

# CHAPTER IX

## Union of the Will

*This is the union which I have desired all my life; it is for this that I continually beseech Our Lord.<sup>1</sup>*

Here now is finished the hard travail of the fourth Mansions. True, the toil of them was sustained by tastes of divine delights, but it was carried on in suffering, in the dark night of sense, according to the terminology of Saint John of the Cross.

A divine reward is offered to the soul, a veritable transformation: union of the will. Let us hear Saint Teresa speak of this. Her 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:

You will have heard of the wonderful way in which silk is made—a way which no one could invent but God—and how it comes from a kind of seed which looks like tiny peppercorns. . . . When the warm weather comes, and the mulberry trees begin to show leaf, this seed starts to take life; until it has this sustenance, on which it feeds, it is as dead. The silkworms feed on the mulberry-leaves until they are full grown, when people put down twigs, upon which, with their tiny mouths, they start spinning silk, making themselves very tight little cocoons, in which they bury themselves. Then, finally, the worm, which was large and ugly, comes right of the cocoon a beautiful white butterfly. . . .

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 confessions, 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.

<sup>1</sup> V Mansions, iii; Peers, II, 260.

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 favour. May His Majesty Himself be our Mansion as He is in this Prayer of Union which, as it were, we ourselves spin.<sup>2</sup>

The Saint explains that for the construction of this divine dwelling, the part that is in our power is to give of ourselves and die to ourselves as do the little silkworms.

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. . . .

On, then, my daughters! 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.<sup>3</sup>

The transformation wrought by the prayer of union is equivalent to a real metamorphosis. Such is the meaning of the comparison emphasized by Teresa herself:

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.<sup>4</sup>

Before studying this profound action of God in the soul, we must mention a problem raised by the Teresian description and terminology.

When describing the same stage of the spiritual life, that is, the one that marks the end of the purification of sense, Saint John of the Cross does not speak of union of the will, but only

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii; 253-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; 254-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*; 255.

of contemplation. He says of the soul that God is about to lead onward:

It is wont to pass a long time, even years, after leaving the state of beginners, in exercising itself in that of proficient. In this latter state it is like to one that has come forth from a rigorous imprisonment; it goes about the things of God with much greater freedom and satisfaction of the soul, and with more abundant and inward delight than it did at the beginning before it entered the said night. . . . It now very readily finds in its spirit the most serene and loving contemplation and spiritual sweetness without the labour of meditation.<sup>5</sup>

Have the differences that were previously noted between the two spiritual masters of Carmel <sup>6</sup> now grown to the point of complete disagreement in the description of the fifth Mansions?

What is the essential mark of that loving contemplation which has become habitual and easy, or of the union of will?

Let us first call attention to the brevity of Saint John of the Cross's description. Our Saint is a spiritual director. Now, just as the doctor goes to the sick and not to those who are well, the director ministers to souls in trouble and difficulty. In the spiritual journey Saint John of the Cross carries, then, in the transition periods, which are the most painful and the most obscure. Being a prudent and compassionate director, he is the doctor of the dark nights. The periods of euphoria, such as the fifth Mansions, detain him very little, although ordinarily the soul passes a rather long time in them, even years, because there it finds tranquillity and enjoyment. His descriptions are limited to what we have quoted, short of a few lines.

Nor does it astonish us that in the few sentences given to this period, which for him is intermediary between the two nights, Saint John of the Cross should place in relief the con-

<sup>5</sup> *Dark Night*, Bk. II, i; Peers, I, 374. We would not dare to say that these descriptions correspond exclusively to the fifth Mansions of Saint Teresa, but they certainly include them, since they refer to the "very long time" that separates the dark night of sense (the beginning of the fourth Mansions) from the dark night of the spirit (sixth Mansions).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *supra*, ch. ii, "God as Light and God as Love," p. 28 ff.

templative effects; both the logic of his explanation and the particular quality of his experience required that it be so. John attains especially to light, as has been said;<sup>7</sup> Teresa to love. The first therefore lays stress on sweet and delightful contemplation, the second speaks of the union of will, which is the fruit of love: two different aspects of the same state, the manifold riches of which are thus opened up to our view.

But, besides the fact that the very brevity of the texts of Saint John of the Cross precludes our seeing in them a complete exposition of this period and expecting to find precise data that the Saint did not intend to give, we think that Saint Teresa's descriptions of it, more developed as they are, are also nearer to life. And so, while we must use extensively the teaching of Saint John of the Cross for the fourth and the sixth Mansions, Saint Teresa's doctrine will be our only guide in the fifth Mansions.

The four chapters of the "fifth Mansions" are devoted to describing, first, a mystical grace of union (chapters one and two), then a state of union or union of the will properly speaking (chapters three and four). Usually, these two descriptions are disassociated. The first, having to do with an extraordinary grace, is left for the initiated and specialists; the second is studied because it is not a transitory grace but is an established state, and especially because Saint Teresa declares that one can attain to it by one's own efforts.

It seems to us that this disassociation arbitrarily breaks the unity of the Teresian fifth Mansions. It incurs the risk of misunderstanding the value of the union of will itself and of placing it in a false perspective.

Union of will constitutes, beyond doubt, the distinctive note of the fifth Teresian Mansions. The Saint wishes to study it and underline its importance. This is the union that is the object of her ardent desire.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

This is the union which I have desired all my life; it is for this that I continually beseech Our Lord.<sup>8</sup>

What is the role of the mystical grace in relation to the union of will? It is a "short cut" <sup>9</sup> to it. Hence two ways lead to this happy state: the short cut of mystical graces and the ordinary way of persevering effort.

But let us not study merely the ordinary way to the neglect of the short cut, under the plea that extraordinary graces are of only limited practical interest. Otherwise we should neglect a body of doctrine of the highest importance. For Saint Teresa, mystical graces are not only luminous signs that indicate the stages of the soul's progress, but also symbols that reveal the nature of the characteristic grace of each stage. In this case, the mystical grace indicates the profound regions of the soul where union of will takes place. The Saint's teaching is to be underlined as most opportune.

How many, actually, are the illusions apropos of this union of will! It is so easy to mistake for it a good persevering will, or a certain taste for the supernatural, or intense desires. Saint Teresa has hunted down these illusions; let us hear what she says.

I like the way in which 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! <sup>10</sup>

And again:

When I see people very diligently trying to discover what kind of prayer they are experiencing and so completely wrapt up in their prayers that they seem afraid to stir, or to indulge in a moment's thought, 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

<sup>8</sup> V Mansions, iii; Peers, II, 260.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*; 262.

whole thing consists in this. But no, sisters, no; what the Lord desires is works.<sup>11</sup>

Saint Teresa is speaking to her daughters and so draws examples from their life. It would be easy to apply them to another milieu.

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 my 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.<sup>12</sup>

There are signs more profound than these that enable one to recognize genuine union of will. An analysis of the mystical grace of union will help us to discover them.

### A. Mystical grace of union

Saint Teresa presents to us at first the mystical grace of union as a deepening of preceding favors. Thus she compares it to the most elevated form of quiet, which is the sleep of the powers, in order to point out the differences.

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.<sup>13</sup>

There is, then, a veritable suspension of the activity of the

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*; 262-3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; 261.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, i; 248. Cf. also: *Way of Perfection*, xxi; Peers, II.

powers, which takes the form of a swoon, with loss of consciousness. The Saint 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.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, 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.<sup>15</sup>

The awakening is followed by anxiety:

The soul is doubtful as to what has really happened until it has had a good deal of experience of it. It wonders if the whole thing was imagination, if it has been asleep, if the favour was a gift of God, or if the devil was transfigured into an angel of light. It retains a thousand suspicions, and it is well that it should, for, as I said, we can sometimes be deceived in this respect, even by our own nature.<sup>16</sup>

This complete obscurity characterizes the mystical grace of union of the fifth Mansions. The mystical graces 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, so that 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 favour 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 favour again, it can neither forget it nor doubt that it has received it.<sup>17</sup>

This certainty, independent of any vision, God alone can give, affirms the Saint.<sup>18</sup> It is such that of itself it makes known the presence of God in the soul.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*; 251.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*; 249.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*; 250-1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; 251.

I know of a person who had not learned that God was in all things by presence and power and essence: God granted her a favour of this kind, which convinced her of this so firmly. . . .<sup>19</sup>

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. The testimony of the Saint is clear, although given only by way of allusion:

He will come into the centre of the soul without using a door, as He did when He came in to His disciples, and said *Pax vobis*, and when He left the sepulchre without removing the stone.<sup>20</sup>

She had already said:

His Majesty is in such close contact and union with the essence of the soul that he [the devil] will not dare to approach, nor can he even understand this secret thing.<sup>21</sup>

And, situating this grace in its relation to those that will come in the following Mansions, Saint Teresa says that it is the soul's first meeting with the divine Spouse.

He grants her [the soul] this mercy, desiring that she shall get to know Him better, and that, as we may say, 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.<sup>22</sup>

## B. Effects of mystical grace: union of will

In this meeting which comes to pass in a union of the whole soul with God,<sup>23</sup> and not simply of some one of its powers, the Master works a profound marvel!

Here is this soul which God has made, as it were, completely foolish in order the better to impress upon it true wisdom.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*; 249.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, iv; 265.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, i; 252.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

In the words of the *Canticle of Canticles*, the Saint says elsewhere:

God put her in the cellar of wine and ordained charity in her.<sup>25</sup>

What can this mean, if not that the divine contact has produced an abundant inflowing of charity.

This charity is in such abundance and of such quality that the soul retains the mark of it. 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.<sup>26</sup>

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; and the devil does not fail to use his most subtle tricks to destroy it:

For this communication has been no more than (as we might say) one single short meeting and the devil will take great pains about combating it and will try to hinder the betrothal. . . .

I tell you, daughters, I have known people of a very high degree of spirituality who have reached this state, and whom, notwithstanding, the devil, with great subtlety and craft, has won back to himself. For this purpose he will marshall all the powers of hell, for as I have often said, if he wins a single soul in this way he will win a whole multitude. The devil has much experience in this matter.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, ii; 257.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; iv; 265. And in the following pages, Saint Teresa finely describes that subtle action of the devil as he succeeds in separating from God a soul already taken captive by Him: "The devil comes with his artful wiles, and, under colour of doing good, sets about undermining it in trivial ways, and involving it in practices which, so he gives it to understand, are not wrong; little by little he darkens its understanding, and weakens its will, and causes its self-love to increase, until in one way and another he begins to withdraw

The soul must wait for the spiritual betrothal before it is so firmly possessed by God that no enemy will be able to separate it from Him.<sup>28</sup>

Although it is true that the bonds created by the grace of union can be broken by the cleverness of the devil, yet the soul comes from this contact with God really transformed, so that

. . . 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.<sup>29</sup>

These words of the Saint, quoted before, recalling the change of the silkworm into a butterfly, tell 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. Captivated by God, it is entirely surrendered to His good pleasure:

That 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.<sup>30</sup>

This abandonment and suppleness of the will—which moreover admits of degrees and goes on being perfected—assures peace to the soul, says Saint Teresa,

. . . in this life and in the next as well. Nothing that happens on earth will afflict it unless it finds itself in peril of losing God, or sees that He is offended—neither sickness nor poverty nor death, except when someone dies who was needed by the Church of God. For this soul sees clearly that He knows what He does better than it knows itself what it desires.<sup>31</sup>

The divine captivation has wrought a detachment which is an uprooting. This is one of the most sensible effects. The soul

---

it from the love of God and to persuade it to indulge its own wishes" (V Mansions, iv; 266).

<sup>28</sup> VI Mansions, iv; 292.

<sup>29</sup> V Mansions, ii; 255.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; 257.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, iii; 260.

is lost, as it were, in the midst of all that formerly concerned it. 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! Here is something to praise God for—namely, that it knows not where to settle and make its abode. By comparison with the abode it has had, everything it sees on earth leaves it dissatisfied, especially when God has again and again given it this wine which almost every time has brought it some new blessing. It sets no store by the things it did when it was a worm—that is, by its gradual weaving of the cocoon. . . . It is no longer bound by ties of relationship, friendship or property. Previously all its acts of will and resolutions and desires were powerless to loosen these and seemed only to bind them the more firmly; now it is grieved at having even to fulfil its obligations in these respects lest these should cause it to sin against God. Everything wearies it, because it has proved that it can find no true rest in the creatures.<sup>32</sup>

This detachment, which makes the butterfly “feel a stranger to things of the earth,”<sup>33</sup> and allows it no “rest in spiritual consolations or in earthly treasures,”<sup>34</sup> is accompanied by burning ardors of love that produce vehement desires to glorify God.

All that it can do for God seems slight by comparison with its desires.<sup>35</sup>

And these are efficacious desires, which ensure it strength to practise the austerities of apostolic immolation:

For the weakness which it used to think it had when it came to doing penance is now turned into strength.<sup>36</sup>

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

Oh, the greatness of God! Only a few years since—perhaps only a few days—this soul was thinking of nothing but itself. Who has plunged it into such grievous anxieties?<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, ii; 255-6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*; 256.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, iv; 264.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, ii; 255.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*; 257.

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

I know that the torment which a certain person of my acquaintance has suffered, and suffers still, at seeing the Lord offended, is so intolerable that she would far sooner die than suffer it.<sup>38</sup>

Its greatest grief is over the loss of Christian souls.<sup>39</sup>

It finds itself so anxious to praise the Lord that it would gladly be consumed and die a thousand deaths for His sake. Then it 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.<sup>40</sup>

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

For my own part I believe it is God's will that so great a favour should not be given in vain, and that if the soul that receives it does not profit by it others will do so. For, as the soul possesses these aforementioned desires and virtues, it will always profit other souls so long as it leads a good life, and from its own heat new heat will be transmitted to them. Even after losing this, it may still desire others to profit, and take pleasure in describing the favours given by God to those who love and serve Him.

I knew a person to whom this happened . . . and she brought them very, very great profit.<sup>41</sup>

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 are permanent. Very happily, Saint Teresa distinguishes the mystical grace from its effects. The grace is extraordinary and reserved to certain souls; its effects, because they constitute the union of will that characterizes the fifth Mansions, are sovereignly desirable.

But can these desires be truly efficacious, however legitimate they may be? How can one make such fruits one's own without the mystical grace? Saint Teresa has solved the problem: the

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*; 258.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*; 256.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*; 255.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, iii; 259. Cf. also: *Life*, xix; *Peers*, I.

mystical grace is a short cut. There is an ordinary way open to all souls; for this, suspension of the powers is not necessary, as 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.<sup>42</sup>

### C. Ordinary way to union of will

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

But note very carefully, daughters, that the silkworm has of necessity to die; and it is this which 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 to die of our own free will. I confess to you that we shall find this much harder.<sup>43</sup>

The image of the short cut through a winding road seems to indicate that the latter is easier because the ascent is slower. But no; by the short cut, quick ascent and a certain facility; by the ordinary way, slow progress and hard asceticism.

We must not be surprised at this. The two ways: mystical grace and ordinary progress, lead indeed to the same end. Let us recall the effects of mystical union already described; two words sum them up: perfect love and absolute detachment. The difference in the way of acquiring them might, almost unconsciously, cause us to place less value on these words and the realities that they signify. This would be to put at stake union of the will, itself. It would not be genuine union without that high degree of love effected by a profound divine rapture, nor without the absolute detachment necessary for the reign of that love.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; 260.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

## I. ASCETICISM OF DETACHMENT

We readily understand this: 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," <sup>44</sup> "we shall need to do a very great deal before we can attain to this higher state, and we must on no account be careless." <sup>45</sup>

This resolute 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; whether it be little or much, He will have it all for Himself, and according to what you know yourself to have given, the favours He will grant you will be small or great. There is no better test than this of whether or no our prayer attains to union.<sup>46</sup>

The sharp sword of active asceticism cannot of itself alone bring about such a liberation. The soul knows how to wield it only by following its own limited views, unconsciously egotistic. It spares itself without knowing it and provides itself with compensations. Besides, could it without apparent cruelty, without presumption or without wounding charity, deprive itself of necessary goods and break with legitimate affections like those of relatives and friends? Only the sword of God has the right to cut clean certain bonds; only it can pierce through into the depths that free. To do this, it makes use of various events and free secondary causes. 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.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*; 248.

## 2. PRACTICE OF LOVE

The part the soul must play is not limited to the asceticism of detachment. More important still is the development of love. Union is the work of love. And so, with Saint John of the Cross, we must repeat that it is supremely important for the soul to exercise itself in holy love. There are some souls who attach such importance to this exercise of love that for them concern about detachment takes only second place. Such was Saint Therese of the Child Jesus. What has been said about the mystical grace of perfect union seems to justify their attitude. Detachment is in their case the fruit of infused love; hence love is both end and means. Why should it not be the same for those who ascend by the ordinary way? But even here, care must be taken that the detachment be real, for it alone is the authentic proof of the quality of love. Whatever may be said of the primacy of love, it is certain that love alone can give to the work of detachment its perfection and assure to the soul the self-surrender and suppleness that are the proper mark of genuine union of will.

What does this practice of love include? Speaking to her daughters, Saint Teresa puts them on guard against illusions created by intensity of feeling, especially against that anxious and gluttonous seeking for God that would want to find Him only in recollection and delights. We have already heard her affably laugh at those persons so "wrapt up" in their prayers that they seem afraid to stir lest they lose the slightest degree of tenderness and devotion, for

. . . 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. 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.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, iii; 263.

There, clearly stated, is the importance of acts in order to attain to this union, which resides in the will and not in the sense faculties. There must be, then, acts and acts over again truly to develop charity. Is not this the place to recall that only those acts develop virtue that put to use the whole strength of the virtue already acquired and hence are called intense: while weak acts, good in themselves but not exercising all the charity that has been acquired, run the risk of diminishing its strength rather than increasing it. This theological truth is of considerable practical importance. Moreover, intensity here means perfection of the act in itself and purity of intention, not necessarily effort or violence in performing the act.

Thus it appears that the development of charity and the union of will that is its fruit are bound up with imponderables. One person goes along accomplishing his duty, honestly, without apparent fervor as without slackness: his acts are good but weak. Another, his neighbor, differs little from him, but his awakened fervor keeps on faithfully attentive to purify his intention and to add to his acts that little nothing which gives them their perfection: his acts are good and intense. The latter, and he alone, is growing in the virtue of love. Years pass in a life that the two lead in common and that differentiates them but little exteriorly. And yet, the second attains at length to the prayer of union; while the first, better endowed perhaps, is lulled into an ease and routine that have arrested all progress.

### 3. THE INTERVENTION OF GOD

Just as the active effort of the soul cannot attain to the detachment and suppleness that we have seen comes through mystical grace, neither can it attain to the love that effects union of will. Certainly, it is always true to say that charity is a divine thing, and that only the Holy Spirit can put it in our hearts. It is also true that it can be an object of merit. But what we want to say precisely here is that the perfect love of union of 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. It is important to emphasize this truth, in order that union of will be not attributed solely to the efforts of the soul, and that even the ordinary way be not considered as exclusively ascetic.

For Saint Teresa, in fact, the work of the soul tends only to bringing about the dispositions "necessary to complete union with the will of God."<sup>48</sup>

She writes:

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.<sup>49</sup>

He it is who "can enrich souls in many ways and bring them to these Mansions."<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, besides the fact that the union of two free beings requires the convergence of their mutual love, and hence the free sharing on the part of each one of them, union of will comes from God's captivity of the soul and leaves, consequently, the principal part to His action.

This direct intervention of God, who infuses His love, occurred before in the prayers of quiet and of contemplative dryness which, under different experiences, are wholly an infusion of love in the will.<sup>51</sup> Saint John of the Cross himself, in the few lines that he has given to it, notes as characteristic of this period facility in entering upon sweet and loving contemplation, as well as a certain spiritual delight.<sup>52</sup> It seems, then, that God progressively takes captive the soul by means of sweet or painful bonds, until union of will is effected.

And so, in order to distinguish from the ordinary way the

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*; 261.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, ii; 254.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, iii; 260.

<sup>51</sup> In the prayer of quiet especially, Saint Teresa likes to stress that only the will is constantly held captive. This prayer, then, is a direct preparation for union of will.

<sup>52</sup> *Dark Night*, Bk. II, i; Peers, I.

short cut that is mystical grace, we should stress much less the direct intervention of God, which is common and necessary to both, than the mode of that intervention. Saint Teresa, in a text already quoted, 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 which has been described.<sup>53</sup>

It is the suspension of the powers, hence the extraordinary and powerful way in which the grace is given, and not a special quality of that grace, which characterizes the short cut. Whatever be the way leading to it, union of will is constituted by God's loving possession of the will, which thus becomes self-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!"<sup>54</sup> It is a sovereignly desirable grace, marking a stage of supreme importance in the way of perfection. Most of all, it is a point of departure for the last stages toward sanctity, for the realization of high destinies in the divine plan.

<sup>53</sup> V Mansions, iii; Peers, II, 260.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*