

## Synthesis

(An Overview of the 7 Mansions)

### The Interior Castle

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Although the **outer wall** of the castle (the **body**) is ordinary... Inside the castle are many dwelling places, above, below, and to the sides, with lovely gardens and fountains and labyrinths... In other words, the **spiritual life** that goes on within the castle is a **complex matter** involving the **individual's capacities**, the **diversity of ways**, and **differing spiritual depths**... God's dwelling place is at the center of the castle.

The **gate of entry is prayer**. Prayer is a **door** that opens up into the **mystery of God** and at the same time a means of communing with Him. It brings about the personal relationship with the Lord present in the very depths of the spirit.

#### The First Dwelling Places

Setting aside those souls **outside the castle**, paralyzed and crippled, in need of special healing from the Lord Himself if they are to enter, Teresa turns her attention to those who have **entered the first area**. Little of the glowing light from the King's royal chamber filters into these first dwelling places. Too many things **entice** and **distract** souls here and thus prevent them from taking the time to search for the **true light**. "So, I think, must be the condition of the soul...it is so involved in worldly things and so absorbed with its possession, honor or business affairs... that even though... it would want to see and enjoy its beauty these things do not allow it to..." Such people do have some good desires, however; and they even pray on occasion. Their need, as is true for everyone, is for **self-knowledge** and for **knowledge of the beauty of a soul in grace** and of the ugliness of one in sin; or, for some insight into the Christian mystery of

sin and grace. **Self-knowledge and humility grow** as the soul moves onward through the castle toward the center.

#### The Second Dwelling Places

...Rooms have been set apart for those who have taken the first steps in the practice of prayer. These souls are more receptive to the promptings...of Christ's grace which comes mainly through external means such as books, sermons, good friendships and trials. The struggle with evil is more keenly felt. It is time for the characteristically Teresian **determination** to persevere convinced that the **spiritual life** cannot be grounded on **consolations**. Conformity with **God's will** must be the **goal** of one's strivings.

#### The Third Dwelling Places

To **persevere in prayer** and the **struggle involved** is to go forward. At this stage these souls begins to long to **not offend** His Majesty; they **guard against** venial sin, are fond of **ascetical practices** and **periods of recollection**, seek to use their **time** well, practice **charity** toward their neighbor, and maintain balance in **speech, dress** and the management of their **household**. They are good Christians and the Lord will not deny these souls entrance into the **final dwelling place** if they so desire. Like the young man in the Gospel, they **could turn** upon hearing the requirements for becoming **perfect**. Any **threat** to honor or wealth will quickly reveal their **attachment** to these as well as to their health... They also have a tendency to be too easily **shocked** by the faults of others and **distraught** by a little dryness in prayer. Though these souls find more **consolation** in the **spiritual life** than in material comforts... they **seldom** receive the deeper... peace and quiet of contemplation... They need to

... speak with someone **free of the world's illusions**.

Dealing less extensively with these first three dwelling places, Teresa says little about prayer, nor does she advise on methods ... as it is in response to the need the souls have of knowing about **passive prayer** that Teresa felt she could contribute.

... Is it not useless we may ask... to read about **mystical prayer** and **favors** when we do not, for whatever reason, experience the same things? Teresa replies that learning about God's work will lead a receptive soul to the **prayer of praise**... Knowledge of these favors will make souls aware of how much they may lose through their own fault. The testimony she gives of her own contemplative experience ... provides the theologian an abundance of material for reflection.

#### **The Fourth Dwelling Places**

The beginning of the **supernatural or mystical** ... presents Teresa with the problem of how to explain **infused prayer**. She first seeks a solution by analyzing the **difference between consolations** (contentos) and **spiritual delights** (gustos); the former have their origins in our human nature and end in God while the latter begin in God and overflow to human nature. The **consolations** result from **our own effort** accompanied by God's grace; the **spiritual delight** is received **passively**.

In this dwelling place, the **first degree** of infused prayer are discussed. Teresa points out here that **'the important thing is not to think much but to love much; and so do that which best stirs you to love.'** For Teresa, **love** "doesn't consist in great delight but in desiring with strong determination to please God in everything ..."

This contemplative prayer begins with a passive experience of recollection... which

is different from the recollection achieved through human effort. This prayer of **infused recollection** is a less intense form of **initial contemplation** or...the **prayer of quiet** ... The **will** finds rest in the prayer of quiet ... while the intellect continues to move about. One should just **let it go**... for **distractions**, the wandering mind, are a part of the human condition...

In a further effort to **explain the difference** between acquired and infused prayer, Teresa turns to another analogy: the different ways in which **two water troughs** are filled. One is filled with water channeled through **aqueducts**...the other is filled by a **spring** bubbling up from the very spot where the trough is...

... The **worth of one's prayer** is not judged however, by its passive character; rather, "it is in the **effects and deeds** following afterward that one discerns the true value of prayer."

Finally, in this dwelling place, **passive prayer**, in its beginning stages, the **natural** (active) and the **supernatural** (passive) are **joined**. It is not unusual for souls to enter here.

#### **The Fifth Dwelling Places**

The **prayer of union** characterizes these rooms. Here the **faculties** become, in Teresa's words, **suspended**. There is a **certitude**, not found in the **partial union** of the fourth mansions, that is left in the soul that **it was in God and God in it**.

Teresa ... in her attempt to find the best explanation turns to the analogy ... of the **silkworm**. Through the image of the silkworm, she speaks ingeniously of **death and of new life in Christ**. In this prayer of union, **God Himself becomes the dwelling place or cocoon** in which the person dies. Once **dead to itself and its attachments**, the soul breaks forth transformed as does a small white butterfly.

Having made the point of the soul's death in Christ, Teresa introduces her final analogy which serves to lead her readers through the **remaining dwelling places** to the center of the castle: **marriage and its preparatory stages ...** In these experiences of union, His Majesty desires that the soul, get to know Him better.

Teresa encourages us not to be **idle**. One so intimate with His Majesty, must walk with care... in **the exercise of virtue**, with special emphasis on **love of neighbor, humility** (or the desire to be considered the least), and in faithful performance of **ordinary tasks**.

### **The Sixth Dwelling Places**

This is the longest section of the Interior Castle is devoted to this stage of the inward journey where Teresa deals with many **extraordinary mystical phenomena**.

...Through both **desires for God** and the **sufferings these desires cause**, the Lord enables the soul to find the **courage** to be **joined** to Him and to take Him as its **Spouse**.

... Without the courage, given by God, such a union would be impossible. This fortitude results from many internal and external **trials** such as opposition from others; praise; illnesses; inner sufferings, fears, misunderstanding on the confessor's part and the resulting anxiety that God will allow one to be deceived; a feeling of inner oppression and even of being rejected by God.

Other preparations for the betrothal come in the form of certain spiritual awakenings and impulses deep within the soul; there are many kinds to include woundings of love that can cause pain and delight at the same time.

The betrothal takes place with His Majesty and 'gives the soul **raptures** that draw it out of its senses.' For if it were to see itself so

near this great Majesty while in its senses, it would perhaps die. Though a soul in ecstasy seems unconscious in its outward life, it was never before so **awake to the things of God** nor did it ever before have so deep an **enlightenment and knowledge of God**.

Beside **locutions** with their beneficial effects, the soul may begin to receive an understanding of **divine mysteries** through **intellectual** and **imaginative visions**. The Lord shows it heavenly secrets.

The supernatural realities of Teresa's mystical experience were so **varied and complex** that they are hard to categorize.

The **effects** they leave in the soul are like **jewels** the Spouse gives the betrothed; they are knowledge of God's grandeur, self-knowledge to include humility and rejection of earthly things not used in the service of God and finally an excess of joy...

Teresa made some firm assertions about the **human and divine Christ** present throughout one's spiritual pilgrimage. He is the one through whom all blessings come. No state is so sublime...that would oblige one to empty the mind of all reference to the **human Christ**. "Life is long, and there are in it many trials, and we need to look at Christ as our model, to see how He suffered these trials...to bear them with perfection. Jesus is too good a companion for us to turn away from Him."

Teresa makes an **important distinction** between **discursive meditation about** the Christ and **contemplative presence to** Him. It is very common that **contemplative souls** are **unable** to engage in discursive thought about the mysteries of the Passion and life of Christ. Teresa suggests contemplating them, or "dwelling on them with a **simple gaze**," that "will not impede the most sublime prayer." But by forgetting Christ and seeking continual absorption in the Divinity will **prevent entry** into the last two Dwelling places. Teresa is most **insistent** on this. The **purification** of the soul is realized

not merely through the **sufferings** inherent to the human condition but especially through **contact** with the person of Christ in his humanity and divinity.

The **desires of love** are always increasing through these **favors** and **purifications**. The butterfly is ever more restless. They reach a point of extreme **spiritual torment** bringing about a **final purification** before entering the seventh dwelling place, “just as those to enter heaven must be cleansed in purgatory.” This intense **spiritual torment** can cause both **ecstasy**, as can intense **spiritual joy**, but can also place one in danger of death. However, the soul is aware that this spiritual suffering is a precious favor.

### The Seventh Dwelling Places

Teresa taught that there are **no closed doors** between the sixth and seventh dwelling places. She divides them “because there are things in the last that are not revealed to those who have not yet reached it.” In the **prayer of union** of the **fifth dwelling place** and the **raptures** of the **sixth**, the Lord makes the **soul blind** and **deaf** as was St. Paul in his conversion. When God joins the soul to Himself, it doesn’t understand anything of the nature and kind of favor enjoyed. However, in the seventh dwelling place, the union happens differently: “Our good God now desires to **remove the scales** from the soul’s eyes and let it see and understand ... something of the favor He grants it... The person no longer ... falls into ecstasy...”

**Entry** into these last ... dwelling places takes place through an **intellectual vision of the Most Blessed Trinity** ... in “the extreme interior, in some place very deep within itself.” ... The presence of the Trinity **remains** and is **felt habitually** ... yet ... **does not interfere** with the multiple and

diverse daily duties carried out as acts of service.

The grace of **spiritual marriage**, of perfect union, is also bestowed in this center dwelling place and occurs through an **imaginative vision** of the **Lord’s most sacred humanity**... The term “**marriage**” designates the **union** and the **degree of His Majesty’s love**. It is so great and reaches such a point that the spirit is **made one** with God “**just as those who are married cannot be separated.**”

With **no allowance for division**, as there is in spiritual betrothal (likened to the joining and separation of the flames of two candles), the union of spiritual marriage makes Teresa think of the **rain** that has fallen into a river, or of a **stream** that enters the sea, or of the **beams of light** entering a room through different windows and becoming one.

At this point the butterfly dies because its new life is Christ ... The ultimate goal of Teresa’s journey, the spiritual marriage, is a union with Christ... and as time passes, the soul understands more clearly that **its life is Christ**.

Having examined the **effects** of this union ... Teresa ... explains that the **purpose** of these splendid favors is that one might **live like Christ** and that the **fruit** of the spiritual marriage **must** be **good works**. The interior calm fortifies these souls ... that they might have the **strength to serve** ... “The Lord doesn’t look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done.” His Majesty will join our sacrifice with that which He offered for us on the cross. “Thus even though our works are small they will have the value our love for Him would have merited had they been great.”

In the prologue, Teresa states her **intention** to **write about prayer**, and anyone reading the Interior Castle would surely agree that it is a book about **prayer and its stages**.

However, in a letter dated December 7,

1577, a week after completion of her manuscript, Teresa refers to her book ... as being a book about God... This remark illustrates well how for Teresa the **journey in prayer through the interior castle to the center room is nothing else that the magnificent work of God's love.**

Amen