  
their  
invincible**

***firmness,  
and which  
yet become  
human  
hearts and  
hearts of  
flesh by  
brotherly  
love. This is  
the effect of  
the  
heavenly  
fire that  
rests upon  
them this  
day. It has  
softened the  
hearts of the  
faithful, it  
has, so to  
speak,  
melted them  
into one....***

***The  
Apostles of  
the Son of  
God had  
once  
disputed  
concerning  
the primacy;  
but now that  
the Holy  
Spirit has  
made them  
of one heart  
and one  
soul they  
are no  
longer  
jealous or  
quarrelsome.***

***It seems to  
them that  
through  
Peter they  
all speak,  
that with  
him they all  
preside, and  
if his  
shadow  
heals the  
sick the  
whole  
Church has  
its part in  
this gift and  
praises our  
Lord for it.'***

**In the same way we ought to regard one another as members of the same mystical body, of which Christ is the head, and, far from allowing ourselves to give way to jealousy or envy, we ought to rejoice with a holy joy in the good qualities of our neighbour; for we profit by them as the hand derives advantage from what the eye sees, or the ear hears.**

**Such were the fruits of the transformation of the Apostles and the disciples by the Holy Spirit.**

**But was the Holy Spirit sent to produce these marvellous fruits only in the infant Church? Evidently not. He continues the same work throughout the course of ages. His action in the Church is apparent in the invincible strength that He gives her; a strength which may be seen in the three centuries of persecution which she underwent, and in the victory that she won over so many heresies.**

**Every Christian community, then, must conform to the example of the infant Church. What must we learn from her?**

**To be of but one heart and one soul, and to banish all divisions amongst us. To work for the extension of the kingdom of God in the**

**world, despite the difficulties with which we are confronted. To believe firmly and practically in the indefectibility of the Church, which is always holy, and never ceases to give birth to saints. Like the early Christians we must bear with patience and love the sufferings which God sends us. Let us with all our hearts believe in the Holy Spirit who never ceases to give life to the Church, and in the Communion of Saints.**

**If we saw the Church as she is in the most generous souls who live most truly the life of the Church, she would appear most beautiful in our sight, despite the human imperfections which are mingled with the activity of her children. We rightly lament certain blots, but let us not forget that if there is sometimes mud in the valley at the foot of the mountains, on the summits there is always snow of dazzling whiteness, air of great purity, and a wonderful view that ever leads the eye to God.**

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **THE PURIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT NECESSARY FOR CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.**

Create  
A  
Clean  
Heart  
In  
Me, O  
Lord.  
[[103](#)]

**We have seen that the transformation of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost was like a third conversion for them. There must be something similar in the life of every Christian, if he is to pass from the way of proficients to that of the perfect. Here, says St. John of the Cross, there must be a radical purgation of the spirit, just as there had to be a purgation of the senses in order to pass from the way of beginners to that of proficients, commonly called the illuminative way. And just as the first conversion, by which we turn away from the world to begin to walk in the way of God, presupposes acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition, so it is also with the other two conversions. But here the acts of the theological virtues are much more profound: God, who makes us perform these acts, drives the furrow in our souls in the same direction, but much more deeply.**

**Let us see now (1) why this conversion is necessary for proficients, (2) how God purifies the soul at this stage and (3) what are the fruits of this third conversion.**

---

▪ [Back](#)

▪ [Index](#)

▪ [Forward](#)



## **THE NECESSITY OF THE PURIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT.**

Many imperfections remain even in those who have advanced in the way of God. If their sensibility has been to a great extent purged of the faults of spiritual sensuality, inertia, jealousy, impatience, yet there still remain in the spirit certain 'stains of the old man' which are like rust on the soul, a rust which will only disappear under the action of an intense fire, similar to that which came down upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. This comparison is made by St. John of the Cross. [\[104\]](#)

This rust remains deep down in the spiritual faculties of the soul, in the intelligence and the will; and it consists in an attachment to self which prevents the soul from being completely united to God. Hence it is that we are often distracted in prayer, that we are subject to sluggishness, to a failure to understand the things of God, to the dissipation of the spirit, and to natural affections which are hardly, if at all, inspired by the motive of charity. Movements of roughness and impatience are not rare at this stage. Moreover, many souls, even among those that are advanced in the way of God, remain too much attached to their own point of view in the spiritual life; they imagine that they have received special inspirations from God, whereas they are in reality the victims of their own imagination or of the enemy of all good. They thus become puffed up with presumption, spiritual pride and vanity; they depart from the true path and lead other souls astray.

As St. John of the Cross says, this catalogue of faults is inexhaustible; and he confines his attention almost exclusively to those defects which relate to the purely interior life. How much longer would the catalogue be if we considered also the faults which offend against fraternal charity, against justice in our relations with our superiors, our equals or our inferiors, and those which relate to the duties of our state and to the influence which we may exert upon others.

Together with spiritual pride there remains often in the soul intellectual pride, jealousy, or some hidden ambition. The seven capital sins are thus transposed into the life of the spirit, to its great detriment.

**All this, says St. John of the Cross, shows the need of the 'strong lye,' that passive purgation of the spirit, that further conversion which marks the entrance into the perfect way. Even after passing through the night of the senses, St. John says,**

***'these  
proficients  
are still at a  
very low  
stage of  
progress,  
and follow  
their own  
nature  
closely in  
the  
intercourse  
and dealings  
which they  
have with  
God;  
because the  
gold of their  
spirit is not  
yet purified  
and refined;  
they still  
think of God  
as little  
children,  
and feel and  
experience  
God as little  
children,  
even as St.  
Paul says,  
because  
they have  
not reached  
perfection,  
which is the  
union of the  
soul with***

**God. In the  
state of  
union,  
however,  
they will  
work great  
things in the  
spirit, even  
as grown  
men, and  
their works  
and faculties  
will then be  
divine rather  
than  
human.'** [105]

**Before this third conversion has taken place we may still say of these souls, in the words of Isaias, that their justices are as a soiled rag; a further, and final, purification is necessary.**

---

▪ *Back*

▪ *Index*

▪ *Forward*



## **HOW DOES GOD PURIFY THE SOUL IN THIS THIRD CONVERSION?**

**It seems that at first He strips the soul instead of enriching it. In order to cure the soul of all spiritual and intellectual pride, and to show it what dregs of poverty it still has within, He leaves the understanding in darkness, the will in aridity, sometimes even in bitterness and anguish. The soul then, says St. John of the Cross, after Tauler, must**

***'remain in the dark, in pure faith, which is dark night for the natural faculties.'* [106]**

**St. Thomas often points out that the object of faith is that which is not seen (fides est de non visis); it is dark. And the Angelic Doctor adds that it is impossible for anyone to believe and to see the same thing under the same aspect; because what is believed, as such, is not seen. [107] The soul has now to enter into the depths of faith and to rise to its heights, like the Apostles when they were deprived of the sensible presence of Christ after His ascension. As He Himself had told them:**

***'It is expedient to you that I go. For if I go not the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go I will send him to***

*you.'* [108]

**St. Thomas gives an admirable explanation of these words in his commentary on St. John; he says that the Apostles, attached as they were to the humanity of Christ by a natural love, were not yet sufficiently filled with a spiritual love of His divinity, and therefore were not yet capable of receiving the Holy Ghost spiritually, as they must if they were to withstand the tribulations which they would meet when Jesus had deprived them of His perceptible presence.**

**At first, then, God seems to strip the soul in this purification, as in the preceding; He seems to leave it in darkness and aridity. The motto of the soul must now be:**

***'Fidelity and  
abandonment.'***

**It is now that the words of Christ will be fulfilled.**

***' He that  
followeth  
me  
walketh  
not in  
darkness,  
but shall  
have the  
light of  
life.'*** [109]

**Especially illuminated now by the purging light of the gift of understanding, the soul begins, as St. Paul says,**

***'to search  
the deep  
things of  
God.'* [110]**

Now humility and the theological virtues are purged of all human alloy. The soul experiences more and more, without seeing it, the infinite purity and greatness of God, who transcends all the ideas that we can form of Him; it experiences likewise all the supernatural riches of the holy soul of Christ, which here on earth contained the fulness of grace,

***'all the treasures  
of wisdom and  
knowledge.'* [111]**

Like the Apostles on the day of Pentecost it has a glimpse of the depths of the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption; it perceives something of the infinite value of the merits of Christ who died for us on the Cross. The soul now has a sort of living knowledge, an experimental perception, of the supernatural world, a new outlook upon it. And by contrast the soul becomes more conscious of its own poverty. The chief suffering of a St. Paul of the Cross, of a Cure d'Ars, at this stage, was to feel themselves so distant from the ideal of the priesthood, which loomed now so great before them in the dark night of faith; while at the same time they understood better the great needs of those many souls that had recourse to them, imploring their prayers and their help.

This third conversion or purification is, evidently, the work of the Holy Spirit, who illuminates the soul by the gift of understanding. As with a lightning-flash during the night He illumines the soul that He wishes to purify. The soul had said to Him so often.

**Enlighten  
my eyes  
that I  
may  
never  
sleep in  
death';  
[112]**

**'O my  
God,  
enlighten  
my  
darkness' ;  
[113]**

**'Create a  
clean heart  
in me, O  
God, and  
renew a  
right spirit  
within my  
bowels.  
Cast me not  
away from  
thy face,  
and take not  
thy holy  
spirit from  
me. Restore  
unto me the  
joy of thy  
salvation  
and  
strengthen  
me with a  
perfect**

***spirit. I will  
teach the  
unjust thy  
ways... and  
my tongue  
shall extol  
thy  
justice.'* [114]**

**The purified soul addresses to Christ those words which He Himself once uttered, and begs that they may be fulfilled in itself.**

***'I am come to  
cast fire on  
the earth;  
and what will  
I, but that it  
be  
kindled?'*[115]**

**This third purification comes about, as St. John of the Cross says, by**

***'an inflowing of  
God into the soul,  
which purges it  
from its ignorances  
and imperfections,  
habitual, natural  
and spiritual, and  
which is called by  
contemplatives  
infused  
contemplation or  
mystical theology.  
Herein God  
secretly teaches  
the soul and  
instructs it in***

***perfection of love,  
without its doing  
anything or  
understanding of  
what manner is this  
infused  
contemplation.*** [**116**]

**This great purification or transformation appears under different forms, according as it is in pure contemplatives like a St. Bruno, or in souls dedicated to the apostolate or to works of mercy, like a St. Vincent de Paul; but in substance it is the same. In every case there is the purification of humility and the three theological virtues from every human alloy, so that the formal motive of these virtues takes increasing ascendancy over all secondary motives. Humility grows according to the process described by St. Anselm, and repeated by St. Thomas:**

**(1) To know  
that one is  
contemptible;**

**(2) to feel  
affliction at  
this  
knowledge;**

**(3) to  
confess that  
one is  
despicable;**

**(4) to wish  
one's  
neighbours  
to know this;**

**(5) patiently  
to endure  
their saying  
so;**

**(6) to submit  
to being  
treated as  
worthy of  
contempt;**

**(7) to like  
being so  
treated.**

**So we have the example of St. Dominic, who by preference went to those parts of Languedoc where he was ill-treated and ridiculed, experiencing a holy joy at feeling himself made like our Lord, who was humbled for our sake.**

**Then the formal motives of the three theological virtues appear in all their sublime grandeur- the supreme Truth that reveals, Mercy ever ready to help, sovereign Goodness, ever lovable for its own sake. These three motives shine forth like three stars of the first magnitude in the night of the spirit, to guide us surely to the end of our journey.**

**The fruits of this third conversion are the same as those of Pentecost, when the Apostles were enlightened and fortified, and being themselves transformed, transformed the first Christians by their preaching-as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles, where we are told of the first sermons of St. Peter and of St. Stephen's discourse before his martyrdom.**

**The fruits of this third conversion are a true and deep humility, and a living faith that begins to relish and savour the mysteries of the supernatural order-as it were, a foretaste of eternal life. Moreover, it produces a firm and confident hope in the divine mercy, which is ever at hand to help us. To attain to this perfection of hope, one must, as St. Paul says, have hoped against hope.**

**But the most perfect fruit of this third conversion is a very great love of God, a very pure and very strong love, a love that hesitates before no contradiction or persecution, like the love of the Apostles who rejoiced to suffer for the sake of our Lord. This love is born of an**

**ardent desire for perfection, it is**

***'hunger  
and  
thirst  
after  
the  
justice  
of  
God,'***

**accompanied by the gift of fortitude, which enables it to triumph over every obstacle. It is the perfect fulfilment of the commandment-**

***'Thou  
shalt  
love  
the  
Lord  
thy  
God  
with  
thy  
whole  
heart,  
with  
thy  
whole  
soul  
and  
with all  
thy  
strength  
and  
with all  
thy  
mind.'***

**Henceforth the depth of the soul belongs completely to God. The soul has now reached the stage of living almost continually the life**

of the spirit in its higher part; it is now an adorer in spirit and in truth. The darkness of the night of faith is thus a prelude to the life of eternity: *quaedam inchoatio vitae aeternae* It is the fulfilment of the words of Christ:

*'If any man  
thirst let  
him come  
to me and  
drink....  
Out of his  
belly shall  
flow rivers  
of living  
water.'* [\[117\]](#)

This is the living water that springs up into eternal life, the water which Jesus promised to the Samaritan woman:

*'If thou didst  
know the gift of  
God... thou  
perhaps wouldst  
have asked of  
him and he  
would have  
given thee living  
water.... The  
water that I will  
give him shall  
become in him a  
fountain of  
water, springing  
up into life  
everlasting.'* [\[118\]](#)

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **PRAYER TO THE HOLY GHOST**

**Holy  
Spirit,  
come  
into my  
heart;  
draw it  
to Thee  
by Thy  
power,  
O my  
God,  
and  
grant  
me  
charity  
with  
filial  
fear.  
Preserve  
me, O  
ineffable  
Love,  
from  
every  
evil  
thought;  
warm  
me,  
inflame  
me with  
Thy  
dear  
love,  
and  
every  
pain will  
seem  
light to  
me. My**

**Father,  
my  
sweet  
Lord,  
help me  
in all  
my  
actions.  
Jesus,  
love,  
Jesus,  
love**

**St.  
Catherine  
of Siena**

**Anyone who has consecrated himself to Mary according to the formula of the Blessed Grignon de Montfort, and then also to the Sacred Heart, will find great treasures in a repeated consecration to the Holy Spirit. The whole influence of Mary leads us to intimacy with Christ, and the humanity of Jesus leads us to the Holy Spirit, who introduces us into the mystery of the adorable Trinity.**

---

▪ [\*\*\*Back\*\*\*](#)

▪ [\*\*\*Index\*\*\*](#)

▪ [\*\*\*Forward\*\*\*](#)



## **PRAYER OF CONSECRATION TO THE HOLY GHOST**

**O Holy  
Ghost,  
divine  
Spirit of  
light and  
love, I  
consecrate  
to Thee my  
intellect,  
my heart,  
my will  
and my  
whole  
being for  
time and  
for  
eternity.**

**May my  
intellect be  
ever docile  
to Thy  
heavenly  
inspirations  
and to the  
teaching of  
the Holy  
Catholic  
Church of  
which  
Thou art  
the  
infallible  
Guide. May  
my heart  
be ever  
inflamed  
with the  
love of**

**God and  
my  
neighbour;  
may my  
will be  
ever in  
conformity  
with the  
divine will,  
and may  
my whole  
life be a  
faithful  
imitation of  
the life and  
virtues of  
our Lord  
and  
Saviour  
Jesus  
Christ, to  
whom,  
with the  
Father and  
thee, Holy  
Spirit, be  
honour  
and glory  
for ever.  
Amen.**

**Indulgence of 300 days once a day, applicable to the souls in Purgatory -- Pius X. This consecration may be renewed by repeating only the first paragraph of the form.**

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## CHAPTER 4

# THE PROBLEM OF THE THREE STAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE IN ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

### **INTRODUCTION**

**THIS** chapter, written especially for theologians, will prove less useful for the majority of readers, who will find the substance of it explained more simply and easily in the following chapter.

One of the great problems of the spiritual life is the question how we are to interpret the traditional distinction of the three ways, purgative, illuminative, and unitive, according to the terminology of Dionysius, or the way of beginners, of proficients, and of the perfect, according to an earlier terminology.

Of this traditional division two notably different interpretations have been given, according as the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God which results from it were considered as belonging to the normal way of sanctity, or as extraordinary favours, not only de facto but also de jure.

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.**

The difference between the two interpretations may be seen if we compare the division of ascetico-mystical theology used until the second half of the eighteenth century with that given by several authors who have written since that time. It is evident, for example, if we compare the treatise of Vallgornera, O. P., *Mystica theologia divi Thomae* (1662), with the two works of Scaramelli, S. J., *Direttorio ascetico* (1751) and *Direttorio mistico*.

Vallgornera follows- more or less closely the Carmelite, Philip of the Trinity. He likens the division given by him to that used by previous authors, and confirms it by appeal to certain characteristic texts of St. John of the Cross on the moment at which the passive nights of the senses and of the spirit generally make their appearance. [119] He divides his treatise for contemplative souls into three parts:

1. Of the purgative way, proper to beginners, in which he treats of the active purification of the external and internal senses, the passions, the intellect and the will by mortification, meditation and prayer, and finally of the passive purification of the senses, where infused contemplation begins and

**leads the soul  
on to the  
illuminative  
way, as St.  
John of the  
Cross  
explains at  
the beginning  
of the Dark  
Night. [\[120\]](#)**

**2. Of the  
illuminative  
way, proper  
to proficients,  
where, after a  
preliminary  
chapter on  
the divisions  
of  
contemplation,  
the writer  
treats of the  
gifts of the  
Holy Ghost  
and of infused  
contemplation,  
which  
proceeds  
especially  
from the gifts  
of  
understanding  
and wisdom,  
and which is  
declared to be  
a legitimate  
object of  
desire for all  
spiritual  
souls, as  
being morally  
necessary for**

**the complete perfection of the Christian life. This second part of the work, after several articles dealing with extraordinary graces (visions, revelations, interior speech) concludes with a chapter of nine articles on the passive purification of the spirit, which marks the transition to the unitive way. This, likewise, is the teaching of St. John of the Cross.**

**[121]**

**3. Of the unitive way, proper to the perfect, where the author deals with the intimate union of the contemplative soul with God and with its**

**degrees, up  
to the  
transforming  
union.**

**Vallgornera considers this division to be the traditional one, and to be truly in harmony with the doctrine of the Fathers, with the principles of St. Thomas and the teaching of St. John of the Cross, and with that of the great mystics who have written on the three periods of the spiritual life, and on the manner in which the transition is generally made from one to another.**

**Quite different is the division given by Scaramelli and the authors who follow him.**

**In the first place Scaramelli treats of Ascetics and Mystics, not in the same work, but in two distinct works. The *Direttorio ascetico*, twice as long as the second work, comprises four treatises: (1) The means of perfection; (2) the obstacles (purgative way); (3) the proximate dispositions to Christian perfection, consisting of the moral virtues in the perfect degree (the way of proficients); (4) the essential perfection of the Christian, consisting of the theological virtues and especially of charity (the love of conformity in the case of the perfect).**

**This treatise of Ascetics hardly mentions the gifts of the Holy Ghost. And yet according to the common teaching of spiritual writers the high degree of perfection in the moral and theological virtues which is here described is unattainable without these gifts.**

**The *Direttorio mistico* consists of five treatises:**

**(1) An Introduction, on the gifts of the Holy Ghost and the gratiae gratis datae;**

**(2) on acquired and infused contemplation, for which, as Scaramelli admits, the gifts are sufficient;**

**(3) on the degrees of obscure infused contemplation, from passive recollection to the transforming union. (Here, in Chapter XXXII, Scaramelli admits that several authors teach 1 Ch xiv. that infused contemplation may be desired humbly by all spiritual souls; but he comes to the**

**conclusion  
that in  
practice it is  
better not to  
desire it  
unless one  
has received  
a special call  
to it: 'Altiora  
te ne  
quaesieris');  
[122]**

**(4) on the  
degrees of  
distinct  
infused  
contemplation  
(visions and  
extraordinary  
interior  
words);**

**(5) of the  
passive  
purifications  
of the senses  
and of the  
spirit.**

**It is surprising not to find until the end of this treatise on Mystics a description of the passive purgation of the senses, a purgation which, for St. John of the Cross and the authors above quoted, marks the entrance into the illuminative way.**

**The difference between this new way of dividing ascetico-mystical theology and the old way obviously arises from the fact that the old authors, unlike the modern ones, maintained that all truly spiritual souls can humbly desire and ask of God the grace of the infused contemplation of the mysteries of the faith: the Incarnation and Passion of Christ, Holy Mass and Eternal Life, mysteries which are**

so many manifestations of the infinite goodness of God. They considered this supernatural and confused contemplation to be morally necessary for that union with God in which the full perfection of the Christian life consists.

Hence it may be wondered whether the new division, as propounded for example by Scaramelli, does not diminish both the unity and the sublimity of the perfect spiritual life. When Ascetics are separated from Mystics in this way, do we sufficiently preserve the unity of the whole which is divided? A good division, if it is not to be superficial and accidental, if it is to be based upon a necessary foundation, must repose upon the definition of the whole which is to be divided, upon the nature of that whole. And the whole in question is the life of grace, called by tradition

*'the  
grace  
of the  
virtues  
and  
gifts';  
[123]*

for the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, since they are connected with charity, are part of the supernatural organism, [124] and, as St. Thomas teaches, are necessary for salvation, a fortiori for perfection. [125]

Similarly, the new conception surely diminishes the sublimity of evangelical perfection, since this is dealt with under the head of Ascetics, without mention of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and without mention of the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God which results from that contemplation. While the new method of treatment emphasizes the necessity of ascetics, does it not at the same time degrade it, weakening the motives for the practice of mortification and for the exercise of the virtues, because it loses sight of the divine intimacy to which the whole of this work should eventually lead? Does it throw sufficient light upon the meaning of the trials, those prolonged periods of aridity, which generally mark the transition from one stage of the spiritual life to the other? Does not the new conception diminish also the

importance and value of mysticism, which, if it is separated thus from asceticism, seems to become a luxury in the spiritual life of a few favoured ones, and a luxury which is not without its dangers? Finally, and above all, does not this conception debase the illuminative and unitive ways, by regarding them simply from the ascetical point of view? Is it possible for these two ways normally to exist without the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, proportionate to the exercise of charity and the other infused virtues? Are there six ways (three ascetical ways which are ordinary, and three mystical ways which are extraordinary), and not only three ways, three periods in the spiritual life, as the ancients maintained? Does it not seem that, if ascetics is divorced from the illuminative and unitive ways, it becomes simply an abstract study of the moral and theological virtues? Or, if the progress and perfection of these virtues is treated in concrete-as is done by Scaramelli -- is it not manifest, according to the teaching of St. John of the Cross, that this perfection is unattainable without the passive purifications and the operation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost? On this matter we shall do well to remember the words of St. Teresa:

*'According  
to certain  
books we  
ought to be  
indifferent  
to the evil  
which is  
spoken of  
us, and even  
rejoice more  
thereat than  
if we were  
well spoken  
of; we ought  
to make  
little of  
honour, and  
be detached  
from our  
neighbour...  
and many  
other things  
of the same*

***sort. In my  
opinion  
these are  
pure gifts of  
God, these  
are  
supernatural  
graces.'* [\[126\]](#)**

In order better to preserve the unity and sublimity of the interior life, such as the Gospels and the epistles reveal it to us, we propose the division which follows. It accords with that of the great majority of authors who wrote before the second half of the eighteenth century, and, by including an imperfect form of the illuminative and unitive ways, mentioned by St. John. of the Cross, [\[127\]](#) it also safeguards that portion of truth which, in our opinion, the more recent conception contains.

---

▪ [Back](#)

▪ [Index](#)

▪ [Forward](#)



## **PROPOSED DIVISION OF THE THREE STAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.**

**Above the condition of hardened sinners, above the state of those sensual souls who live in dissipation, conversion or justification sets us in the state of grace; grace which sin ought never to destroy in us, grace which, like a supernatural seed, ought continually to grow until it has reached its full development in the immediate vision of the divine essence and in a perfect love which will last for ever.**

**After conversion there ought to be a serious beginning of the purgative life, in which beginners love God by avoiding mortal sin and deliberate venial sin, through exterior and interior mortification and through prayer. But in actual fact this purgative life is found under two very different forms: in some, admittedly very few, this life is intense, generous; it is the narrow way of perfect self-denial described by the saints. In many others the purgative life appears in an attenuated form, varying from good souls who are a little weak down to those tepid and retarded souls who from time to time fall into mortal sin. The same remark will have to be made for the other two ways, each of which likewise is found in an attenuated and in an intense form.**

**The transition to the illuminative life follows upon certain sensible consolations which generally reward the courageous effort of mortification. As the soul lingers in the enjoyment of these consolations, God withdraws them, and then the soul finds itself in that more or less prolonged aridity of the senses which is known as the passive purgation of the senses. This purgation persists unceasingly in generous souls and leads them, by way of initial infused contemplation, to the full illuminative life. In other souls that are less generous, souls that shun the cross, the purgation is often interrupted; and these souls will enjoy only an attenuated form of the illuminative life, and will receive the gift of infused contemplation only at long intervals. [128] Thus the passive night of the senses is seen to be a second conversion, more or less perfect.**

**The illuminative life brings with it the obscure infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith, a contemplation which had already been initiated in the passive night of the senses. It appears under two normal forms. the one definitely contemplative, as in the many saints**

of the Carmel; the other active, as in a St. Vincent de Paul, a contemplation which, by the light of the gifts of wisdom and counsel, constantly sees in the poor and abandoned the suffering members of Christ. Sometimes this full illuminative life involves, not only the infused contemplation of mysteries, but also certain extraordinary graces (visions, revelations, interior speech), such as those described by St. Teresa in her own life.

The transition to the unitive life follows upon more abundant spiritual lights, or an easier and more fruitful apostolate, these being, as it were, the reward of the proficient's generosity. But in them the proficient is apt to take some complacency, through some remnant of spiritual pride which he still retains. Accordingly, if God wills to lead the proficient into the perfect unitive life, He causes him to pass through the night of the spirit, a painful purgation of the higher part of the soul. If this is endured supernaturally it continues almost without interruption until it leads the soul to the perfect unitive life. If, on the other hand, the proficient fails in generosity, the unitive life will be correspondingly attenuated. This painful purgation is the third conversion in the life of the servants of God.

The perfect unitive life brings with it the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and a passive union which is almost continuous. Like the preceding, this life appears under two forms: the one exclusively contemplative, as in a St. Bruno or a St. John of the Cross; the other apostolic, as in a St. Dominic, a St. Francis, a St. Thomas, or a St. Bonaventure. Sometimes the perfect unitive life involves, not only infused contemplation and almost continuous union with God, but also extraordinary graces, such as the vision of the Blessed Trinity received by St. Teresa and described by her in the VIIth Mansion. In this perfect unitive life, whether accompanied by extraordinary favours or not, there are evidently many degrees, ranging from the lowest to the highest among the saints, to the Apostles, to St. Joseph and our Lady.

This division of the three stages of the spiritual life is set out in the following table, which should be read beginning from below; the three purgations or conversions figure in the table as transitions from one stage to another.

The scheme may be compared with the doctrine of Tradition, and above all with the doctrine of St. Thomas, concerning the grace of the virtues and the gifts, and with that of St. John of the Cross on the

**passive purgations, on infused contemplation and on the perfect union, the normal prelude to the life of heaven.**

**We have seen also how it may be compared with the three ages of our bodily life, infancy, adolescence, and manhood, especially as regards the crises which mark the transition from one to another.**

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **THE TRANSITION FROM ONE STAGE TO ANOTHER IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.**

The transitions from one stage to another in the spiritual life, analogous to similar transitions in our bodily life, are marked by a crisis in the soul; and none has described these crises so well as St. John of the Cross. He shows that they correspond to the nature of the human soul, and to the nature of the divine seed, which is sanctifying grace. In the Dark Night, [129] after having spoken of the spiritual imperfections of beginners, he writes:

*'The one  
night or  
purgation  
will be  
sensual,  
wherein  
the soul is  
purged  
according  
to sense,  
which is  
subdued  
to the  
spirit....  
The night  
of sense  
is  
common,  
and  
comes to  
many;  
these are  
the  
beginners.'*

Then he adds: [130]

***'When this  
house of  
sensuality  
was now at  
rest -- that is,  
was mortified  
its passions  
being  
quenched and  
its desires put  
to rest and  
lulled to sleep  
by means of  
this blessed  
night of the  
purgation of  
sense, the  
soul went  
forth to set  
out upon the  
road and way  
of the spirit,  
which is that  
of  
progressives  
and  
proficients,  
and which by  
another name  
is called the  
way of  
illumination  
or of infused  
contemplation,  
wherewith  
God Himself  
feeds and  
refreshes the  
soul, without  
meditation, or  
the soul's  
actual help.  
Such, as we***

*have said, is  
the night and  
purgation of  
sense in the  
soul.'*

The words that we have italicized in this passage are very significant, and they reproduce the original Spanish exactly.

St. John of the Cross then proceeds [131] to treat of the imperfections which are proper to progressives or proficient: natural roughness, outward clinging of the spirit, presumption, a remnant of spiritual pride -- and he thus shows the need of the passive purgation of the spirit, another painful crisis, a third conversion which is necessary before the soul can enter fully upon the life of union which belongs to the perfect, to those who, as St. Thomas says, wish above all things to cleave to God and to enjoy Him, and yearn ardently for eternal life, to be with Christ. [132]

This doctrine of the Dark Night is found also in the Spiritual Canticle, especially in the division of the poem and in the argument which precedes the first strophe. [133]

It is sometimes objected that this sublime conception of St. John of the Cross far transcends the ordinary conception given by spiritual writers, who speak less mystically of the illuminative life of proficient and of the unitive life of the perfect. It would seem therefore that the beginners of whom St. John speaks in the Dark Night are not the beginners in the spiritual life, whom writers generally have in mind, but rather those who are already beginning the mystical states.

To this we may easily reply that the conception of St. John of the Cross corresponds admirably with the nature of the soul (sensitive and spiritual) and also with the nature of grace, and that therefore the beginners of whom he speaks are actually those who are usually so called. To prove this it is enough to note the faults which he finds in them: spiritual gluttony, a tendency to sensuality, to anger, to envy, to spiritual sloth, to that pride which causes them to

**'seek  
another  
confessor  
to tell the  
wrongs  
that they  
have done,  
so that  
their own  
confessor  
shall think  
that they  
have done  
nothing  
wrong at  
all, but  
only  
good...  
desiring  
that he  
may think  
them to be  
good.'** **[134]**

The souls thus described are certainly beginners, not at all advanced in asceticism. But it must be remembered that when St. John of the Cross speaks of the three ways, purgative, illuminative and unitive, he takes them, not in their attenuated sense, but in their normal and plenary sense. And in this he follows the tradition of the Fathers, of Clement of Alexandria, Cassian, St. Augustine, Dionysius, and the great teachers of the Middle Ages: St. Anselm, Hugh of St. Victor, St. Albert the Great, St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas.

This is particularly apparent in the traditional distinction of the degrees of humility, **[135]** which, by reason of the connection of the virtues among themselves, correspond to the degrees of charity. This traditional gradation in humility leads to a perfection

which is assuredly not inferior to that of which St. John of the Cross speaks. St. Catherine of Siena, the author of the Imitation, St. Francis of Sales and all the spiritual writers reproduce the same doctrine on

**the degrees of humility, corresponding to the degrees in the love of God. All books on ascetics likewise say that we must rejoice in tribulations and in being calumniated; but, as St. Teresa remarks, this presupposes great purgations, the purgations of which St. John of the Cross speaks, and can result only from faithful correspondence with the grace of the Holy Spirit.**

**The same is apparent in the classic distinction, preserved for us by St. Thomas, between political virtues (necessary for social life), purging virtues (purgatoriae), and the virtues of the purified soul. Describing the 'purging virtues,' [\[136\]](#) St. Thomas says:**

***'Prudence  
despises all  
the things of  
the world in  
favour of the  
contemplation  
of divine  
things; it  
directs all  
thoughts to  
God.***

***Temperance  
gives up all  
that the body  
demands, so  
far as nature  
can allow.***

***Fortitude  
prevents us  
from fearing  
death and the  
unknown  
element in  
higher  
things.***

***Justice,  
finally,  
makes us  
enter fully  
into the way  
of God.'***

**The virtues of the purified soul are more perfect still. All this, together with what the Angelic Doctor says elsewhere of the immediate union of charity with God dwelling in the soul, is certainly not less sublime than what St. John of the Cross was to write later on.**

**Finally, the division of the three stages of the spiritual life corresponds perfectly to the three movements of contemplation described by St. Thomas after Dionysius. (1) The soul contemplates the goodness of God in the mirror of material creatures, and rises to Him by recalling the parables which Jesus preached to beginners; (2) The soul contemplates the divine goodness in the mirror of intelligible truths, or the mysteries of salvation, and rises to Him by a spiral movement, from the Nativity of Christ to His Ascension; (3) The soul contemplates sovereign Goodness in itself, in the darkness of faith, circling round again and again, to return always to the same infinite truth, to understand it better and more fully to live by it.**

**It is certain that St. John of the Cross follows this traditional path which so many great teachers had trodden before him; but he describes the progress of the soul as it is found in contemplatives, and in the most perfect among them, in order to arrive, as directly as possible at God. [137] He thus shows what are the higher laws of the life of grace and of the progress of charity. But these same laws apply in an attenuated form to many other souls as well, souls which do not reach so high a state of perfection, but which nevertheless make generous progress without turning back. In all things, similarly, we can distinguish two 'tempos.' For example, the medical books describe diseases as they are in their acute stage, but they also point out that they may be found in a modified or attenuated form.**

**In the light of what has been said it will be easier for us now to describe the characteristics of the three ways, with special reference to the purgations or conversions which precede each of them -- purgations which are necessary even though the soul may not have fallen again into mortal sin, but remained always in the state of grace.**

**From this point of view we shall now study what exactly constitutes**

the spiritual state of the beginner, the proficient, and the perfect; and it will become apparent that this is not merely a conventional scheme, but a truly vital process founded on the very nature of the spiritual life, that is, on the nature of the soul and on the nature of grace, that divine seed which is the germ of eternal life: semen gloriae. [[138](#)]

---

▪ [Back](#)

▪ [Index](#)

▪ [Forward](#)



## CHAPTER 5

# CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THREE STAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

### **INTRODUCTION**

**WE** have seen the different conceptions which various writers have proposed of the three stages or periods of the spiritual life; and we have seen which of these is to be regarded as the traditional one. There is, we have said, an analogy between these three stages of the life of the soul and those of the life of the body- infancy, adolescence and manhood; and we have paid particular attention to the transition between one period and another, marked by a crisis analogous to that which, in the natural or physical order, occurs in life about the age of fourteen or fifteen and again at twenty or twenty-one. We have seen also how these different periods of the interior life have their counterpart in the life of the Apostles. We now intend, following the principles of St. Thomas and of St. John of the Cross, to describe briefly the characteristics of these three periods, that of beginners, proficients and perfect, in order to show that these are successive stages in a normal development, a development which corresponds both to the distinction between the two parts of the soul (sensitive and spiritual), and to the nature of

*'the  
grace  
of the  
virtues  
and  
the  
gifts.'*

**This grace progressively permeates the soul with the supernatural life, elevates its faculties, both higher and lower, until the depth of the soul [139] is purged of all egoism and self-love, and belongs truly, without any reservation, to God. We shall see that the whole development is logical, it is logical with the logic of life, the logic**

**which is imposed necessarily by life's end and purpose: *Justum deduxit Dominus per vias rectas:***

***'The  
Lord  
guides  
the  
just by  
straight  
ways.'***

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **BEGINNERS.**

The first conversion is the transition from the state of sin to the state of grace, whether by baptism or, in the case of those who have lost their baptismal innocence, by contrition and sacramental absolution. Theologians explain at length in the treatise on grace what precisely justification is in an adult, and how and why it requires, under the influence of grace, acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition, or detestation of sin committed. [140] This purgation by the infusion of habitual grace and the remission of sins is in a sense the type or pattern of all the subsequent purgations of the soul, all of which involve acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition. Often this first conversion comes about after a more or less painful crisis in which the soul progressively detaches itself from the spirit of the world, like the prodigal son, to come back to God. It is God always who makes the first step towards us, as the Church has taught against the Semi-pelagians; it is He who inspires the good movement in us, that initial goodwill which is the beginning of salvation. For this purpose, by His grace and by the trials to which He subjects the soul, He as it were 'tills' the ground of the soul before sowing the divine seed within it; He drives a first furrow therein, a furrow upon which He will later return, to dig more deeply still and to eradicate the weeds which remain; much as the vine-tender does with the vine when it has already grown, to free it from all that may retard its development.

After this first conversion, if the soul does not fall again into mortal sin, or at all events if it rises from sin without delay and seeks to make progress, [141] it is then in the purgative way of beginners.

The mentality or spiritual state of the beginner may be best described in function of that which is primary in the order of goodness, namely his knowledge of God and of himself, and his love of God. Admittedly there are some beginners who are specially favoured, like many great saints who have had greater grace in their early beginnings than many who are proficient; just as in the natural order there are infant prodigies. But after all, they are children, and it is possible to say in general in what the mentality of beginners consists. They begin to know themselves, to see their poverty and their neediness, and they have every day to examine their conscience to correct their faults. At the same time they begin

to know God, in the mirror of the things of sense, in the things of nature or in the parables, for example, in those of the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep or the Good Shepherd. Theirs is a direct movement up to God, not unlike that of the swallow when it rises up to the heavens uttering a cry. [\[142\]](#) In this state there is a love of God proportionate to the soul's knowledge; beginners who are truly generous love God with a holy fear of sin, which causes them to avoid mortal sin and even deliberate venial sin, by dint of mortifying the senses and concupiscence in its various forms.

When they have been engaged for a certain time in this generous effort they are usually rewarded by some sensible consolations in prayer or in the study of divine things. In this way God wins over their sensibility, for it is by their sensibility that they chiefly live; He directs it away from dangerous things towards Himself. At this stage the generous beginner already loves God

*'with  
all  
his  
heart,'*

but not yet with all his soul, with all his strength, or with all his mind. Spiritual writers often mention the milk of consolation which is given at this period. St. Paul himself says: [\[143\]](#)

*'I could  
not  
speak  
to you  
as unto  
spiritual  
but as  
unto  
carnal,  
as unto  
little  
ones in  
Christ.  
I gave  
you*

*milk to  
drink,  
not  
meat;  
for you  
were  
not  
able as  
yet.'*

**But what happens, usually, at this stage? Practically all beginners, when they receive these sensible consolations, take too much complacency in them; they regard them as though they were an end in themselves, and not merely a means to higher things. They then become an obstacle to their progress; they are an occasion of spiritual greed, of curiosity in the things of God, of an unconscious pride which leads the recipient to talk about his favours and, under a pretext of doing good to others, to pose as master in the spiritual life. Then, as St. John of the Cross says, [144] the seven capital sins make their appearance, no longer in their gross form, but in the order of spiritual things, as so many obstacles to a true and solid piety.**

**Accordingly, by a logical and vital transition, a second conversion becomes necessary, described by St. John of the Cross under the name of the passive purgation of the senses. Of this he says that it is**

*'common  
and  
comes to  
many;  
these are  
beginners,'*

**and that its purpose is to lead them into**

***'the road and  
way of the  
spirit, which  
is that of  
progressives  
and  
proficients...  
the way of  
infused  
contemplation,  
wherewith  
God Himself  
feeds and  
refreshes the  
soul.'* [145]**

**This purgation is characterized by a prolonged aridity of the senses, in which the beginner is deprived of all those sensible consolations in which he had taken too great complacency. If in the midst of this aridity there is an intense desire for God, a desire that He should reign in us, together with a fear of offending Him, then this is a second sign that it is a divine purgation. Still more so, if to this intense desire for God there is added a difficulty in praying according to the discursive method, and an inclination towards the prayer of simple regard, with love. This is the third sign that the second conversion is in progress, and that the soul is being raised up to a higher form of life, that of the illuminative way.**

**If the soul endures this purgation satisfactorily its sensibility becomes more and more subject to the spirit; the soul is cured of its spiritual greed and of the pride that had led it to pose as a master; it learns better to recognize its own neediness. Not infrequently there arise other difficulties pertaining to this process of purgation, for example, in study, in our relations with persons to whom we are too greatly attached, and from whom God now swiftly and painfully detaches our affections. At this time, too, there arise often enough grave temptations against chastity and patience, temptations which God allows so that by reaction against theta these virtues, which reside in the sensible part of our nature, may become more firmly and truly rooted in us. Illness, too, may be sent to try us during this period.**

**In this crisis God again tills the ground of the soul, digging deeper in the furrow which He has already driven at the moment of our first conversion: He is uprooting the evil weeds, or the relics of sin, 'reliquias peccati.'**

**This crisis is not without its dangers, like the crisis of the fourteenth or fifteenth year in the development of our natural life. Some prove faithless to their vocation Some souls do not pass through this crisis in such a way as to enter upon the illuminative way of proficient, and they remain in a state of tepidity; they are not in the proper sense beginners, rather they are retarded or tepid souls. In their case, the words of the Scriptures are fulfilled: 'They have not known the time of their visitation' ; they have failed to recognize the time of their second conversion. These souls, especially if they are in the religious or the priestly state, are not tending to perfection as they should, and unconsciously they are stopping others from doing so, placing serious obstacles in the way of those who really desire to make progress. Communal prayer, instead of becoming contemplative, becomes mechanical; instead of prayer supporting the soul, the soul has to support and endure prayer. Such prayer may even, unhappily, become anti-contemplative !**

**In those, on the contrary, who pass through this crisis successfully it is, according to St. John of the Cross, the beginning of infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith, accompanied by an intense desire for perfection. Then the beginner, under the illumination especially of the gift of understanding, [146] becomes a proficient and enters upon the illuminative way; he recognizes his own poverty, sees the emptiness of honours and dignities and the things of this world; he detaches himself from these entanglements. This he must do, as P. Lallemand says, 'in order to take the step' which will lead him into the illuminative way. He now begins what is like a new life; he is like the child that becomes a youth.**

**It is true that this passive purgation of the senses, even in the case of those who actually enter upon it, may be more or less manifest and more or less successfully endured. St. John of the Cross remarks this, speaking of those who are less generous at this stage:**

***'This night of aridities is not usually continuous in their senses. At times they have these aridities; at others they have them not. At times they cannot meditate; at times they can... for not all those who consciously walk in the way of the spirit are brought by God to contemplation.... And this is why He never weans the senses of such persons from the breasts of meditations and reflections, but only for short periods and at certain seasons.'* [147]**

**In other words, they have only an attenuated form of the illuminative life. St. John of the Cross explains this later by their lack of generosity:**

**'Here it behoves us to note why it is that there are so few that attain to this lofty state. It must be known that this is not because God is pleased that there should be few raised to this high spiritual state -- on the contrary, it would please Him if all were so raised....**

**When He proves them in small things and finds them weak and sees that they at once flee from labour and desire not to submit to the least discomfort or mortification....**

**He goes no farther with their purification... they would fain go farther on the road, yet cannot**

***suffer the  
smallest  
things nor  
submit  
themselves to  
them....' [148]***

**Such is the transition, more or less generously made, which leads to a higher form of life. So far it is easy to see the logical and vital sequence of the phases through which the soul must pass. This is no mechanical juxtaposition of successive states, but an organic development of life.**

---

▪ ***Back***

▪ ***Index***

▪ ***Forward***



## **PROFICIENTS OR PROGRESSIVES**

The mentality of proficientes, like that of the preceding, must be described in function of their knowledge and love of God. With their self-knowledge there is developed in them a quasi- experimental knowledge of God. They know Him, no longer merely in the mirror of the things of sense or of parables, but in the mirror of the mysteries of salvation, with which they become more and more familiar and which the Rosary, the school of contemplation, sets daily before their eyes. The greatness of God is contemplated now, no longer merely in the mirror of the starry heavens, in the sea or the mountains, no longer merely in the parables of the Good Shepherd or the Prodigal Son, but in the incomparably more perfect mirror of the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption. [149] To use the terminology of Dionysius, employed also by St. Thomas, [150] the soul rises in a spiral movement, from the mystery of the Incarnation or the Infancy of Jesus, to those of His Passion, His Resurrection, His Ascension and His Glory; and in these mysteries it contemplates the radiance of the sovereign Goodness of God, thus admirably communicating itself to us. In this contemplation, which is more or less frequent, the proficientes receive an abundance of light -- in proportion to their fidelity and generosity -- through the gift of understanding, which enables them to penetrate more and more deeply into these mysteries, and to appreciate their beauty, at once so simple and so sublime.

In the preceding period or stage God had won over their sensibility; now He thoroughly subjugates their intelligence to Himself, raising it above the excessive preoccupations and complications of merely human knowledge. He simplifies their knowledge by spiritualizing it.

Accordingly, and as a normal consequence, these proficientes being thus enlightened concerning the mysteries of the life of Christ, love God, not only by avoiding mortal sin and deliberate venial sin, but by imitating the virtues of our Lord. His humility, gentleness, patience; and by observing not only those commandments that are laid upon all, but also the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, or at any rate by keeping the spirit of these counsels, and by avoiding imperfections.

As happened in the preceding period, this generosity is rewarded,

but no longer by merely sensible consolations, but by a greater abundance of light in contemplation and in the work of the apostolate; by intense desires for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and by a greater facility in prayer. Not infrequently we find in the proficients the prayer of Quiet, in which the will is momentarily held captive by the love of God. This period is marked also by a great facility in doing works for God, such as teaching, directing, organizing, and the rest. This is to love God, not only with the whole heart, but with the whole soul, with the whole of one's activities; but not yet with the whole strength, nor with the whole mind, because God has not yet achieved complete dominion in that higher region of the soul which we call the spirit.

And what happens generally at this stage? Something similar to what happened in the case of the beginners who had been rewarded with sensible consolations. The proficient begins to take complacency -- by reason of an unconscious pride -- in this great facility in prayer, working, teaching, or preaching. He tends to forget that these are God's gifts, and he rejoices in them with a proprietary air which ill beseems one who adores in spirit and in truth. It is true that he is working for God, he is working for souls; but he has not yet sufficiently forgotten himself. An unconscious self-seeking and self-importance cause him to dissipate himself and to lose the sense of the presence of God. He thinks that his labours are being very fruitful; but it is not quite certain. He is becoming too sure of himself, he gives himself too much importance and is perhaps inclined to exaggerate his own talents, to forget his own imperfection and to be too greatly aware of the imperfections of others. Purity of intention, true recollection, perfect straightforwardness, are often lacking; there is something of a lie in his life.

*'The  
depth  
of  
the  
soul,'*

as Tauler puts it,

**'does  
not  
belong  
entirely  
to  
God.'**

**God is offered an intention which really is only half given to Him. St. John of the Cross mentions these defects of proficients as they are found in pure contemplatives, who, he says,**

**'believe in  
vain  
visions...  
and  
presume  
that God  
and the  
saints are  
speaking  
with  
them,' [151]**

**being deceived by the ruses of the evil one. Not less notable are the defects, mentioned, for example, by St. Alphonsus, which are found in apostolic men entrusted with the care of souls. These defects in proficients become manifest especially in the obstacles which they are called upon to meet, or in differences of opinion which, even at this advanced period of the spiritual life, may cause vocations to be lost. It then becomes evident that the presence of God is not sufficiently borne in mind, and that in the search for God it is the self which is really being sought. Hence the need of a third purgation; hence the need of that 'strong lye' of the purgation of the spirit, in order to cleanse the very depth of the spiritual faculties.**

**Without this third conversion there is no entrance into the life of union, which is the adult age, the manhood of the spiritual life.**

**This new crisis is described by St. John of the Cross [152] in all its**

depth and acuteness, as it occurs in the great contemplatives who, in point of fact, usually suffer not only for the sake of their own purification, but for the souls for whom they have offered themselves. The same trial occurs also in proficients of the apostolic type, generous souls who have reached a high perfection, but it is generally less obvious in them since it is mingled with the sufferings incident to their apostolic labours.

In what does this crisis essentially consist? -- In the soul being deprived, not only of sensible consolations, but of its supernatural lights on the mysteries of salvation, of its ardent desires, of that facility in action, in preaching and in teaching, in which it had felt a secret pride and complacency, and by reason of which it had been inclined to set itself above others. This is a period of extreme aridity not only as regards the senses, but as regards the spirit, in prayer and the recitation of the office. Temptations frequently occur during this stage, not precisely against chastity or patience now, but against the virtues that reside in the higher part of the soul, against faith, hope and charity towards one's neighbour, and even against charity towards God, whom the soul is tempted to regard as cruel for trying souls in such a crucible of torment. Generally during this period great difficulties occur in connection with the apostolate. detraction, failures, checks. It will often happen that the apostle is made to suffer calumnies and ingratitude, even from those souls to whom he has done much good, so that he may thus be brought to love them more exclusively in God and for God's sake. Hence this crisis, or passive purgation of the spirit, is like a mystical death; it is the death of the old man, according to the words of St. Paul:

*'Our old man is  
crucified with  
Jesus Christ,  
that the body of  
sin may be  
destroyed.'* **[153]**

It is necessary to

**'put off...  
the old  
man who  
is  
corrupted  
according  
to the  
desire of  
error, and  
be  
renewed  
in the  
spirit of  
your  
mind,  
putting  
on the  
new man  
who  
according  
to God is  
created in  
justice  
and  
holiness  
of  
truth.'** [154]

**All this is profoundly logical; it is the logical development of the supernatural life.**

**'Sometimes,'**

**says St. John of the Cross,**

***'in the  
stress of  
this  
purgation  
the soul  
feels itself  
wounded  
and hurt  
by strong  
love. It is a  
heat that is  
engendered  
in the  
spirit,  
when the  
soul,  
overcome  
with  
sufferings,  
is  
grievously  
wounded  
by the  
divine  
love. '***

**The love of God is as a fire that progressively dries up the wood, penetrates it, sets it alight and transforms it into itself. [155] The trials of this period are permitted by God in order to lead proficientes to a more lofty faith, to a firmer hope, and to a purer love; for it is absolutely necessary that the depth of their soul should belong completely to God. This is the meaning of the words of Scripture:**

**'As gold in  
the  
furnace he  
hath  
proved  
them, and  
as a victim  
of a  
holocaust  
he hath  
received  
them.'** **[156]**

**'The just  
cried and  
the Lord  
heard  
them; and  
delivered  
them out  
of all their  
troubles.  
The Lord  
is nigh  
unto them  
that are of  
a contrite  
heart....  
Many are  
the  
afflictions  
of the just;  
but out of  
them all  
will the  
Lord  
deliver  
them.'** **[157]**

**This crisis, like the preceding, is not without its dangers; it calls for**

**great courage and vigilance, for a faith sometimes reaching to heroism, a hope against all hope, transforming itself into perfect abandonment. For the third time God tills the ground of the soul, but this time much more deeply, so deeply indeed that the soul seems overwhelmed by these afflictions of the spirit, afflictions similar to those often described by the prophets, in particular by Jeremias in the third chapter of the Lamentations.**

**He who passes through this crisis, loves God, not only with all his heart and all his soul, but according to the scale of the Scriptural phrase, with all his strength; and he now prepares to love Him 'with all his mind,' to become an 'adorer in spirit and in truth,' that higher part of the soul which should control the whole of our activity being now in some sort established in God.**

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **THE PERFECT.**

**What is the spiritual state of the perfect after this purgation, which has been like a third conversion for them? They know God with a knowledge which is quasi-experimental and almost continuous; not merely during times of prayer or the divine office, but in the midst of external occupations, they have a constant sense of the presence of God. Whereas at the beginning man had been selfish, thinking constantly of himself and, unconsciously, directing all things to himself, the perfect soul thinks constantly of God, of His glory, of the salvation of souls and, as though instinctively, causes all things to converge upon that end. The reason of this is that he no longer contemplates God merely in the mirror of the things of sense, no longer merely in parables or even in the mirror of the mysteries of the life of Christ, for this cannot continue throughout the whole day, but he contemplates the divine goodness in itself, very much in the way in which we constantly see light diffused about us and illuminating all things from on high. In the terminology of Dionysius, employed also by St. Thomas, it is a movement of contemplation, no longer straight nor spiral, but circular, like the flight of the eagle which, after rising to a great height, circles round and round, and hovers to view the horizon.**

**This simple contemplation removes those imperfections that arise from natural eagerness, from unconscious self-seeking and from the lack of habitual recollection.**

**The perfect know themselves no longer merely in themselves, but in God, their source and their end, they examine themselves, pondering what is written of their existence in the book of life, and they never cease to see the infinite distance that separates them from their Creator. Hence their humility. This quasi- experimental contemplation of God proceeds from the gift of wisdom, and, by reason of its simplicity, it can be almost continuous; it can persist in the midst of intellectual work, conversation, external occupations, such continuity being impossible in the case of a knowledge of God which uses the mirror of parables or that of the mysteries of Christ.**

**Finally, whereas the egoist, thinking always of himself, wrongly loves himself in all things, the perfect, thinking nearly always of God, loves Him constantly, and loves Him, not merely by avoiding sin and**

**by imitating the virtues of our Lord, but**

**'by  
adhering to  
Him,  
enjoying  
Him,  
desiring, as  
St. Paul  
said, to be  
dissolved  
and to be  
with  
Christ.'** [158]

**It is the pure love of God and the love of souls in God; it is apostolic zeal, zealous beyond measure; but humble, patient and gentle. This is to love God, no longer merely**

**'with the  
whole  
heart,  
with the  
whole  
soul,  
with the  
whole  
strength,'**

**but continuing up the scale,**

**'with  
the  
whole  
mind.'**

**For he that is perfect is no longer merely rising gradually to this highest region in himself; he is established there; he is spiritualized**

**and supernaturalized; he has now become truly 'an adorer in spirit and in truth.' These souls preserve peace almost constantly amidst even the most distressful and unforeseen circumstances, and they communicate it to others who are troubled. This is why St. Augustine says that the beatitude of the peacemakers corresponds to the gift of wisdom, which, together with charity, holds dominion over these souls. The great model of such souls, after the holy soul of Christ, is the Blessed Virgin Mary.**

**All this, so it seems to us, shows the legitimacy of the traditional division of the three periods of the spiritual life, as understood by a St. Thomas, a St. Catherine of Siena, a Tauler, and a St. John of the Cross. The transition from one stage to another is explained by the need of a purgation which in actual fact is more or less manifest. These are not schemes artificially constructed and placed mechanically side by side; it is the description of a vital development in which each stage has its own raison d'etre. If there is sometimes a misunderstanding of the division, it is because sufficient account is not taken of the defects even of generous beginners or of proficients; it is because the necessity of a second and even a third conversion is forgotten; it is because it is sometimes overlooked that each of the purgations necessary may be more or less satisfactorily undergone, and may thus introduce more or less perfectly into the illuminative or the unitive way. [\[159\]](#)**

**Unless due attention is paid to the necessity of these purifications it is impossible to form a just idea of what the spiritual condition of proficients and perfect must be. It is of the necessity of a new conversion that St. Paul was speaking when he wrote to the Colossians: [\[160\]](#)**

**'Lie not  
one to  
another;  
stripping  
yourselves  
of the old  
man with  
his deeds,  
and  
putting on  
the new,  
who is  
renewed  
unto  
knowledge  
according  
to the  
image of  
him who  
created  
him.... But  
above all  
these  
things  
have  
charity,  
which is  
the bond  
of  
perfection.'**

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## CHAPTER 6

# THE PEACE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD: A PRELUDE TO THE LIFE OF HEAVEN

### **INTRODUCTION**

**THOSE** who follow the way of generosity, self-denial, and self-sacrifice which the saints have taught, will come at length to know and taste the joys of God's complete dominion within us.

Truly spiritual delights have their source in the cross, in the spirit of sacrifice which causes disordered inclinations to die in us and gives the first place to the love of God and the love of souls in God, which installs in the throne of our souls that charity which is the source of peace, the tranquility of order. These deep joys cannot enter into the soul until the senses and the spirit have been purged and refined by tribulations and sufferings which detach us from things created. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles:

*'Through  
many  
tribulations  
we must  
enter into  
the  
kingdom  
of  
God.'* [[161](#)]

---

▪ [Back](#)

▪ [Index](#)

▪ [Forward](#)



## **THE DIVINE AWAKENING.**

**After the dark and painful night of the spirit there is, St. John of the Cross tells us, a divine awakening:**

***'The soul  
uses a  
similitude  
of the  
breathing  
of one  
that  
awakens  
from his  
sleep,'***

**and says,**

***'How  
gentle and  
loving is...  
thine  
awakening,  
O Word  
and  
Spouse, in  
the centre  
and depth  
of my  
soul...  
wherein  
alone,  
secretly  
and in  
silence,  
Thou  
dwestest  
as its  
Lord.'***

**This divine awakening is an inspiration of the Word manifesting His dominion, His glory and His intimate sweetness. [162]**

**This inspiration shows the face of God radiant with graces and the works which He accomplishes.**

***'This is  
the great  
delight of  
this  
awakening:  
to know  
the  
creatures  
through  
God and  
not God  
through  
the  
creatures;  
to know  
the effects  
through  
the cause  
and not  
the cause  
through  
the effects  
[163] Then  
is the  
prayer of  
the  
Psalmist  
fulfilled:  
'Arise,  
Lord, why  
sleepest  
thou?'  
'Arise,  
Lord,'***

**that is to say, remarks St. John of the Cross,**

**'do thou  
awaken  
us, and  
enlighten  
us, my  
Lord,  
that we  
may  
know  
and love  
the  
blessings  
that  
Thou  
hast  
ever set  
before  
us.'** **[164]**

**The same grace is described in the 39th Psalm:**

**'With  
expectation  
I have  
waited for  
the Lord,  
and he  
was  
attentive  
to me. And  
he heard  
my  
prayers  
and  
brought  
me out of  
the pit of  
misery**

***and the  
mire of  
dregs; and  
he set my  
feet upon  
a rock and  
directed  
my steps,  
and he put  
a new  
canticle  
into my  
mouth.'***

**In this 'powerful and glorious awakening' the soul receives, as it were, an aspiration of the Holy Spirit, who fills it to overflowing with His goodness and His glory,**

***'wherein  
He has  
inspired it  
with love  
for  
Himself,  
which  
transcends  
all  
description  
and all  
sense, in  
the deep  
things of  
God.'* [165]**

**These graces are a preparation for that other awakening of the supreme moment of death, when the soul issuing forth from the body will see itself immediately as a spiritual substance, as the angels see themselves. And the last awakening of all will be in the moment of entrance into glory, when the soul, separated from the body, sees God face to face, and sees itself in God. Happy the saints**

who go straight to heaven. While those about them are lamenting their departure, they have reached the end of their journey in the clearness of the vision that gives them joy. As the Gospel says, they have entered into the joy of their Lord.

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **THE LIVING FLAME.**

**Already here on earth the divine awakening produces in the soul of the perfect a flame of love which is a participation of that living flame which is the Holy Spirit Himself.**

***'This flame the soul feels within it, not only as a fire that has consumed and transformed it in sweet love, but also as a fire which burns within it and sends out flame.... And this is the operation of the Holy Spirit in the soul that is transformed in love, that His interior actions cause it to send out flames.... And thus these acts of the soul are most precious, and even one of them is of greater merit and worth than all that the soul may***

***have done in  
this life apart  
from this  
transformation,  
however much  
this may be;...  
it is the same  
difference as  
that between  
the log of  
wood that is  
enkindled and  
the flame  
which it sends  
forth.... In this  
state,  
therefore, the  
soul can  
perform no  
acts, but it is  
the Holy Spirit  
that moves it  
to perform  
them.... Hence  
it seems to the  
soul that  
whenever  
this flame  
breaks forth...  
it is granting it  
eternal life... it  
teaches the  
soul what is  
the savour of  
eternal life... it  
causes the  
soul to  
experience the  
life of God,  
even as David  
says: My heart  
and my flesh  
have rejoiced***

*in the living  
God.'* **[166]**

**This flame wounds the soul as it is given, but the wound is tender, salutary and, instead of causing death, it increases life; for the soul is holiest that is most wounded by love. Thus St. John of the Cross says that**

*'this  
wound is  
delectable,'*

**and he adds that this**

*'came to  
pass  
when the  
seraph  
wounded  
the soul  
of St.  
Francis  
(of Assisi)  
with  
love.'* **[167]**

**When the heart is thus burning with love for its God, the soul is contemplating lamps of fire which enlighten all things from on high. These are the divine perfections: Wisdom, Goodness, Mercy, Justice, Providence, Omnipotence. They are, so to speak, the colours of the divine rainbow which, without destroying one another, are identified in the intimate life of God, in the Deity, as the seven colours of the rainbow are united in the one white light from which they proceed.**

***'All these  
are one  
lamp,  
which is  
the  
Word....  
This lamp  
is all these  
lamps,  
since it  
gives light  
and burns  
in all these  
ways.'* [168]**

**The powers of the soul are then as though melted in the splendour of the divine lamps ;[169] it is truly a prelude to eternal life.**

***' The soul  
is  
completely  
absorbed  
in these  
delicate  
flames,  
and  
wounded  
subtly in  
each of  
them, and  
in all of  
them more  
deeply  
and subtly  
wounded  
in love of  
life, so  
that it can  
see quite  
clearly  
that that***

**love  
belongs to  
life  
eternal,  
which is  
the union  
of all  
blessings.  
So that the  
soul in  
that state  
knows  
well the  
truth of  
those  
words of  
the  
Spouse in  
the Songs,  
where He  
says that  
the lamps  
of love  
were  
lamps of  
fire and  
flame.'**[\[170\]](#)

**The flame which the wise virgins must tend in their lamps is a participation of this flame.** [\[171\]](#)

**The following lines from a recent commentary on the Canticle of Canticles are worth pondering:**

***'The divine  
love is a  
consuming  
fire. It  
penetrates the  
soul to its  
depth. It  
burns and  
consumes,  
but it does not  
destroy; it  
transforms  
into itself.  
Material fire  
which burns  
wood to its  
innermost  
fibres and  
iron to its last  
molecules, is  
an image of  
that fire, but  
how feeble an  
image! At  
times, under  
the influence  
of a specially  
powerful  
grace, the  
soul that is on  
fire with  
divine love  
sends forth  
flames. They  
ascend  
straight to  
God. He is  
their principle  
as He is their  
end; and it is  
for His sake  
that the soul  
is consumed***

***with love. The  
charity that  
elevates the  
soul to God is  
only a  
created, finite,  
analogical  
participation  
of uncreated  
charity; but it  
is  
nevertheless  
a real,  
positive and  
formal  
participation  
of the  
substantial  
flame of  
Jehovah.'* [172]**

**We can understand, therefore, why St. John of the Cross often compares the soul that is penetrated by God with the union of air and fire in a flame, which is nothing else but air on fire. Doubtless there is always an infinite distance between the Creator and the creature, but God by His action enters so intimately into the purified soul that He deifies it, giving it an increase of sanctifying grace. And sanctifying grace is a real and formal participation of His inner life, His own nature, which is Deity.**

**Unitive love then becomes in the soul like a sea of fire that**

**'reaches  
to the  
farthest  
heights  
and  
depths,  
filling it  
wholly  
with  
love.'** **[173]**

**This love, hardly perceptible at first, grows more and more until the soul experiences an ever-increasing hunger for God and a burning thirst, of which the Psalmist says: 'For thee my soul hath thirsted; for thee my flesh, O, how many ways!' [174] This is truly the beatitude of those that hunger and thirst after justice; this is truly the prelude to the life of heaven, truly a beginning of eternal life,**

**'quaedam  
inchoatio  
vitae  
aeternae,'**

**as St. Thomas has said. This is the supreme, but normal, development of the life of grace on earth, the seed of glory, semen gloriae.**

**What are we to conclude from this doctrine, which may appear too sublime for us poor mortals?**

**It would certainly be too sublime for us if we had not received in baptism that life of grace which, in us too, must develop into eternal life; if we had not often received Holy Communion, the precise effect of which is to increase that grace within us. Let us remind ourselves that each of our Communions ought to be substantially more fervent than the preceding, since each of them ought to increase the love of God in us, and thus dispose us to receive our Lord with a greater fervour of will on the following day.**

**As St. John of the Cross says, [175] spiritual souls that desire this union would attain it if they did not flee from those trials which God sends them for their purification.**

**Exactly the same doctrine is found in the Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena, where we are given the explanation of those words of Christ:**

***'If any  
man  
thirst  
let him  
come  
to me  
and  
drink....  
Out of  
his  
belly  
shall  
flow  
rivers  
of  
living  
water.'***

***'You were all  
invited,  
generally  
and in  
particular,  
by My Truth  
when He  
cried in the  
Temple,  
saying: "If  
any man  
thirst, let  
him come to  
me and  
drink...." So  
that you are***

***invited to  
the fountain  
of living  
water of  
Grace, and it  
is right for  
you, with  
perseverance  
to keep by  
Him who is  
become for  
you a  
bridge, not  
being turned  
back by any  
contrary  
winds that  
may arise,  
either of  
prosperity or  
adversity,  
and to  
persevere  
until you  
find Me,  
Who give  
the water of  
Life, by  
means of  
this sweet  
Word of  
love, my  
only-  
begotten  
Son.... ' [176]***

***'But you  
must have  
thirst,  
because  
only those  
that thirst  
are invited.  
"If any man  
thirst," He  
says, "let  
him come to  
me and  
drink." He  
who has no  
thirst will  
not  
persevere,  
for either  
fatigue  
causes him  
to stop, or  
pleasure  
distracts  
him... he  
turns back  
at the  
smallest  
persecution,  
for he likes  
it not... The  
intellect  
must gaze  
into the  
ineffable  
love which I  
have shown  
thee by  
means of My  
only-  
begotten  
Son.... A  
man who is  
full of My***

**love and the  
love of his  
neighbour  
finds himself  
the  
companion  
of many real  
virtues; and  
then the  
soul is  
disposed to  
thirst: it  
thirsts for  
virtue, and  
the honour  
of My name  
and the  
salvation of  
souls, every  
other thirst  
in him is  
spent and  
dead. The  
soul then  
walks  
securely...  
being  
stripped of  
self-love; it  
is raised  
above itself  
and above  
transitory  
things.... It  
contemplates  
the deep  
love that I  
have  
manifested  
to you in  
Christ  
crucified....  
The heart,**

***emptied of  
the things  
that pass  
away,  
becomes  
filled with  
heavenly  
love which  
gives  
access to  
the waters of  
grace.  
Having  
arrived  
there, the  
soul passes  
through the  
door of  
Christ  
crucified  
and tastes  
the water of  
life, slaking  
his thirst in  
Me, who am  
the Ocean of  
Peace.'***

**What practical conclusion are we to draw from all this? We ought to say and repeat this prayer to our Blessed Lord.**

**' Lord, teach  
me to know  
the obstacles  
that,  
consciously  
or  
unconsciously,  
I am placing in  
the way of Thy  
grace in me.  
Give me the  
strength to  
put them  
aside, and if I  
am negligent  
therein,  
vouchsafe  
Thyself to  
remove them,  
howsoever I  
may suffer  
thereby. What  
wouldst Thou  
have me to do  
for Thee this  
day, my God?  
Show me what  
it is in me that  
displeaseth  
Thee. Teach  
me rightly to  
value the  
Precious  
Blood which  
Thou didst  
shed for me,  
of the  
sacramental  
or spiritual  
communion  
by which we  
are enabled to  
drink that**

***Blood from  
the wound of  
Thy most  
loving Heart.***

***' Make me, O  
Lord, to grow  
in love of  
Thee. Grant  
that our inner  
conversation  
may never  
cease; that I  
may never  
separate  
myself from  
Thee; that I  
may receive  
all that Thou  
dost deign to  
give me; and  
that I may not  
stand in the  
way of the  
grace which  
through me  
should be  
poured out  
upon other  
souls to give  
them light and  
life.'***

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## **PAX IN VERITATE.**

And thus, in the words of St. Thomas, man lives no longer for himself, but for God. [177] He may say, with St. Paul:

*'To me to  
live is  
Christ,  
and to die  
is  
gain.'* [178]

Life for me is not study, not work, or natural activity of any kind, but Christ.

Such is the way that leads to this quasi-experimental and almost continuous knowledge of the Blessed Trinity dwelling within us. And this is what makes St. Catherine say at the end of her Dialogue: [179]

*' O eternal  
Trinity, O  
Godhead, O  
divine  
Nature that  
gavest to  
the Blood  
of Thy Son  
so great a  
price, Thou,  
O eternal  
Trinity, art a  
bottomless  
sea into  
which the  
more I  
plunge the  
more I find,  
and the  
more I find*

*the more I  
seek Thee  
still. Of  
Thee it is  
never  
possible to  
say-  
Enough.  
The soul  
that is  
sated in  
Thy depths  
desires  
Thee yet  
unceasingly,  
for it  
hungers  
ever after  
Thee....  
Thou art the  
fire that  
burns ever  
and is  
never  
quenched,  
the fire that  
consumes  
in itself all  
the self-  
love of  
souls, that  
melts all ice  
and gives  
all light.  
This light is  
an ocean  
into which  
the soul  
plunges  
ever more  
deeply and  
there finds  
peace.'*

What better commentary could we find on those sublime words of St. Paul to the Philippians:[\[180\]](#)

*' the peace of  
God, which  
surpasseth all  
understanding,  
keep your  
hearts and  
minds in  
Christ Jesus.'*

This is the fruit of the third conversion, in very truth a prelude to the life of heaven.

---

▪ [Back](#)

▪ [Index](#)

▪ [Forward](#)



## **NOTE ON THE CALL TO THE INFUSED CONTEMPLATION OF THE MYSTERIES OF FAITH**

**WE** have pointed out above -- and we have developed the theme at length elsewhere [181] -- that the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost are connected with charity, [182] and that they consequently develop together with it. It is therefore impossible to have a high degree of charity without having at the same time and in a proportionate degree the gifts of understanding and wisdom, gifts which, together with faith, are the principle of the infused contemplation of revealed mysteries. In some of the saints, as in St. Augustine, this contemplation bears immediately upon the mysteries themselves; in others, as in a St. Vincent de Paul, it bears upon the practical consequences of these mysteries; for example, upon the life of the members of the mystical body of Christ. But in either case it is infused contemplation. The superhuman mode of the gifts, a mode of activity which is derived from the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost and which transcends the human mode of the virtues, [183] is at first latent, as in the ascetic life; but then it becomes manifest and frequent in the mystical life. In fact, the Holy Ghost usually inspires souls proportionately to their habitual docility or to their supernatural dispositions (i. e. according to the degree in which they possess the virtues and the gifts). This is definitely the traditional teaching.

We have also shown elsewhere, [184] that according to St. Thomas the gifts have not a human mode specifically distinct from their superhuman mode; for if this were so, the former might always be perfected without ever attaining to the latter, and would thus not be essentially subordinate to it.

Now, if the gifts have no human mode specifically distinct from their superhuman mode, it follows that -- as we have often said -- there is for all truly spiritual. souls a general remote call or vocation to the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith -- a contemplation which alone can give a profound and living understanding of the redemptive Incarnation, of the indwelling of God within us, of the sacrifice of Calvary substantially perpetuated on the altar during the Mass, and of the mystery of the Cross which should be reproduced in any true and profound Christian life. However, this 'general and remote call' does not mean the same as an 'individual and proximate

**call,' just as a ' sufficient call' does not mean the same as an 'efficacious call.'**

**We have recently been conceded, on this matter, a point which we had not asked -- and which, incidentally, we do not accept -- namely, that**

***'the  
negative  
clement of  
perfection,  
that is to  
say,  
detachment  
from  
creatures,  
must be  
the same  
for all  
souls:  
complete,  
absolute,  
universal' ;***

***'there can  
be no  
degrees in  
the  
absence of  
voluntary  
faults. The  
very  
smallest,  
like the  
very  
greatest,  
destroys  
perfection...  
a thread is  
enough to  
hold a man***

*captive.'*

**We do not think that detachment from creatures is the same for all, whether for the greatest saints or for those souls that have reached a minimal perfection. And the principal reason is, that perfection excludes not only faults that are directly voluntary, but also those that are indirectly voluntary; those which proceed from negligence and a relative tepidity, from a secret and semi-conscious egoism that does not allow the depth of the soul to belong completely to God. Likewise there is a certain co-relational between the intensive growth of charity and its extension, in consequence of which charity gradually excludes even those obstacles which we more or less unconsciously oppose to the work of grace in our souls.**

**If then, as we are granted, every soul is called by its progress in the love of God to exclude all voluntary faults, even the smallest, even those that are indirectly voluntary, it will succeed only by means of a high degree of charity. This charity will, evidently, be proportionate to the vocation of the individual soul; it will not be the same for Bernadette of Lourdes as it was for St. Paul; but it will have to be a high degree of charity. Without this the depth of the soul will not belong completely to God; without this there will still be some egoism, which will manifest itself often enough by faults that are at least indirectly voluntary.**

**If a soul is to be perfect, it must possess a degree of charity higher than that which it possessed when it was still in the ranks of beginners or of proficients; just as in the physical order the full age of manhood presupposes a physical strength superior to that of childhood or adolescence -- though it may be that accidentally a youth is found to be more vigorous than a fully grown man. [185]**

**What conclusion follows regarding the purgation of the depth of the soul, which is necessary to exclude all egoism and secret pride? A recent study on this question contains the following:**

**' I admit that  
the passive  
purgations  
(which are of  
the mystical  
order) are  
necessary in  
order to  
arrive at the  
purity  
required for  
mystical  
union; and it  
is in this  
sense that St.  
John of the  
Cross  
speaks.... But  
I deny that  
the passive  
purgations  
are  
necessary for  
the purity  
required in  
the union of  
love by  
conformity of  
wills. -- The  
reason of  
this  
difference is  
a profound  
one. For the  
mystical  
union, which  
involves  
infused  
contemplation  
and love,  
active  
purgation is  
not sufficient,**

***precisely  
because the  
purity of the  
will is not  
sufficient. It  
is necessary  
that there  
should be  
added to it a  
sort of  
psychological  
purity of the  
substance  
and the  
powers of the  
soul, which  
consists in  
rendering  
them adapted  
to the mode  
of being of  
the divine  
infusion.'***

**The important question, then, is: Are the passive purgations, according to St. John of the Cross, not necessary for the profound purity of the will? Are they not necessary in order to exclude that more or less conscious egoism, and those indirectly voluntary faults which are incompatible with the full perfection of charity, incompatible also with the full perfection of the infused virtues and gifts, which develop together with charity like so many functions of the same spiritual organism?**

**The answer to this extremely important question, for our part, is not for a moment in doubt.**

**It suffices to read in the Dark Night [186] the description of those faults of beginners which render the purgation of the senses necessary. Here are, not faults opposed to the sort of psychological purity of which our author speaks, but faults which are contrary to the moral purity of the sensibility and of the will. They are, in fact, as**

**St. John of the Cross tells us, the seven capital sins translated into the order of the spiritual life, such as spiritual greed, spiritual sloth, spiritual pride.**

**The same remark may be made of the faults [187] of proficient which render necessary the passive purgation of the spirit; they are**

*'stains of  
the old  
man  
which  
still  
remain in  
the  
spirit,  
like a  
rust  
which  
will  
disappear  
only  
under  
the  
action of  
an  
intense  
fire.'*

**These proficient, says St. John of the Cross, are really subject to natural affections; they have moments of roughness, of impatience; there is still in them a secret spiritual pride, and an egoism which causes some of them to make use of spiritual goods in a manner not sufficiently detached, and so they are led into the path of illusions. In a word, the depth of the soul is lacking, not only in psychological purity, but in the moral purity that is required. Tauler has spoken in the same sense, solicitous especially to purify the depth of the soul of all self-love, of all more or less conscious egoism. Hence it is our opinion that the passive purgations are necessary for this profound moral purity. But these purgations are of the mystical order. They do not always appear under so definitely contemplative a form as that described by St. John of the Cross; but in the lives of the saints,**

even of the most active among them, like a Vincent de Paul, the chapters which treat of their interior sufferings prove that they all have a common basis, which none has described better than St. John of the Cross.

A final and very important concession has been made to us in connection with the famous passage of the Living Flame, ST. II, 23:

*' It behoves  
us to note  
why it is that  
there are so  
few that  
attain to this  
lofty state. It  
must be  
known that  
this is not  
because God  
is pleased  
that there  
should be  
few raised to  
this high  
spiritual  
state-on the  
contrary it  
would please  
Him if all  
were so  
raised -- but  
rather  
because He  
finds few  
vessels in  
whom He can  
perform so  
high and  
lofty a work.  
For, when He  
proves them  
in small  
things and*

***finds them  
weak and  
sees that  
they at once  
flee from  
labour, and  
desire not to  
submit to the  
least  
discomfort or  
mollification...  
He finds that  
they are not  
strong  
enough to  
bear the  
favour which  
He was  
granting  
them when  
He began to  
purge them,  
and goes no  
farther with  
their  
purification....'***

**With regard to this it has recently been conceded.**

***'We admit  
that St.  
John of the  
Cross is  
treating  
here of the  
spiritual  
marriage,  
and that he  
states that  
the will of  
God is that***

***all souls  
should  
attain to  
this state.***

***But we  
deny that  
this implies  
a universal  
call to the  
mystical  
life.... The  
confusion  
arises, in  
our  
opinion,  
from a  
failure to  
distinguish  
two  
elements  
included by  
St. John of  
the Cross  
in the two  
degrees of  
union  
called  
spiritual  
betrothal  
and  
marriage.***

***One of  
these two  
elements is  
essential  
and  
permanent;  
the other  
accidental  
and  
transitory.***

***The  
essential***

***element is  
the union  
of wills  
between  
God and  
the soul, a  
union  
which  
results  
from the  
absence of  
voluntary  
faults and  
from the  
perfection  
of charity;  
the  
accidental  
element  
consists in  
the actual  
union of  
the powers,  
a mystical  
union in  
the proper  
sense of  
the word, a  
union  
which  
cannot be  
continuous.'***

**In this supposition, it is possible that the transforming union, or spiritual marriage, should exist in a person without that person ever having had a mystical union, the mystical union being merely an accidental element, like the interior words or the intellectual vision of the Blessed Trinity mentioned by St. Teresa. [188] To us, on the contrary, it appears certain that, according to St. John of the Cross, the transforming union cannot exist without there having been at least from time to time a very lofty contemplation of the divine**

perfections, an infused contemplation [[189](#)] proceeding from the gifts, which have now reached a degree proportionate to that of perfect charity. It is, he says,

*'even as  
the fire  
that  
penetrates  
the log of  
wood...  
and  
having  
attacked  
and  
wounded  
it with its  
flame,  
prepares it  
to such a  
degree  
that it can  
enter it  
and  
transform  
it into  
itself.'* [[190](#)]

Moreover, to our mind it is absolutely certain-that the profound union of wills between God and the soul, which is recognized as being the essential element of the transforming union, presupposes the moral purgation of the depth of the soul, a purgation from that more or less conscious self-love or egoism which is the source at least of many indirectly voluntary faults; and this moral purification of the depth of the soul, according to St. John of the Cross, requires the passive purgations which eliminate the faults of beginners and proficient.

We therefore maintain what we have said, in common with numerous theologians, Dominican and Carmelite, about the doctrine of St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross concerning the gifts of the Holy Ghost. To conclude, we recall especially these two important texts:

***'The night of  
sense is  
common and  
comes to many;  
these are the  
beginners.'* [191]**

**Being passive, this purification, or night, is of the mystical order.**

***'The way of  
progressives  
or  
proficients...  
is called the  
way of  
illumination  
or of infused  
contemplation,  
wherewith  
God Himself  
feeds and  
refreshes the  
soul.'* [192]**

**Hence infused contemplation is in the normal way of sanctity, even before the unitive way is reached; and therefore it is inconceivable that a soul should be in the state of spiritual marriage or the transforming union without ever having had that infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith which is the eminent exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, developing in us side by side with charity.**

**We cannot admit that a mind of the calibre of St. John of the Cross can have meant only something accidental when he wrote the passage which we have just quoted, and which we quote once more in conclusion:**

**'The way of  
progressives  
or of  
proficients...  
is called the  
way of  
illumination  
or of infused  
contemplation,  
wherewith  
God Himself  
feeds and  
refreshes the  
soul.'**

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)

▪ [\*Forward\*](#)



## ENDNOTES

### ENDNOTES

**[1]** St. Thomas often quotes this Augustinian thought: cf. I-IIae, Q. xxviii, art. 4, ad 2; III, Q. xxiii, art. 1, ad 3

**[2]** Luther went so far as to say: 'Pecca fortiter et crede firmitus: sin mightily and believe more mightily still; you will be saved.' Not that Luther intended thereby to exhort men to sin; it was merely an emphatic way of saying that good works are useless for salvation -- that faith in Christ alone suffices. He says, truly enough (Works, Weimar edition, XII, 559 (1523) ), that if you believe, good works will follow necessarily from your faith. 'But as Maritain justly observes (Notes sur Luther; appendix to the second edition of Trois Reformateurs),' in his thought these good works follow from salutary faith as a sort of epiphenomenon. 'Moreover, the charity which will follow this faith is the love of our neighbour rather than the love of God. And thus the notion of charity is degraded, emptied gradually of its supernatural and God-ward content and made equivalent to works of mercy. In any case, it remains true that for Luther a man is justified simply by faith in Christ, even though the sin is not blotted out by the infusion of charity, or the supernatural love of God.

**[3]** J. Maritain explains very clearly how Naturalism arises necessarily from the principles of Protestantism: 'According to the Lutheran theology, it is we ourselves, and only we ourselves, who lay hold of the mantle of Christ so that with it we may "cover all our shame.'" It is we who exercise this' ability to jump from our own sin on to the justice of Christ, thus becoming as sure of possessing the holiness of Christ as we are of possessing our own bodies. 'The Lutheran theory of justification by faith may be called a Pelagianism born of despair. In ultimate analysis it is man who is left to work out his own redemption by stimulating himself to a despairing confidence in Christ. Human nature has then only to cast aside, as a useless theological accessory, the mantle of a grace which means nothing to him, and to transfer its faith-confidence from Christ to itself -- and there you have that admirable emancipated brute, whose unflinching and continuous progress is an object of wonder to the

**universe. In Luther and his doctrine we witness -- on the spiritual and religious plane -- the advent of the Ego.**

**'We say that it is so in fact; it is the inevitable outcome of Luther's theology. But this does not prevent the same theology in theory from committing the contrary excess.... And so Luther tells us that salvation and faith are to such an extent the work of God and of Christ that these alone are active in the business of our redemption, without any co-operation on our part.... Luther's theology was to oscillate between these two solutions: in theory it is the first, apparently, that must prevail: Christ alone, without our co-operation, is the author of our salvation. But since it is psychologically impossible to suppress human activity, the second has inevitably prevailed in fact.' It is a matter of history that liberal Protestantism has issued in Naturalism.**

**[4] Cf. St. Thomas, I-IIae, Q. cix, art. 3: 'Homo in statu naturae integrae dilectionem suiipsius referebat ad amorem Dei sicut ad finem, et similiter dilectionem aliarum rerum, et ita Deum diligebat plus quam seipsum et super omnia. Sed in statu naturae corruptae homo ab hoc deficit secundum appetitum voluntatis rationalis, quae propter corruptionem naturae sequitur bonum privatum, nisi sanetur per gratiam Dei.' Ibid., art. 4: 'In statu naturae corruptae, non potest homo implere omnia mandata divina sine gratia sanante.'**

**[5] Ps. 1, 3-14.**

**[6] Isa. xliiii, 25**

**[7] i, 7**

**[8] vi, 10.**

**[9] xxxvi, 25**

**[10] i, 16**

**[11] i, 5**

**[12] v, 5**

**[13]** iv, 7

**[14]** i, 11-13

**[15]** John iii, 5

**[16]** iii, 9.

**[17]** i, 8

**[18]** 2 Pet. i, 4

**[19]** i, 17

**[20]** I John iii, 2

**[21]** Matt. v, 48

**[22]** John iii, 36; v, 24, 39; vi, 40, 47, 55

**[23]** vi, 55.

**[24]** viii, 51-58

**[25]** John iv, 10-14

**[26]** John vii, 37

**[27]** xiv, 23

**[28]** I John iv, 16.

**[29]** Luke xvii, 20

**[30]** 1 John iii, 14

**[31]** V, 13

**[32]** John xvii, 3.

**[33]** II-IIae, Q. xxiv, art. 3; I-IIae, Q. Ixix, art. 2; De Ver., Q. xiv, art. 2.

**[34]** Meditations sur l'Evangile, II, 37th day; in Joan., xvii, 3.

**[35]** De civ. Dei, lib. IV, c. 9

**[36]** In Joan., tract. 92, c. xiv, 12

**[37]** Q. cxiii, art. 9.

**[38]** In reality there is a greater distance between any created nature, even the angelic nature, and the inner life of God, of which charity is a participation, than there is between bodies and created spirits. All creatures, even the highest, are at an infinite distance from God, and in this sense are equally below Him

**[39]** Pensees (ed. Havet), p. 269

**[40]** John xiv, 23

**[41]** John iv, 16

**[42]** cf I-IIae, Q. lxxxvii, art. 3

**[43]** I Cor. xiii, 8, 13

**[44]** I-IIae, Q. lxvi, art. 2.

**[45]** We have treated it fully elsewhere: Perfection chretienne et contemplation, t. 11, pp. 430-462; see also note below, p. 105.

**[46]** Rom. viii, 29

**[47]** I Cor. ii, 9.

**[48]** Heb. i, 3.

**[49]** 2 Cor. iv, 10

**[50]** Second Sermon for Lent

**[51]** Dark Night, Book 1, ch. 9 and ch. 10

**[52]** Doctrine Spirituelle, Pr. II, sect. ii, ch. 6, art. 2

**[53]** Sermon for Monday in Passion Week

**[54]** Dark Night, Book II, ch. 1-13

**[55]** II-IIae Q. xxiv, art. 3, ad 2; I-IIae, Q. Ixix, art. 2

**[56]** 2 John vi, 47-55.

**[57]** La Doctrine Spirituelle, Pr. II, sect. ii, ch. 6, art. 2.

**[58]** This is not an instance of a private revelation relating to some future event or some new truth, it is a more profound contemplation of a truth already revealed in the Gospel -- a fulfilment of the promise of Christ that the Holy Spirit would call to mind whatsoever He had told to His Apostles (John xiv, 26).

**[59]** Luke xxii, 31-34

**[60]** xxii, 60-62

**[61]** III, Q. lxxxix, art. 2.

**[62]** The teaching of St. Thomas is quite clear: 'Contingit intensionem motus poenitentis quandoque proportionatum esse majori gratiae, quam fuerit illa a qua ceciderat per peccatum, quandoque aequali, quandoque vero minori. Et ideo poenitens quandoque resurgit in majori gratia, quam prius habuerat, quandoque autem in aequali, quandoque etiam in minori' (III, Q. lxxxix, art. 2). Certain modern theologians think that it is possible to recover a high degree of grace with an attrition which is barely sufficient. St. Thomas and the ancient theologians do not admit this. And in fact we find in human relationships that, after considerable offence has been given,

**friendship will revive in the same degree as it existed before only if there is, not merely regret, but regret proportionate to the offence committed and to the greatness of the previous friendship**

**[63] Ch. 63**

**[64] John xxi, 15 seq**

**[65] Ch. 60**

**[66] According to St. Thomas this mixture is impossible in the angels, because they cannot sin venially. They are either very holy or very perverse. Either they love God perfectly, or else they turn away from Him completely by mortal sin. This is due to the vigour of their intelligence, which enters completely and definitively into the way it has taken (I-IIae, Q. lxxxix, art. 4).**

**[67] This is the quasi-experimental knowledge of the distinction between nature and grace, quite different from that which we have through speculative theology. It is not difficult to understand in abstract the difference between the two orders; but to see it in concrete, and to perceive it almost continuously, supposes a spirit of faith which, in this degree, is found hardly in any but the Saints**

**[68] Dialogue, ch. 63.**

**[69] Thus our Lord deprived His disciples of His visible presence, saying to them: 'It is expedient to you that I go.' It was in fact expedient that they should be for some time deprived of the sight of His humanity, so that they might be elevated to a higher spiritual life, a life more independent of the senses, a life which would later, when made more vigorous, find expression in the sacrifice of an heroic martyrdom.**

**[70] Dark Night, Book I, ch. 9**

**[71] Ibid., ch. 14**

**[72] Luke xxii, 61**

**[73]** It is obvious that when the Saint speaks of 'self-hatred' she has in mind the aversion which we must have for that self-love, or inordinate love of self, which is the source of all sin. Self-love, she tells us in chapter 122 of the Dialogue, is the cause of injustice towards God, towards one's neighbour, and towards oneself, it destroys in the soul both the desire for the salvation of souls and the hunger for virtue; it prevents the soul from reacting as it should against the most crying injustices, because of the inordinate fear of offending creatures that self-love entails. 'Self-love,' she says 'has poisoned the whole world and the mystical body of the holy Church, and through self-love the garden of the Spouse has run to seed and given birth to putrid flowers.'

'Thou knowest,' God says to the Saint (ch. 51), 'that every evil is founded in self-love, and that self-love is a cloud that takes away the light of reason, which reason holds in itself the light of faith, and one is not lost without the other.' We find the same doctrine in St. Thomas: 'Inordinate love of self is the source of all sin and darkens the judgement - for when will and sensibility are ill-disposed (that is, when they tend to pride and sensuality) everything that is in conformity with these inclinations appears to be good; (I-IIae, Q. lxxvii, art. 4).

**[74]** Ch. 75

**[75]** Luke x, 27.

**[76]** Ch. 60

**[77]** There is nothing easier than to be convinced in theory that Providence ordains all things without exception unto good. But it is rare to find that truth realized in practice when some unforeseen disaster enters like a cataclysm into our lives. There are few who are able to see in such an event one of God's greatest graces, the grace of their second or third conversion. The venerable Boudon, a priest held in high repute by his own bishop and by several bishops in France, one day received, in consequence of a calumny, a letter from his bishop suspending him and forbidding him to say Mass or to hear confessions. He straightway threw himself on his knees before his crucifix, thanking our Lord for a grace of which he felt himself to be unworthy. He had achieved that concrete and living conviction, of which St. Catherine speaks here, that in the divine government

**everything, absolutely everything, is ordained to the manifestation of His goodness.**

**[78]** Ch. 166

**[79]** Luke xxiv, 25-27

**[80]** Thus St. Thomas at the end of his life was raised up to a supernatural contemplation of the mysteries of the faith, such that he could not dictate the end of the Summa Theologica, the last part of the treatise on Penance. He could no longer compose articles with a status quaestionis, beginning with three difficulties, followed by the body of the article and by the answers to the objections. The higher unity which he had now attained made him view all theological principles more simply and more radiantly, and he could no longer descend to the complexity of a purely didactic exposition.

**[81]** Ch xxvi, 74

**[82]** Luke xxiv, 11

**[83]** In Joan., tract. 25, n. 3; Serm. 265, 2-4.

**[84]** Acts ii, 1-4.

**[85]** It is in the light of what is said here of the grace that purifies and transforms that we should read the articles of St. Thomas on the gifts of understanding and wisdom, and on the purification which they bring about within us; likewise the Dark Night of St. John of the Cross

**[86]** Acts ii, 17, 21.

**[87]** Cf. St. Thomas, I, Q. xliii, art. 6, ad I.

**[88]** John xiv, 26

**[89]** Acts ii, 8-12

**[90]** Matt. xxviii, 19

**[91]** II-IIae, Q. clxxxviii, art. 6: 'Ex plenitudine contemplationis derivatur doctrina et praedicatio.

**[92]** Ps. cxviii, 140.

**[93]** Acts i, 6

**[94]** It is to be noted in this and similar texts that the immutable or plan of God is mentioned before His foreknowledge of which it is the basis. God foresaw from all eternity the mystery of the Redemption, because from all eternity He had decreed to bring it about.

**[95]** Acts ii, 22-36

**[96]** ii, 41

**[97]** Acts iii, 15; iv, 11-12

**[98]** Matt. xvi, 22--23

**[99]** Acts vii, 1-53

**[100]** Acts i, 8

**[101]** Acts v, 41

**[102]** ii, 42--47; iv, 32--37; v, 1-11

**[103]** Ps. 1, 12.

**[104]** Dark Night, Book II, ch. vi.

**[105]** Dark Night, Book II, ch. iii.

**[106]** *ibid.*, ch. iv

**[107]** II-IIae, Q. i, art. 5.

**[108]** John xvi, 7

**[109]** John viii, 12

**[110]** I Cor. ii, 10: 'Spiritus enim omnia scrutatur, etiam profunda Dei.... Nos autem accepimus.... Spiritum qui ex Deo est, ut sciamus quae a Deo donata sunt nobis.

**[111]** Col. ii, 3

**[112]** Ps. Xii, 4.

**[113]** xvii, 29.

**[114]** 1, 12

**[115]** Luke xii, 49.

**[116]** Dark Night, Book II, ch. v.

**[117]** John vii, 37

**[118]** iv, 10, 14.

**[119]** Cf. Philip of the Trinity: *Summa theologiae mysticae* (ed. 1874, p. 17)

**[120]** Book I, ch. viii and ch xiv

**[121]** Dark Night Book II, ch. ii and ch. xi

**[122]** Similarly Tr. I, ch. 1, n. 10.

**[123]** Cf. St. Thomas, III, Q. Ixii, art. 2: 'Utrum gratia sacramentalis addat aliquid super gratiam vir[utum et donorum] ; where we are reminded that habitual or sanctifying grace perfects the essence of the soul, and that from grace there proceed into the faculties the infused virtues (moral and theological) and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are to the soul like the sails of a ship intended to

**receive inspirations from heaven**

**[124]** I-IIae, Q. Ixviii, art. 5: 'Sicut virtutes morales connectuntur sibi invicem in prudentia, ita dona Spiritus Sancti connectuntur sibi invicem in caritate; ita scilicet quod qui caritatem habet, omnia dona Spiritus Sancti habet, quorum nullum sine caritate haberi potest

**[125]** I-IIae, Q. Ixviii, art. 2, where these passages of Scripture are cited: 'God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom' (Wisd. vii, 28), and 'Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God' (Rom. viii, 14).

**[126]** Life, c. xxxi

**[127]** Dark Night, Book I, c. xiv.

**[128]** See Dark Night, Book I, c. ix and c. xiv; Living Flame, 2nd stanza, v. 5

**[129]** Book I, ch. viii

**[130]** Ibid. ch. xiv

**[131]** Dark Night, Book II, ch. ii

**[132]** II-IIae, Q. xxiv, art. 9

**[133]** See also str. 4, str. 6, str. 22, v. I.

**[134]** Dark Night, Book I, ch. ii.

**[135]** See above, p. 63

**[136]** I-IIae, Q. Ixi, art. 5

**[137]** Cf. P. Louis de la Trinite, O. C. D., *Le Docteur mystique*; Desclee de Brouwer, 1929, p. 55.

**[138]** An interesting point in this connection is that which Pope Pius

**X had in mind when, in prescribing an earlier age for First Communion, he said: 'There will be saints among the children.'** These words seem to have found their fulfilment in the very special graces which have been granted to several children, taken very early into heaven, who are to-day proving to be the source of so many vocations to the priestly and the religious life: such as little Nelly, Anne de Guigne Guy de Fontgalland, Marie-Gabrielle, T. Guglielmina and several others in France and Belgium -- souls that remind us of the Blessed Imelda, who died of love while making her thanksgiving after her First Communion. Our Lord, who said: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me,' is able evidently to endow these souls with great sanctity at a very early age; He sows the divine seed in greater or less abundance in souls, according to His good pleasure. (See Collection Parvuli, Lethielleux, Paris. )

**[139]** This expression, a favourite with Tauler, has the same meaning as 'the summit of the soul' the metaphor changes according as the things of sense are considered as exterior or as inferior

**[140]** Cf. Council of Trent (Denzinger, 798) and St. Thomas, I-IIae, Q. cxiii art. 1-8 inclusive

**[141]** St. Thomas (III, Q. lxxxix, art. 5, ad 3) explains that recovery is proportionate to the fervour of contrition. That is to say, if a person had two talents before committing a mortal sin, and if his contrition has been only barely sufficient and imperfect in relation to his former goodness, he will perhaps recover only one talent (resurgit in minori caritate). To recover the same degree of grace and charity which he had lost he will need a more fervent contrition, proportionate to the sin and to his former sanctity.

**[142]** The beginner sometimes considers the goodness of God also in the mysteries of salvation; but he is not yet familiar with these and it is not an exercise which is proper to his condition

**[143]** I Cor. iii, 2

**[144]** Dark Night, Book I, ch. i-vii

**[145]** Dark Night, Book I, ch. viii; Book I, ch. xiv

**[146]** Dark Night, Book I, ch. xiv.

**[147]** Dark Night, Book I, ch. ix

**[148]** Living Flame, stanza II, 23.

**[149]** The proficient also contemplates the goodness of God in the things of nature and in the parables of the Gospel; but this is not the exercise proper to his condition, now that he has become familiar with the mysteries of salvation. But he has not yet attained, unless it be rarely and transitorily, to that circular movement whereby the perfect contemplate the divine goodness in itself.

**[150]** II-IIae, Q. clxxx, art. 6.

**[151]** Dark Night, Book II, ch. ii.

**[152]** Dark Night, Book II, ch. 3 seq.

**[153]** Rom. vi, 6

**[154]** Eph. iv, 22.

**[155]** The progress in the knowledge and love of God which characterizes this purgation is precisely what differentiates it from certain sufferings which bear some resemblance to it, such as those of neurasthenia. These neurasthenic sufferings may have of themselves no purging character, but they too may be endured with resignation and for the love of God. Similarly the sufferings which may be the effect of our own lack of virtue, the effect of an undisciplined and exaggerated sensibility, have no purging quality of themselves, although they similarly may be accepted as a salutary humiliation in consequence of our faults, and in reparation for them.

**[156]** Wisd. iii, 6

**[157]** Ps. xxxiii, 18-20

**[158]** II-IIae, Q. xxiv, art. 9. Hence I would reply to M. H. Bremond that this adherence to God, a direct act, which is at the source of the

**discursive and reflex acts of the perfect, contains the solution of the problem of the pure love of God and its reconciliation with a legitimate love of self; for this is truly to love oneself in God, and to love Him more than oneself.**

**[159]** The Carmelite, Philip of the Holy Trinity, in the prologue of his *Summa theologiae mysticae* (ed. 1874, p. 17), also regards the passive purgation of the senses as a transition between the purgative and the illuminative way, and the passive purgation of the spirit as a disposition to the way of union. In this, as in many other things, Th. Vallgornera, O. P., has followed him, and even copied literally from his work. Anthony of the Holy Spirit, O. C. D., has done likewise, summarizing him in his *Directorium mysticum*.

**[160]** iii, 9-14.

**[161]** xiv 21

**[162]** Living Flame. st. IV. 3. 4

**[163]** Living Flame, st. IV, 5

**[164]** Ibid., 9

**[165]** Ibid., 17

**[166]** Living Flame, st. I, 20-22; cf. Ps. lxxxiii, 3

**[167]** Ibid., II, 12

**[168]** Living Flame, st., III, 3

**[169]** Ibid. 9

**[170]** Ibid., 5

**[171]** Matt. xxv, 4-7.

**[172]** *Virgo Fidelis*, by Robert de Langeac (Lethielleux, 1931), p. 279

**[173]** Living Flame, st. II, 9

**[174]** Ps. Ixii, 2; Dark Night, Book II, ch. xi

**[175]** Living Flame, st. II, 23

**[176]** Ch. 53.

**[177]** II-IIae, Q. xvii, art 6, ad 3

**[178]** Phil. i, 21

**[179]** Ch. 167

**[180]** iv, 7

**[181]** Perfection chretienne et contemplation, t. I, pp. 338-417; t. II, pp.- 430-477

**[182]** Cf. St. Thomas, I-IIae, Q. Ixviii, art. 5

**[183]** I-IIae, Q. Ixviii, art. 1; see also Perfection chretienne... t. I, pp. 355-385; t. II, pp. (52)-(64).

**[184]** Vie Spirituelle, November, 1932 (Supplement, pp. (65)-(83): Les dons ont-ils un mode humain?

**[185]** Non sunt iudicanda ea qua sunt per se, per ea quae sunt per accidens.

**[186]** Book I, ch. ii-ix

**[187]** Dark Night, Book II, ch. i and ch. ii.

**[188]** VIIIth Mansion, ch. i and ch. ii

**[189]** According to St. John of the Cross (Dark Night, Book I, ch. xiv) 'the way of illumination' is a 'way of infused contemplation, wherewith God Himself feeds and refreshes the soul.' A fortiori, Man

## in the way of union

**[190]** Living Flame, st. 1, 16

**[191]** Dark Night, Book I, ch. viii

**[192]** Dark Night, Book I, ch. xiv.

---

▪ [\*Back\*](#)

▪ [\*Index\*](#)