

Union of the Will

an extract taken from...

I am a daughter of the Church

Chapter 1X

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Union of the Will

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:

Union of the Will

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

Union of the Will

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

Union of the Will

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

Union of the Will

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

Union of the Will

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.

Union of the Will

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.

Union of the Will

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

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.

Union of the Will

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

Union of the Will

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

Union of the Will

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

A-Mystical Grace of Union

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

A-Mystical Grace of Union

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

A-Mystical Grace of Union

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

A-Mystical Grace of Union

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.

A-Mystical Grace of Union

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

A-Mystical Grace of Union

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

A-Mystical Grace of Union

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

A-Mystical Grace of Union

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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

Teresa continues:

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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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:

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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 ...

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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.

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

... 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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

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

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

Such are the marvelous riches left in the soul by the grace of mystical union. The contact with God was of short duration; its 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.

B-Effects of Mystical Grace: Union of Will

... 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

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

... 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.

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

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

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

1-ASCETISM OF DETACHMENT

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

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

1-ASCETISM OF DETACHMENT

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.

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

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.

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

2-PRACTICE OF LOVE

... 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 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

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

2-PRACTICE OF LOVE

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.

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

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.

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

3-THE INTERVENTION OF GOD

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

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

3-THE INTERVENTION OF GOD

... 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.

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

3-THE INTERVENTION OF GOD

...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

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

3-THE INTERVENTION OF GOD

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.

C. Ordinary Way to Union of Will

3-THE INTERVENTION OF GOD

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