

SUPERNATURAL PRAYER

**EMMANUEL RENAULT, O.C.D.
JEAN ABIVEN, O.C.D.**

Two Different Forms of Interior Prayer

First Form

Teresa of Avila's 'WAY'

Second Form

The supernatural forms of prayer not accessible through human effort & are a free gift from God.

Why Study Supernatural Prayer?

- ❖ What's the point is for the ordinary Christian to study supernatural prayer?
- ❖ In the **Judeo-Christian** the belief is in a **loving God**; a God inviting His creature into a father-child... relationship.... whose greatest desire is to give Himself.

Attraction to Mystical Life

- ❖ This attraction to the mystical life has been lived more or less intensely based on the era and the country.
- ❖ With the rise of the **Charismatic** movement, it could be thought that we are living in a time of increase of these hopes and perhaps even of these graces.

Recognizing Divine Initiative & Practical Attitudes to Adopt

- ❖ Putting ourselves in the school of Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross;
- ❖ Our goal is to recognizing **divine** initiative; & outline some practical **attitudes** to adopt when we run into it on our own path or that of another.

Types of Supernatural Prayer

4 Ways of Watering the Garden

- ❖ Different degrees of interior prayer;
- ❖ the 4 ways to water the **garden**. The garden is the **soul**;
- ❖ The **watering** represents the diverse forms of interior **prayer**. (V 11through 21).

4 Ways of Watering the Garden

- ❖ getting water from a **well** with a bucket & watering the garden ourselves; our own efforts helped by grace;
- ❖ A **water wheel** operated using a little mule;
- ❖ An **aqueduct** to promote better irrigation;
- ❖ **Rain** would only require letting it happen & the result would be achieved under the best conditions.

Supernatural Prayer vs. Prayer of Recollection

- ❖ Supernatural” interior prayer is, a form of prayer where all the **initiative** belongs to God.
- ❖ ‘Recollection’ which can be **practiced by anyone**, grace is at work but it is incognito.
- ❖ We put ourselves in the Presence of this God that only faith allows us to know-in the tabernacle or in the depths of our soul.
- ❖ We force ourselves to let go everything that is soliciting our exterior senses & triggering our desires, fears, preoccupations, etc.

Supernatural Prayer vs. Prayer of Recollection

- ❖ To carry on an 'exchange of friendship' with this Presence, we have to from time to time 'throw some twigs' to rekindle the flame: we can use Gospel texts, conversations or scenes from the Gospel.
- ❖ Occasionally express this or that desire or love impulse; struggle against recurring distractions, etc.
- ❖ In short, we employ a certain activity which is nevertheless tiring.

Supernatural Prayer vs. Prayer of Recollection

- ❖ When it **pleases God** to grant us the grace of supernatural prayer, things do not happen in this way.
- ❖ We feel ourselves seized, captured that we cannot reproduce by our will or we are blessed with joy—or pain—or maybe we get insights that seem to be explicitly for us.
- ❖ We get a **taste of the divine**.
- ❖ It's as if the soul were blessed with a supernatural mind permitting it to capture **divine waves**.

The First Supernatural Prayer

Quiet & Recollection

Two different ways to enjoy God's company

Naturally or '*contentos*',

Supernaturally or '*gustos*'

Contentos

- ❖ The '*contentos*' are **natural satisfactions**, the result of the attainment of a goal;
- ❖ Teresa gives the example of the joy of a woman whose husband or son is at war and who sees him return safe and sound;
- ❖ Other examples: we have overcome a temptation; we realize that we have acquired a virtue or a type of interior prayer agrees with us and, so we are happy.
- ❖ These joys have a **cause**.

St. Teresa describes 'Contentos'

“Let’s consider, for a better understanding, that we see **two founts** with two water troughs....These two troughs are **filled** with water in **different ways**:

- with one the water comes from far away through many aqueducts and the use of much ingenuity;
- with the other the source of the water is right there, and the trough fills without any noise...

This is the **difference**: the water coming from the **aqueducts** is comparable, in my opinion, to the consolations I mentioned that are drawn from **meditation**. For we obtain them through thoughts, assisting ourselves, using creatures to help our meditation, and **tiring** the intellect. Since, in the end, the consolation comes through **our own efforts**, noise is made when there has to be some replenishing of the benefits the consolation causes in the soul, as has been said.”

St. Teresa describes ‘Gustos’

“With this other fount, the water comes from **its own source** which is **God**. And since His Majesty desires to do so-when He is pleased to grant some supernatural favor – He produces this delight with the greatest **peace** and **quiet** and **sweetness** in the very **interior** part of the ourselves.

I don’t know from where or how, nor is that happiness and delight experienced as are **earthly consolations**, in the **heart**.

I mean there is no similarity at the beginning, for afterward the delight fills everything;

this water overflows through all the dwelling places and faculties until reaching the body.”

“I was now thinking, while writing this, that the verse mentioned above, Dilatasti cor meum, says the heart was expanded. I don’t think the experience is something, as I say, that rises from the **heart**, but from another part still more interior, as from something deep. I think this must be the **center of the soul**...(IC 4 2, 1 to 5).”

Prayer of Quiet

Here for **example** is what Christine wrote:

“Very often during interior prayer for several years...I have been accompanied by this presence (of the Lord)...and, I had no trouble recollecting myself or finding this presence which filled me with joy and gave me a great strength to accomplish whatever I was doing.”

Anytime & Unexpectedly

❖ The **awareness** and **joy** that invade you without apparent reason can happen during interior prayer, but also at **anytime, unexpectedly;** joy to be loved by God, to be His child. Joy that can sometimes be followed, without apparent reason, by a period of sadness or anxiety:

“I am going to “pay the price”, said Lucienne leaving the retreat, but Jesus will be with me. When I saw what was waiting for me, I was full of anxiety and did not sleep all night.

And then, this morning, all of a sudden, just like that,

I was **invaded** with an **immense peace**.

Since that is what He wants, He will not leave me alone.”

Recognize a Basic Form of Supernatural Prayer

- ❖ Without a doubt, it is necessary to exercise discernment ... ‘A tree can be recognized by its fruits’, said Jesus, and it is only after the fact that we can **discern** a visit from the Lord.
- ❖ Nothing would be more dangerous than to think you ‘have a **direct line**’ to the Holy Spirit. But, on this note of caution, it is good to be able to **recognize** a relatively common, **basic** form of supernatural prayer.

More or Less

❖ ... Teresa said, that in these things, there is the **more** and the **less**;

❖ ...the third way to water the garden...later she would recognize it as like the **prayer of quiet**, but in a **greater intensity**...

“where the soul would only want to be tongues to praise the Lord, saying a thousand crazy things, wishing for a thousand deaths (V16 4)”.

❖ ...commentators to compare what Teresa says here to what is seen in the **Charismatic Renewal**.

Outside of these Circles

Outside of these **circles** similar experiences can be found. Here is what Christine:

“This was a true passion, an exchange, a mutual gift, a devouring fire...it was something profound and intense that I could not refuse. The senses did not play any role in it. Everything in me was a gift, welcome...I only desired to be surrendered more and more deeply and that the Lord would be in the deepest part of me and that I understood that it was truly like that.

Supernatural Recollection

- ❖ In the *Interior Castle*, Saint Teresa describes another experience that she calls **supernatural recollection**; she tells us it often happens **before** the **prayer of quiet**;
- ❖ A lot of people have experienced this prayer. They come to prayer one morning, and they **feel overcome** by the **presence of the Lord**, in the tabernacle or in the deepest part of their soul.
- ❖ For a time more or less long, **nothing interests them except this presence**. The preoccupations of the day, memories could return to their consciousness, but they are not tempted to let themselves become absorbed by them.
- ❖ Completely happy, they tell themselves that maybe: “This time I believe I have it, I know how to do interior prayer”, and when they return to it and try to recreate this state of mind-- **profound disillusionment**! They do not succeed and find themselves in their usual state of heaviness. They then realize that this was given to them as a **purely free gift** and there is **not a recipe** to bring it about.

Recognize His Voice

*“Let us suppose that these **senses** and **faculties** have
(...these powers are the people of this castle...)
have gone outside and have walked for days and years with strangers—
enemies of the well-being of the castle*

*Once the great King, who is in the **center dwelling place** of this castle,
sees their good will, He desires in His wonderful mercy
to bring them back to Him.*

*Like a good shepherd, with a **whistle** so gentle that even
they themselves almost fail to hear it.
He makes them **recognize His voice** and
stops them from going so far astray so
that they will **return to their dwelling place**.
And this shepherd’s whistle has such power that
they **abandon the exterior things** in which they were estranged from Him
and **enter the castle** (IC 4 3, 2).*

A Few Drops of Contemplation

Quiet & Recollection

are two forms of supernatural prayer that are **elementary** and relatively **common**.

“A few little drops of contemplation happen to everyone!”

The 'Nights' of John of the Cross

Passive Night of the Senses

- ❖ In the *Dark Night*, a few **signs** to allow the seeker or more often the one directing him, to recognize another way in which God communicates supernaturally.
- ❖ The soul goes through **dryness**, a sort of **emptiness**. Nothing happens during his interior prayer time. **Worried** ... he tries to either read the Gospelhe wonders if he is not undergoing **punishment** ... he is not intentionally refusing to give anything to God...this worry is accompanied by an increasing desire to serve the Lord as the dryness continues.
- ❖ It is, says Saint John of the Cross, a form of **authentic contemplation**. God communicates in a way that allows the person to experience who He is but in a **negative way**...
- ❖ Saint Jean of the Cross, it is God Himself who **infuses His light** and, like a bird of the night exposed to the light of day, we are **blinded**, immersed in a dark night that he calls **passive night of the senses**.

The 'Nights' of John of the Cross

Passive Night of the Soul

- ❖ The Passive Night of the Soul, even **more difficult**, can manifest at the **same time** or **after** the passive night of the senses.
- ❖ This divine light **exposes** our **sinful nature**. The soul suffers an intolerable pain, realizing how **resistant** it was to God.
- ❖ It is too small and weak to **adapt** to the divine light, but is in addition, **soiled by sin**. It seems **impure**, contrasted with God.

The 'Nights' of John of the Cross

Log thrown on the Fire

- ❖ It is a sort of insight into one's own hell. It is really rather a **purgatory**.
- ❖ Infinite Love is communicating with the soul. He allows the soul to realize in an **acute** manner its **isolation from this love**.
- ❖ John of the Cross used the comparison of the **log thrown in the fire** which, before becoming a source of lively flames or glowing embers, must weep, blacken, smoke and crackle.

The 'Nights' of John of the Cross

Purification & Trials

- ❖ It is thought that perhaps these forms of **dry contemplation** are more **common** than those spoken of by Teresa of Jesus.
- ❖ What is important to **recognize** these '**negative**' forms of supernatural prayer.
- ❖ In light of their character of **purification**, they can manifest in all sorts of **trials**: sickness, depression, professional or family difficulties, etc. and as a result it is possible to not understand anything and to limit oneself to a '**natural**' reading of events, putting aside their spiritual dimension.

The 'Nights' of John of the Cross

State of the Soul

- ❖ When John of the Cross speaks of the 'nights', he describes the **state of the soul**, a type of general **climate** it is not specifically about what happens in interior **prayer**.
- ❖ Teresa of Jesus never clearly makes the **distinction** between interior prayer & the life of interior prayer.
- ❖ What has been described so far can also be found during prayer but also outside of prayer.

The Prayer of Union

A Much Rarer Gift

- ❖ The prayer of 'union' is a much **rarer** gift.
- ❖ It's about the famous image of the **silkworm** (IC 5, 2). This fat, widespread, dull, ugly animal builds a cocoon in which it buries itself and dies only to be reborn a gracious, colorful and agile **butterfly**...
- ❖ The soul is grasped by God ... It is no longer the power of the will, the intellect or the imagination ... all psychological activity is suspended which would normally bring about a loss of consciousness... **no awareness** of 'me'.
- ❖ The soul '**thrust**' like this into God realizes, once restored to consciousness, that it was introduced into another world and came out of it totally **transformed**...
- ❖ Teresa cited the expressions of Saint Paul : '**We are buried with the Christ to be reborn to a new life**' or that '**Christ is our life**' (Col.3:3; Rm. 6:4).

The Prayer of Union

A New Life

- ❖ Teresa was interested in its **effects**, loyal to the Gospel ...you recognize the tree by its fruit.
- ❖ This gift of union results in a **new life** for the person, blessed to received it, a life in **unison** with **Christ's** life.

The Prayer of Union

Graces

- ❖ Teresa gave a description of the **graces** that accompanied-----the prayer of union...hardly compatible, with a loss of consciousness.
- ❖ She experienced **visions** in **images**...deep inside; profound insights into mysteries or **intellectual** visions; the impression of Christ at her side... her confessors called **intellectual** visions. (IC 6 8, 2).

The Prayer of Union

An Ordinary Person's Testimony

❖ Should we talk about exceptional gifts or rare experiences? It's true they are not found on every spiritual path?

❖ Here is the **witness** of a simple person, who does not really understand what happened to her:

“This happened during the communal prayer in the chapel. I was overtaken by the presence of God, as I am at times. Jesus was there, I was not thinking about anything, but He was there and I was with Him. When it was over, I was surprised; everyone had gone. The others thought that I had gone to sleep. I was certain not to have gone to sleep, but during this time I was not aware of anything going on around me.”

❖ My knowledge of this person and of her habitual behavior allows us to think that something **ecstatic** happened there.

The Prayer of Union

Magnifying Glass

- ❖ **Intellectual visions** or insights can be contrasted with relatively frequent experiences during or outside of prayer.
- ❖ A Gospel verse, read so often that it is known by heart, comes up during prayer but this time a **whole new sense** is revealed. It seems to us to be ‘right on target’, adapted personally to us or illuminating an aspect of our life to an unexpected depth..
- ❖ Perhaps the goal of the visions of the great mystics is to allow all of us to recognize the modest gifts the Lord enjoys giving...the ‘**little drops of contemplation**’ which would probably go unnoticed, if the more exceptional visions of Teresa and others—did not allow us to see them as through a **magnifying mirror**.

What Attitude to Adopt ?

Two Opposite Pitfalls

- ❖ These Graces are not important; they are not a **Sign of Holiness**;
- ❖ These Graces **are important**; we should ask God for these Graces.

Not a Sign of Holiness

So Not Important

- ❖ The graces of **supernatural prayer**—hold a variable place in the lives of the Saints; eg. St. Therese vs. St. Teresa; St. Vincent de Paul
- ❖ They are **not** an appropriate criteria to evaluate the degree of union with God or holiness.

Graces are Helpful & Precious

So Are Important

- ❖ These graces are a way that God intimately **communicates** with souls;
- ❖ To consider these graces null and void would be to **ignore** God's love and His desire for union with His creature;
- ❖ These graces are precious because of the **fruits** they produce;
- ❖ The effects of supernatural prayer and its usefulness to the recipient or God's people determine their **value**;
- ❖ The recipient of these graces becomes a **witness**.

SOLUTION

Be Open to God's Will

- ❖ Be **open** to **God's will** whatever that may be avoids the two pitfalls;
- ❖ God wants us to become **saints**...the union of our wills with His now & forever;
- ❖ If He gives us mystical graces, we appreciate the gift.... this is **not** perfection.
- ❖ We are to recognize the **gift** He entrusts to us to use for the good of His people & His Church.

Practical Indications

Prayer of Recollection

- ❖ Caution and Care- supernatural graces are **not** indicative of **holiness** or a **high degree** of spiritual life;
- ❖ Caution and Care do **not** mean contempt or rejection: Teresa encouraged the complete development of **baptismal graces** in whatever form the Lord gives; a **spiritual director** helps interpret the experience & remind against vain glory;
- ❖ If God gives supernatural gifts, we can't do anything about it, but **outside** of these experiences, let's always return to the **prayer of recollection** in the presence of the Lord.