

INFUSED CONTEMPLATION AS THE NORMAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIFE OF GRACE AND THE VIRTUES

Earlier writers, including St. Thomas Aquinas, did not distinguish between acquired and infused contemplation. In the *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 180, a. 3, ad 1, contemplation is called a simple intuition of truth. While it is essentially intellectual, yet it begins in the affective part of the soul, since one is moved by charity to the contemplation of God. Then, since the end corresponds with the beginning, the term and end of the contemplative life is found in the affections, since a person delights in the vision of something that is loved and this delight in turn excites him to more love (*ibid.*, a. 7, ad 1).

Today contemplation of this supernatural type is usually divided into three kinds: acquired, infused, and mixed.

Acquired contemplation is a loving, simple attentiveness of the mind to God and divine things that results from our own activity under the grace of God. It is essentially active and it characterizes the ascetical life.

Infused contemplation is more passive than active: it results from divine activity rather than from our own. In it God takes hold of a person by means of a special operating grace and causes him to receive lights and affections which, however, he freely accepts. Infused contemplation is a chief characteristic of the mystical life.

Mixed contemplation is an alternation of our own activity in producing contemplative acts under grace with the act or acts of contemplation caused by the special action of God through operating grace. Since the active phase prepares for the passive phase, this kind of contemplation is called mixed.

Because of the obscurity and consequent difficulty of the matter at issue, it is to be expected that many questions are raised and controversies aroused especially in the field of infused contemplation. Two main questions concerning this highest form of contemplation on earth are these:

1. Does it entirely dispense with concepts or not? This is a very interesting question from the standpoint of philosophy and theology, but it is not on our agenda.

2. Are all who are in the state of grace called to infused contemplation or not? This is our question.

The call to infused contemplation can be understood in two ways. First, it can refer to the *proximate* and *individual* call. Since contemplation is a free gift of God, He may grant it to whom He wills, when He wills, and in the way He wills. Usually, however, He grants it to souls that are well prepared to receive it. No controversy exists over this point. All seem to agree that the proximate and individual call is not universal.

Second, the call to infused contemplation can refer to the *remotely sufficient* and *general* call. The precise question at issue now is whether all souls in the state of grace are remotely yet sufficiently called to the mystical life consisting mainly in infused contemplation. Two different answers are given to this question.

1. *The theory of a universal call.* That such a call, remote and sufficient, is given to all in the state of grace is maintained by many spiritual writers. Adolphe Tanquerey, S.S., in his *The Spiritual Life*, second and revised edition, 1930, English translation p. 731, lists the following authors as supporting this view: among Dominicans, Garrigou-Lagrange, Arintero, Joret, Janvier; among Benedictines, Louismet, Huyghen; among Franciscans, Ludovic de Besse; among Carmelites, Theodore of St. Joseph; among Jesuits, L. Peters; among Eudists, Lamballe; among seculars, Saudreau. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, 1942, English translation, p. 348, undertakes to prove that "all souls in the state of grace are in a general and remote manner called to the mystical life, as they are to that of heaven. . . ."

2. *The theory of a special and restricted call.* Others on the contrary think that infused contemplation is a free gift of God which is not given to all and which moreover is not necessary for the attainment of sanctity (Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, 732). Tanquerey cites in favor of this view: among Jesuits, Billot, Maumigny, Poulain, Bainvel, J. de Guibert; among Discalced Carmelites, Father Mary Joseph of the Sacred Heart; among seculars, Msgr. Lejeune, Msgr. Farges.

In this view not all who are in the state of grace are called even remotely though sufficiently to the mystical life. A call of this kind is restricted to those whom God has prepared to receive it.

3. Father Tanqueray himself offers a mediating view between these extreme positions. His solution lies in these two assertions: (1) Infused contemplation considered *in itself* is a normal development of the Christian life. (2) In fact, however, not all souls in the state of grace seem to be called even in a remote way to such contemplation, especially that which results in a transforming union with God (*cf. op. cit.*, 733-737).

With this introduction giving the state of the question at issue, we are now ready to listen to the views of four experts in this field.

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I

I do not think that I could offer any useful contribution to this discussion—at any rate in eight minutes—by remaining within the somewhat technical framework in which the matter has been rightly presented. Soon we might find ourselves involved in weighing the relative merits of God's pre-determining decrees and the *scientia media*, elucidating the distinctions between efficacious and sufficient grace, while reminding ourselves that we are not allowed to pray: "*A gratia sufficiente libera nos, Domine*". Rather would I raise other and perhaps more practical aspects of the matter. Certain obvious principles may be recalled:

The end of man is the vision of God—or, perhaps more accurately, to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever. Just as grace is the seed of glory, so the supernatural equipment of the soul (the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit) prepares us now for a life of eternal contemplation. But what I would suggest calls for some re-thinking, is the inferences we draw from these principles. How much, for instance, are dedicated souls—or, for that matter, the ordinary Catholic faithful—to have the desirability of contemplative prayer urged upon them? Contemplation, we are told, is better than action—from which it is fatally easy to draw the inference that those who

strive after contemplation are better than those engaged in action; whereas they may in fact be a great deal worse.

Let me suggest that the conventional antithesis between contemplation and action owes more to Greek philosophy than it does to the Gospel. The famous story of Martha and Mary in St. Luke—a very homely attractive story in its original context—was allegorized by the Greek Fathers, and has come down to us through St. Augustine and St. Thomas, in that allegorized form which few of us trouble to go behind to discover its literal meaning.

There is an over-simplified presentation of the desirability of contemplation which can lead us astray. As soon as a man thinks of himself as a contemplative far better employed than people in the workaday world he is on the wrong track. Whenever, seeking for the delights of contemplation, we take up some ascetic practice and observe our own achievement, we are in the company of the Pharisees. How is it certain writings on this topic, for some of us at any rate, strike a disturbing note? Is it not that, perhaps only half-consciously, we feel that we are in the presence of an egoist? And egoism does not cease to be egoism even when we attempt to sanctify it! Can we deny that self-centered spirituality exists; indeed that it exists in some measure in the souls of each of us. Which is the reason why the only sensible comment on even our most notable achievements is that we are unprofitable servants.

All men desire peace, says the author of the *Imitation*, but few desire the things that make for peace. It is easier to intoxicate people's minds with a desire for contemplation than it is to persuade them of what it required before that gift can be received. We may go back to the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for their's is the kingdom of God"; "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God". Briefly it may be said that the gift of contemplation will always be given to those who make themselves poor enough in spirit and pure enough in heart to receive it. Let me hasten to add, in line with the masters of the spiritual life, that this poverty of spirit and purity of heart call for detachment but not violent asceticism. As St. Francis de Sales used to remark, the spirit cannot endure the body when overfed, but if underfed, the body cannot endure the spirit. In a word, moderation here as in all things; that is, so far as

bodily privations go. Experience testifies that without health the steady persistence of effort required by the spiritual life is difficult of achievement.

But if physical austerities are relatively of little importance what is of fundamental importance is the mortification of self; that is to say, the elimination of self-will, self-interest, self-centered thinking, wishing and imagining. May I suggest that contemplation—often conceived of in too intellectualist terms—is nothing else but the realization of God's presence and of our utter dependence on Him. The contemplative is simply one who sees the divine-human situation as it is. Hence the contemplative state is essentially passive; that is, an alert passivity by which we are, in varying degrees of clarity, aware of God—both as transcendent above His creation and immanent within it.

How many are called to this state here on earth no one but God knows. But if it be true here that many are called but few chosen, the reason no doubt is because few choose to be chosen. One thing, however, is quite certain that the loving knowledge of God, which is contemplation, cannot be produced by any effort of ours. All we can do, under grace, is to dispose ourselves to it by removing the impediments, and wait on God. The impediments are whatever concentrates our thoughts on the ego—vices, obviously; but also self-centered virtues. Self-forgetting love is of course the key—that *agape* of the New Testament. This does not mean an anxious striving after God, but letting Him work his will in us; imitating God's love for us by a correspondent compassion toward our neighbor, loving the unlovable. In the greatest prayer on the love of God ever composed there is no such affective aspiration as "O my God I love Thee". There might have been too much of the ego about that—*my* God, *I* love. No, the time-honored formula summing it all up is "*Thy* kingdom come"; "*Thy* will be done". When a man can from his heart realize that the only thing that makes sense is that he shall submit to God's invasion of his own little world, on the principle that if God's kingdom is to come then my kingdom must go, he will then be as near to the state of contemplation as makes no difference.

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II

It seems to me not only fitting but pressingly important that this problem on infused contemplation should be submitted to scrutiny and discussion by this distinguished assembly of theologians. Out of it there is reason to expect a deeper penetration not only into the ways of God with the soul, but also in the proper manner of expressing these sublime and ineffable truths. Such penetration cannot but drive home the practical nature of the wisdom of Theology. Sanctity is not a subject about which one is permitted to speculate without practical applications and personal decisions. In the study of the progress of a soul to God, no one can afford to forget that his own soul is bound on the same journey—that deeper knowledge ought to increase not only love of truth but love of God. The saintly theologians whose doctrine we greatly admire and generously quote have solved this problem practically in their own lives. The theoretical formulation of the problem and its solution awaits, according to God's providential plan, a more complete and exact statement.

I should like to emphasize by means of repetition that infused contemplation—that loving knowledge of God—is the fruit of a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and hence is not producible at will, as is, for instance, an act of faith. By the term *normal* or *ordinary* I understand every grace, act and state which is morally necessary for attaining sanctity. Included will be graces that may be called extraordinary in point of fact because they are uncommon, but that are according to the normal law, if they are truly necessary for the attainment of sanctity. By *sanctity* is understood what is generally required to enter heaven immediately after death, since the soul suffers in purgatory only through its own fault. (Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 45-46.) By the remote and sufficient call, I understand that if all souls were faithful in avoiding, as they ought, not only mortal but venial sin, if they were, each according to his condition, generally docile to the Holy Ghost, and if they lived long enough, a day would come when they would receive the proximate and efficacious vocation to a high perfection and to the mystical life, properly so called. Until that day comes, however, we may say simply that they are not as

yet called to it; just as we say that infidels, who have never heard the Gospel preached are not as yet individually called to the Christian life, even though all pagans have a general vocation to the Christian life, as the sole way of salvation willed by God for all men.

That this call is universal to all in the state of grace has been called by its adherents, the traditional doctrine. In spite of opposition, the arguments adduced from Sacred Scripture and the Fathers are not devoid of all cogency because of the use of accommodation. Their cumulative value is not inconsequential. However it is more to the point to offer not lists of authors, but arguments and reasons drawn from the essential and formal aspects of the supernatural life. In showing that the interior life has its full, normal development here only in the mystical life we look to the following: (1) that their principle is the same; (2) that the progress of one is complete only in the others; (3) that their end is the same, and that only the mystical life prepares immediately and perfectly for this end.

The basic principle of the mystical life is the same as that of the common interior life. The gifts of the Holy Ghost, as habitual dispositions connected with charity, grow with it. The Holy Ghost ordinarily moves us according to the degree of our habitual receptivity and with greater frequency as we become more docile. Consequently as a rule, there is no sanctity unless the soul is moved by the Holy Ghost according to the superior degrees of the gifts. This constitutes the mystical life, the passive state in which the human mode of our activity no longer dominates, but rather the activity of the Holy Ghost and our completely docile passivity.

In the progress of the interior life, the purification of the soul is not complete without the passive purifications which belong to the mystical order. This progress should be brought about by purification from sin, from its results and from imperfections. This work (active under the influence of ordinary grace at the beginning) is normally completed through the passive purifications of the senses and the soul. The former exposes the too human manner of the soul in thinking about God and loving Him so that it may live in the divine manner which God wishes to see in it. The latter, granted to souls that have already made progress, is intended to remove habitual imperfections, of which they are so often unaware, and which are

an obstacle to the divine union. They alone free humility and the three theological virtues from all alloy, and propose to the soul the entirely supernatural formal motive of these highest virtues.

The end of the interior life is the same as that of the mystical life, but the latter prepares the soul more immediately for it. Heaven is the end of the interior life. Although, in fact quite rare, the normal summit of the development of the life of grace (*semen gloriae— inchoatio vitae aeternae*) on this earth should be a very perfect disposition to receive the light of glory immediately after death, without passing through purgatory. The perfect disposition to receive the beatific vision immediately after death can only be the intense charity of a fully purified soul, coupled with the earnest desire to see God, such as we find in the mystical state. This last is, therefore, the summit of the development of the life of grace in the soul; in it alone do we find the full development of the supernatural life.

In conclusion, may I say that this position seems to me to be the term in the logical development of the principle of predilection: "For since God's love is the cause of goodness, no one thing would be better than another, if God did not will greater good for one than another." (I, q. 20, a. 3) The unfolding of Thomistic mystical doctrine is derived from the rich tradition of the Church concerning the sanctification of the soul by God. It is confirmed by the writings of the great mystics of the Church.

In understanding the latter it is imperative to maintain clearly the distinction between sanctifying grace and the *gratiae gratis datae*, especially faith, the word of wisdom and knowledge, (I-II, q. 111, a. 4; II-II, q. 171, prol.; q. 45, a. 5.) The special consciousness, and particularly communicable consciousness, of the great mystics of what God was effecting in their souls qualifies as a *gratia gratis data*. As such it would have no essential connection with infused contemplation.

It is significant that in the case of the theologian-saints, that there was a steady withdrawal inward away from external activity to the center of supernatural gravity, to that simple unity of the life of grace—the awareness of God and His love.

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III

The question under discussion is at the present state of theological development still highly controverted and will probably remain so for some time to come.

Stated in different form, our question amounts to this: is contemplation necessary for the attainment of perfect sanctity? And supposing that a person does not attain to perfect sanctity, can the soul make noteworthy progress in the spiritual life without the help of infused contemplation?

Amidst all the confusion that accompanies our question, I feel that I would like to limit my remarks to the Doctrine of Saint John of the Cross, primarily because he is the Mystical Doctor of the Church and then, too, because authors on both sides of the question have often claimed his authority in support of their thesis.

The principle works of Saint John of the Cross that I will make use of in this discussion are the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night of the Soul* since it was largely because of these books that he has been honored as a Doctor of the Universal Church. In these two treatises his complete doctrine is substantially contained.

In giving a definite answer to the question whether contemplation is necessary for the normal development of the life of grace and virtues, much will depend on the definition of contemplation itself.

According to Saint John of the Cross, contemplation is nothing more nor less than a general loving knowledge that God infuses into the soul for the purpose of uniting it to Himself and purifying it from any obstacles to that union. Or to use his own words: "This is an infused and loving knowledge of God which enlightens the soul and at the same time enkindles it until it is raised up step by step even unto God its Creator." (*Dark Night 2*, 18, 8.)

Though contemplation can be realized in souls under the most diverse forms, conditions and degrees, it has the following characteristics: (a) It is essentially a loving knowledge (of faith); that is, it is a knowledge of something that is presented as *objectively* lovable. For this reason the soul not only knows but also loves because it is enamoured of this object of its contemplation. (b) It is knowledge that comes through the exercise of the virtue of faith, conse-

quently the soul has only a general and obscure knowledge of God and therefore must blindly adhere to this knowledge with help of actual grace. (c) God infuses the loving knowledge of contemplation directly into the soul, without the aid of the senses. This loving knowledge is of a more perfect degree than the knowledge that the soul attained through meditation and as a result produces more profound and lasting fruits in the soul.

It is well known that there are some spiritual theologians who hold that there are two ways of sanctity, an ascetical way and a mystical way, the one leading to an ascetical perfection, the other to a mystical perfection. Father Chrysogonus de Jesu Sacramentado, O.C.D. and others maintain that such a doctrine is to be found in the writings of Saint John of the Cross. They use the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* to prove their argument. Accordingly, the *Ascent* would deal with an ascetical way, sufficient in itself for sanctity. The doctrine of the *Dark Night*, on the other hand, would deal with a way of sanctity that is reserved for those souls whom God intends to lead by the mystical way of infused contemplation.

We hold that the *Ascent* and *Dark Night* taken together form one complete doctrinal synthesis. The one without the other would be incomplete. To relegate the *Ascent* to the ascetical way and the *Dark Night* to the mystical way would disrupt the unity of the Saint's spiritual doctrine. Saint John regards both the active and passive nights as essential to attain the union which he proposes. It might be well to remark that the passive nights are strictly of a mystical nature and are caused by contemplation which God infuses into the soul.

We can prove our point from a brief examination of the very first paragraph of the first book of the *Ascent*. In this passage, Saint John of the Cross gives us the general division of the work he proposes to write. We must admit that the text is not as clear as we might wish. It is nevertheless sufficiently exact in its general outline to prove that the passive purifications are an integral and essential part of this doctrine.

In the first paragraph the Saint sets before our eyes the end to be attained—"the state of perfection." He tells us that in order to attain this state of perfection the soul ordinarily must pass through two principal kinds of night.

In the second paragraph he tells us that the first kind of night which "is of the sensual part of the soul" is to be treated of in the first part of the *Ascent*. The second kind of night, which is of the spiritual part of the soul, is to be treated of in the second and third parts of the *Ascent*. The Saint then adds some very significant words: "with respect to the activity of the soul." The first three books of the *Ascent*, therefore, are to deal with an active night of the senses and an active night of the spirit.

Toward the end of the same paragraph, Saint John tells us that he is going to treat of the passivity of the soul in the fourth part of the *Ascent*. In the third paragraph he makes it clear that there is also a passive night of sense and a passive night of spirit.

From these first three paragraphs of the *Ascent* we can clearly see that the Saint intends to divide his work in the following manner:

Active Night	of sense part one of spirit part two and three
Passive Night	(of sense and spirit) . . . part four

All who have studied the question agree that the first, second, and third parts of this division correspond respectively to the first, second, and third books of the *Ascent*. But the *Ascent*, as we know it, has only three books, the fourth seems to have been omitted.

We have, however, another work of the Saint known as the *Dark Night of the Soul*. It contains that doctrine which the Saint promised to treat of in the *Ascent*. The *Dark Night* deals with the passive nights of the sense and spirit which, according to the original plan of the Saint, should be dealt with in the fourth part of the *Ascent*. Hence, even apart from the question as to whether the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night of the Soul* are separate treatises or whether they form one composite whole, it is clear that the doctrine of the passive nights outlined in the *Dark Night* are the fulfillment of the promise made by the Saint in the opening paragraphs of the *Ascent* and therefore pertain to his spiritual doctrine.

One might ask whether his doctrine is for all, or whether it is only for a few contemplative souls. I think the answer to this ques-

tion can be found in the writings of the Saint, particularly in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*.

He tells us in that work that he wants to treat of the "manner of arriving at the heights of the mountain which is the high state of perfection which we call union of the soul with God." He then goes on to enumerate the different phases of the journey up the mountain of perfection and concludes: "Of all these, with the Divine favour, we shall endeavour to say something, so that each soul who reads this may be able to see something of the road that he ought to follow, if he aspires to attain to the summit of this Mount."

He concedes that the matter he will treat of is lofty and obscure, but he declares that it contains "solid and substantial instruction, as well suited to one kind of person as to another if they desire to pass to the detachment of spirit, which is here treated."

It is true he declares in the last paragraph of the Prologue of the *Ascent* that his "principal intent was not to address all, but rather certain persons of our sacred Order of Mount Carmel of the primitive observance, both friars and nuns—since they have desired me to do so—to whom God is granting the favour of setting them on the road to this Mount." But he wrote for them, (a) because they asked him to write about such matters, and (b) because they better understood the doctrine of "poverty of spirit". It is to be remembered, too, that he did not prepare this work for publication, but intended it to be a practical solution to the problems of those for whom he wrote it. But from the quotations we have given from the Prologue and from statements that are constantly recurring, it is beyond doubt that he felt that his doctrine was of value to all.

Saint John of the Cross regards the passive purifications of sense and spirit as necessary for the attainment of union. This simply means that contemplation is necessary to attain union, since the passive purifications are caused by contemplation. Speaking of the passive nights he writes: "This night, which as we say, is *contemplation*, produces in spiritual persons two kinds of darkness or purgation, corresponding to the two parts of man's nature—namely, the sensual and the spiritual." (D.N. I, VIII, 1.) Elsewhere in the same book he tells us: "This dark night is an inflowing of God into the soul, which purges it from its ignorance and imperfections, habitual,

natural and spiritual, and which is called by contemplatives infused contemplation, or mystical theology." (D.N. II, V, 1.)

In the first six chapters of the *Dark Night*, Saint John speaks of the imperfections of beginners. For him beginners are "those that meditate upon the spiritual road." (D.N. I, I, 1.) He tells us of these imperfections in order to show the necessity of the passive night of sense. "Wherefore, to the end that we may the better understand and explain what night is this through which the soul passes, and for what cause God sets it therein, it will be well here to touch first of all upon certain characteristics of beginners . . . in order that, realizing the weakness of the state wherein they are, they may take courage, and may desire that God may bring them into this night, wherein the soul is strengthened and confirmed in the virtues, and made ready for the inestimable delights of the love of God." (D.N. I, I, 1.)

The imperfections which Saint John of the Cross mentions are most certainly incompatible with sanctity or perfect love of God. He speaks of the spiritual pride and presumption of beginners, of their spiritual avarice, luxury, gluttony, envy and sloth. The Saint indicates "how like to children are these persons in all they do." (D.N. I, I, 3.) Beginners must rid themselves of such imperfections if they wish to enter the state of proficients. Saint John of the Cross tells us that the night of the senses rids the soul of these imperfections. "And it will also be seen," he writes, "how many blessings the dark night of which we shall afterwards treat brings with it, since it cleanses the soul and purifies it from all these imperfections." (D.N. I, I, 3.)

Saint John of the Cross tells us when the passive night of the senses begins. "Into this dark night souls begin to enter when God draws them forth from the state of beginners—which is the state of those that meditate on the spiritual road—and begins to set them in the state of progressives—which is that of those who are already contemplatives—to the end that, after passing through it, they may arrive at the state of the perfect, which is that of the Divine union of the soul with God." (D.N. I, I, 1.) Hence infused contemplation begins relatively early in spiritual life. It marks the passage from the way of beginners to the way of proficients, from the purgative way to the illuminative way.

Some might say that the soul could be purified of its defects by other ascetical practices, thus they would deny the necessity of the passive purification of sense, which God works in the soul by means of infused contemplation. Saint John of the Cross recognizes no other means of purification than the passive night of sense. "But neither from these imperfections," he writes, "nor from those others can the soul be perfectly purified until God brings it into the passive purgation of that dark night whereof we shall speak presently. . . . Because however greatly the soul itself labors, it cannot actively purify itself so as to be in the least degree prepared for the Divine union of perfection of love, if God takes not its hand and purges it in that dark fire." (D.N. I, III, 3.) The soul actively seeks to purify itself by the practices of the ascetical life. However, by these practices it cannot "in the least degree" prepare itself for Divine union. God must bring it into the passive night of sense. It must be noted that we are not only dealing with preparation for union, but with the actual purification of the soul from defects and imperfections which are definitely incompatible with sanctity. Concluding his description of the defects of beginners, Saint John writes: "Let it suffice here to have described these imperfections . . . so that it may be seen how greatly they need God to set them in the state of proficients. . . . For, however assiduously the beginner practices the mortification in himself of all these actions and passions of his, he can never completely succeed—very far from it—until God works it in him passively by means of the purgation of the said night." (D.N. I, VII, 5.)

In Book II of the *Dark Night*, Saint John of the Cross treats of the dark night of the spirit. Once again he makes clear that this night, which directly precedes union of the soul with God, is a necessary part of the soul's spiritual journey. Just as the senses must be purified by the passive night of sense, so the spirit must be purified by the passive night of spirit. Without this night the purification of the soul could not be completed.

In chapters one and two of the second book of the *Dark Night*, the imperfections of the proficients are briefly described. We are told that some are habitual, others actual. "The habitual imperfections are the imperfect habits and affections which have remained

all the time in the spirit, and are like roots, to which the purgation of sense has been unable to penetrate." (D.N. II, II, 1.) The actual imperfections are many and varied, and all are not liable to them in the same way. At times the soul may believe in vain visions; it may become proud and presumptuous; "it may become bold with God, and lose holy fear, which is the key and the custodian of all the virtues." (D.N. II, II, 3.)

Saint John tells us that such imperfections are found to some extent in all proficient. He knows but one means by which they can be eradicated—the passive night of spirit. Only this night can get down to the very roots of the imperfections of the soul. ". . . None of these proficient," he writes, "however greatly he may have exerted himself, is free, at best, from many of these natural affections and imperfect habits, the purification whereof we said is necessary if a soul is to pass to Divine union." (D.N. II, III, 4.)

Saint John of the Cross recognizes no other means of completely eradicating the imperfections of the soul than the passive night of spirit. This purification is effected by means of a "pure and dark contemplation." (D.N. II, III, 3.) Without the passive purification of spirit these defects remain in the soul. Consequently without the passive purifications of spirit there can be no sanctity.

It is beyond dispute that all souls do not arrive at that perfect state where they are transformed into God through love. Can it be that God will not give all souls the grace of contemplation and therefore many are not able to arrive at the heights of sanctity? Or is it because many souls do not prepare themselves for the reception of this grace?

Those who hold that contemplation is for a select few very often quote the following text in support of their contention: "Not all who consciously walk in the way of the spirit are brought to contemplation, nor even the half of them—why, He best knows." (D.N. I, IX, 9.) Taken out of context, this phrase would have the meaning that they assign to it, but taken with the rest of the chapter we find that the Saint nowhere states that those who do not have contemplation nevertheless arrive at perfect sanctity. On the contrary, he makes it clear that those souls retain their faults and imperfections which prevent them from perfect union with God.

The reason why so few arrive at union, is given in the *Living Flame of Love*: "And here it behooves us to note the reason why there are so few that attain to this lofty state of the perfection of union with God. It must be known that it is not because God is pleased that there should be few raised to this high spiritual state, for it would rather please Him that all souls should be perfect, but it is rather that He finds few vessels which can bear so high and lofty a work. For, when He proves them in small things and finds them weak . . . and so He goes no farther with their purification, neither does He lift them up from the dust of the earth." (*Flame B*, 2, 27.) It is clear in this text that the chief reason is the lack of generosity and cooperation on the part of the soul and that God would desire to grant contemplation to all.

It is well known that a large number of Spiritual Theologians generally explain the grace of contemplation in the light of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Saint John of the Cross nowhere explains contemplation in this way. He frequently speaks of the most elevated realities of the spiritual life, and of the delicate actions of the Holy Ghost in the soul, but he never reverts to the Thomistic theory of the gifts in explaining the genesis and development of contemplation.

Yet it would be unfair to say—as it is sometimes said—that John of the Cross did not wish to give a theological explanation of these sublime graces but that he preferred to give a description of his own personal experiences. In the *Ascent* and *Dark Night* he gives not only a psychological but also a theological explanation of the grace of contemplation. In those books we find that the Saint uses no other explanation than the virtues, especially the theological virtues. It is to be noted that he particularly insists on the theological virtue of faith, since faith is the root, the basis of contemplation.

Saint John of the Cross refers to faith as teaching a higher knowledge of God. He writes: "And faith is above all that he understands and experiences and feels and imagines. And if he be not blinded as to this, and remain in total darkness, he attains not to that which is greater—namely, *THAT WHICH IS TAUGHT BY FAITH*." (*Ascent II*, 4, 2.) What sort of knowledge is taught by faith? The knowledge that is beyond any knowledge that is under-

stood distinctly and accompanied by feelings and imaginings. Such knowledge is contemplation, and can be no other. In this way, he continues, "is communicated to it all the wisdom of God in general, which is the Son of God, Who communicates Himself to the soul in faith." (*Ascent* II, 29, 6.)

Finally, there is an important text from the *Ascent* in which he identifies faith with contemplative knowledge. He writes: "for after some manner this dark and loving knowledge . . . which is faith, serves as a means to Divine union in this life, even as in the next life, the light of glory serves as an intermediary to the clear vision of God." (*Ascent* II, 24, 4.) In this text the Saint not only tells us that contemplative knowledge depends on faith, but that it *is* faith. Since the Saint so often speaks of faith while never mentioning the gifts of the Holy Ghost we must conclude that he attributes the origin of contemplation to the virtue of faith alone.

I would like to mention in passing that he never speaks of charity as causing contemplation. Charity is an *effect*, not a *cause* of this loving knowledge of contemplation. Love naturally flows from this superior infused knowledge.

According to the studies of Father Juan de Jesus-Maria, Professor of Spiritual Theology in Saint Teresa's College, Rome, Saint John of the Cross gives a *positive theological explanation* of the highest graces of contemplation and in giving this explanation not only does not feel the need of recurring to the Thomistic explanation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, but excludes the possibility of this theory being inserted into his theological synthesis. Father Juan also notes that almost all the important commentators of Saint John of the Cross in the Discalced Carmelite Order have hitherto explained contemplation in terms of the Thomistic theory of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

And now to summarize very briefly:

(1) In this short paper we have shown what contemplation is according to the mind of John of the Cross and that it does not require any extraordinary or unusual mystical experiences. It is simply a loving infused knowledge of God and divine things.

(2) We have shown that Saint John has but one spiritual doctrine. In his writings there is no foundation for saying that he

taught two ways of sanctity, the one ascetical and the other mystical. He teaches one way of sanctity which involves contemplation.

(3) This doctrine has a universal value for all souls.

(4) In fact, this doctrine is necessary for all because the passive nights are indispensable not only as a preparation for the union he proposes but also for the purification of the soul from the many defects and imperfections which are incompatible with true sanctity. He knows of no other means for the attainment of complete purification than the passive nights of sense and spirit.

(5) And finally we have shown that in the last analysis contemplation stems from faith, hence all souls who possess the theological virtue of faith (informed by charity) should normally obtain the grace of contemplation.

In conclusion we hold that contemplation is normal in the development of the life of grace and virtues.

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IV

The impatient pun of the old missionary, divested of its impatience and of its exaggeration as well, one may in part make one's own. "Mysticism!" he cried. "Bah! It begins in mist, and it ends in schism." The record of theological affirmation throughout the past six decades on the point which engages us here would seem to provide elaborate witness to the fact that initial vagueness about what mysticism is ends in divergencies of opinion about its purpose, its value, even about its normalcy in the life of grace.

At the risk, therefore, of trespassing unduly upon your good will, I should like first of all to report briefly the interim conclusions of a modest historical inquiry into the nature of *infused contemplation* upon which I have intermittently been engaged during the past several years, for I believe that the convergence of evidence now available bids fair to exorcise finally vagueness which has so long haunted such enterprises as ours today and rendered them in the end

unfruitful.¹ In any case it will serve to sharpen the contours of what little I have to say and reveal my basic reason for saying it. Then, with even greater brevity, I should like to comment upon a moderately illuminating implication of the descriptive definition of infused contemplation proposed as one of the suppositis in our discussion. Finally an opinion will be hazarded on the topic of our discussion.

I. Amid all the diversities of the mystical fact (and they are extremely marked) this irreducible commonalty reveals itself upon historical analysis:

(a) In infused contemplation the object confronted is held as somehow *ultimate*. Within that confrontation there may be further experiential progress; within it, and not beyond it, for it is felt that there is nothing beyond it.

(b) The object, as well, is a *religious* ultimate, always surrounded with ethical overtones of one sort or another. It may be that such a confrontation with the ultimate is itself considered the terminal ethical enterprise, all other ethical endeavor being but mediating and preparatory to this. Or it may be that, although other ethical efforts have their own ultimate values, this, in another and more exalted form, by implication fulfills them all. Or it may be that all else is reputed to be only deception and snare, so that this confrontation is the sole ethical act and an essential escape from the human conditions which attach to all else and render it invalid. The object, then, is always a religious ultimate, always (to use a term which has not the more sophisticated and detailed connotations of "religious") *numinous*.

(c) The manner of confrontation is always *direct*. It may be intuitive, a one-to-one relation between object and subject. Or it may be insight, the unmediated perception of a higher coherence within the materials of one's more or less usual knowledge. Or it may work entirely the other way round: it may be a "received" knowledge in which the subject is conscious of being wholly passive, an experienced invasion of the ultimate. But in every instance, be it intuition, insight, illumination, it is essentially diverse in its modali-

¹ More extended treatment will be found in the author's "Mysticism," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Supplement II, and in the forthcoming volume, *Varieties of Mystic Experience*, New York: Scribner, 1954.

ties from the ordinary exercise of either sense perception or of reasoning. The variant philosophic backgrounds of individual mystics, or the total lack of any such background, brings it about that the diversity of its modalities will be variously expressed and explained. It seems, however, to come to this: the self, itself, becomes awareness. There is, to put it most prosaically, none of the exteriority that characterizes even sense perception nor is there any of the progressive concatenation of partial insights that characterizes the reasoning process.

To conclude, the mystical fact is in every way esteemed an ultimate: the ultimate of objects is attained in ultimate experience by the ultimate of human receptivity here on earth, for the two—object and subject—are herein fused in consciousness. That is why some of the mystics appear at times to get God and themselves mixed up.

It may briefly be defined as the experiential awareness of the presence of God.

II. It may now be allowable to remark a certain instructive implication of the descriptive definition of infused contemplation provided us. It implies that spiritual consolation-desolation and infused contemplation are one and the same thing, for it defines the first and calls it the second. In doing so it accurately transcribes the opinion of Father Garrigou-Lagrange, and one can only applaud the hardy good sense of Msgr. O'Connor in choosing it. That Father Garrigou-Lagrange has somehow persisted in confusing the genus (spiritual consolation-desolation) with one of its species (infused contemplation) becomes quite noticeable directly we cease reading into his pages something which, despite the Johannine language, is simply not there. As aids to such a clarificatory reading I would suggest three prefatory exercises: advertence to his stock example of infused contemplation; a tallying of his substitutions of sensible consolation for what St. Teresa says of (ordinary) spiritual consolation, namely, that it is not mystical experience; and finally examination of his reason for excluding the experimental knowledge of the present of God as an essential characteristic of infused contemplation.

III. "Are all souls remotely yet sufficiently called to the mystical life consisting mainly in infused contemplation?"

(a) Taking infused contemplation in the sense in which Father Garrigou-Lagrange understands it, I would say "Yes." I would do so for two reasons: not only does advertence to the origin, means, and end of the spiritual life and to its fallen creaturely recipient lead one strongly to suspect that all are thus called to a life consisting mainly in that inner sanctifying turbulence which is ordinary spiritual consolation-desolation, but, more suasive still, there is the traditional teaching on the perilous condition of one in whom such inner turbulence is for any length of time lacking.

(b) Taking it, however, in the sense to which the present convergence of evidence would seem to impel us, I would be strongly inclined at the moment to say "No." On the one hand I can find no positive reason for asserting that God's sanctifying presence must, in the laws of grace, eventually rise above the threshold of spiritual consciousness (except, of course, if one holds for a materialistic concept of grace), and on the other hand the burden of witness in the Christian tradition is against it.

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DIGEST OF DISCUSSION:

First Question Asked: Question asked by Father McCann, Assumption College. Question addressed to Father Michael Griffin, O.C.D.:

It seems to me that the question of just what we mean by contemplation is important. As I understand it, Father Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., considers infused contemplation as contemplation of the mysteries of faith. On the other hand, St. John of the Cross considered the practical order and looked on infused contemplation as conscious effort to produce a void, an emptying out of all concepts and images in the soul—when the time for the call to contemplation comes there is an emptying of the soul of everything and the soul produces a void. So, for St. John of the Cross contemplation is a negation, but for Garrigou-Lagrange it is something positive?

Answer by Father Griffin: To St. John of the Cross infused contemplation is a more perfect way of exercising the virtue of faith.

Faith is obscure virtue. Soul is in darkness because of transcendence of God. Soul receives the infused knowledge of God without aid of the senses, as in meditation and study. Some of St. John's commentators say the contemplation comes from charity and soul gets taste of God. But in St. John it is the other way around—knowledge is first.

Second Question: Question asked by Father Palmer, S.J., Fordham University. Question addressed to Father Gillis, O.P.:

Is contemplation a normal call for those called to the vocation of marriage? Celibacy is more perfect. Does the marriage state, as such, render infused contemplation extremely unlikely, Does St. Paul realize that the gift is not given to all? Are there a whole class of people in a less perfect state, and in a state that is not orientated toward what you understand by infused contemplation?

Answer by Father Gillis: As far as essentials go, they have same sanctifying grace and the virtues and the gifts. Situations in their lives may seem to lessen opportunity. Not all are proximately and efficaciously called. But "normal" means that, if they utilize the graces they get, they will arrive at infused contemplation as normal culmination.

Further question of Father Palmer to Father Gillis: Is it purification demanded for infused contemplation compatible with the normal state of husband and wife?

Ans.: Not incompatible. Some will find difficulties, but grace can raise one if he does not place obstacles. "Normal" means that contemplation is the development if grace does not meet obstacles.

Further question of Father Palmer to Father Gillis: Is married life compatible with the need of the perfection of the senses?

Ans.: It is not *per se* an obstacle.

Remarks made by Father Philip J. Donnelly, S.J., Weston College, Boston:

It seems to me that every step in the progress to the beatific vision is a gift of God and there is receptivity on our part, and that this fact is not enough stressed. We are totally dependent on God.

A question to consider is precisely *how* infused contemplation as the normal development of the life of grace and the virtues is supernatural. If it were absolutely supernatural in the same degree as the

beatific vision, that would mean that every grace—sanctifying grace, infused virtues, gifts of the Holy Ghost—all of these would be nothing but dispositions for the beatific vision. Now we do not have the beatific vision. And yet mysticism does not go beyond the limits of faith. Now, is infused contemplation absolutely supernatural? To know God intuitively, as He is in Himself? It seems to me that mystical contemplation cannot go beyond the limits of supernatural *secundum quid*.

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