

## Union of the Will

### Chapter IX

(An Extract taken from...)

I am a Daughter of the Church

Blessed Fr. Marie-Eugene, ocd

The **hard work** of the **fourth Mansions** is **finished**. It was sustained by **tastes of divine delights**, carried out in **suffering**...

A **divine reward** is offered the soul, a veritable **transformation: union of the will**. Saint Teresa's pretty comparison with the **silkworm** allows her to summarize the stages already reached, to place the new grace in its proper setting, and to point out its importance:

**The silkworm is like the soul which takes life when, through the heat which comes from the Holy Spirit, it begins to utilize the general help which God gives to all, and to make use of the remedies which He left in His Church---such as frequent confession, good books and sermons... the soul begins to live and nourishes itself on this food, and on good meditations, until it is full grown---and this is what concerns me now; the rest is of little importance.**

**When it is full-grown, then, as I wrote at the beginning, it starts to spin its silk and to build the house in which it is to die...**

**Here, then, daughters, you see what we can do, with God's favor, may His Majesty Himself be our Mission as He is in this Prayer of Union which, as it were, we ourselves spin.** V Mansions

She goes on to say...

**And, before we have finished doing all that we can in that respect, God will take this tiny achievement of ours, which is nothing at all, unite it with His greatness and give it such worth that its reward will be the Lord Himself...**

**...Let us hasten to perform this task and spin this cocoon... let the silkworm die---let it die, as in fact it does when it has completed the work which it was created to do. Then we shall see God and shall ourselves be as completely hidden in His greatness as is this little worm in its cocoon. Note, that, when I speak of seeing God, I am referring to the way in which, as I have said,**

**He allows Himself to be apprehended in this kind of union.**

**And now let us see what becomes of this silkworm, for all that I have been saying about it is leading up to this. When it is in this state of prayer, and quite dead to the world, it comes out as a little white butterfly.** V Mansions

The **transformation** brought about by the prayer of union is equivalent to a real metamorphosis. Teresa states:

**I tell you truly, the very soul does not know itself. For think of the difference between an ugly worm and a white butterfly; it is just the same here.** V Mansions

Before studying this profound action of God in the soul, let's mention a **problem** raised by the **Teresian description** and **terminology**.

When describing the same **stage of spiritual life** or the **end of the purification of the senses**... Saint John of the Cross does **not** speak of **union of the will**, but only of **contemplation**. He says:

**... The soul very readily finds in its spirit the most serene and loving contemplation and spiritual sweetness without the labor of meditation.** Dark Night

Have the **differences** ... between the two spiritual masters of Carmel grown to complete disagreement in the description of the fifth Mansions?

What is the **essential mark** of that loving **contemplation**, now habitual and easy, or the **union of the will**?

... Saint John of the Cross is a **spiritual director**. So just as the doctor goes to the sick, not to the well, the director ministers to **souls in trouble and difficulty**. His focus is on the **transition periods** which are the most **painful** and **obscure**. He is the doctor of the **dark nights**. The periods of euphoria --the fifth Mansions---detain him very little...although the soul could spend years in them because it finds tranquility and enjoyment...For him they are no more than an **intermediary** between **two nights**.... John attains especially to **light** and ... Teresa to **love: two different aspects of the same state**.

And so, while we must use the **teachings** of Saint John of the Cross for the **fourth** and the **sixth** Mansions, while Saint Teresa's doctrine is our **only guide** for the fifth Mansions.

The **four chapters** of the "**fifth Mansions**" are devoted to describing: the **grace of mystical union** (Chapters 1 & 2); a **state of union** or **union of the will** properly speaking (Chapters 3 & 4). These **two descriptions** are usually **disassociated**. The first, having to do with an **extraordinary grace**, is left for the **specialists**; the second is studied because it is ...an **established state** and especially because Saint Teresa declares that one can **attain** it by **one's own efforts**...

**Union of the will** constitutes...the **distinct note** of the fifth Mansions. Teresa studied it and underlined its importance. This is the union that is the **object** of her **ardent desire**.

...What is the **role** of the **mystical grace** in relation to **union of will**? Well, mystical grace is a "**shortcut**" to it. Hence **two ways lead** to this happy state: the **shortcut** of **mystical graces** and the **ordinary way** of **persevering effort**.

It is important to **study both** the short cut and the ordinary way to not neglect a body of doctrine of the highest importance. For Saint Teresa, **mystical graces** are not only **luminous signs** that indicate the **stage of the soul's progress**, but also **symbols** that reveal the ...**characteristic grace** of each stage. In this case **mystical grace** indicates the **region of the soul** where the **union takes place**.

It is easy to **mistake** a **good persevering will** or a **taste** for the **supernatural** or **intense desires** for **union of the will**. Let's hear from Teresa:

I like the way some souls, when they are at prayer, think that, for God's sake, they would be glad if they could be humbled and put to open shame—and then try to conceal quite a slight failure. Oh, and if they should be accused of anything that they have not done---! God save us from having to listen to them! V Mansions

And again:

When I see people very diligently trying to discover what kind of prayer they are experiencing and so completely rapt up in their prayers, that they seem afraid to stir...lest they should lose the slightest degree of the tenderness

and devotion which they have been feeling, I realize how little they understand of the road to the attainment of union. They think that the whole thing consists in this. But no, sisters, no; what the Lord desires is works. V Mansions

... Another **illusion**, more subtle, would be for a soul to think that it has arrived at union of will if it does not **grieve** at the **loss** of one who is dear:

**Do not think that if, for example, my father or brother dies, I ought to be in such conformity with the will of God that I shall not grieve at his loss, or that, if I have trials or illnesses, I must enjoy bearing them. It is good if we can do this and sometimes it is a matter of common sense: being unable to help ourselves, we make a virtue of necessity.** VII Mansions

There are more **profound signs** to enable us to **recognize genuine union of will**. An **analysis of mystical grace of union** will help us discover them.

## A-Mystical Grace of Union

Saint Teresa presents the **mystical grace of union** to us first as a deepening of preceding favors. She thus **compares** it to the **most elevated form of quiet**, which is the **sleep of the powers**, in order to point out the differences. The Saint writes:

**Do not think it is a state, like the last, in which we dream; I say "dream," because the soul seems to be, as it were, drowsy, so that it neither seems asleep nor feels awake. Here we are all asleep, and fast asleep, to the things of the world, and to ourselves ( in fact for the short time that the condition lasts, the soul is without consciousness and has no power to think, even though it may desire to do so)... In fact, it has completely died to the world so that it may live more fully in God. This is a delectable death, a snatching of the soul from all the activities which it can perform while it is in the body.** V Mansions

There is a real **suspension** of the activity of the powers, which takes the form of a **swoon**, with **loss of consciousness**. Teresa continues:

**I do not know if it (the soul) has still life enough to be able to breathe. I have just been thinking about this and I believe it has not; or at least, if it still breathes, it does so without realizing it.** V Mansions

The loss of consciousness is very brief:

**As long as such a soul is in this state, it can neither see nor hear nor understand: the period is always short and seems to the soul even shorter than it really is.** V Mansions

The awakening is followed by anxiety:

**The soul is doubtful as to what really happened until it has a good deal of experience. It wonders if the whole thing was imagined, if it was asleep, if the favor was a gift of God... It retains a thousand suspicions, and it is well that it should...** VII Mansions

**Complete obscurity characterizes the mystical grace of union of the fifth Mansions. The mystical grace of the sixth Mansions will be received in light. The soul has certitude nevertheless, even in the obscurity, and this certitude is an essential aspect of the grace ... Saint Teresa asserts that it is the surest sign of its authenticity.**

**I will give you a clear indication which will make it impossible for you to go wrong or to doubt if some favor has come from God. ... God implants himself in the interior of that soul in such a way that, when it returns to itself, it cannot possibly doubt that God has been in it and it has been in God; so firmly does this truth remain within it that, although for years God may never grant it that favor again, it can neither forget it nor doubt that it has received it.** V Mansions

This **certainty**, independent of any vision, **God alone can give**, affirms Saint Teresa. ... This **certitude** reveals to the soul what took place in the **obscurity of God's direct action** in it. The soul in its **whole essence** has been **united with God**. Teresa writes:

**He will come into the center of the soul without using a door, as He did when He came in to His**

**disciples, and said *Pax Vobis* (Peace be with you), and when He left the sepulchre without removing the stone.** V Mansions

Again...

**His Majesty is in such close contact and union with the essence of the soul that the devil will not dare to approach, nor can he understand this secret thing.** V Mansions

To **situate** this grace in relation to those to come in the following Mansions, Saint Teresa says it is the **soul's first meeting** with the **divine Spouse**.

**He grants the soul this mercy, desiring that she shall get to know Him better, and that ... they shall meet together, and he shall unite her with Himself. We can compare this kind of union to a short meeting of that nature because it is over in the very shortest time.** V Mansions

### **B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will**

In this meeting of the **whole soul in union with God**, the Master works a **profound marvel**.

**Here is the soul which God has made...completely foolish ....to better impress upon it true wisdom.** V Mansions

Teresa continues:

**God put her in the wine and ordained charity in her.** V Mansions

What can this mean, if not that the divine contact has produced an **abundant inflowing of charity...** The **effects** of these substantial touches of God are **profound** and **immutable** as is the essence of the soul that they affect. The **mystical grace of union** brings about an effective **hold of God** upon the soul; thereafter it bears the **mark** of a **divine seal**:

**His will is that, without understanding how, the soul shall go thence sealed with His seal. In reality, the soul in that state does no more than the wax when a seal is impressed upon it---the wax does not impress itself; it is only prepared**

**for the impress: that is, it is soft—and it does not even soften itself so as to be prepared; it merely remains quiet and consenting.** VI Mansions

But this possession of the soul by God after the grace of union, Saint Teresa warns us, is not yet definitive. It can be lost; ...

For this communication has been no more than (as we might say) one single short meeting and the devil will take great pains ...to hinder the betrothal...for as I have often said, if he wins a single soul in this way he will win a whole multitude ...

...Yet the soul comes from this contact with God really transformed

**... the very soul does not know itself. For think of the difference between an ugly worm and a white butterfly; it is just the same here.** V Mansions

With these words, Teresa... tells us how extraordinarily **profound** and **fruitful** are the **effects** of the **grace of union**. An **abundant inflowing of love** comes from this touch of God in the soul. It is normal that it is the **will** that gives sign of the most powerful effects, since this is the **faculty receptive of love** (charity)...

**The soul has now delivered itself into His hands and His great love has so completely subdued it that it neither knows nor desires anything save that God shall do with it what He wills.** V Mansions

This abandonment and suppleness of the will... assures peace to the soul, says Saint Teresa,

**... Nothing that happens on earth will afflict it unless it finds itself in peril of losing God... the soul sees clearly that He knows what He does better than it knows itself what it desires.** V Mansions

The divine captivation has wrought a detachment which is uprooting... The Saint writes:

**To see, then, the restlessness of this little butterfly — though it has never been quieter or more at rest in its life! ... Everything it sees on earth leaves it dissatisfied ... It is no longer bound by ties of relationship, friendship or property... Everything wearies it, because it has proved that it can find no true rest in creatures.** V Mansions

This detachment, which makes the butterfly “**feel a stranger to things of the earth,**” and allows it no “**rest in spiritual consolation or in earthly treasures,**” is accompanied by **burning ardors of love** that produce vehement **desires to glorify God.**

... This love creates in souls a strange solicitude for the things of God—strange because so new, strong, and painful:

**... Only a few years since—perhaps only a few days—this soul was thinking of nothing but of itself. Who has plunged it into such grievous anxieties?** V Mansions

Saint Teresa insists on the suffering that comes to the soul through the love that has been infused:

**I know that the torment that a certain person... suffers ... at seeing the Lord offended, is so intolerable that she would far sooner die than suffer it.** V Mansions

Its **greatest grief** is over the **loss of Christian souls.**

**...the soul finds itself longing to suffer great trials and unable to do otherwise. It has the most vehement desires for penance, for solitude, and for all to know God.** V Mansions

In fact, the **grace of union** is always **fruitful** for others, even if the soul is **unfaithful:**

**...it is God’s will that so great a favor should not be given in vain, and if the soul that receives it does not profit by it others will do so. For if a soul possesses these desires and virtues, it will always profit other souls so long as it leads a good life...** V Mansions

Such are the **marvelous riches** left in the **soul** by the **grace of mystical union**. The **contact** with God was of **short duration**; it **fruits permanent**. Very happily, Saint Teresa **distinguishes** the **mystical grace** from its **effects**. The **grace** is extraordinary and **reserved** for certain souls; its effects because they constitute the **union of will** that **characterizes the fifth Mansions**, are **sovereignly desirable**.

... How can one **make such fruits one's own without the mystical grace**? Saint Teresa has **solved the problem: mystical grace is a shortcut**. There is an **ordinary way** open to all souls; for this, suspension of the powers is **not** necessary. The Saint explains:

**The Lord can enrich souls in many ways and bring them to these Mansions by many other paths than the short cut which has been described.** V Mansions

### C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

Before entering upon this **new way**, Saint Teresa gives us a **grave warning** that to advance on this way will be **no less difficult** for being ordinary:

**...the silkworm has of necessity to die; and it is this that will cost you most; for death comes more easily when one can see oneself living a new life, whereas our duty now is to continue living this present life, and yet die of our own free will. I confess to you that we shall find this much harder.** V Mansions

... The **short cut**, quick ascent and a certain facility; by the **ordinary way**, slow progress and hard asceticism.

... The **two ways**: mystical grace and ordinary progress, lead to the **same end**. Let us recall the effects of mystical union; two words sum them up: **perfect love and absolute detachment**... It would not be **genuine union** without that **high degree of love effected** by a **profound divine rapture**, or without the **absolute detachment** necessary for the reign of that love.

### 1-ASCETISM OF DETACHMENT

In order to arrive at the detachment from relatives, friends, and worldly goods that ensures perfect liberty of spirit and makes one feel **“a stranger to things of the earth,” “we shall need to do a very great deal before we can attain this higher state, and we must on no account be careless.** V Mansions

This labor will consist in the **practice** of the **virtues**, of **obedience** particularly, which **sets free** the **will** and **judgment**, and in the **gift of self**, which must be **complete**.

**But observe, daughters, that, if you are to gain this, He would have you keep back nothing; ... He will have it all for Himself, ... There is no better test than this of whether or no our prayer attains union.** V Mansions

The sharp sword of **active asceticism cannot** ... bring about such a **liberation**. The soul ... follows its own **limited views**, unconsciously **egotistic**. It spares itself without knowing it and provides itself with compensations... **Only the sword of God** has the right to **cut clean** certain **bonds**; only it can pierce through into the depths that free... the lives of the **saints** and the experience of souls whose valor has attracted **God's purifying glance** and **merited this honor** permit us to see with what **merciful power Holy Wisdom** excels in **tormenting** those whom He calls to **perfect union**.

### 2-PRACTICE OF LOVE

The soul's role is **not limited** to the **asceticism of detachment**. More important still is the **development of love** (or charity-God's way of loving). **Union** is the **work of love**... Love alone can give to the **work of detachment** its **perfection** and assure the soul's **surrender** and **suppleness** which are the **marks of genuine union of will**. What does the **practice of love include**? Saint Teresa put her nuns **on guard against** illusions created by **intensity of feeling**, especially against **...seeking God** ... only in **recollection and delights**.

**... how little do they understand the road to the attainment of union. ... what the Lord desires is**

works. If you see a sick woman to whom you can give some help, never be affected by fear that your devotion will suffer, but take pity on her: if she is in pain, you should feel pain too; if necessary, fast so that she may have your food, not so much for her sake as because you know it to be your Lord's will. That is true union with His will. V Mansion

There, clearly stated, is the **importance of acts** to attain **union**, which resides in the **will**... There must be acts and acts over again to truly develop **charity**... only those **acts develop virtue**...

... One person accomplishes **his duty**, honestly, **without fervor**: his acts are good but weak. His neighbor differs little from him, but his **awakened fervor** contributes to **purifying his intention** and gives his acts that **little nothing** which makes them perfect: his **acts** are **good** and **intense**. Little differentiates the two exteriorly. And yet, the **second** attains over time the **prayer of union**; while the **second** has been **lulled into routine** that has **arrested all progress**.

### 3-THE INTERVENTION OF GOD

Just as the **active effort** of the **soul** cannot attain **detachment** and **suppleness** that comes from **mystical grace**, **neither** can it attain the **love** necessary to bring about **union of the will**.

... **Charity** is **divine** and only the Holy Spirit can put it in our hearts... the **perfect love of union** of the **will**, even in the **ordinary way**, is not uniquely the **fruit of the soul's merits**. It is given by a **merciful intervention** of divine **Wisdom**... **Union of the will** cannot be attributed solely to the **soul's efforts**, nor can the **ordinary way** be considered uniquely **ascetic**.

For Saint Teresa, the **soul's work** brings about the **disposition** "necessary to complete union with the will of God."

And before we have finished doing all that we can do in that respect, God will take this tiny achievement of ours, which is nothing at all, unite it with His greatness and give it such worth that its reward will be the Lord Himself. V Mansions

... **Union** comes from God's captivation of the soul and leaves the **principal part** to **His action**. This **direct intervention of God**, who **infuses His love**, occurred before in the **prayer of quiet** and of **contemplative dryness** which...are wholly an **infusion of love in the will**... It seems that God **progressively** takes **captive** the soul by means of **sweet or painful bonds**, until **union of will** is effected.

...To **distinguish** the **ordinary way** from the **short cut that is mystical grace**, we should not so much stress **God's direct intervention**—common and necessary to both—as the **mode** of that **intervention**. Saint Teresa gives us the solution to the problem:

**The Lord can enrich souls in many ways and bring them to these Mansions by many other paths than the short cut...** V Mansions

It is the **suspension of the powers** or the extraordinary **way** the **grace** is given, and not a **special quality** of that grace, which **characterizes** the **short cut**. Whatever the way that leads to it, union of the will is constituted by God's loving possession of the will, which becomes surrendered and supple under His divine impulses.

A precious grace, "**But alas**, laments Saint Teresa, "**that so few of us are destined to attain!**" It is a grace that marks a **stage of supreme importance** in the **way of perfection**. It is the point of departure for the **last stages** toward **sanctity**, for the **fulfillment of high destinies** in the **divine plan**.

AMEN