

Transforming Union

(Extract taken from...)

I am a Daughter of the Church

Chapter VIII

Blessed Fr. Marie-Eugene, ocd

I am the vine and you are the branches (Jn.15:5)

As if the ends of two wax candles were joined so that the light they give is one.

...Is there even any use in making a **special study of transforming union**, when Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross seem to **assimilate** it into spiritual marriage?...

A. Spiritual Marriage and Transforming Union

Spiritual marriage and transforming union do **not** designate **two different spiritual states**, rather **two aspects** of the same interior reality or the **summit of the spiritual life**.

Spiritual marriage calls to mind that spiritual state ... indicating that the soul has arrived at the **summit**. It places on relief...the **phenomenal aspect** of the **union**...

Transforming union designates...the **degree of charity** that brings about that **perfect union with God** through the **transformation** and **likeness of love**. It is ...**charity** in its **transforming** and **unifying plenitude** ... It is useful to **distinguish** clearly between **spiritual marriage** and **transforming union**, between the **manifestation** and the **reality** of which they are **signs**... because **confusion** between the **mystical phenomenon** and **reality** are frequent, favoring the **phenomenon**, sought out and emphasized as if it were the principal element. This is because ... the mass of faithful are **eager for signs** and for the **extraordinary**, the **miraculous**.

Even spiritual persons seem to desire the **mystical experience** over **spiritual charity**...to the point of making **spiritual marriage** a **state superior to transforming union**... Some even hesitated to recognize in Saint Therese of the Child Jesus the **highest states of spiritual life** as they weren't accompanied ... by the **mystical phenomena** thought **inseparable** of these states. The Saint however warned that **appearing perfect** is of **small importance compared to being so**. Confusion between **being** (brilliant and showy) and **appearing** (hidden and obscure) can bring about errors in the **nature of perfection** and the **goal** sought and can cause errors in direction from the very beginning of spiritual life. Souls can be **delayed** or brought to a

standstill in their journey. The road of the **imperfect soul** is the one where all the **goods of heaven** are sought, the goods that accompany **union** but are **not** union and can hinder one from attaining it, if desired for themselves.

Let's situate **transforming union** in reference to the manifestations of **spiritual marriage** and point out the **relationship** between them and their respective **value**.

1-Manifestations, the Fruits of Love

These **manifestations**, the **fruit of transforming union**, take different forms and expressions.

The extraordinary and first favors of **contemplative lights** procure the **advancement** of the soul, but usually have a clearly **charismatic character**, that is, they are given for the good of the **Church**. They prepare the soul for the accomplishment of a **special mission**...They are **not a specific fruit of union** of the soul with God. And so...these extraordinary favors could **never**...be considered a sufficient **proof of sanctity**...

2-Contemplative Lights

Contemplative lights are sovereignly useful. They are a means ordered to the **development of love**.

To belittle the **riches** of light that proceed from the fire of transforming union would be wrong. They are **divine riches**, among the purest and most useful that God dispenses here below. They **disclose** to the contemplative gaze, as much as can be on earth, the **secrets of God's very being**. They derive their excellence from the fact that they issue from the soul's contact with supernatural realities... **Light and life, thought and being**, join in this **unifying contact** that love establishes between two spirits...that of **God** and that of the **soul**...

The **lights on God** that these **divine touches** give, and the **vision** of the world that they procure, lift the soul up above ...this world and the natural ways of knowing...It makes the soul a **royal soul** whose eagle gaze penetrates to the depths of God and of men.

Such **lights** are one of the most **precious treasures of the Church**, one of its most **effective means of evangelization and teaching**. From works written under their influence flows a ...plenitude of love that enlightens and draws. They are the rivers of living water which, according to the promise of Jesus, flow from him who believes. They reveal **God living and acting here below**... To go through the treatises of Saint Teresa of Avila and the other Carmelites Saints is enough to make one aware of the **supernatural power and wealth of light and recollection** that **emanate from writings**

composed under the influence of a love which comes from **abounding mystical understanding...**

Love is the end of all...The **beatific vision** is alone **more desirable**, but is not of earth...

It would be **vain** to be **attached** to these lofty **manifestations of knowledge**, and to want to use them for themselves. That would be to try to grasp with the hand the flame leaping up from the fire or the light coming from it, so as to carry it away and make it one's own...Separated from the fire from which it emanates...it seems profaned and loses its living force...

Love alone has **absolute value** here below...

3-The Beatific Vision

The **beatific vision** is in the measure of **transforming love** and issues from it.

Contemplative lights lead the soul up to the **transparent veil** that conceals the majesty of God...One might think that when **death**, or rather the **force of love**, has **torn asunder the veil**, the lofty **knowledge** experienced in transforming union would, through the torn veil, be made **perfect** in the presence of its divine object. Not so...

The direct vision of God pertains to a **new power** given the soul ... or the **light of glory**; it issues from love...

The **contemplative lights** that **perfect** and **sustain** the **supernatural life** here below, the beginning of eternal life, **do not...**bring that life to its **perfection in heaven...**

Love and the **union** it effects between God and the soul transcend all **spiritual goods** of this world...
--and **love alone** will receive as its reward the vision and possession of God...

If I have prophecy and know all mysteries...yet do not have charity (love), I am nothing. 1Cor. 13:2

...if we would place all things according to their true value; we can **see clearly** the **only goal** of all our desire.

B-Transforming Union

... It is important to know in what the **transforming union** consists...The **definition** gives us the true notion of **sanctity** or **holiness...**This union is a **supernatural union**. It comes through **grace** and is a **participation** in the **divine life...** It consists in the **perfect union of wills...**

Perfect conformity with the will of God; ...is the **essential effect** and **practical criterion** of **perfect union**. And union cannot exist without **perfect purity...**

Purity in the soul is its capacity to **receive** God and **be united** with Him... the soul can **penetrate** into God and receive Him into itself in the measure of its purity...

This **aptitude for union** differs according to souls, being determined, it seems, by a **design of God...**The important thing then for each soul, is to **perfect the capacity for purity** that God has given it and to arrive at the purity that this perfection requires...Each soul is called to a certain **degree of union...**

The **transforming union** presented by Saint Teresa...has its **positive criteria** that **isolate** it from **divine union** and that ... place it on the **summit**, while presenting it as a legitimate object of our **supernatural hope**.

Though mysterious, these **criteria** are **precise** and **certain**. They can be grouped under **three headings**: transforming plenitude of grace, sovereignly dominating presence of the Holy Spirit, identification with Christ Jesus.

1-Transforming Plenitude of Grace

The term transforming union evokes...**complete transformation** of the soul through love. The soul is made divine and becomes **God by participation** in so far as may be in this life." (Spiritual Canticle). Its union with God is such that they have become "**two natures in one spirit and love of God.**" The full meaning of these words is best understood through the **definition** of sanctifying grace.

Sanctifying grace, first given at Baptism, is a **real participation in divine life**. It is infused into the soul...and takes possession of the **faculties** by means of the infused **theological virtues of faith, hope and love or charity...** The **soul** and its **faculties** are both **enveloped** and **penetrated** by this **divine life**. In fact spiritual life is **nothing else** than the **conquering progression** of the **divine life** by gradual **interiorization** (or turning within)...

...**Grace**, or participation in the divine life, penetrates to the depths of the soul, where it progressively **conquers** and **transforms** the **natural powers** of the soul (the intellect, the memory and the will) without destroying them and while imposing its **properties** on them. The soul becomes **God by participation...**

Grace transforms the soul only to unite it more closely to God. Union and transformation go along together...**Grace is charity, as God is love...**

Transforming union consists in this **mutual and complete merging** and the **perfect love** that brings it to pass. In **spiritual betrothal**, says Saint Teresa, the soul "is affected **only** in its **higher part**," whereas now the soul is drawn completely into its **center** where God dwells. (VII Mansions).

This Mansion of God becomes the soul's now too, where it will live from now on. For transforming union is **stable and definitive**... This **essential character**, the **stability of the union**, is illustrated especially by the **symbolism of marriage**...

This union draws its **stability** from the **transformation** which is its **basis**. ... it is confirmed by an abiding contact with God... this transformation comes about by a certain **absorption** of the soul in God, yet leaving the **two natures distinct**.

To make **clear** what this **transforming union** is and to express the **various aspects** of it---transformation, union of two natures through communication and stability in a certain absorption in God---Saint Teresa eagerly multiplies comparison and symbols:

We might say that union is as if the ends of two wax candles were joined so that the light they give is one: the wicks and the wax and the light are all one; yet afterwards the one candle can be perfectly well separated from the other and the candles become two again, or the wick may be withdrawn from the wax. But here it is like rain falling from the heavens into a river or a spring; there is nothing but water there and it is impossible to divide or separate the water belonging to the river from that which fell from the heavens. It is as if a tiny streamlet enters the sea, from which it will find no way of separating itself, or as in a room with two large windows through which the light streams in: it enters in different places but all becomes one.

Perhaps when Saint Paul says: "He who is joined to God becomes one spirit with Him," he is referring to his sovereign Marriage, which presupposes the **entrance of His Majesty into the soul by Union**. (VII Mansions)

These comparisons cast some light on an aspect of transforming Union...but let's bring them together to cast sufficient light on this **profound spiritual reality**...the **transforming union** ... shows us in the Saints, the living realization of **essence of divine life** in souls. It is **only that**, but it is **all that**. It is **stable and permanent** ... and can **progress**.

By **habitual union**, a transformation takes place in the substance of the soul and in the deep roots of the faculties... Through **the influence of the union and of**

God Himself on the activity of the **faculties**, the soul is **transformed**.

Transforming Union does not change but the **love** that brings it about can reach greater **degrees of perfection and intensity**. When a soul reaches transforming union all its natural **tendencies and properties are absorbed by love**. It is wholly filled with love and the soul's **capacity** for love can always be **enlarged**; love can go on progressing in new perfection and intensity. Love continues to kindle ever more subtle divine fires in the furnace of the purified, transformed soul...

2-Presence of the Holy Spirit

...**Participation in divine life** and in the **presence of God** are **two elements of sanctifying grace** received at Baptism. They are both **fully developed** in the transforming union. **Charity**, which **transforms and deifies** the soul also ensures union with God... The **transformed soul** possesses a **divine presence distinct** from the **participation** in the **divine life** that has become **habitual**. As the apostle says:

The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Rom. 5:5

...In transforming union, the **divine presence**, by its **activity and domination** over the soul, becomes as it were the **central fact** around which the **soul's whole life gravitates**.

3- Identification with Christ Jesus

Transforming union ends in **identification** with **Jesus Christ**, it's most perfect expression and work... He is the **goal of perfection**, God's **masterpiece** in the world; ... we must be **transformed into Him**...

The Holy Spirit ...takes possession of the soul as of a temple at Baptism to effect in it the **incarnation of divine life**.

...but the source par excellence of the divine life here below is the **Holy Eucharist—the principal channel of grace** ...that **sanctifies** the soul and **builds up** the **Church**... it unites souls to Christ Jesus. The Holy Eucharist is the **sanctifying sacrament** because of the soul's union with Jesus Christ.

Holiness and the **plan of God** are summed up in a few words in the **priestly prayer of Jesus**:

That they may be one, even as we are one: I in them and them in me; they may be perfected in unity. Jn. 17:23

...The **divine life** in us is the **life of Christ**; ...the whole Christ is made up of Christ and His members. This **essential truth** must be **realized** and **manifested** in the transforming union...

The **exterior revelation** of Christ in souls will take **different forms** ... it must be **real** and **deep** and visible by the **likeness** that **love creates** in the **will, thoughts, sentiments, and external activity**...

This **profound penetration** into the **charity of Christ** and this **transformation in Him**, together with the **lights of living faith** that accompany it---what a happy **definition of transforming union**, the fullness of God in the soul!

We discover this in fact in Saint Teresa. After describing this wondrous union with God that spiritual marriage brings to pass, the Saint adds, recalling the words of Saint Paul:

“For to me, to live is Christ; and to die is gain.” This I think, the soul may say here, for it is here that the little butterfly to which we have referred dies, and with the greatest joy, because Christ is now its life.
VII Mansions

A little further on, she insists on the discovery she has just made. Speaking of Christ’s praying for His apostles, she says:

His Majesty went on to say: **“Not for them alone do I pray, but also for all who believe in Me”**; and again: **“I am in them.”**

... **Transforming union** is a union and **communion of persons, realized in Jesus Christ**...

There are **great depths** to be **fathomed in Christ**... Saint John of the Cross tells us that this knowledge is the **loftiest wisdom attainable** in this **life**. (Spiritual Canticle)...

We are truly on the **summit**. We have gathered the **last** and **highest fruit** of the **transforming union**, the most beautiful and the simplest: **union with Christ Jesus** and a **likeness to Him** through **love**, for the **realization** of the **whole Christ**. Christian perfection and contemplative perfection lie in this union and this realization of Jesus Christ our Lord.

In conclusion, **transforming union** is a transformation through **loving resemblance with Christ Jesus**, the God-Man. The **saint** is the **branch** brought to fullness of life by the **sap** of the **vine that is Christ**.

...Jesus is God, and the transformation in Him is a **divinization** demanding **both detachment and self-denial**...

... **Perfection** consists in the likeness of love with Jesus, God and Man, and this **resemblance** is brought about in us by an **incarnation of the divine life**, which **transforms but does not destroy human nature**.

Divinization of human nature, that we may be **children of God**; **incarnation of the divine life** that we may be **Christians**—such is the **twofold realism** we must find in **transforming union** if it be **genuine and authentically Christian**.

Amen