

The Living Flame Of Love by St. John of the Cross

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Introduction To The Living Flame Of Love

The Poem

The stanzas of The Living Flame of Love sing of an elevated union within the intimate depths of the spirit. The subject matter is exalted, so much so that John dares speak of it only with a deeply recollected soul. The image of flame, working on the wood, dispelling the moisture, turning it black, then giving it the qualities of fire, appeared first in the Dark Night. In the Canticle it turns up again in the serene night toward the end of the poem, a flame that is painless, comforting, and conformed to God. This flame, John told us there, is the love of the Holy Spirit. Now, having grown hotter and sometimes flaring up, it impels the Carmelite friar to write more verses about the sublime communion taking place in his deepest center.

At this depth he lives in both stable serenity and exalted activity; the tone is prolonged admiration and holy ardor. The six-line length of each stanza, the sounds, the rhythm, convey these characteristics.

All the verses of the poem point to the same profundity; there is no progressive movement from stage to stage. The focus is on the present, on what is taking place now. Only a few times is there a glance toward what went before, and then merely for the sake of stating that the past has unfolded into the peace and plenitude of the present.

John wrote this brief lyric creation that so ardently and closely approaches the mystery of divine union for Doña Ana de Peñalosa, a devout laywoman whom he directed. It is the only instance we know of in which he composed a poem for another, although we do not know whether he did so in answer to a request from her. What is certain is that he composed these stanzas burning in love's flame, with the intimate and delicate sweetness of love.

The Commentary

As John composed his commentary on the stanzas of the Spiritual Canticle, those close to him made copies and circulated them. It is not surprising that Ana de Peñalosa would ask for another commentary, one on the magnificent stanzas John had written for her. If we consider the mentality of the times, when many frowned on the practice of mental prayer among women (as we know from St. Teresa's experience) and thought of sanctity as a pursuit more suited to monks and friars, it is surprising that John wrote this loftiest of his works for a laywoman. The only thing that made him hesitate to respond to her pleadings was his difficulty in speaking of what pertained to the intimate depths of one's being. He waited for a spirit of recollection and fervor to descend on him, as seems to have been the case with his poems. Then he wrote the work, immersed in the flame, in the shortest space of time, within a span of two weeks (according to Fray Juan Evangelista), and at a time, in 1586, when he had many other duties as vicar provincial of Andalusia. The profound recollection he required of himself referred to the interior quality of his life, not to a freedom from business matters and concerns. He waited for an opportunity in which he could almost relive the moment of the poem, and thus the commentary bears much of the poetry's light and heat, its symbolism and lyric tone.

As with the Dark Night and the Spiritual Canticle, he follows his customary procedure: first he cites the entire poem; then, repeating each stanza separately, he sums up its content; finally, he explains each verse in particular. The commentary of the Flame is more prolonged than that of the Canticle, but not as extended as in the Night. At times, rather than adhere to a simple interpretation of these expressions of his own experience,

he heeds the call to be a spiritual teacher and enters into digressions that enlarge the commentary. The paramount one occurs in the third stanza, numbers 27-67. There he explains how souls must watch what they are doing and into whose hands they commit themselves so as not to impede God's work and thereby stumble and slip back on their journey.

John also teaches about some other topics that lie outside the immediate scope of the poem: the soul's purgation wrought previously by the flame (1. 19-25); the cause and mode of death of those who have reached the state of transformation (1. 30); transpiercing of the soul and impression of the stigmata (2. 9-14); the necessity of suffering in order to reach transformation in God (2. 25-30); the thirst, hunger, and longing of the spiritual faculties experienced toward the end of purification and illumination (3. 18-26).

On the whole, as with the poem itself, John's concentration is on the present, the high goal from which he may glance fleetingly at the past or look to a future glory intuited rather than fully known from his present horizon. He begins where he left off in the *Spiritual Canticle*, with the highest degree of perfection attainable in this life, transformation in God, called also spiritual marriage.

Within this state love can become more ardent, and the wood more incandescent and inflamed. In other words, the love is deeper in quality and more perfect within this very state of transformation. What this means is that there is greater likelihood for habitual union to become actual, for the fire to burst into flame. The activity of the Holy Spirit is now more powerful, the experiences are on the borderline between faith and eternal glory. In different modes the stanzas concentrate on the same realities. Thus as he interprets his poem for us, John explains how there are two different aspects of union with God and the total union experienced in the substance and faculties of the soul may be either habitual or actual. The actual union, always a passing phenomenon, never becomes permanent on this earth. The habitual union of love is compatible with everyday life, less intense in form. Here John is speaking of those moments in which God's special self-communication is more alive and intense. He refers to these symbolically as living flames, delightful wounds, splendors from the lamps of fire, and awakenings of the Beloved.

The dominant theme is the wonderful work of God in his Trinitarian Being, illumining and delighting and absorbing the soul in the embrace of love. And John here describes and gives witness to this mystical experience taking place in his deepest center, in the profound caverns of his being. This is a new country to which he brings us. Now he speaks more of glorification than of purification. His absorption is not in some undetermined absolute, but in communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The heightened periods of sublime union are like glimpses of glory offered to the spirit. It is as though the Holy Spirit were summoning a person to the next life by the immense glory he marvelously and with gentle affection places before its eyes. This is made possible by a highly illumined faith, the veil being now so thin that it no longer cloaks the light with darkness but allows it to begin to seep through. This soul finds as well a remarkable new delight in all of creation, for it now knows creatures in God. Absorbed in God, enlivened by his loving presence and communication, it receives a foretaste of eternal life. At the time of these glorious encounters, the soul comes within a step of departing from earth.

John senses that people may either think he is exaggerating or not believe him at all; in fact, what he says seems to him as far short of the reality as a painting is from the living object. He notes in such human skepticism a failure to understand who God really is, that the Lord delights in being with the children of this earth. Why should we marvel that he wants to be so prodigal in giving? John points out that lovers love and do good to others in the measure of their own nature and properties. Because God is liberal, the reasoning continues, he loves and favors and does good to us liberally. But perhaps Ana de Peñalosa was herself able to share something of the very realities John was describing. Those who are cleansed and enkindled with love are in the position to taste and relish this language of God; others without this preparation may find the words uninteresting, bitter, or incredible.

As with the *Spiritual Canticle*, two redactions have come down to us and are referred to as Flame A and

Flame B. But the likeness to the Canticle stops there, for the differences between the two versions of the Flame are not notable. Without any change in the sequence of the stanzas, the modifications in the second redaction, Flame B, consist only of some clarifying insertions and some more detailed doctrinal explanations. Most probably John introduced these variations into the text while at La Peñuela in the last months of his life, August-September 1591. A witness who lived with him at La Peñuela told of how in the early morning John used to withdraw into the garden for prayer and remain there until, coaxed by the heat of the sun, he returned to his monastery cell where he spent his time writing on certain stanzas of poetry. By this date all his other works, including the Canticle, had reached their final stage. Moreover John brought a copy of the work with him to Ubeda. He gave it as a gift in gratitude to Ambrosio de Villareal, the doctor who had cared for him there. What must have been the doctor's thoughts as he read of "how much God exalts the soul that pleases him"?

The work may be divided this way:

Stanza 1

The nature and work of the flame (1-26).

In the deepest center.

A flame that previously purged.

The desire for glory (27-36).

The veils of separation.

The death of love.

Stanza 2

The work of the three divine Persons in the soul's substance (1-22).

The blazing, wounding fire of the Holy Spirit.

The powerful, bounteous hand of the Father.

The delicate, delightful touch of the Word.

The hundredfold reward (23-36).

Stanza 3

The splendors produced by the lamps of fire (1-76).

The work of both the soul and the Holy Spirit.

The deep capacities of the caverns of the soul.

Cautions against three blind guides.

Blindness caused by the appetites.

The soul's gift to God (77-84).

Stanza 4

Awakening of the Word; knowledge of creation in him (1-13).

The secret indwelling of God in the soul's substance (14-16).

Participation in the breathing of the Holy Spirit (17).

We have translated the second redaction, or Flame B, and have followed the Codex of Sevilla, consulting as well the Codex of Baeza and the Codex of Toledo, which is a copy of the first redaction.

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Prologue

THE LIVING FLAME OF LOVE

Jesus Mary Joseph

A commentary on the stanzas that treat of a very intimate and elevated union and transformation of the soul in God, written at the request of Doña Ana de Peñalosa¹ by the author of the stanzas.

Prologue

1. I have felt somewhat reluctant, very noble and devout lady, to explain these four stanzas as you asked. Since they deal with matters so interior and spiritual, for which words are usually lacking - in that the spiritual surpasses sense - I find it difficult to say something of their content; also, one speaks badly of the intimate depths of the spirit if one does not do so with a deeply recollected soul. Because of my want of such recollection, I have deferred this commentary until now, a period in which the Lord seems to have uncovered some knowledge and bestowed some fervor. This must be the result of your holy desire; perhaps, since I have composed the stanzas for you, His Majesty wants me to explain them for you. I have been encouraged in knowing certainly that through my own ability I shall say nothing worthwhile, especially in matters so sublime and vital, and thus only the faults and mistakes of this commentary will be mine. Submitting it to the judgment and better opinion of our Holy Mother the Roman Catholic Church, by whose rule no one errs, finding my support in Sacred Scripture, and knowing the reader understands that everything I say is as far from the reality as is a painting from the living object represented, I will venture to declare what I know.

2. There is no reason to marvel at God's granting such sublime and strange gifts to souls he decides to favor. If we consider that he is God and that he bestows them as God, with infinite love and goodness, it does not seem unreasonable. For he declared that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit would take up their abode in those who love him by making them live the life of God and dwell in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Jn. 14:23], as the soul points out in these stanzas.

3. Although in the stanzas we have already commented on,¹ we speak of the highest degree of perfection one can reach in this life (transformation in God), these stanzas treat of a love deeper in quality and more perfect within this very state of transformation. Even though it is true that what these and the other stanzas describe is all one state of transformation, and as such one cannot pass beyond it; yet, with time and practice, love can grow deeper in quality, as I say, and become more ardent. We have an example of this in the activity of fire: Although the fire has penetrated the wood, transformed it, and united it with itself, yet as this fire grows hotter and continues to burn, so the wood becomes much more incandescent and inflamed, even to the point of flaring up and shooting out flames from itself.

4. It should be understood that the soul now speaking has reached this enkindled degree, and is so inwardly transformed in the fire of love and elevated by it that it is not merely united to this fire but produces within it a living flame. The soul feels this and speaks of it thus in these stanzas with intimate and delicate sweetness of love, burning in love's flame, and stressing in these stanzas some of the effects of this love.

In this commentary I will use the method I have used before: First I will quote all the stanzas together; then, after recording each stanza separately, I will present a brief explanation of it; finally I will quote each verse and comment upon it.

Stanzas the Soul Recites in Intimate Union With God.

1. O living flame of love
that tenderly wounds my soul
in its deepest center! Since
now you are not oppressive,
now consummate! if it be your will:
tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!

2. O sweet cautery,
O delightful wound!
O gentle hand! O delicate touch
that tastes of eternal life
and pays every debt!
In killing you changed death to life.

3. O lamps of fire!
in whose splendors
the deep caverns of feeling,
once obscure and blind,
now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,
both warmth and light to their Beloved.

4. How gently and lovingly
you wake in my heart,
where in secret you dwell alone;
and in your sweet breathing,
filled with good and glory,
how tenderly you swell my heart with love.

The composition of these lyric lines is like those that in Boscón are given a religious meaning and that go:

La soledad siguiendo.
llorando mi fortuna,
me voy por los caminos que se ofrecen, and so on.

In these stanzas there are six lines; the fourth rhymes with the first, the fifth with the second, and the sixth with the third.²

STANZA 1

O living flame of love
that tenderly wounds my soul
in its deepest center! Since
now you are not oppressive,
now consummate! if it be your will:
tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!

Commentary

1. The soul now feels that it is all inflamed in the divine union, its palate is all bathed in glory and love, that in the intimate part of its substance it is flooded with no less than rivers of glory, abounding in delights, and from its depths flow rivers of living water [Jn. 7:38], which the Son of God declared will rise up in such souls. It seems, because it is so forcefully transformed in God, so sublimely possessed by him, and arrayed with such rich gifts and virtues, that it is singularly close to beatitude - so close that only a thin veil separates it.

And the soul sees that every time the delicate flame of love, burning within, assails it, it does so as though glorifying it with gentle and powerful glory. Such is the glory this flame of love imparts that each time it absorbs and attacks, it seems that it is about to give eternal life and tear the veil of mortal life, that very little is lacking, and that because of this lack the soul does not receive eternal glory completely. With ardent desire the soul tells the flame, the Holy Spirit, to tear the veil of mortal life now by that sweet encounter in which he truly communicates entirely what he is seemingly about to give each time he encounters it, that is, complete and perfect glory. And thus it says:

O living flame of love

2. To lay stress on the sentiment and esteem with which it speaks in these four stanzas, the soul uses in all of them the exclamations, "O" and "how," which indicate an affectionate emphasis. Each time they are uttered they reveal more about the interior than the tongue expresses. "O" serves to express intense desire and to use persuasion in petitioning. The soul uses this expression for both reasons in this stanza because it intimates and stresses its tremendous desire, persuading love to loose it.

3. This flame of love is the Spirit of its Bridegroom, who is the Holy Spirit. The soul feels him within itself not only as a fire that has consumed and transformed it but as a fire that burns and flares within it, as I mentioned. And that flame, every time it flares up, bathes the soul in glory and refreshes it with the quality of divine life.

Such is the activity of the Holy Spirit in the soul transformed in love: The interior acts he produces shoot up flames, for they are acts of inflamed love, in which the will of the soul united with that flame, made one with it, loves most sublimely. Thus these acts of love are most precious; one of them is more meritorious

and valuable than all the deeds a person may have performed in the whole of life without this transformation, however great they may have been. The same difference lying between a habit and an act lies between the transformation in love and the flame of love. It is like the difference between the wood on fire and the flame leaping up from it, for the flame is the effect of the fire present there.

4. We can compare the soul in its ordinary condition in this state of transformation of love to the log of wood that is ever immersed in fire, and the acts of this soul to the flame that blazes up from the fire of love. The more intense the fire of union, the more vehemently does this fire burst into flames. The acts of the will are united to this flame and ascend, carried away and absorbed in the flame of the Holy Spirit, just as the angel mounted to God in the flame of Manoah's sacrifice [Jgs. 13:20].

Thus in this state the soul cannot make acts because the Holy Spirit makes them all and moves it toward them. As a result all the acts of the soul are divine, since both the movement to these acts and their execution stem from God.¹

It seems to such persons that every time this flame shoots up, making them love with delight and divine quality, it is giving them eternal life, since it raises them up to the activity of God in God.

5. This is the language and these the words God speaks in souls that are purged, cleansed, and all enkindled; as David exclaimed: Your word is exceedingly enkindled [Ps. 119:139]; and the prophet: Are not my words, perchance, like a fire? [Jer. 23:29]. As God himself says through St. John, these words are spirit and life [Jn. 6:63]. These words are perceived by souls who have ears to hear them, those souls, as I say, that are cleansed and enamored. Those who do not have a sound palate, but seek other tastes, cannot taste the spirit and life of God's words; his words, rather, are distasteful to them.

Hence the loftier were the words of the Son of God, the more tasteless they were to the impure, as happened when he preached the sovereign and loving doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, for many turned away [Jn. 6:60-61, 66].

6. Those who do not relish this language God speaks within them must not think on this account that others do not taste it. St. Peter tasted it in his soul when he said to Christ: Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life [Jn. 6:68]. And the Samaritan woman forgot the water and the water jar for the sweetness of God's words [Jn. 4:28].

Since this soul is so close to God that it is transformed into a flame of love in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are communicated to it, how can it be thought incredible that it enjoy a foretaste of eternal life? Yet it does not enjoy eternal life perfectly since the conditions of this life do not allow it. But the delight that the flaring of the Holy Spirit generates in the soul is so sublime that it makes it know that which savors of eternal life. Thus it refers to this flame as living, not because the flame is not always living but because of this effect; it makes the soul live in God spiritually and experience the life of God in the manner David mentions: My heart and my flesh rejoiced in the living God [Ps. 84:2]. David did not refer to God as living because of a necessity to do so, for God is always living, but in order to manifest that the spirit and the senses, transformed in God, enjoy him in a living way, which is to taste the living God - that is, God's life, eternal life. Nor did David call him the living God other than because he enjoyed him in a living way, although not perfectly, but as though by a glimpse of eternal life. Thus in this flame the soul experiences God so vividly and tastes him

with such delight and sweetness that it exclaims: O living flame of love!

that tenderly wounds my soul

7. That is, that with your ardor tenderly touches me. Since this flame is a flame of divine life, it wounds the soul with the tenderness of God's life, and it wounds and stirs it so deeply as to make it dissolve in love. What the bride affirmed in the Song of Songs is fulfilled in the soul. She was so moved that her soul melted, and so she says: As soon as he spoke my soul melted [Sg. 5:6]. For God's speech is the effect he produces in the soul.

8. But how can one claim that the flame wounds the soul, since there is nothing left in it to wound now that it is all cauterized with the fire of love? It is something splendid that since love is never idle, but in continual motion, it is always emitting flames everywhere like a blazing fire, and since its duty is to wound in order to cause love and delight, and it is present in this soul as a living flame, it dispatches its wounds like most tender flares of delicate love. Joyfully and festively it practices the arts and games of love, as though in the palace of its nuptials, as Ahasuerus did with his bride Esther [Est. 2:16-18]. God shows his graces there, manifests his riches and the glory of his grandeur that in this soul might be fulfilled what he asserted in Proverbs: I was delighted every day, playing before him all the time, playing in the world. And my delights were to be with the children of the earth [Prv. 8:30-31], that is, by bestowing delights on them. Hence these wounds (his games) are flames of tender touches; arising from the fire of love, which is not idle, they suddenly touch the soul. These, it says, occur inwardly and wound the soul.

in its deepest center!

9. This feast takes place in the substance of the soul where neither the center of the senses nor the devil can reach. Therefore, the more interior it is, the more secure, substantial, and delightful, because the more interior it is, the purer it is. And the greater the purity, the more abundantly, frequently, and generously God communicates himself. Thus the delight and joy of the soul is so much more intense because God is the doer of all without the soul's doing anything. Since the soul cannot do any work of its own save through the means and aid of the corporeal senses, from which in this event it is very free and far removed, its sole occupation now is to receive from God, who alone can move the soul and do his work in its depths. Thus all the movements of this soul are divine. Although they belong to it, they belong to it because God works them in it and with it, for it wills and consents to them.² Since by saying that the flame wounds in its deepest center the soul indicates that it has other, less profound centers, we ought to explain what is meant by these words.

10. First it should be known that the soul, insofar as it is a spirit, does not possess in its being high and low, deeper or less deep, as do quantitative bodies. Since it has no parts, there is no difference as to inward and outward; it is all one kind and does not have degrees of quantitative depth. It cannot receive greater illumination in one part than in another like physical bodies, but all of it is illumined equally in a degree of greater or lesser intensity, like air that is illumined or not illumined according to degrees.

11. The deepest center of an object we take to signify the farthest point attainable by that object's being and power and force of operation and movement. So fire or a rock have the natural power and motion necessary to reach their center, but they cannot pass beyond it. They can fail to reach and rest in this center if a powerful contrary movement impedes them.

Accordingly, we assert that when a rock is in the ground it is, after a fashion, in its center, even though it is not in its deepest center, for it is within the sphere of its center, activity, and movement; yet we do not assert that it has reached its deepest center, which is the middle of the earth. Thus the rock always possesses the

power, strength, and inclination to go deeper and reach the ultimate and deepest center; and this it would do if the hindrance were removed. When once it arrives and no longer has any power or inclination toward further movement, we declare that it is in its deepest center.

12. The soul's center is God. When it has reached God with all the capacity of its being and the strength of its operation and inclination, it will have attained its final and deepest center in God, it will know, love, and enjoy God with all its might. When it has not reached this point (as happens in this mortal life, in which the soul cannot reach God with all its strength, even though in its center - which is God through grace and his self-communication to it), it still has movement and strength for advancing further and is not satisfied. Although it is in its center, it is not yet in its deepest center, for it can go deeper in God.

13. It is noteworthy, then, that love is the inclination, strength, and power for the soul in making its way to God, for love unites it with God. The more degrees of love it has, the more deeply it enters into God and centers itself in him. We can say that there are as many centers in God possible to the soul, each one deeper than the other, as there are degrees of love of God possible to it. A stronger love is a more unitive love, and we can understand in this manner the many mansions the Son of God declared were in his Father's house [Jn. 14:2].

Hence, for the soul to be in its center - which is God, as we have said - it is sufficient for it to possess one degree of love, for by one degree alone it is united with him through grace. Should it have two degrees, it becomes united and concentrated in God in another, deeper center. Should it reach three, it centers itself in a third. But once it has attained the final degree, God's love has arrived at wounding the soul in its ultimate and deepest center, which is to illuminate and transform it in its whole being, power, and strength, and according to its capacity, until it appears to be God.

When light shines on a clean and pure crystal, we find that the more intense the degree of light, the more light the crystal has concentrated within it and the brighter it becomes; it can become so brilliant from the abundance of light received that it seems to be all light. And then the crystal is undistinguishable from the light, since it is illumined according to its full capacity, which is to appear to be light.

14. When the soul asserts that the flame of love wounds it in its deepest center, it means that insofar as this flame reaches its substance, power, and strength, the Holy Spirit assails and wounds it. It does not make such an assertion to indicate that this wounding is as essential and integral as in the beatific vision of the next life. Even though a soul attains to as lofty a state of perfection in this mortal life as that which we are discussing, it neither can nor does reach the perfect state of glory, although perhaps in a passing way God might grant it some similar favor. Yet the soul says this in order to manifest the fullness and abundance of delight and glory it feels in this kind of communication from the Holy Spirit. This delight is so much more intense and tender the stronger and more substantially the soul is transformed and concentrated in God. Since this center is the furthest attainable in the present life - although not as perfectly attainable as in the next - the soul refers to it as the deepest center.

Even though the soul can perhaps possess in this life a habit of charity as perfect as in the next, yet the operation and fruition of charity in this life will not be so perfect, even though the operation and fruition of love increase to such a degree in this state that there is great resemblance to the beatific state. The similarity is such that the soul dares to affirm only what it would dare affirm about the next life, that is: in the deepest center of my soul.

15. Since these rare experiences (which are what we ascribe to the soul in this state) are more remarkable than credible, I do not doubt that some persons, not understanding them through their own knowledge or knowing of them through experience, will either fail to believe them or consider the account an exaggeration; or they will think these experiences less than what they really are.

Yet I reply to all these persons that the Father of lights [Jas. 1:17], who is not closefisted but diffuses himself abundantly as the sun does its rays, without being a respecter of persons [Acts 10:34], wherever there is room - always showing himself gladly along the highways and byways - does not hesitate or consider it of little import to find his delights with the children of the earth at a common table in the world [Prv. 8:31].

It should not be held as incredible in a soul now examined, purged, and tried in the fire of tribulations, trials, and many kinds of temptations, and found faithful in love, that the promise of the Son of God be fulfilled, the promise that the Most Blessed Trinity will come and dwell in anyone who loves him [Jn. 14:23]. The Blessed Trinity inhabits the soul by divinely illumining its intellect with the wisdom of the Son, delighting its will in the Holy Spirit, and absorbing it powerfully and mightily in the unfathomed embrace of the Father's sweetness.

16. If he acts thus in some souls, as it is true he does, it should be believed that this soul we are speaking of will not be left behind in regard to receiving these favors from God. For what we are explaining about the activity of the Holy Spirit within it is something far greater than what occurs in the communication and transformation of love. This latter resembles glowing embers; the former is similar to embers that are not merely glowing but have become so hot that they shoot forth a living flame.³

And thus these two kinds of union (union of love alone, and union with an inflaming of love) are somehow comparable to the fire of God which, Isaiah says, is in Zion, and to his furnace which is in Jerusalem [Is. 31:9]. The one signifies the Church Militant, in which the fire of charity is not enkindled to an extreme; the other signifies the vision of peace, which is the Church Triumphant,⁴ where this fire is like a furnace blazing in the perfection of love. Although, as we said,⁵ the soul has not attained such great perfection as is present in this vision of peace, yet, in comparison with the other common union, this union resembles a blazing furnace in which there is a vision much more peaceful and glorious and tender, just as the flame is clearer and more resplendent than the burning coal.

17. The soul, feeling that this living flame of love is vividly communicating to it every good, since this divine love carries all things with it, exclaims: "O living flame of love that tenderly wounds my soul." This is like saying: O enkindled love, with your loving movements you are pleasantly glorifying me according to the greater capacity and strength of my soul, bestowing divine knowledge according to all the ability and capacity of my intellect, communicating love according to the greater power of my will, and rejoicing the substance of my soul with the torrent of your delight, your divine contact and substantial union, in harmony with the greater purity of my substance and the capacity and breath of my memory! And this is what happens, in an indescribable way, at the time this flame of love rises up within the soul.

Since the soul is completely purged in its substance and faculties (memory, intellect, and will), the divine substance, which because of its purity touches everywhere profoundly, subtly, and sublimely, as the Wise Man says [Wis. 7:23-24], absorbs the soul in itself with its divine flame. And in that immersion of the soul in wisdom, the Holy Spirit sets in motion the glorious flickerings of his flame. Since the flame is so gentle the soul adds:

Since now you are not oppressive,

18. This means: since you no longer afflict or distress or weary me as you did before. It should be recalled that when the soul was in the state of spiritual purgation, which was at the time of the beginning of contemplation, this flame of God was not so friendly and gentle toward it as now in this state of union. In order to explain this we will have to delay somewhat.⁶

19. Before the divine fire is introduced into the substance of the soul and united with it through perfect and complete purgation and purity, its flame, which is the Holy Spirit, wounds the soul by destroying and consuming the imperfections of its bad habits. And this is the work of the Holy Spirit, in which he disposes it for divine

union and transformation in God through love.

The very fire of love that afterward is united with the soul, glorifying it, is what previously assailed it by purging it, just as the fire that penetrates a log of wood is the same that first makes an assault on the wood, wounding it with the flame, drying it out, and stripping it of its unsightly qualities until it is so disposed that it can be penetrated and transformed into the fire.

Spiritual writers call this activity the purgative way. In it a person suffers great deprivation and feels heavy afflictions in the spirit that ordinarily overflow into the senses, for this flame is extremely oppressive.

In this preparatory purgation the flame is not bright for a person but dark. If it does shed some light, the only reason is so the soul may see its miseries and defects. It is not gentle but afflictive. Even though it sometimes imparts the warmth of love, it does so with torment and pain. And it is not delightful, but dry. Although sometimes out of his goodness God accords some delight in order to strengthen and encourage it, the soul suffers for this before and afterward with another trial.

Neither is the flame refreshing and peaceful, but it is consuming and contentious, making a person faint and suffer with self-knowledge. Thus it is not glorious for the soul, but rather makes it feel wretched and distressed in the spiritual light of self-knowledge that it bestows. As Jeremiah declares, God sends fire into its bones and instructs it [Lam. 1:13]; and as David also asserts, he tries it with fire [Ps. 17:3].

20. At this stage persons suffer from sharp trials in the intellect, severe dryness and distress in the will, and from the burdensome knowledge of their own miseries in the memory, for their spiritual eye gives them a very clear picture of themselves. In the substance of the soul they suffer abandonment, supreme poverty, dryness, cold, and sometimes heat. They find relief in nothing, nor does any thought console them, nor can they even raise the heart to God, so oppressed are they by this flame. This purgation resembles what Job said God did to him: You have changed to being cruel toward me [Jb. 30:21]. For when the soul suffers all these things jointly, it truly seems that God has become displeased with it and cruel.

21. A person's sufferings at this time cannot be exaggerated; they are but little less than the sufferings of purgatory. I do not know how to explain the severity of this oppression and the intensity of the suffering felt in it, save by what Jeremiah says of it in these words: I am the man that sees my poverty in the rod of his indignation. He has led me and brought me into darkness and not into light. Only against me he has turned and turned again his hand. He has made my skin and my flesh old, and he has broken my bones. He has surrounded me and compassed me with gall and labor. He has set me in dark places as those who are dead forever. He has built around me that I might not get out. He made my fetters heavy. And besides this when I have cried out and prayed, he has shut out my prayer. He shut up my ways with square rocks and turned my steps and paths upside down [Lam. 3:1-9]. Jeremiah laments all this and goes on to say much more.⁷

Since in this fashion God mediates and heals the soul of its many infirmities, bringing it to health, it must necessarily suffer from this purge and cure according to its sickness. For here Tobias is placing the heart on the coals to release and drive out every kind of demon [Tb. 6:8]. All the soul's infirmities are brought to light; they are set before its eyes to be felt and healed.

22. Now with the light and heat of the divine fire, it sees and feels those weaknesses and miseries that previously resided within it, hidden and unfelt, just as the dampness of the log of wood was unknown until the fire applied to it made it sweat and smoke and sputter. And this is what the flame does to the imperfect soul.

For (O wonderful thing!) contraries rise up at this time against contraries - those of the soul against those of God that assail it. And as the philosophers say: One contrary when close to the other makes it more manifest.⁸ They war within the soul, striving to expel one another in order to reign. That is: The virtues and

properties of God, extremely perfect, war against the habits and properties of the soul, extremely imperfect; and the soul suffers these two contraries within itself.

When this flame shines on the soul, since its light is excessively brilliant, it shines within the darkneses of the soul, which are also excessive. Persons then feel their natural and vicious darkneses that are contrary to the supernatural light; and they fail to experience the supernatural light because they do not have it within themselves as they do their darkneses - and the darkneses do not comprehend the light [Jn 1:5]. They feel these darkneses inasmuch as the light shines on them, for it is impossible to perceive one's darkneses without the divine light focusing on them. Once they are driven out a soul is illumined and, being transformed, beholds the light within itself, since its spiritual eye was cleansed and fortified by the divine light. A tremendous light causes total darkness in a weak and impure eye, for if a sensible object is too intense it deprives its relative faculty. And thus this flame was oppressive to the intellectual eye.

23. This flame of itself is extremely loving, and the will of itself is excessively dry and hard. When the flame tenderly and lovingly assails the will, hardness is felt beside the tenderness, and dryness beside the love. The will does not feel the love and tenderness of the flame since, because of its contrary hardness and dryness, it is unprepared for this until the love and tenderness of God expel the dryness and hardness and reign within it. Accordingly, this flame was oppressive to the will, making it feel and suffer its own hardness and dryness.

Because this flame is immense and far-reaching, and the will is narrow and restricted, the will feels its confinement and narrowness in the measure that the flame attacks it. It feels this until the flame, penetrating within it, enlarges, widens, and makes it capable of receiving the flame itself.

Because this flame is savory and sweet, and the will possesses a spiritual palate disturbed by the humors of inordinate affections, the flame is unpleasant and bitter to it; and the will cannot taste the sweet food of God's love. And in this fashion it feels distress and distastefulness beside so ample and delightful a flame. The will does not experience the savor of the flame because it does not feel this flame within itself; it only feels what it does have within itself - its own misery.

And finally, because this flame contains immense riches and delights and the soul of itself is extraordinarily poor, without any goods or satisfaction, the soul knows and feels clearly beside this goodness and these riches and delights its own misery, poverty, and evil. For evil cannot comprehend goodness, nor poverty riches, and so on, until this flame purifies a soul completely and by this transformation enriches, glorifies, and delights it.

This flame previously oppressed the soul in an indescribable way, since contraries were battling contraries: God, who is all perfect, against all the imperfections of the soul. God does this so, by transforming the soul into himself, he might soften, pacify, and illumine it, as does fire when it penetrates the log of wood.

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STANZA 1 (24-36)

24. Not many people undergo so strong a purgation, only those whom God wishes to elevate to the highest degree of union. For he prepares individuals by a purification more or less severe in accordance with the degree to which he wishes to raise them, and also according to their impurity and imperfection.⁹

This suffering resembles that of purgatory. Just as the spirits suffer purgation there so as to be able to see God through clear vision in the next life, souls in their own way suffer purgation here on earth so as to be able to be transformed in him through love in this life.

25. In *The Dark Night of The Ascent of Mount Carmel* we dealt with the intensity of this purgation,¹⁰ how it is greater and how less, and when it is in the intellect, when in the will, how it is in the memory, when and how it is also in the soul's substance, and also when it involves the whole soul. We discussed, too, the purgation of the sensory part, and how it can be discerned when the purgation is of the sensory part and when of the spiritual part, and the time or stage along the spiritual road in which each begins. Since we have already explained all of this, and such is not our aim here, I will not go into it again.

Let it suffice to know that the very God who desires to enter within the soul through the union and transformation of love is he who first assails and purges it with the light and heat of his divine flame, just as the fire that penetrates the log of wood is the same that first prepares it for this, as we said.¹¹ Hence the very flame that is now gentle, since it has entered within the soul, is what was formerly oppressive, assailing it from without.

26. Such is the meaning of the present verse, "Now you are not oppressive." It is in sum like saying: Not only now are you no longer dark as you were before, but you are the divine light of my intellect by which I can look at you; and you not only have ceased making me faint in my weakness, but are rather the strength of my will by which I can love and enjoy you, being wholly converted into divine love; and you are no longer heavy and constraining to the substance of my soul but rather its glory and delight and amplitude, for the words of the divine *Song of Songs* can be spoken of me: Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved, diffusing love everywhere? [Sg. 8:5]. Since this is true,

now consummate! if it be your will:

27. That is, consummate the spiritual marriage with me perfectly by means of the beatific vision. This is the soul's petition. It is true that in this high state it is as conformed to the will of God and satisfied as it is transformed in love; it wants nothing for itself, nor dares ask for anything, but everything is for its Beloved, since as St. Paul says, charity seeks not things for itself [1 Cor. 13:5], but for the Beloved. Nonetheless, its sigh is as great as what it lacks for the perfect possession of the adoption of the children of God [Rom. 8:23]; for it still lives in hope, in which one cannot fail to feel emptiness. When the soul's glory is consummated, its appetite will come to rest. However intimate may be a person's union with God, there will never be satisfaction and rest until God's glory appears [Ps. 17:15], especially since the savor and sweetness of that glory is now experienced. This experience is so intense that if God had not favored the flesh by fortifying the sensory part with his right hand, as he did Moses in the rock, enabling him to behold the divine glory without dying [Ex. 33:22], nature would be torn apart and death would ensue, since the lower part is unequipped to suffer so much and such a sublime fire of glory.

28. Affliction, then, does not accompany this desire and petition, for the soul is no longer capable of such affliction; but with a gentle and delightful desire it seeks this in the conformity of both spirit and sense to God's will. As a result it says in this verse, "Now consummate! if it be your will," for its will and appetite are so united with God that it considers the fulfillment of God's will to be its glory.

Yet the sudden flashes of glory and love that appear vaguely in these touches at the door of entry into the soul, and are unable to fit into it because of the narrowness of the earthly house, are so sublime that it would rather be a sign of little love not to try to enter into that perfection and completion of love.

Moreover, a soul is conscious that in the vigor of the Bridegroom's delightful communication the Holy Spirit rouses and invites it by the immense glory he marvelously and with gentle affection places before its eyes, telling it what he told the bride in the Song of Songs. The bride thus refers to this: Behold what my Spouse is saying to me: Arise and make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come; for winter is now passed, and the rains are over and gone, and the flowers have appeared in our land; the fig tree has put forth her fruits; the vines in flower have given their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come; my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow of the wall, show me your face, let your voice sound in my ears, because your voice is sweet and your face beautiful [Sg. 2:10-14]. The soul in a sublime experience of glory feels and understands most distinctly all these things that the Holy Spirit, desiring to introduce it into that glory, shows it in this gentle and tender blaze. Consequently, the soul thus roused answers: "Now consummate! if it be your will." It makes the two requests of the Bridegroom that he taught us in the Gospel: *Adveniat regnum tuum; fiat voluntas tua* [Mt. 6:10].¹² It is like saying: "Now consummate" giving me this kingdom, "if it be your will," according to your will. And that this may be true:

tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!

29. The veil is what impedes so singular an event. It is easy to reach God when all the impediments are removed and the veils that separate the soul from union with him are torn. We can say there are three veils that constitute a hindrance to this union with God and must be torn if the union is to be effected and possessed perfectly by the soul; that is: the temporal veil, comprising all creatures; the natural, embodying the purely natural inclinations and operations; and the sensitive, which consists only of the union of the soul with the body, that is, the sensitive and animal life of which St. Paul speaks: We know that if this our earthly house is dissolved, we have a building of God in heaven [2 Cor. 5:1].

The first two veils must necessarily be torn in order to obtain this union with God in which all the things of the world are renounced, all the natural appetites and affections mortified, and the natural operations of the soul divinized.

All of this was accomplished, and these veils were torn by means of the oppressive encounters of this flame. Through the spiritual purgation we referred to above, the soul tears these two veils completely and is united with God as it here is; only the third veil of this sensitive life remains to be torn. As a result it mentions a veil and not veils, since there is only this one to tear. Because the veil is now so tenuous, thin, and spiritualized through this union with God, the flame is not harsh in its encounter as it was with the other two, but savory and sweet. The soul hence calls it a "sweet encounter"; the sweeter and more savory, the more it seems about to tear through the veil of mortal life.

30. It should be known that the natural death of persons who have reached this state is far different in its cause and mode from the death of others, even though it is similar in natural circumstances. If the death of other people is caused by sickness or old age, the death of these persons is not so induced, in spite of their being sick or old; their soul is not wrested from them unless by some impetus and encounter of love far more sublime than previous ones; of greater power, and more valiant, since it tears through this veil and carries off the jewel, which is the soul.

The death of such persons is very gentle and very sweet, sweeter and more gentle than was their whole spiritual life on earth. For they die with the most sublime impulses and delightful encounters of love, resembling the swan whose song is much sweeter at the moment of death. Accordingly, David affirmed that the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord [Ps. 116:15]. The soul's riches gather together here, and its rivers of love move on to enter the sea, for these rivers, because they are blocked, become so vast that they themselves resemble seas. The just one's first treasures, and last, are heaped together as company for the departure and going off to the kingdom, while praises are heard from the ends of the earth, which, as Isaiah says, are the glory of the just one [Is. 24:16].

31. The soul, then, conscious of the abundance of its enrichment, at the time of these glorious encounters feels to be almost at the point of departing for complete and perfect possession of its kingdom, for it knows that it is pure, rich, full of virtues, and prepared for such a kingdom. God permits it in this state to see its beauty, and he entrusts to it the gifts and virtues he has bestowed; for everything is converted into love and praises, and it has no touch of presumption or vanity since it no longer bears the leaven of imperfection that corrupts the mass [1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9]. Since it is aware that nothing is wanting other than to tear the weak veil of this natural life, in which it feels the entanglement, hindrance, and captivity of its freedom, and since it desires to be dissolved and to be with Christ [Phil. 1:23], it laments that a life so weak and base impedes another so mighty and sublime, and asks that the veil be torn, saying: "Tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!"

32. There are three reasons for the term "veil": first, because of the union between the spirit and the flesh; second, because this union separates the soul from God; third, because a veil is not so thick and opaque that a brilliant light cannot shine through it; and in this state the bond seems to be so tenuous a veil, since it is now very spiritual, thin, and luminous, that it does not prevent the divinity from vaguely appearing through it. Since the soul perceives the power of the other life, it is conscious of the weakness of this one and that the veil is of delicate fabric, as thin as a spider's web; in David's words: Our years shall be considered as the spider [Ps. 90:9]. And this life is even much less in the eyes of persons thus exalted, for, since they have God's view of things, they regard them as God does, in whose sight, as David also declares, a thousand years are as yesterday, which is past [Ps. 89:4], and according to Isaiah, all nations are as though they were not [Is. 40:17]. These things carry the same weight in the soul's view: All things are nothing to it, and it is nothing in its own eyes; God alone is its all.¹³

33. The reason it begs that the veil be torn and not cut or destroyed is noteworthy, for there does not seem to be much difference. We can offer four reasons.

First, we use this term for the sake of speaking more appropriately, since tearing is more proper to this encounter than cutting or destroying.

Second, because love is the friend of the power of love and of the strong and impetuous touch, exercised more in tearing than in cutting and destroying.

Third, because love desires the act to be very brief and quick. The strength and power of the act is commensurate with its brevity and spirituality, for virtue when united is stronger than when scattered. And love is introduced as form is introduced into matter; it is done in an instant, and until then there is no act but only the dispositions toward it. Spiritual acts are produced instantaneously in the soul because God infuses them. But those the soul makes of itself can better be referred to as dispositive acts by means of successive desires and affections, which only become perfect acts of love or contemplation, as I say, when God sometimes forms and perfects them very quickly in the spirit. As a result the Wise Man affirmed that the end of prayer is better than the beginning [Eccl. 7:9], and it is commonly quoted that the short prayer pierces the heavens.¹⁴ A person already disposed can make many acts in a short time, acts far more intense than can be made in a long time by someone undisposed; and, by being so fully disposed, such a person usually remains for a long time in an act of love or contemplation. With one who is not disposed, all is spent in preparing the spirit, and even then the fire usually holds back without entering the wood, either because of excessive dampness of the wood or

lack of sufficient heat to dispose it, or for both reasons. But in the prepared soul the act of love enters immediately, for at each touch the spark catches fire in the dry tinder, and thus the enamored soul desires the brevity of tearing more than the delay involved in cutting or destroying.

The fourth reason is that the veil of this life is done away with more quickly; cutting or destroying requires greater care since one must wait for the object to be prepared or ready, or for some other reason; whereas if one tears it there is no waiting, it seems to me, for this readiness or for anything of the sort.

34. The enamored soul desires this tearing so it may suffer no delay by waiting for its life to be destroyed naturally, or cut off at such and such a time. Both the force of love and the disposition the soul sees in itself make it desire and beg that the veil of life be torn immediately by a supernatural encounter and impetus of love.

A person having reached this stage knows full well that it is characteristic of God to take to himself, before their time, souls that love him ardently, perfecting them in a short while by means of that love, which in any event they would have gained at their own pace. This is what the Wise Man said: He pleased God and was loved; and living among sinners he was translated and carried away lest evil should change his understanding or affection deceive his soul. Perfected in a short time, he fulfilled a long time. Because his soul was pleasing to God, he therefore made haste to take him out of the midst, and so on [Wis. 4:10-11, 13-14]. These words are the words of the Wise Man in which it will be seen how rightly and adequately the soul uses the expression "tear through," for the Holy Spirit uses the words "carry away" and "make haste," which indicate something apart from all delay. God's making haste signifies the haste by which he perfected in a short time the love of the just one, and "carry away" refers to a premature death.

It is vital for individuals to make acts of love in this life so that in being perfected in a short time they may not be detained long, either here on earth or in the next life, before seeing God.¹⁵

35. Let us see now why it calls this inner assault of the Spirit an encounter rather than something else. The reason is that when the soul feels in God an infinite longing, as we said, for the ending of its life and this wish goes unfulfilled since the time of its perfection has not arrived, it is aware that he produces these divine and glorious assaults in the manner of encounters so as to perfect it and raise it out of the flesh. Since their purpose is to purify it and draw it out of the flesh, they are indeed encounters, by which he ever penetrates and deifies the substance of the soul, absorbing it above all being into his own being.

And the cause of this absorption is that he vigorously encountered and transported it in the Holy Spirit, whose communications are impetuous when they are fervent, as is this encounter. Because the soul tastes God in a living way in this encounter, it calls it sweet; not because many other touches and encounters received in this state are not sweet but because of its eminence over all others. God grants this, as we said, in order soon to loose and glorify it. Whereon it acquires the courage to entreat: "Tear through the veil," and so on.

36. To sum up the entire stanza now, it is like saying: O flame of the Holy Spirit that so intimately and tenderly pierces the substance of my soul and cauterizes it with your glorious ardor! Previously my requests did not reach your ears, when, in the anxieties and weariness of love in which my sense and my spirit suffered because of considerable weakness, impurity, and lack of strong love, I was praying that you loose me and bring me to yourself because my soul longed for you, and impatient love did not allow me to be so conformed to the conditions of this life in which you desired me still to live. The previous impulses of love were not enough, because they did not have sufficient quality for the attainment of my desire; now I am so fortified in love that not only do my sense and spirit no longer faint in you, but my heart and my flesh, reinforced in you, rejoice in the living God [Ps. 84:2], with great conformity between the sensory and spiritual parts. What you desire me to ask for, I ask for; and what you do not desire, I do not desire, nor can I, nor does it even enter my mind to desire it. My petitions are now more valuable and estimable in your sight, since they come from you, and you move me to make them, and I make them in the delight and joy of the Holy Spirit, my judgment now

issuing from your countenance [Ps. 17:2], that is, when you esteem and hear my prayer. Tear, then, the thin veil of this life and do not let old age cut it naturally, that from now on I may love you with the plenitude and fullness my soul desires forever and ever.

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STANZA 2

O sweet cautery,
O delightful wound!
O gentle hand! O delicate touch
that tastes of eternal life
and pays every debt!
in killing you changed death to life.

Commentary

1. In this stanza the soul proclaims how the three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are the ones who effect this divine work of union in it. Thus the hand, the cautery, and the touch are in substance the same. The soul applies these terms to the Persons of the Trinity because of the effect each of the Persons produces. The cautery is the Holy Spirit, the hand is the Father, and the touch is the Son. The soul here magnifies the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, stressing the three admirable favors and blessings they produce in it, having changed its death to life, transforming it in the Trinity.

The first is the delightful wound. This it attributes to the Holy Spirit, and hence calls him a sweet cautery.

The second is the taste of eternal life. This it attributes to the Son, and thus calls him a delicate touch.

The third is transformation, a gift by which all debts are fully paid. This it attributes to the Father and hence calls him a gentle hand.

Although it names the three according to the properties of their effects, it speaks only to one, saying "You changed death to life," because all of them work together; and accordingly it attributes everything to one, and everything to all. The verse is:

O sweet cautery,

2. This cautery, as we mentioned, is the Holy Spirit. For as Moses declares in Deuteronomy, Our Lord God is a consuming fire [Dt. 4:24], that is, a fire of love that, being of infinite power, can inestimably consume and transform into itself the soul it touches. Yet he burns each soul according to its preparation. He will burn one more, another less, and this he does insofar as he desires, and how and when he desires.¹ When he wills to touch somewhat vehemently, the soul's burning reaches such a high degree of love that it seems to surpass that of all the fires of the world, for he is an infinite fire of love. As a result, in this union the soul calls the Holy Spirit a cautery. Since in a cautery the fire is more intense and fierce and produces a more singular effect than it does in other combustibles, the soul calls the act of this union a cautery in comparison with other acts of union, for it is the outcome of a fire so much more aflame than all other fires. Because the soul in this case is entirely transformed by the divine flame, it not only feels a cautery, but has become a cautery of blazing fire.

3. It is a wonderful thing and worth relating that, since this fire of God is so mighty it would consume a thousand worlds more easily than the fire of this earth would burn up a straw, it does not consume and destroy

the soul in which it so burns. And it does not afflict it; rather, commensurate with the strength of the love, it divinizes and delights it, burning gently within it.

And this is so on account of the purity and perfection with which the spirit burns in the Holy Spirit. Similarly, as told in the Acts of the Apostles, this fire came mightily and enkindled the disciples [Acts 2:2-3], who, as St. Gregory affirms, burned interiorly and gently with love.² This is the Church's meaning when, as regards the same subject, she says: Fire came from heaven, not burning but shining bright; not devouring but illumining.³ Since God's purpose in granting these communications is to exalt the soul, he does not weary and restrict it but enlarges and delights it; he does not blacken it and convert it to ashes as fire does to coal, but he brightens and enriches it. Hence it calls him a sweet cautery.

4. The happy soul that by great fortune reaches this cautery knows all things, tastes all things, does all it wishes, and prospers; no one prevails before it and nothing touches it. This is the soul of which the Apostle speaks: The spiritual person judges all things and is judged by no one [1 Cor. 2:15]. And again: The spirit searches out all things, even the deep things of God [1 Cor. 2:10]. This is love's trait: to scrutinize all the good things of the Beloved.

5. Oh, the great glory of you who have merited this supreme fire! It is certain that, although it does not consume you - for it has infinite force to consume and annihilate you - it does overwhelmingly consume you in glory. Do not wonder that God brings some souls to this high peak. The sun is distinguished by some of its marvelous effects; as the Holy Spirit says, it burns the mountains (that is, the saints) in three ways [Eccles. 43:4].

Since this cautery is sweet, then, how delighted will be the soul touched by it! The soul desiring to speak of it does not do so, but keeps the esteem in its heart and only expresses exclamation vocally through the use of "O," saying: "O sweet cautery!"

O delightful wound!

6. Having addressed the cautery, the soul now speaks to the wound caused by the cautery. The cautery was sweet, and the wound must logically conform to the cautery. Thus the wound issuing from a sweet cautery is a delightful wound. Since the cautery is a cautery of love, the wound is a wound of sweet love and is both delightful and sweet.

7. To understand the nature of this wound, which is addressed by the soul, it should be known that the cautery of material fire always leaves a wound where it is applied. And it possesses this property: If applied to a wound not made by fire, it converts it into a wound caused by fire. Whether a soul is wounded by other wounds of miseries and sins or whether it is healthy, this cautery of love immediately effects a wound of love in the one it touches, and those wounds deriving from other causes become wounds of love.

Yet there is a difference between this loving cautery and the cautery produced by material fire. The wound left by material fire is only curable by other medicines, whereas the wound effected by the cautery of love is incurable through medicine; for the very cautery that causes it, cures it, and by curing it, causes it. As often as the cautery of love touches the wound of love, it causes a deeper wound of love, and thus the more it wounds, the more it cures and heals. The more wounded the lover, the healthier the lover is, and the cure caused by love is to wound and inflict wound upon wound, to such an extent that the entire soul is dissolved into a wound of love. And now all cauterized and made one wound of love, it is completely healthy in love, for it is transformed in love.

This is what is understood by the wound of which the soul (all wounded and all healthy) speaks. Even though the soul is all wounded and all healthy, the cautery of love does not fail to fulfill its task, which is to

touch and wound with love. Being wholly delightful and completely sound, the wound brings delight, just as a good doctor usually does. As a result the soul says: "O delightful wound!"

Oh, then, wound, so much more delightful as the fire of love that causes it is higher and more sublime! The Holy Spirit produces it only for the sake of giving delight, and since his will to delight the soul is great, this wound will be great, for it will be extremely delightful.

8. O happy wound, wrought by one who knows only how to heal! O fortunate and choicest wound; you were made only for delight, and the quality of your affliction is delight and gratification for the wounded soul! You are great, O delightful wound, because he who caused you is great! And your delight is great because the fire of love is infinite and makes you delightful according to your capacity and greatness. O, then, delightful wound, so much more sublimely delightful the more the cautery touched the intimate center of the substance of the soul, burning all that was burnable in order to give delight to all that could be delighted!

It is understandable that this cautery and this wound are of the highest degree possible in this state. For there are many other ways God cauterizes the soul that are unlike this one and fail to reach such a degree. For this cautery is a touch only of divinity in the soul, without any intellectual or imaginative form or figure.

9. There is another way of cauterizing the soul; through an intellectual form it usually comes about in a very sublime manner. It will happen that while the soul is inflamed with the love of God, although not with a love of as deep a quality as we mentioned - yet it is fitting that it be so for what I want to say - it will feel that a seraph is assailing it by means of an arrow or dart that is all afire with love. And the seraph pierces and cauterizes this soul that like a red-hot coal, or better a flame, is already enkindled. And then in this cauterization, when the soul is transpierced with that dart, the flame gushes forth fiercely and with a sudden ascent, like the fire in a furnace or an oven when someone uses a poker or bellows to stir and excite it. And being wounded by this fiery dart, the soul feels the wound with unsurpassable delight. Besides being fully stirred in great sweetness by the blowing or impetuous motion of the seraph, in which it feels in its intense ardor to be dissolving in love, it is aware of the delicate wound and the herb (which serves as a keen temper to the dart) as though it were a sharp point in the substance of the spirit, in the heart of the pierced soul.⁴

10. Who can fittingly speak of this intimate point of the wound, which seems to make its mark in the middle of the heart of the spirit, there where the soul experiences the excellence of the delight? The soul feels that the point is like a tiny mustard seed, very much alive and enkindled, sending into its surroundings a living and enkindled fire of love. The fire issuing from the substance and power of that living point, which contains the substance and power of the herb, is felt to be subtly diffused through all the spiritual and substantial veins of the soul in the measure of the soul's power and strength. The soul feels its ardor strengthen and increase and its love become so refined in this ardor that seemingly there flow seas of loving fire within it, reaching to the heights and depths of the earthly and heavenly spheres, imbuing all with love. It seems to it that the entire universe is a sea of love in which it is engulfed, for conscious of the living point or center of love within itself, it is unable to catch sight of the boundaries of this love.

11. There is nothing else to say about the soul's enjoyment here except that it realizes how appropriately the kingdom of heaven was compared in the Gospel to a grain of mustard seed that, by reason of its intense heat, grows into a large tree, despite its being so small [Mt. 13:31-32]. For the soul beholds itself converted into the immense fire of love that emanates from that enkindled point at the heart of the spirit.

12. Few persons have reached these heights. Some have, however, especially those whose virtue and spirit were to be diffused among their children. With respect to the first fruits of the spirit, God accords to founders wealth and value commensurate with the greater or lesser following they will have in their doctrine and spirituality.⁵

13. Let us return to the work of that seraph, for he truly inflicts a sore, and wounds inwardly in the spirit.

Thus, if God sometimes permits an effect to extend to the bodily senses in the fashion in which it existed interiorly, the wound and sore appear outwardly, as happened when the seraph wounded St. Francis. When his soul was wounded with love by the five wounds, their effect extended to the body, and these wounds were impressed on the body, which was wounded just as his soul was wounded with love.⁶

God usually does not bestow a favor on the body without bestowing it first and principally on the soul. Thus the greater the delight and strength of love the wound produces in the soul, so much greater is that produced by the wound outside on the body, and when there is an increase in one there is an increase in the other. This so happens because these souls are purified and established in God, and what is a cause of pain and torment to their corruptible flesh is sweet and delectable to their strong and healthy spirit. It is, then, a wonderful thing, experiencing the pain augmented with the delectable.

Job, with his wounds, clearly beheld this marvel when he said to God: Returning to me, you torment me wondrously [Jb. 10:16]. This is an unspeakable marvel and worthy of the abundance and sweetness God has hidden for them that fear him [Ps. 31:19]: to give one enjoyment of as much savor and sweetness as there is experience of pain and torment.

Nevertheless, when the wound is made only in the soul without being communicated outwardly, the delight can be more intense and sublime. Since the flesh bridles the spirit, when the goods of the spirit are communicated also to the flesh, the flesh pulls the reins, pulls back at the mouth of this swift horse of the spirit, and restrains its wild impetuosity; for if the spirit makes use of its power the reins will break. Yet until the reins are broken the flesh does not fail to oppress the spirit's freedom, as the Wise Man asserts: The corruptible body is a load on the soul, and the earthly dwelling oppresses the spiritual mind which of itself comprehends many things [Wis. 9:15].

14. I say this in order to make it clear that the one who would go to God relying on natural ability and reasoning will not be very spiritual. There are some who think that by pure force and the activity of the senses, which of itself is lowly and no more than natural, they can reach the strength and height of the supernatural spirit. One does not attain to this peak without surpassing and leaving aside the activity of the senses.

Yet it is sometimes quite different when an effect of the spirit overflows into the senses. When this is true, the effect in the senses proceeds from an abundance of spirit, as in the event of the wounds that proceed from the inner strength and appear outwardly. This happened with St. Paul, whose immense compassion for the sufferings of Christ redounded in the body, as he explains to the Galatians: I bear the wounds of the Lord Jesus in my body [Gal. 6:17].

15. What we have expounded concerning the cautery and the wound is sufficient. If the picture we have painted of them is true, what, do you think, will be the hand that produces this cautery, and what the touch? The soul reveals this in the subsequent verse more through interjection than by explanation, saying:

O gentle hand! O delicate touch

16. This hand is, as we said,⁷ the merciful and omnipotent Father. We should understand that, since it is as generous and bountiful as it is powerful and rich, it gives, when opened to favor the soul, rich and powerful presents. For this reason the soul calls it a gentle hand. It is like saying: O hand, you are as gentle to my soul, which you touch by resting gently, as you would be powerful enough to submerge the entire world if you rested somewhat heavily, for by your look alone the earth trembles [Ps. 104:32], the nations melt and faint, and the mountains crumble! [Hb. 3:6]. Oh, then again, great hand, by touching Job a little bit roughly, you were as hard and rigorous with him [Jb. 19:21] as you are friendly and gentle with me; how much more lovingly, graciously, and gently do you permanently touch my soul! You cause death, and you give life, and no one flees from your hand [Dt. 32:39].

For you, O divine life, never kill unless to give life, never wound unless to heal. When you chastise, your touch is gentle, but it is enough to destroy the world. When you give delight you rest very firmly, and thus the delight of your sweetness is immeasurable. You have wounded me in order to cure me, O divine hand, and you have put to death in me what made me lifeless, what deprived me of God's life in which I now see myself live. You granted this with the liberality of your generous grace, which you used in contacting me with the touch of the splendor of your glory and the figure of your substance [Heb. 1:3], which is your only begotten Son, through whom, he being your substance, you touch mightily from one end to the other [Wis. 8:1]. And your only begotten Son, O merciful hand of the Father, is the delicate touch by which you touched me with the force of your cautery and wounded me.

17. O you, then, delicate touch, the Word, the Son of God, through the delicacy of your divine being, you subtly penetrate the substance of my soul and, lightly touching it all, absorb it entirely in yourself in divine modes of delights and sweetnesses unheard of in the land of Canaan and never before seen in Teman [Bar. 3:22]! O, then, very delicate, exceedingly delicate touch of the Word, so much more delicate for me insofar as, after overthrowing the mountains and smashing the rocks to pieces on Mount Horeb with the shadow of might and power that went before you, you gave the prophet the sweetest and strongest experience of yourself in the gentle breeze [1 Kgs. 19:11-12]! O gentle breeze, since you are a delicate and mild breeze, tell us: How do you, the Word, the Son of God, touch mildly and gently, since you are so awesome and mighty?

Oh, happy is the soul that you, being terrible and strong, gently and lightly touch! Proclaim this to the world! But you are unwilling to proclaim this to the world because it does not know of a mild breeze, and will not experience you, for it can neither receive nor see you [Jn. 14:17]. But they, O my God and my life, will see and experience your mild touch who withdraw from the world and become mild, bringing the mild into harmony with the mild, thus enabling themselves to experience and enjoy you. The more you dwell permanently hidden within them, the more gently you touch them, for the substance of their soul is now refined, cleansed, and purified, withdrawn from every creature and every touch and trace of creature. As a result you hide them in the secret of your face, which is the Word, from human disturbance [Ps. 31:20].

18. O, then again, repeatedly delicate touch, so much stronger and mightier the more you are delicate, since you detach and withdraw the soul from all the other touches of created things by the might of your delicacy, and reserve it for and unite it to yourself alone, so mild an effect do you leave in the soul, that every other touch of all things both high and low seems coarse and spurious. It displeases the soul to look at these things, and to deal with them is a heavy pain and torment to it.

19. It should be known that the breadth and capacity of an object corresponds to its refinement, and the more diffuse and communicative it is, the more it is subtle and delicate. The Word is immensely subtle and delicate, for he is the touch that comes into contact with the soul. The soul is the vessel having breadth and capacity because of its remarkable purity and refinement in this state.

O, then, delicate touch, the more abundantly you pervade my soul, the more substance you have and the greater purity my soul has!

20. It should also be known that the more subtle and delicate the touch, the more delight and gratification it communicates there where it touches; and the less volume, because the Word who grants it is alien to every mode and manner, and free from all the volume of form, figure, and accident that usually encircles and imposes boundaries or limits to the substance. This touch we are discussing is indescribable insofar as it is substantial, that is, from the divine substance.

Finally, then, O Word, indescribably delicate touch, produced in the soul only by your most simple being that, since it is infinite, is infinitely delicate and hence touches so subtly, lovingly, eminently, and delicately,

that tastes of eternal life

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STANZA 2 (21-36)

21. Although that which the soul tastes in this touch of God is not perfect, it does in fact have a certain savor of eternal life, as was mentioned.⁸ And this is not incredible if we believe, as we should, that this is a touch of substances, that is, of the substance of God in the substance of the soul. Many saints have attained to this substantial touch during their lives on earth.

The delicateness of delight felt in this contact is inexpressible. I would desire not to speak of it so as to avoid giving the impression that it is no more than what I describe. There is no way to catch in words the sublime things of God that take place in these souls. The appropriate language for the persons receiving these favors is that they understand them, experience them within themselves, enjoy them, and be silent. One is conscious in this state that these things are in a certain way like the white pebble that St. John said would be given to the one who conquers: and on that pebble a new name written, which no one knows but the one who receives it [Rv. 2:17]. Thus one can only say, and truthfully, "that tastes of eternal life."

Although one does not have perfect fruition in this life as in glory, this touch, nevertheless, since it is a touch, tastes of eternal life. As a result the soul tastes here all the things of God, since God communicates to it fortitude, wisdom, love, beauty, grace, goodness, and so on. Because God is all these things, a person enjoys them in only one touch of God, and the soul rejoices within its faculties and within its substance.

22. Sometimes the unction of the Holy Spirit overflows into the body and all the sensory substance, all the members and bones and marrow rejoice, not in so slight a fashion as is customary, but with the feeling of great delight and glory, even in the outermost joints of the hands and feet. The body experiences so much glory in that of the soul that in its own way it magnifies God, feeling in its bones something similar to what David declares: All my bones shall say: God, who is like to you? [Ps. 35:10]. And because everything that can be said of this unction is less than what it is, it is sufficient to say in reference to both the bodily and the spiritual experience, "that tastes of eternal life."

and pays every debt!

23. The soul affirms this because in the taste of eternal life, which it here enjoys, it feels the reward for the trials it passed through in order to reach this state. It feels not only that it has been compensated and satisfied justly but that it has been rewarded exceedingly. It thoroughly understands the truth of the promise made by the Bridegroom in the Gospel that he would repay a hundredfold [Mt. 19:29]. It has endured no tribulation or penance or trial to which there does not correspond a hundredfold of consolation and delight in this life; and it can truly say: "and pays every debt."

24. To know the nature of these debts for which the soul feels compensated here, it should be noted that ordinarily no one can reach this high state and kingdom of espousal without first undergoing many tribulations and trials. As is said in the Acts of the Apostles, It is necessary to undergo many tribulations to enter the kingdom of heaven [Acts 14:22]. In this state these tribulations are ended; the soul being purified suffers no more.

25. The trials that those who are to reach this state suffer are threefold: trials, discomforts, fears, and temptations from the world; and these in many ways: temptations, aridities, and afflictions in the senses; and

tribulations, darkneses, distress, abandonment, temptations, and other trials in the spirit. In this way a soul is purified in its sensory and spiritual parts, as we mentioned in discussing the fourth verse of the first stanza.

The reason these trials are necessary in order to reach this state is that this highest union cannot be wrought in a soul that is not fortified by trials and temptations, and purified by tribulations, darkneses, and distress, just as a superior quality liqueur is poured only into a sturdy flask that is prepared and purified. By these trials the sensory part of the soul is purified and strengthened, and the spiritual part is refined, purged, and disposed. Since unpurified souls must undergo the sufferings of fire in the next life to attain union with God in glory, so in this life they must undergo the fire of these sufferings to reach the union of perfection. This fire acts on some more vigorously than on others, and on some for a longer time than on others, according to the degree of union to which God wishes to raise them, and according to what they must be purged of.⁹

26. Through these trials in which God places the spirit and the senses, the soul in bitterness acquires virtues, strength, and perfection, for virtue is made perfect in weakness [2 Cor. 12:9] and refined through the endurance of suffering. Iron cannot serve for the artificer's plan, or be adapted to it without fire and the hammer; as Jeremiah says of the fire that gave him knowledge: You have sent fire into my bones and have instructed me [Lam. 1:13]. And Jeremiah also says of the hammer: You have chastised me, Lord, and I was instructed [Jer. 31:18]. Hence Ecclesiasticus says: What can anyone know who is not tried? And the one that has no experience knows little [Ecclus. 34:9-10].

27. And here it ought to be pointed out why so few reach this high state of perfect union with God. It should be known that the reason is not that God wishes only a few of these spirits to be so elevated; he would rather want all to be perfect, but he finds few vessels that will endure so lofty and sublime a work. Since he tries them in little things and finds them so weak that they immediately flee from work, unwilling to be subject to the least discomfort and mortification, it follows that not finding them strong and faithful in that little [Mt. 25:21, 23], in which he favored them by beginning to hew and polish them, he realizes that they will be much less strong in these greater trials. As a result he proceeds no further in purifying them and raising them from the dust of the earth through the toil of mortification. They are in need of greater constancy and fortitude than they showed.

There are many who desire to advance and persistently beseech God to bring them to this state of perfection. Yet when God wills to conduct them through the initial trials and mortifications, as is necessary, they are unwilling to suffer them and they shun them, flee from the narrow road of life [Mt. 7:14] and seek the broad road of their own consolation, which is that of their own perdition [Mt. 7:13]; thus they do not allow God to begin to grant their petition. They are like useless containers, for although they desire to reach the state of the perfect they do not want to be guided by the path of trials that leads to it. They hardly even begin to walk along this road by submitting to what is least, that is, to ordinary sufferings.¹⁰

We can answer them with Jeremiah's words: If you have grown weary running with footmen, how will you contend with horses? And if you have had quiet in the land of peace, what will you do in the swelling of the Jordan? [Jer. 12:5]. This is like saying: If by the common trials (on foot) that form part of human life, it seemed to you that you were running because there were so many, and you took such short steps, how will you keep up with the horse's stride, which signifies more than ordinary trials for which human strength and speed is not enough? And if you have not wanted to forego the peace and pleasure of your earth, which is your sensuality, or contradict it in anything or stir up a war, I do not know how you will desire to enter the impetuous waters of spiritual tribulations and trials that are deeper.

28. O souls who in spiritual matters desire to walk in security and consolation! If you but knew how much it behooves you to suffer in order to reach this security and consolation, and how without suffering you cannot attain to your desire but rather turn back, in no way would you look for comfort either from God or from creatures. You would instead carry the cross and, placed on it, desire to drink the pure gall and vinegar. You

would consider it good fortune that, dying to this world and to yourselves, you would live to God in the delights of the spirit, and patiently and faithfully suffering exterior trials, which are small, you would merit that God fix his eyes on you and purge you more profoundly through deeper spiritual trials in order to give you more interior blessings.¹¹

Those to whom God grants so signal a favor as to tempt them more interiorly must have performed many services for him, have had admirable patience and constancy for his sake, and in their life and works have been very acceptable to him. For he tries them in this way so as to make them advance in gifts and merits, as he did with holy Tobit to whom St. Raphael said: Since you were acceptable to God, he favored you by sending you temptation that he might try you more in order to exalt you more [Tb. 12:13]. After that temptation, all the rest of his life was in joy, as Sacred Scripture says [Tb. 14:4]. We also see in the life of holy Job that once God accepted his works in the sight of the good and evil spirits, he immediately favored him by sending those great trials so that subsequently he could extol him much more. And this he did, multiplying his goods, both spiritual and temporal [Jb. 1-2; 42:10, 12].

29. God acts similarly with those he wishes to lead on by means of what is most beneficial for them. He allows them to be tempted in order to elevate them as high as possible, that is, to union with divine wisdom, which, as David says, is silver examined in the fire, tried in the earth - that is, of our flesh - and purged seven times, which is all the purgation possible [Ps. 12:6]. There is no reason to be detained any longer in order to describe the nature of each of these seven purgations required to attain wisdom, or how the seven degrees of love correspond to them.¹² To the soul this wisdom is still like the silver of which David speaks, however great may be the union; but in the other life it will be like gold to it.

30. People, then, should live with great patience and constancy in all the tribulations and trials God places on them, whether they be exterior or interior, spiritual or bodily, great or small, and they should accept them all as from God's hand as a good remedy and not flee from them, for they bring health. In this matter let them take the counsel of the Wise Man: If the spirit of him who has power descends upon you, do not abandon your place (the place and site of your probation, which is the trial he sends you), for the cure will make great sins cease [Eccl. 10:4]; that is, it will cut off the roots of your sins and imperfections - your evil habits. The combat of trials, distress, and temptations deadens the evil and imperfect habits of the soul and purifies and strengthens it. People should hold in esteem the interior and exterior trials God sends them, realizing that there are few who merit to be brought to perfection through suffering and to undergo trials for the sake of so high a state.

31. Returning to our explanation,¹³ the soul knows in this state that everything has ended well and that now sicut tenebrae ejus ita et lumen ejus [Ps. 139:12],¹⁴ and that, as it was a sharer of tribulations, it is now a sharer of consolations and of the kingdom [2 Cor. 1:7]. For God repays the interior and exterior trials very well with divine goods for the soul and body, so there is not a trial that does not have a corresponding and considerable reward. It proclaims this by saying with full satisfaction: "and pays every debt." It thanks God in this verse for having withdrawn it from trials, as David also did in his psalm: What great tribulations you have shown me, many and difficult, and you have freed me from them all, and have brought me back again from the abyss of the earth. You have multiplied your magnificence and turning to me you have comforted me [Ps. 71:20-21].

Before attaining to this state, the soul was like Mordecai who sat at the gates of the palace, wept in the square of Susan over the danger of his life, wore sackcloth, and was unwilling to receive a garment from Queen Esther [Est. 4:1-2, 4] because he had not obtained any reward for the services he had rendered the king or for his fidelity in defending the king's honor and life [Est. 6:3]. One day, just as with Mordecai, the soul is repaid for all its trials and services [Est. 6:10-11], and not only made to enter the palace and stand, clothed in royal garments, before the king, but also accorded the royal crown, scepter, and throne, and possession of the royal ring, so it might do anything it likes and omit anything it does not like in the kingdom of its Bridegroom [Est. 8: 1-2, 15]. Those who are in this state obtain everything they desire. Thus they are not merely paid, but even the Judeans, their enemies, the inordinate appetites, are dead, for these were eliminating the spiritual life

in which it now lives through its faculties and appetites. Hence it subsequently says:

in killing you changed death to life.

32. For death is nothing else than the privation of life, because when life comes no vestige of death remains. Spiritually speaking, there are two kinds of life:

One is beatific, consisting in the vision of God, which must be attained by natural death, as St. Paul says: We know that if this our clay house is dissolved, we have a dwelling place of God in heaven [2 Cor. 5:1].

The other is the perfect spiritual life, the possession of God through union of love. This is acquired through complete mortification of all the vices and appetites and of one's own nature. Until this is achieved one cannot reach the perfection of the spiritual life of union with God, as the Apostle also declares in these words: If you live according to the flesh you shall die; yet if with the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh you shall live [Rom. 8:13].

33. Let it be known that what the soul calls death is all that goes to make up the old self: the entire engagement of the faculties (memory, intellect, and will) in the things of the world, and the indulgence of the appetites in the pleasures of creatures. All this is the activity of the old life, which is the death of the new spiritual life. The soul is unable to live perfectly in this new life if the old self does not die completely. The Apostle warns: Take off the old self and put on the new self who according to God is created in justice and holiness [Eph. 4:22-24]. In this new life that the soul lives when it has arrived at the perfect union with God here being discussed, all the inclinations and activity of the appetites and faculties - of their own the operation of death and the privation of the spiritual life - become divine.

34. Since every living being lives by its operations, as the philosophers say, and the soul's operations are in God though its union with him, it lives the life of God.¹⁵ Thus it changed its death to life, its animal life to spiritual life.

The intellect, which before this union understood naturally by the vigor of its natural light by means of the natural senses, is now moved and informed by another higher principle of supernatural divine light, and the senses are bypassed. Accordingly, the intellect becomes divine, because through its union with God's intellect both become one.

And the will, which previously loved in a base and deadly way with only its natural affection, is now changed into the life of divine love, for it loves in a lofty way with divine affection, moved by the strength of the Holy Spirit in which it now lives the life of love. By means of this union God's will and the soul's will are now one.

And the memory, which by itself perceived only the figures and phantasms of creatures, is changed through this union so as to have in its mind the eternal years mentioned by David [Ps. 77:5].

And the natural appetite that only had the ability and strength to relish creatures (which causes death), is changed now so that its taste and savor are divine, and it is moved and satisfied by another principle: the delight of God, in which it is more alive. And because it is united with him, it is no longer anything else than the appetite of God.

Finally all the movements, operations, and inclinations the soul had previously from the principle and strength of its natural life are now in this union dead to what they formerly were, changed into divine movements, and alive to God. For the soul, like a true daughter of God, is moved in all by the Spirit of God, as St. Paul teaches in saying that those who are moved by the Spirit of God are children of God himself [Rom. 8:14].¹⁶

Accordingly, the intellect of this soul is God's intellect; its will is God's will; its memory is the memory of God; and its delight is God's delight; and although the substance of this soul is not the substance of God, since it cannot undergo a substantial conversion into him, it has become God through participation in God, being united to and absorbed in him, as it is in this state. Such a union is wrought in this perfect state of the spiritual life, yet not as perfectly as in the next life. Consequently the soul is dead to all it was in itself, which was death to it, and alive to what God is in himself. Speaking of itself, the soul declares in this verse: "In killing you changed death to life."¹⁷

The soul can well repeat the words of St. Paul: I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me [Gal. 2:20]. The death of this soul is changed to the life of God. We can also apply the words of the Apostle *absorpta est mors in victoria* [1 Cor. 15:54],¹⁸ as well as those the prophet Hosea speaks in the person of God: O death, I will be your death [Hos. 13:14]. In other words: Since I am life, being the death of death, death will be absorbed in life.

35. The soul, then, is absorbed in divine life, withdrawn from its natural appetites and from all that is secular and temporal; it is brought into the king's cellars where it rejoices in its Beloved, remembering his breasts more than wine, saying: Although I am dark I am beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem [Sg. 1:4-5], for my natural black color was changed into the beauty of the heavenly king.

36. In this state of life so perfect, the soul always walks in festivity, inwardly and outwardly, and it frequently bears on its spiritual tongue a new song of great jubilation in God, a song always new, enfolded in a gladness and love arising from the knowledge the soul has of its happy state. Sometimes it walks in joy and fruition, expressing in its spirit those words of Job: My glory will ever be renewed, and I shall multiply my days as a palm tree [Jb. 29:20,18]. This is equivalent to declaring that God himself, always remaining the same, renews all things. As the Wise Man states: Being ever one in my glory, I will ever renew my glory [Wis. 7:27], that is, I will not let it grow old as it was before. And I will multiply my days as the palm tree, that is, raise my merits heavenward as the palm tree lifts its branches.

The merits of a person in this state are usually remarkable in number and quality, and ordinarily such a soul also sings in its spirit all that David proclaims in the psalm that begins: *Exaltabo te, Domine, quoniam suscepisti me*,¹⁹ and especially in the last two lines: *Convertisti planctum meum in gaudium mihi*, and so on; *conscidisti saccum meum, et circumdedisti me laetitia*,²⁰ to the end that my glory may sing to you and I may not regret; my Lord, God, I will praise you forever [Ps. 30:1,11-12].

There is no need to be amazed that the soul so frequently walks amid this joy, jubilation, fruition, and praise of God. Besides the knowledge it has of the favors received, it feels in this state that God is so solicitous in regaling it with precious, delicate, and enhancing words, and in extolling it by various favors, that he has no one else in the world to favor nor anything else to do, that everything is for the soul alone. With this feeling it proclaims like the bride in the Song of Songs: *Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi* [Sg. 2:16].²¹

STANZA 3

O lamps of fire!
in whose splendors
the deep caverns of feeling,
once obscure and blind,
now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,
both warmth and light to their Beloved.

Commentary

1. May God be pleased to help me here, for I certainly need his help to explain the deep meaning of this stanza. Readers of this commentary should be attentive for, if they have no experience, it will perhaps seem somewhat obscure and prolix; but if they do have experience, it will perhaps seem clear and pleasant to read.

In this stanza the soul exalts and thanks its Bridegroom for the admirable favors it receives from its union with him. It states that by means of this union it receives abundant and lofty knowledge of God, which is all loving and communicates light and love to its faculties and feeling. These who were once obscure and blind can now receive illumination and the warmth of love, as they do, so as to be able to give forth light and love to the one who illumined them and filled them with love. True lovers are only content when they employ all they are in themselves, all they are worth, have, and receive, in the beloved; and the greater all this is, the more satisfaction they receive in giving it. The soul rejoices on this account because, from the splendors and love it receives, it can shine brightly in the presence of its Bridegroom and give him love. The verse follows:

O lamps of fire!

" 2. First of all it should be known that lamps possess two properties: They transmit light and give off warmth.

To understand the nature of these lamps and how they shine and burn within the soul, it ought to be known that God in his unique and simple being is all the power and grandeur of his attributes. He is almighty, wise, and good; and he is merciful, just, powerful, loving, and so on; and he is the other infinite attributes and powers of which we have no knowledge. Since he is all of this in his simple being, the soul views distinctly in him, when he is united with it and deigns to disclose this knowledge, all these powers and grandeurs, that is: omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, mercy, and so on. Since each of these attributes is the very being of God in his one and only suppositum, which is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and since each one is God himself, who is infinite light or divine fire, we deduce that the soul, like God, gives forth light and warmth through each of these innumerable attributes. Each of these attributes is a lamp that enlightens the soul and gives off the warmth of love.

3. Insofar as the soul receives the knowledge of these attributes in only one act of this union, God himself is for it many lamps together. They illumine and impart warmth to it individually, for it has clear knowledge of each, and through this knowledge is inflamed in love. By means of all the lamps the soul loves each individually, inflamed by each one and by all together because all these attributes are one being, as we said.

All these lamps are one lamp, which according to its powers and attributes shines and burns like many lamps. Hence the soul in one act of knowledge of these lamps loves through each one and, in so doing, loves through them all together, bearing in that act the quality of love for each one and from each one, and from all together and for all together.

The splendor of this lamp of God's being, insofar as he is omnipotent, imparts light to the soul and the warmth of love of him according to his omnipotence. God is then to the soul a lamp of omnipotence that shines and bestows all knowledge in respect to this attribute. And the splendor of this lamp of God's being insofar as he is wisdom grants the soul light and the warmth of the love of God according to his wisdom. God is then a lamp of wisdom to it. And the splendor of this lamp insofar as he is goodness imparts to the soul light and the warmth of love according to his goodness. God is then a lamp of goodness to it.

He is also to the soul a lamp of justice, fortitude, and mercy, and of all the other attributes that are represented to it together in God. The light communicated to it from all these attributes together is enveloped in the warmth of love of God by which it loves him because he is all these things. In this communication and manifestation of himself to the soul, which in my opinion is the greatest possible in this life, he is to it innumerable lamps giving forth knowledge and love of himself.

4. Moses beheld these lamps on Mount Sinai where, when God passed by, he prostrated himself on the ground and began to call out and enumerate some of them: Emperor, Lord, God, merciful, clement, patient, of much compassion, true, who keeps mercy unto thousands, who takes away iniquities and sins, no one is of himself innocent before you [Ex. 34:6-8]. In this passage it is clear that the greatest attributes and powers that Moses knew there in God were those of God's omnipotence, dominion, deity, mercy, justice, truth, and righteousness; this was the highest knowledge of God. Because love was communicated to him in accord with the knowledge, the delight of love and the fruition he enjoyed there were most sublime.

5. It is noteworthy that the delight received by the soul in the rapture of love, communicated by the fire of the light of these lamps, is wonderful and immense, for it is as abundant as it would be if it came from many lamps. Each lamp burns in love, and the warmth from each furthers the warmth of the other, and the flame of one, the flame of the other, just as the light of one sheds light on the other, because through each attribute the other is known. Thus all of them are one light and one fire, and each of them is one light and one fire.

Immensely absorbed in delicate flames, subtly wounded with love through each of them, and more wounded by all of them together, more alive in the love of the life of God, the soul perceives clearly that this love is proper to eternal life. Eternal life is the aggregation of all goods,¹ and the soul somehow experiences this here and fully understands the truth of the Bridegroom's assertion in the Song of Songs, that the lamps of love are lamps of fire and of flames [Sg. 8:6]. You are beautiful in your steps and shoes, prince's daughter [Sg. 7:1]. Who can relate the magnificence and rareness of your delight and majesty in the admirable splendor and love of your lamps?

6. Sacred Scripture recounts that in times long past one of these lamps went by Abraham and caused him a dark and terrible horror, for the lamp was from the rigorous justice that was to be exercised later on the Canaanites [Gn. 15:12-17]. All these lamps of the knowledge of God illumine you in a friendly and loving way, O enriched soul; how much light and happiness of love will they beget in you, much more than the darkness and horror one lamp produced in Abraham! How remarkable, how advantageous, and how multifaceted will be your delight; in all and from all you receive fruition and love, since God communicates himself to your faculties according to his attributes and powers!

When individuals love and do good to others, they love and do good to them in the measure of their own nature and properties. Thus your Bridegroom, dwelling within you, grants you favors according to his nature. Since he is omnipotent, he omnipotently loves and does good to you; since he is wise, you feel that he loves

and does good to you with wisdom; since he is infinitely good, you feel that he loves you with goodness; since he is holy, you feel that with holiness he loves and favors you; since he is just, you feel that in justice he loves and favors you; since he is merciful, mild, and clement, you feel his mercy, mildness, and clemency; since he is a strong, sublime, and delicate being, you feel that his love for you is strong, sublime, and delicate; since he is pure and undefiled, you feel that he loves you in a pure and undefiled way; since he is truth, you feel that he loves you in truthfulness; since he is liberal, you feel that he liberally loves and favors you, without any personal profit, only in order to do good to you; since he is the virtue of supreme humility, he loves you with supreme humility and esteem and makes you his equal, gladly revealing himself to you in these ways of knowledge, in this his countenance filled with graces, and telling you in this his union, not without great rejoicing: "I am yours and for you and delighted to be what I am so as to be yours and give myself to you."

7. Who, then, will be able to express your experience, O happy soul, since you know that you are so loved and with such esteem exalted? Your belly, which is your will, is like the bride's, similar to a bundle of wheat, covered and surrounded with lilies [Sg. 7:2]. For while you are enjoying together the grains of the bread of life, the lilies, or virtues, surrounding you provide you with delight. These are the king's daughters mentioned by David, who will delight you with myrrh, aloes, and other aromatic spices [Ps. 45:8-9]; for the knowledge of his graces and virtues, which the Beloved communicates to you, are his daughters. You so overflow with these and are so engulfed in them that you are likewise the well of living waters that flow impetuously from Mount Lebanon [Sg. 4:15], that is, from God.

You were made wonderfully joyful according to the whole harmonious composite of your soul and even your body, converted completely into a paradise divinely irrigated, so the psalmist's affirmation might also be fulfilled in you: The impetus of the river makes the city of God joyful [Ps. 46:4].

8. O marvelous thing, that the soul at this time is flooded with divine waters, abounding in them like a plentiful fount overflowing on all sides! Although it is true that this communication under discussion is the light and fire from these lamps of God, yet this fire here is so gentle that, being an immense fire, it is like the waters of life that satisfy the thirst of the spirit with the impetus the spirit desires. Hence these lamps of fire are living waters of the spirit like those that descended on the Apostles [Acts 2:3]; although they were lamps of fire they were clear and pure waters as well. The prophet Ezekiel referred to them in this fashion when he prophesied the coming of the Holy Spirit: I will pour out upon you, God says there, clean waters and will put my spirit in the midst of you [Ez. 36:25-27]. Although it is fire, it is also water. For this fire is represented by the fire of the sacrifice that Jeremiah hid in the cistern: While it was hidden it was water, and when they drew it out for the sacrifice it was fire [2 Mac. 1:19-23].

Thus the spirit of God, insofar as it is hidden in the veins of the soul, is like soft refreshing water that satisfies the thirst of the spirit; insofar as it is exercised in the sacrifice of loving God, it is like living flames of fire. These flames of fire are the lamps of the act of love and of flames that we ascribed above to the Bridegroom according to the Song of Songs: Your lamps are lamps of fire and of flames [Sg. 8:6]. The soul calls them flames here because it not only tastes them like water within itself, but also makes them active, like flames, in the love of God. Since in the communication of the spirit of these lamps, the soul is inflamed and placed in the activity of love, in the act of love, it calls them lamps rather than waters, saying: "O lamps of fire!"

All that can be said of this stanza is less than the reality, for the transformation of the soul in God is indescribable. Everything can be expressed in this statement: The soul becomes God from God through participation in him and in his attributes, which it terms the "lamps of fire."

in whose splendors

9. To understand what these splendors of the lamps are and how the soul is resplendent in them, it should be known that they are the loving knowledge that the lamps of God's attributes give forth from themselves to

the soul. United with them in its faculties, the soul is also resplendent like them, transformed in loving splendors.

This illumination from the splendors, in which the soul shines brightly with the warmth of love, is not like that produced by material lamps that through their flames shed light round about them, but like the illumination that is within the very flames, for the soul is within these splendors. As a result it says, "in whose splendors," that is, within the splendors; and it does not merely mean "within" but, as we pointed out, it means transformed in them. The soul is like the air within the flame, enkindled and transformed in the flame, for the flame is nothing but enkindled air. The movements and splendors of the flame are not from the air alone or from the fire of which the flame is composed, but from both air and fire. And the fire causes the air, which it has enkindled, to produce these same movements and splendors.

10. We can consequently understand how the soul with its faculties is illumined within the splendors of God. The movements of these divine flames, which are the flickering and flaring up we have mentioned,² are not produced by the soul alone that is transformed in the flames of the Holy Spirit, nor does the Holy Spirit produce them alone, but they are the work of both the soul and him since he moves it in the manner that fire moves the enkindled air. Thus these movements of both God and the soul are not only splendors, but also glorifications of the soul.

These flames and their activity are the happy festivals and games that the Holy Spirit inspires in the soul, as we said in the commentary on verse 2 of the first stanza. It seems in these that he is always wanting to bestow eternal life and transport it completely to perfect glory by bringing it into himself. All the gifts, first and last, great and small, that God grants to the soul, he always grants in order to lead it to eternal life. In the same way, the flame flickers and flares together with the enkindled air in order to bring the air with itself to the center of its sphere, and it produces all these movements in order to persist in bringing the air nearer itself. As the flame does not carry the air away, because the air is in its own sphere, so too, although these movements of the Holy Spirit are most efficacious in absorbing the soul in sublime glory, they do not do so completely until the time comes for it to depart from the sphere of the air of this carnal life and enter into the center of the spirit of the perfect life in Christ.

11. Let it be known that these motions are motions of the soul more than of God, for God does not move. These glimpses of glory given to the soul are in God stable, perfect, continuous, and constantly serene. Afterward this will also be true of the soul. There will be no change as to more or less and no intrusion of these movements; it will see distinctly how, although here below God seemingly moved within it, he does not in himself move, just as fire does not move when in its center; and it will see how it experienced this movement and flaring of the flame because it was not perfect in glory.

12. By what was said and what we shall now say it will be more plainly understood how excellent the splendors of these lamps are, for by another name they are called "overshadowings." To understand this expression, it should be known that an overshadowing is the equivalent of casting a shadow; and casting a shadow is similar to protecting, favoring, and granting graces. For when a person is covered by a shadow, it is a sign that someone else is nearby to protect and favor. As a result the Angel Gabriel called the conception of the Son of God, that favor granted to the Virgin Mary, an overshadowing of the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you [Lk. 1:35]

13. For a clear understanding of the nature of this casting of the shadow of God or these overshadowings of great splendor, which is all the same, it should be observed that everything has and makes a shadow according to its size and its properties. If an object is opaque and dark, it makes a dark shadow; if it is transparent and delicate its shadow is transparent and delicate. Thus the shadow of a dark object amounts to another darkness in the measure of the darkness of the object, and the shadow of something bright amounts to something else that is bright according to the brightness of the object.

14. Since the virtues and attributes of God are enkindled and resplendent lamps, they cannot but touch the soul by their shadows, since, as we said, they are so close to it. These shadows must also be enkindled and resplendent in the measure of the splendor of the lamps that make them, and thus they will be splendors. As a result the shadow that the lamp of God's beauty casts over the soul will be another beauty according to the measure and property of God's beauty; and the shadow that fortitude casts over it will amount to another fortitude commensurate with God's; and the shadow of God's wisdom on it will be another wisdom corresponding to God's wisdom; and so on with the other lamps. To express it better: We have the very wisdom and the very beauty and the very fortitude of God in shadow, because the soul here cannot comprehend God perfectly. Since the shadow is so formed by God's size and properties that it is God himself in shadow, the soul knows well the excellence of God.

15. What, then, will be the shadows of the grandeurs of his virtues and attributes that the Holy Spirit casts on the soul? For he is so close to it that his shadows not only touch but unite it with these grandeurs in their shadows and splendors, so that it understands and enjoys God according to his property and measure in each of the shadows. For it understands and enjoys the divine power in the shadow of omnipotence; and it understands and enjoys the divine wisdom in the shadow of divine wisdom; and it understands and enjoys the infinite goodness in the shadow of infinite goodness that surrounds it, and so on. Finally, it enjoys God's glory in the shadow of his glory. All this occurs in the clear and enkindled shadows of those clear and enkindled lamps. And these lamps are within the one lamp of the undivided and simple being of God, which is actually resplendent in all these ways.³

16. Oh, then, what will be the soul's experience in the knowledge and communication of the figure that Ezekiel beheld in the animal with four faces and in the wheel with four wheels [Ez. 1:5, 15]? He saw how it resembled lamps and burning coal [Ez. 1:13]; and he beheld the wheel, which is God's wisdom, full of eyes within and without, which represent the divine knowledge and the splendors of its powers [Ez. 1:18]; and he heard in his spirit the sound it made in passing, which was like the sound of a multitude, an army, which signifies God's countless grandeurs, which the soul knows distinctly here through the sound of his passing by it only once [Ez. 1:24]; and finally the prophet enjoyed that sound of the beating of its wings, which he asserted was like the sound of many waters and of the most high God, meaning here the force of the divine waters [Ez. 1:24]. These waters assail the soul by the fluttering of the Holy Spirit in the flame of love, gladdening it so it enjoys God's glory in likeness and shadow. For this prophet also said that the vision of that animal and wheel was a likeness of the Lord's glory [Ez. 1:28].

Who can express how elevated this happy soul feels here, how exalted, how much admired in holy beauty? Conscious of being so abundantly assailed by the waters of these divine splendors, it realizes that the eternal Father has generously granted it the upper and lower watery land, as did Achsah's father in response to her sigh [Jos. 15:17-19]. For these waters irrigate both the soul and the body, that is, the higher and lower parts of the soul.

17. O wonderful excellence of God! Since the lamps of the divine attributes are one simple being and are enjoyed only in him, they are seen and enjoyed distinctly, each one as enkindled as the other and each substantially the other. O abyss of delights! You are so much more abundant the more your riches are concentrated in the infinite unity and simplicity of your unique being, where one attribute is so known and enjoyed as not to hinder the perfect knowledge and enjoyment of the other; rather, each grace and virtue within you is a light for each of your other grandeurs. By your purity, O divine Wisdom, many things are beheld in you through one. For you are the deposit of the Father's treasures, the splendor of the eternal light, the unspotted mirror and image of his goodness [Wis. 7:26], in whose splendors

the deep caverns of feeling.

18. These caverns are the soul's faculties: memory, intellect, and will. They are as deep as the boundless goods of which they are capable since anything less than the infinite fails to fill them. From what they suffer when they are empty, we can gain some knowledge of their enjoyment and delight when they are filled with God, since one contrary sheds light on the other.

In the first place, it is noteworthy that when these caverns of the faculties are not emptied, purged, and cleansed of every affection for creatures, they do not feel the vast emptiness of their deep capacity. Any little thing that adheres to them in this life is sufficient to so burden and bewitch them that they do not perceive the harm or note the lack of their immense goods, or know their own capacity.

It is an amazing thing that the least of these goods is enough so to encumber these faculties, capable of infinite goods, that they cannot receive these infinite goods until they are completely empty, as we shall see. Yet when these caverns are empty and pure, the thirst, hunger, and yearning of the spiritual feeling is intolerable. Since these caverns have deep stomachs, they suffer profoundly; for the food they lack, which as I say is God, is also profound.

And this feeling that is so intense commonly occurs toward the end of the illumination and purification, just before the attainment of union, where a person is then satisfied. Since the spiritual appetite is emptied and purged of every creature and affection for creatures, and since it has lost its natural quality and is adapted to the divine, and since its void is disposed and the divine is not communicated to it in union with God, the pain of this void and the thirst are worse than death, especially when a divine ray appears vaguely as though through some crevices and is not communicated to the soul. These are the ones who suffer with impatient love, for they cannot remain long without either receiving or dying.⁴

19. In regard to the first cavern - the intellect - its void is a thirst for God. This thirst is so intense when the intellect is disposed that David compares it to the thirst of the hart. Such thirst, they say, is so vehement that David could find none greater for his comparison: As the hart pants for the fountain of waters, so does my soul long for you, O God [Ps. 42:2]. This thirst is for the waters of God's wisdom, the object of the intellect.

20. The second cavern is the will, and its void is a hunger for God so intense that it makes the soul faint, as David also affirms: My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord [Ps. 84:2]. This hunger is for the perfection of love after which the soul aims.

21. The third cavern is the memory, and its void is a yearning and melting away of the soul for the possession of God, as Jeremiah notes: *Memoria memor ero et tabescet in me anima mea*, that is: With the memory I will be mindful and will remember him often, and my soul will melt within me. Thinking these things over in my heart I shall live in the hope of God [Lam. 3:20-21].

22. The capacity of these caverns is deep because the object of this capacity, namely God, is profound and infinite. Thus in a certain fashion their capacity is infinite, their thirst is infinite, their hunger is also deep and infinite, and their languishing and suffering are infinite death. Although the suffering is not as intense as is the suffering of the next life, yet the soul is a living image of that infinite privation, since it is in a certain way disposed to receive its plenitude. This suffering, however, is of another quality because it lies within the recesses of the will's love; and love is not what alleviates the pain, since the greater the love, so much more impatient are such persons for the possession of God, for whom they hope at times with intense longing.

23. Yet - may the Lord help me - since it is true that when the soul desires God fully, it then possesses him whom it loves, as St. Gregory affirms in commenting on St. John,⁵ how does it suffer for want of what it already possesses? In the desire that St. Peter says the angels have for the vision of the Son of God [1 Pt. 1:12] there is no pain or anxiety because they already possess him. Thus it seems that the more the soul desires God the

more it possesses him, and the possession of God delights and satisfies it. Similarly the angels, in satisfying their desire, delight in possession, for their spirit is ever being filled by the object of their desire without the disgust of being satiated. Since there is no disgust, they are always desiring; and they do not suffer, for they have possession. As a result it seems that the greater the soul's desire, the greater will be its satisfaction and delight rather than its suffering and pain.

24. In this matter it is worth noting the difference between the possession of God through grace in itself and the possession of him through union, for one lies in loving and the other lies also in communicating. The difference resembles that between betrothal and marriage.

In betrothal there is only a mutual agreement and willingness between the two, and the bridegroom graciously gives jewels and ornaments to his betrothed. But in marriage there is also a communication and union between the persons. Although the bridegroom sometimes visits the bride in the betrothal and brings her presents, as we said, there is no union of persons, nor does this fall within the scope of betrothal.

Likewise, when the soul has reached such purity in itself and its faculties that the will is very pure and purged of other alien satisfactions and appetites in the inferior and superior parts, and has rendered its "yes" to God concerning all of this, since now God's will and the soul's are one through their own free consent, then the soul has attained possession of God insofar as this is possible by way of the will and grace. And this means that in the "yes" of the soul, God has given the true and complete "yes" of his grace.

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STANZA 3 (25-46)

25. This is a high state of spiritual betrothal between the soul and the Word, in which the Bridegroom favors it and frequently pays it loving visits wherein it receives wonderful delight. Yet these delights are not comparable to those of marriage, for these are preparations for the union of marriage. Although it is true that this betrothal occurs in the soul that is greatly purified of every affection for creatures - for the spiritual betrothal is not wrought until this comes to pass - the soul still needs other positive preparations from God. It needs his visits and gifts by which he purifies, beautifies, and refines it further so it might be suitably prepared for so lofty a union.

This preparation takes time, for some more than for others, since God carries out this work according to the mode of the soul.⁶ This is typified in those young maidens chosen by King Ahasuerus. Although he had already brought them out of their countries and the house of their fathers, they had still to wait a year, even in the palace, before approaching the king's bed. For half of the year they were prepared by means of certain ointments of myrrh and other spices, and for the remaining half by other, more precious ointments. After this they went to the king's bed [Est. 2:3, 12].

26. During this time of the betrothal and expectation of marriage and the anointings of the Holy Spirit, when the ointments preparatory for union with God are more sublime, the anxieties of the caverns of the soul are usually extreme and delicate. Since these ointments are a more proximate preparation for union with God (for they are more closely related to God and consequently lure the soul and make it relish him more delicately), the desire for him becomes more refined and profound - and the desire for God is the preparation for union with him.

27. Oh, what an excellent place this is to advise souls on whom God bestows these delicate unctions to watch what they are doing, and into whose hands they are committing themselves, that they might not turn back! This does not pertain to our subject, yet the compassion and grief that come to my heart on seeing souls fall back (not only by hindering the anointings so there can be no progress from them but even by losing their effects) is so great that I do not think it improper here to advise them about what they should do to avoid such harm. Even though we may be somewhat detained before returning to our subject, for I plan to return to it soon, this will all help toward understanding the property of these caverns. Since this advice is very necessary, not only for all those who advance so prosperously but also for all others who seek their Beloved, I want to speak of it.⁷

28. In the first place it should be known that if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more. And if a soul directs to God its loving desires, which are as fragrant to him as the pillar of smoke rising from the aromatic spices of myrrh and incense [Sg. 3:6], God sends it the fragrance of his ointments by which he draws it and makes it run after him [Sg. 1:3], and these are his divine inspirations and touches. As often as these inspirations and touches are his, they are always bound and regulated by the perfection of his law and of faith. It is by means of this perfection that a person must always draw closer to him. Thus it should be understood that the desire for himself that God grants in all his favors of unguents and fragrant anointings is a preparation for other more precious and delicate ointments, made more according to the quality of God, until the soul is so delicately and purely prepared that it merits union with him and substantial transformation in all its faculties.

29. The soul, then, should advert that God is the principal agent in this matter. He acts as guide of the

blind, leading it by the hand to the place it knows not how to reach (to supernatural things of which neither its intellect nor will nor memory can know the nature). It should use all its principal care in watching so as not to place any obstacle in the way of God, its guide on this road ordained for it by him according to the perfection of his law and of the faith, as we said.

It can cause this obstacle by allowing itself to be led by another blind guide. There are three blind guides who can draw it off the road: the spiritual director, the devil, and the soul itself. So the soul may understand how this happens, we will briefly discuss each of these blind guides.

30. As regards the first, it is very important that individuals, desiring to advance in recollection and perfection, take care into whose hands they entrust themselves, for the disciple will become like the master, and as is the father so will be the son. Let them realize that for this journey, especially its most sublime parts (and even for the intermediate parts), they will hardly find a guide accomplished as to all their needs, for besides being learned and discreet, a director should have experience. Although the foundation for guiding a soul to spirit is knowledge and discretion, directors will not succeed in leading the soul onward in it when God bestows it, nor will they even understand it if they have no experience of what true and pure spirit is.

31. As a result, many spiritual masters cause great harm to a number of souls; not understanding the ways and properties of the spirit, they ordinarily make souls lose the unction of these delicate ointments with which the Holy Spirit anoints and prepares them for himself, and they instruct them in other inferior ways, serviceable only to beginners, which they themselves have used or read of somewhere. Knowing no more than what pertains to beginners - and please God they would even know this much - they do not wish to permit souls to pass beyond these beginnings and these discursive and imaginative ways (even though God may desire to lead them on). Thus they do not let them go beyond their natural capacity, but through their natural capacity souls cannot make much progress.

32. For a better understanding of this beginner's stage, it should be known that the practice of beginners is to meditate and make acts and discursive reflection with the imagination. Individuals in this state should be given matter for meditation and discursive reflection, and they should by themselves make interior acts and profit in spiritual things from the delight and satisfaction of the senses. For by being fed with the relish of spiritual things, the appetite is torn away from sensual things and weakened in regard to the things of the world.

But when the appetite has been fed somewhat and has become in a certain fashion accustomed to spiritual things and acquired some fortitude and constancy, God begins to wean the soul, as they say, and place it in the state of contemplation. This occurs in some persons after a very short time, especially with religious; in denying the things of the world more quickly, they accommodate their senses and appetites to God and pass on to the spirit in their activity, God thus working in them. This happens when the soul's discursive acts and meditations cease, as well as its initial sensible satisfaction and fervor, and it is unable to practice discursive meditation as before or find any support for the senses. The sensory part is left in dryness because its riches are transferred to the spirit, which does not pertain to the senses.

Since the soul cannot function naturally except by means of the senses, it is God who in this state is the agent; the soul is the receiver. The soul conducts itself only as the receiver and as one in whom something is being done; God is the giver and the one who works in it, by according spiritual goods in contemplation (which is knowledge and love together, that is, loving knowledge), without the soul's natural acts and discursive reflections, for it can no longer engage in these acts as before.

33. Hence persons at this time should be guided in a manner entirely contrary to the former. If, prior to this, directors suggested matter for meditation and these individuals meditated, now this matter should instead be withheld and they should not meditate. For, as I say, they are unable to do so even though they may want

to; and were they to try they would be distracted instead of recollected. If previously they sought satisfaction, love, and devotion, and found it, now they should neither desire nor seek it; for not only do they fail to procure it through their own diligence but, on the contrary, they procure dryness. Through the activity they desire to carry on with the senses, they divert themselves from the peaceful and quiet good secretly being given to their spirit. In losing one good they do not gain the other, for these goods are no longer accorded through the senses as before.

Therefore directors should not impose meditation on persons in this state, nor should they oblige them to make acts or strive for satisfaction and fervor. Such activity would place an obstacle in the path of the principal agent who, as I say, is God, who secretly and quietly inserts in the soul loving wisdom and knowledge, without specified acts; although sometimes he makes specific ones in the soul for a certain length of time. Thus individuals also should proceed only with a loving attention to God, without making specific acts. They should conduct themselves passively, as we have said, without efforts of their own but with the simple, loving awareness, as when opening one's eyes with loving attention.

34. Since God, then, as the giver communes with individuals through a simple, loving knowledge, they also, as the receivers, commune with God through a simple and loving knowledge or attention, so knowledge is thus joined with knowledge and love with love. The receiver should act according to the mode of what is received, and not otherwise, in order to receive and keep it in the way it is given. For as the philosophers say: Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver.⁸

It is obvious that if persons do not lay aside their natural active mode, they will not receive that good except in a natural mode; thus they will not receive it, but will remain only with their natural act. For the supernatural does not fit into the natural mode, nor does it have anything to do with it. If individuals should, then, desire to act on their own through an attitude different from the passive loving attention we mentioned, in which they would remain very passive and tranquil without making any act unless God would unite himself with them in some act, they would utterly hinder the goods God communicates supernaturally to them in the loving knowledge. This loving knowledge is communicated in the beginning through the exercise of interior purgation, in which the individual suffers, as we said, and afterward in the delight of love.⁹

If as I say - and it is true - this loving knowledge is received passively in the soul according to the supernatural mode of God, and not according to the natural mode of the soul, individuals, if they want to receive it, should be very annihilated in their natural operations, unhampered, idle, quiet, peaceful, and serene, according to the mode of God. The more the air is cleansed of vapors and the quieter and more simple it is, the more the sun illumines and warms it. A person should not bear attachment to anything, neither to the practice of meditation nor to any savor, whether sensory or spiritual, nor to any other apprehensions. Individuals should be very free and annihilated regarding all things, because any thought or discursive reflection or satisfaction on which they may want to lean would impede and disquiet them and make noise in the profound silence of their senses and their spirit, which they possess for the sake of this deep and delicate listening. God speaks to the heart in this solitude, which he mentioned in Hosea [Hos. 2:14], in supreme peace and tranquility while the soul listens, like David, to what the Lord God speaks to it [Ps. 85:8], for he speaks this peace in this solitude.

35. When it happens, therefore, that souls are conscious in this manner of being placed in solitude and in the state of listening, they should even forget the practice of loving attentiveness I mentioned so as to remain free for what the Lord then desires of them. They should make use of that loving awareness only when they do not feel themselves placed in this solitude or inner idleness or oblivion or spiritual listening. So they may recognize it, it always comes to pass with a certain peace and calm and inward absorption.

36. Once individuals have begun to enter this simple and idle state of contemplation that comes about when they can no longer meditate, they should not at any time or season engage in meditations or look for support in spiritual savor or satisfaction, but stand upright on their own feet with their spirit completely detached

from everything, as Habakkuk declared he was obliged to do in order to hear what God spoke to him: I will stand on my watch and fix my foot upon my fortress, and I will contemplate what is said to me [Hb. 2:1]. This is like saying: I will raise my mind above all activity and knowledge belonging to my senses and what they can retain, leaving all below, and will fix the foot of the fortress (my faculties), not allowing these faculties to advance a step as regards their own operation that they may receive through contemplation what God communicates to me; for we have already asserted that pure contemplation lies in receiving.

37. It is impossible for this highest wisdom and language of God, which is contemplation, to be received in anything less than a spirit that is silent and detached from discursive knowledge and gratification. Isaiah speaks of it in these words: Whom will he teach knowledge and whom will God make understand the hearing? And Isaiah replies: Those that are weaned from the milk (that is from satisfaction) and drawn away from the breasts (from particular knowledge and apprehensions) [Is. 28:9].

38. Wipe away, O spiritual soul, the dust, hairs, and stains, and cleanse your eye; and the bright sun will illumine you, and you will see clearly. Pacify the soul, draw it out, and liberate it from the yoke and slavery of its own weak operation, which is the captivity of Egypt (amounting to not much more than gathering straws for baking bricks) [Ex. 5:7-19]. And, O spiritual master, guide it to the land of promise flowing with milk and honey [Ex. 3:8, 17]. Behold that for this holy liberty and idleness of the children of God, God calls the soul to the desert, where it journeys festively clothed and adorned with gold and silver jewels, since it has now left Egypt and been despoiled of its riches, which is the sensory part [Ex. 32:2-3]. Not only this, but the Egyptians are drowned in the sea of contemplation [Ex. 14:27-28], where the Egyptian of sense, not finding a foothold or some support, drowns and thereby frees the child of God, which is the spirit that has emerged from the narrow limits and slavery of the operation of the senses, from its little understanding, its base feeling, and its poor way of loving and being satisfied, that God may give it the sweet manna. Although this manna has all these tastes and savors [Wis. 16:20] with which you desire the soul to be occupied through its own labor, nonetheless, since it is so delicate it melts in one's mouth, it will not be tasted if mingled with some other taste or some other thing.

When a soul approaches this state, strive that it become detached from all satisfaction, relish, pleasure, and spiritual meditations, and do not disquiet it with cares and solicitude about heavenly things or, still less, earthly things. Bring it to as complete a withdrawal and solitude as possible, for the more solitude it obtains and the nearer it approaches this idle tranquility the more abundantly will the spirit of divine wisdom be infused into its soul. This wisdom is loving, tranquil, solitary, peaceful, mild, and an inebriator of the spirit, by which the soul feels tenderly and gently wounded and carried away, without knowing by whom or from where or how. The reason is that this wisdom is communicated without the soul's own activity.

39. And a little of this that God works in the soul in this holy idleness and solitude is an inestimable good, a good much greater at times than a soul or its director can imagine. And although one is not always so clearly conscious of it, it will in due time shed its light. The least that a person can manage to feel is a withdrawal and an estrangement as to all things, sometimes more than at other times, accompanied by an inclination toward solitude and a weariness with all creatures and with the world, in the gentle breathing of love and life in the spirit. Everything not included in this estrangement becomes distasteful, for, as they say, once the spirit has tasted, all flesh becomes bitter.¹⁰

40. Yet the blessings this silent communication and contemplation impress on the soul, without its then experiencing them, are inestimable, as I say. They are most hidden unctions of the Holy Spirit and hence most delicate; they secretly fill the soul with spiritual riches, gifts, and graces. Since it is God who grants them, he does so in no other manner than as God.

41. Because of the refined quality and purity of these delicate and sublime anointings and shadings of the Holy Spirit, neither the soul nor its director understands them; only he who bestows them in order to be more pleased with the soul comprehends them. Individuals can with the greatest ease disturb and hinder these

anointings by no more than the least act they may desire of their memory, intellect, or will; or by making use of their senses, appetite, and knowledge, or their own satisfaction and pleasure. This is all seriously harmful and a great sorrow and pity.

42. Oh, it is a serious and regrettable situation that even though this interfering with these holy unctions seems to cause hardly any damage at all, the harm done is greater and worthy of deeper sorrow and compassion than the harm done in the disturbance and ruin of many other ordinary souls who are not in the position to receive such sublime adornment and shadings! Were a portrait of extremely delicate workmanship touched over with dull and harsh colors by an unpolished hand, the destruction would be worse, more noticeable, and a greater pity than if many other portraits of less artistry were effaced. Who will succeed in repairing that delicate painting of the Holy Spirit once it is marred by a coarse hand?

43. Although this damage is beyond anything imaginable, it is so common and frequent that scarcely any spiritual director will be found who does not cause it in souls God is beginning to recollect in this manner of contemplation. How often is God anointing a contemplative soul with some very delicate unguent of loving knowledge, serene, peaceful, solitary, and far withdrawn from the senses and what is imaginable, as a result of which it cannot meditate or reflect on anything, or enjoy anything heavenly or earthly (since God has engaged it in that lonely idleness and given it the inclination to solitude), when a spiritual director will happen along who, like a blacksmith, knows no more than how to hammer and pound with the faculties. Since hammering with the faculties is this director's only teaching, and he knows no more than how to meditate, he will say: "Come, now, lay aside these rest periods, which amount to idleness and a waste of time; take and meditate and make interior acts, for it is necessary that you do your part; this other method is the way of illusions¹¹ and typical of fools."

44. Thus, not understanding the stages of prayer or the ways of the spirit, these directors are not aware that those acts they say the soul should make, and the discursive reflection they want it to practice, have already been accomplished. The soul has already reached the negation and silence of the senses and of meditation, and has come to the way of the spirit that is contemplation. In contemplation the activity of the senses and of discursive reflection terminates, and God alone is the agent who then speaks secretly to the solitary and silent soul. These directors fail to observe that if they want to make souls who in this fashion have attained to spirit still walk the path of the senses, they will cause them to turn back and become distracted. If those who have reached the end of their journey continue to walk in order to reach the end, they will necessarily move away from that end, besides doing something ridiculous.

Once individuals, through the activity of their faculties, have reached the quiet recollection that every spiritual person pursues, in which the functioning of these faculties ceases, it would not merely be useless for them to repeat the acts of these same faculties in order to reach this recollection, but it would be harmful, for in abandoning the recollection already possessed they would become distracted.

45. Since these spiritual masters do not understand recollection and spiritual solitude or its properties (in which solitude God applies these sublime unctions to the soul), they superpose or interpose anointings from a lower spiritual exercise, which is the soul's activity, as we said. There is as much difference between what the soul does itself and what it receives from God as there is between a human work and a divine work, between the natural and the supernatural. In one, God works supernaturally in the soul; in the other, only the soul works naturally. What is worse is that by the activity of their natural operations individuals lose inner solitude and recollection and, consequently, the sublime image God was painting within them. Thus all their efforts are like hammering the horseshoe instead of the nail; on the one hand they do harm, and on the other hand they receive no profit.

46. These directors should reflect that they themselves are not the chief agent, guide, and mover of souls in this matter, but the principal guide is the Holy Spirit, who is never neglectful of souls, and they themselves

are instruments for directing these souls to perfection through faith and the law of God, according to the spirit given by God to each one.

Thus the whole concern of directors should not be to accommodate souls to their own method and condition, but they should observe the road along which God is leading one; if they do not recognize it, they should leave the soul alone and not bother it. And in harmony with the path and spirit along which God leads a soul, the spiritual director should strive to conduct it into greater solitude, tranquility, and freedom of spirit. He should give it latitude so that when God introduces it into this solitude it does not bind its corporeal or spiritual faculties to some particular object, interior or exterior, and does not become anxious or afflicted with the thought that nothing is being done. Even though the soul is not then doing anything, God is doing something in it.

Directors should strive to disencumber the soul and bring it into solitude and idleness so it may not be tied to any particular knowledge, earthly or heavenly, or to any covetousness for some satisfaction or pleasure, or to any other apprehension; and in such a way that it may be empty through the pure negation of every creature, and placed in spiritual poverty. This is what the soul must do of itself, as the Son of God counsels: Whoever does not renounce all possessions cannot be my disciple [Lk. 14:33]. This counsel refers not only to the renunciation according to the will of all corporeal and temporal things, but also to the dispossession of spiritual things, which includes spiritual poverty, to which the Son of God ascribes beatitude [Mt. 5:3].

When the soul frees itself of all things and attains to emptiness and dispossession concerning them, which is equivalent to what it can do of itself, it is impossible that God fail to do his part by communicating himself to it, at least silently and secretly. It is more impossible than it would be for the sun not to shine on clear and uncluttered ground. As the sun rises in the morning and shines on your house so that its light may enter if you open the shutters, so God, who in watching over Israel does not doze [Ps. 121:4] or, still less, sleep, will enter the soul that is empty, and fill it with divine goods.

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STANZA 3 (47-67)

47. God, like the sun, stands above souls ready to communicate himself. Let directors be content with disposing them for this according to evangelical perfection, which lies in nakedness and emptiness of sense and spirit; and let them not desire to go any further than this in building, since that function belongs only to the Father of lights from whom descends every good and perfect gift [Jas. 1:17]. If the Lord, as David says, does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor [Ps. 127:1]. And since he is the supernatural artificer, he will construct supernaturally in each soul the edifice he desires, if you, director, will prepare it by striving to annihilate it in its natural operations and affections, which have neither the ability nor strength to build the supernatural edifice. The natural operations and affections at this time impede rather than help. It is your duty to prepare the soul, and God's office, as the Wise Man says, is to direct its path [Prv. 16:9], that is, toward supernatural goods, through modes and ways understandable to neither you nor the soul.

Do not say, therefore: "The soul does not advance, because it is not doing anything."¹² For if it is true that it is not doing anything, I will prove to you that it is accomplishing a great deal by doing nothing. If the intellect empties itself of particular knowledge, natural or spiritual, it advances; and the freer it becomes of particular knowledge and acts of understanding, the further it advances in its journey toward the supreme, supernatural Good.

48. "Or," you will say, "it doesn't understand anything in particular, and thus will be unable to make progress." I reply that, quite the contrary, if it would have particular knowledge it would not advance. The reason is that God transcends the intellect and is incomprehensible and inaccessible to it. Hence while the intellect is understanding, it is not approaching God but withdrawing from him. It must withdraw from itself and from its knowledge so as to journey to God in faith, by believing and not understanding. In this way it reaches perfection, because it is joined to God by faith and not by any other means, and it reaches God more by not understanding than by understanding.

Do not be disturbed on this account; if the intellect does not turn back (which it would do if it were to desire to be occupied with particular knowledge and other discursive reflections), but desires to remain in idleness, it advances. It thereby empties itself of everything comprehensible to it, because none of that is God; as we have said, God does not fit in an occupied heart. In this matter of striving for perfection, not to turn back is to go forward; and the intellect goes forward by establishing itself more in faith. Thus it advances by darkening itself, for faith is darkness to the intellect. Since the intellect cannot understand the nature of God, it must journey in surrender to him rather than by understanding, and thus it advances by not understanding. For its own well-being, the intellect should be doing what you condemn; that is, it should avoid busying itself with particular knowledge, for it cannot reach God through this knowledge, which would rather hinder it in its advance toward him.

49. "Or," you will say, "when the intellect does not understand particular things, the will is idle and does not love (something that must always be avoided on the spiritual road), because the will can only love what the intellect understands." This is true, especially in the natural operations and acts of the soul in which the will does not love except what the intellect understands distinctly. But in the contemplation we are discussing (by which God infuses himself into the soul), particular knowledge as well as acts made by the soul are unnecessary. The reason for this is that God in one act is communicating light and love together, which is loving supernatural knowledge. We can assert that this knowledge is like light that transmits heat, for that light also enkindles love. This knowledge is general and dark to the intellect because it is contemplative knowledge, which is a ray of darkness for the intellect, as St. Dionysius teaches.¹³

Love is therefore present in the will in the manner that knowledge is present in the intellect. Just as this knowledge infused by God in the intellect is general and dark, devoid of particular understanding, the love in the will is also general, without any clarity arising from particular understanding. Since God is divine light and love in his communication of himself to the soul, he equally informs these two faculties (intellect and will) with knowledge and love. Since God is unintelligible in this life, knowledge of him is dark, as I say, and the love present in the will is fashioned after this knowledge.

Yet sometimes in this delicate communication God wounds and communicates himself to one faculty more than to the other; sometimes more knowledge is experienced than love, and at other times more love than knowledge; and likewise at times all knowledge is felt without any love, or all love without any knowledge.

This is why I say that when the soul makes natural acts with the intellect, it cannot love without understanding. But in the acts God produces and infuses in it, as he does in these souls, there is a difference; God can communicate to one faculty and not to the other. He can inflame the will with a touch of the warmth of his love even though the intellect does not understand, just as a person can feel warmth from a fire without seeing it.¹⁴

50. The will often feels enkindled or tenderly moved or captivated without knowing how or understanding anything more particularly than before, since God is ordaining love in it; as the bride declares in the Song of Songs: The king brought me into the wine cellar and set in order charity in me [Sg. 2:4].

There is no reason to fear idleness of the will in this situation. If the will stops making acts of love on its own and, in regard to particular knowledge, God makes them in it, inebriating it secretly with infused love either by means of the knowledge of contemplation or without it, as we just said, these acts are much more delightful and meritorious than the acts the soul makes on its own, just as God, who moves it and infuses this love, is much better.

51. God infuses this love in the will when it is empty and detached from other particular, earthly or heavenly pleasures and affections. Take care, then, to empty the will of its affections and detach it from them. If it does not retrogress through the desire for some satisfaction or pleasure, it advances, even though it experiences nothing particular in God, by ascending above all things to him. Although it does not enjoy God very particularly and distinctly, nor love him in so clear an act, it does enjoy him obscurely and secretly in that general infusion more than it does all particular things, for it then sees clearly that nothing satisfies it as much as that solitary quietude. And it loves him above all lovable things, since it has rejected all the gratifications and pleasures of these things and they have become distasteful to it.

One, therefore, should not be disturbed, for the will makes progress if it cannot dwell on the satisfactions and pleasures of particular acts. For by not turning back in the embrace of something sensible, it goes forward to the inaccessible, which is God; and so it is no wonder if it does not feel him.

To journey to God, the will must walk in detachment from every pleasant thing, rather than in attachment to it. It thus carries out well the commandment of love, which is to love God above all things; this cannot be done without nakedness and emptiness concerning them all.

52. Neither should there be any fear because the memory is void of forms and figures. Since God is formless and figureless, the memory walks safely when empty of form and figure, and it draws closer to God. The more it leans on the imagination, the farther away it moves from God and the more serious is its danger; for in being what he is - unimaginable - God cannot be grasped by the imagination.

53. These spiritual masters, not understanding souls that tread the path of quiet and solitary contemplation, since they themselves have not reached it and do not know what it is to part with discursive meditation, think these souls are idle. They hinder them and hamper the peace of restful and quiet contemplation that God of his own was according them, by making them walk along the path of meditation and imaginative reflection, and perform interior acts. In doing this, these souls find great repugnance, dryness, and distraction; they want to remain in their holy idleness and quiet and peaceful recollection.

Since the senses find nothing to be attached to, take pleasure in, or do in this recollection, these directors also persuade souls to strive for satisfaction and feelings of fervor when they should be counseling the opposite. When these persons cannot accomplish this as before, because the time for such activity has passed and this is not their road, they grow doubly disquieted, thinking that they are lost. Their directors foster this belief in them, cause in them aridity of spirit, and deprive them of the precious anointings God was bestowing on them in solitude and tranquility. This causes serious harm, as I said; and these directors bring them grief and ruin, for on the one hand such persons lose ground, and on the other they suffer a useless affliction.

54. These directors do not know what spirit is. They do a great injury to God and show disrespect toward him by intruding with a rough hand where he is working. It cost God a great deal to bring these souls to this stage, and he highly values his work of having introduced them into this solitude and emptiness regarding their faculties and activity so that he might speak to their hearts, which is what he always desires. Since it is he who now reigns in the soul with an abundance of peace and calm, he takes the initiative himself by making the natural acts of the faculties fail, by which the soul laboring the whole night accomplished nothing [Lk. 5:5]; and he feeds the spirit without the activity of the senses because neither the sense nor its function is capable of spirit.

55. The extent to which God values this tranquility and sleep, or annihilation of sense, is clear in the entreaty, so notable and efficacious, that he made in the Song of Songs: I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the harts of the fields, that you stir not up nor awaken my beloved until she please [Sg. 3:5]. He hereby indicates how much he loves solitary sleep and forgetfulness, for he compares it to these animals that are so retiring and withdrawn. Yet these spiritual directors do not want the soul to rest and remain quiet, but want it always to labor and work, so that consequently it does not allow room for God's work and through its own activity ruins and effaces what he is doing. Its activities are like the little foxes that destroy the flourishing vineyard of the soul [Sg. 2:15]. Thus the Lord complains through Isaiah: You have devoured my vineyard [Is. 3:14].

56. Perhaps in their zeal these directors err with good will because they do not know any better. Not for this reason, however, should they be excused for the counsels they give rashly, without first understanding the road and spirit a person may be following, and for rudely meddling in something they do not understand, instead of leaving the matter to one who does understand. It is no light matter or fault to cause a soul to lose inestimable goods and sometimes leave it in ruin through temerarious counsel.

Thus one who recklessly errs will not escape a punishment corresponding to the harm caused, for such a one is obliged to be certain, as is everyone in the performance of duties. The affairs of God must be handled with great tact and open eyes, especially in so vital and sublime a matter as is that of these souls, where there is at stake almost an infinite gain in being right and almost an infinite loss in being wrong.

57. Since, however, you insist that you have some excuse, although I do not see it, at least you cannot hold that they have an excuse who in guiding a soul never let it out of their hands on account of vain considerations of which they are aware.¹⁵ Such directors will not escape punishment for these considerations. For it is certain that since that soul must always advance along the spiritual road on which God is always a help to it, it will have to change its style and mode of prayer and will need another doctrine more sublime than yours, and another spirituality. Not everyone knows all the happenings and stages of the spiritual journey, nor is

everyone spiritually so perfect as to know every state of the interior life in which a person must be conducted and guided. At least directors should not think that they have all the requirements, or that God will not want to lead the soul further on.

Not everyone capable of hewing the wood knows how to carve the statue, nor does everyone able to carve know how to perfect and polish the work, nor do all who know how to polish it know how to paint it, nor do all who can paint it know how to put the finishing touches on it and bring the work to completion. One can do with the statue only what one knows how to do, and when craftsmen try to do more than they know how to do, the statue is ruined.

58. Let us see, then: If you are only a hewer, which lies in guiding the soul to contempt of the world and mortification of its appetites, or a good carver, which consists in introducing it to holy meditations, and know no more, how can you lead this soul to the ultimate perfection of delicate painting, which no longer requires hewing or carving or even relief work, but the work that God must do in it?

It is certain that if you always bind it to your teaching, which is ever of one kind, it will either backslide or fail to advance. What, I ask, will the statue look like if all you do is hammer and hew, which, in the case of the soul, is the active use of the faculties? When will the statue be complete? When or how will it be left for God to paint? Is it possible that all these functions are yours and that you are so perfect the soul will never need any other than you?

59. Granted that you may possess the requisites for the full direction of some soul (for perhaps it does not have the talent to make progress), it is impossible for you to have the qualities demanded for the guidance of all those you refuse to allow out of your hands. God leads each one along different paths so that hardly one spirit will be found like another in even half its method of procedure.¹⁶ For who is there who would become, like St. Paul, all things to all so as to win them all [1 Cor. 9:22]? You tyrannize souls and deprive them of their freedom, and judge for yourself the breadth of the evangelical doctrine. Therefore you endeavor to hold on to your penitents. But what is worse, you may by chance learn that one of them has consulted another (for perhaps you were not the suitable one to consult, or that person was led by God to another so as to learn what you did not teach), and you treat that penitent - I am ashamed to say it - with the very jealous quarrelsomeness we find among married couples. And this is not jealousy for the glory of God, but a jealousy motivated by your own pride and presumption or some other imperfection, for you should not assume that in turning from you this person turned from God.

60. God becomes extremely indignant with such directors and in Ezekiel promises them chastisement: You ate the milk of my flock and you covered yourself with their wool and did not feed my flock; I will seek my flock at your hand, he says [Ez. 34:3, 10].

61. Spiritual masters, then, should give freedom to souls and encourage them in their desire to seek improvement. The director does not know the means by which God may wish to benefit a soul, especially if it is no longer satisfied with the director's teaching. This dissatisfaction is in fact a sign that the director is not helping it, either because God is making it advance by a road different from the one along which it is being led, or because the master has changed style. These masters should themselves counsel this change; all the rest stems from foolish pride and presumption, or some other ambition.

62. Let us leave aside our discussion of this attitude and speak of another more pestiferous trait of these directors or of other worse methods used by them. It will happen that God is anointing some souls with the unctions of holy desires and motives for renouncing the world, changing their way of life, and serving him, with contempt of the world (and God esteems this stage to which he has brought them, because worldly things do not please him), when these directors, by their human rationalizations or reflections singularly contrary to the doctrine of Christ and of his humility and contempt for all things, and by depending on their own interests or

satisfactions, or out of fear where there is no reason to fear, either make matters difficult for these souls or cause them to delay, or even worse try to make them put the thought from their minds. With a spirit not too devout, with little of Christ's meekness, and fully clothed in worldliness, since they do not enter by the narrow gate of life, these directors do not let others enter either.

Our Lord threatens them through St. Luke: Woe to you, for you have taken away the key of knowledge, and you neither enter yourselves nor do you allow others to enter [Lk. 11:52].

These directors are indeed like barriers or obstacles at the gate of heaven, hindering those who seek their counsel from entering. They know that God has commanded them not only to allow and help souls enter but even to compel them to enter, when he says through St. Luke: Make them enter that my house may be filled with guests [Lk. 14:23]. But they, on the contrary, compel them to stay out.¹⁷

The director is thus a blind guide who can be an obstacle to the life of the soul, which is the Holy Spirit. We discover this to be the case with spiritual masters in the many ways we mentioned, in which some are aware of it and others are unaware. But neither will escape punishment; since this is their duty, they are obliged to be careful and understand what they are doing.

63. The second blind guide who, we said,¹⁸ was capable of thwarting the soul in this kind of recollection is the devil; being blind himself, he desires that the soul be blind too. When the soul is in the loftiest solitudes, receiving the infusion of the delicate unctions of the Holy Spirit insofar as it is alone, despoiled, and withdrawn from every creature and trace of creature, the devil, with great sadness and envy, seeing that the soul is not only enriched but flying along at such a pace that he cannot catch it in anything, strives to intrude in this withdrawal with some clouds of knowledge and sensible satisfaction. This knowledge and satisfaction he gives is sometimes good, so he may feed the soul more and make it revert to particular things and the work of the senses, and make it turn thus to this good knowledge and satisfaction, embrace it, and journey to God leaning upon it.

He consequently distracts it very easily and draws it out of that solitude and recollection in which, as we said, the Holy Spirit is bringing about those secret marvels. Since humans of themselves are inclined toward feeling and tasting, especially if they are seeking something and do not understand the road they are traveling, they easily grow attached to the knowledge and satisfaction provided by the devil and lose the solitude God was providing. Since the soul was doing nothing in that solitude and quiet of the faculties, it thinks that this way is better because it is now doing something. It is a great pity that, in not understanding itself and for the sake of eating a morsel of particular knowledge and satisfaction, the soul impedes God from feeding on it entirely, which God does in that solitude where he places it, since he absorbs it in himself by means of those solitary spiritual anointings.¹⁹

64. With little more than nothing, the devil causes the gravest harm. He makes the soul lose abundant riches by alluring it with a little bait - as one would lure a fish - out of the simple waters of the spirit, where it was engulfed and swallowed up in God without finding any bottom or foothold. And by this bait he provides it with a prop and drags it ashore so it might find the ground and go on foot, with great effort, rather than swim in the unctions of God, in the waters of Shiloh that flow in silence [Is. 8:6].

The devil considers this so important that it is worth noting that, since he accomplishes more through a little harm caused in these souls than by great damage effected in many others, as we have mentioned, there is hardly anyone walking this path on whom he does not bring serious harm and loss. This evil one establishes himself cautiously at the passageway from sense to spirit, deceiving souls and feeding the sensory part itself, as we said, with sensible things. The soul does not think there is any loss in this; it thus fails to enter into the inner dwelling of the Bridegroom, and remains at the threshold to watch what is happening outside in the sensory part. The devil sees every high thing, says Job [Jb. 41:25], that is, every spiritual height of souls in

order to combat them. If, by chance, some soul enters a sublime recollection in such fashion that the devil cannot distract it in the way we mentioned, he struggles through horrors, fears, bodily pains, or exterior sounds and noises to make it at least advert to sense and to draw it out thereby and divert it from the interior spirit, until being able to do no more he leaves it.

But it is so easy for him to thwart and block the riches of these precious souls that even though he values doing this more than he does ruining many other souls, he still does not esteem it highly because of the ease in which he accomplishes it and the little it costs him.

We can in this sense interpret God's words to Job about him: He will absorb a river and not wonder and he trusts that the Jordan will run into his mouth, which refers to the highest matters of perfection. In his eyes as with a hook he will catch him and with awls pierce his nostrils [Jb. 40:23-24], that is, he will divert the spirit with the points of the knowledge by which he is wounding it; for the air that rushes out of the recollected nostrils that are pierced is scattered in many parts. And further on he says: The rays of the sun will be under him and gold will be strewn under him like mire [Jb. 41:22], for the devil causes illumined souls to lose wonderful rays of divine knowledge and seizes and scatters the precious gold of the divine embellishments.²⁰

65. Oh, then, souls, when God is according you such sovereign favors as to lead you by the state of solitude and recollection, withdrawing you from the labors of the senses, do not revert to the senses. Abandon your activity, for if this helped you to deny the world and yourselves when you were beginners, it is a serious obstacle now that God favors you by being himself the agent. God will feed you with heavenly refreshment since you do not apply your faculties to anything, or encumber them, but detach them from everything, which is all you yourself have to do (besides the simple loving attentiveness in the way I mentioned above,²¹ that is, when you feel no aversion toward it). You should not use any force except to detach your soul and liberate it, so as not to alter its peace and tranquility.

66. The third blind guide is the soul that, by not understanding itself, disturbs and harms itself. Since it only knows how to act by means of the senses and discursive reflection, it thinks it is doing nothing when God introduces it into that emptiness and solitude where it is unable to use the faculties and make acts; as a result it strains to perform these acts. The soul, therefore, that was enjoying the idleness of spiritual peace and silence, in which God was secretly adorning it, is distracted and filled with dryness and displeasure.

It will happen that while God persists in keeping the soul in that silent quietude, it persists in its desire to act through its own efforts with the intellect and the imagination. It resembles a little boy who kicks and cries, wanting to walk when his mother wants to carry him; thus he neither allows his mother to make any headway nor makes any himself.²² Or it resembles one who moves a painting back and forth while the artist is at work so either nothing is accomplished or the painting is damaged.

67. Individuals should take note that even though they do not seem to be making any progress in this quietude or doing anything, they are advancing much faster than if they were treading along on foot, for God is carrying them. Although they are walking at God's pace, they do not feel this pace. Even though they do no work with their faculties, they achieve much more than if they did, for God is the agent.

It is no wonder if they do not advert to this, for the senses do not attain to what God effects in the soul at this time; it is done in silence. As the Wise Man says: The words of wisdom are heard in silence [Eccl. 9:17].

A soul, then, should abandon itself into God's hands, and not into its own or those of the other two blind guides. Insofar as it abandons itself to God and does not apply its faculties to anything, it will advance securely.

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STANZA 3 (68-85)

68. Let us return now to the subject of these deep caverns of the faculties of the soul, in which, we said,²³ its suffering is usually intense when God is anointing and disposing it with the most sublime unctions of the Holy Spirit for union with himself.

These anointings are so subtle and delicate that, in penetrating the intimate substance of the soul's depths, they prepare it and give it such savor that the suffering and the fainting of desire in the tremendous void of these caverns is immense.

Hence, if the anointings that prepare these caverns of the soul for the union of the spiritual marriage with God are so sublime, what will be the possession of knowledge, love, and glory of the intellect, will, and memory in this union with God? Certainly the satisfaction, fullness, and delight of these caverns will then correspond to their former hunger and thirst. And the exquisite quality of both the soul's possession and the fruition of its feeling²⁴ will be in conformity with the delicacy of the preparations.

69. By the "feeling" of the soul, the verse refers to the power and strength the substance of the soul has for feeling and enjoying the objects of the spiritual faculties; through these faculties a person tastes the wisdom and love and communication of God.²⁵ The soul here calls these three faculties (memory, intellect, and will) "the deep caverns of feeling" because through them and in them it deeply experiences and enjoys the grandeurs of God's wisdom and excellence. It very appropriately calls them the deep caverns of feeling because, since it feels that the deep knowledge and splendors of the lamps of fire fit into them, it knows that its capacity and recesses correspond to the particular things it receives from the knowledge, savor, joy, delight, and so on, of God. All these things are received and seated in this feeling of the soul which, as I say, is its power and capacity for experiencing, possessing, and tasting them all. And the caverns of the faculties administer them to it, just as the bodily senses go to assist the common sense of the phantasy with the forms of their objects, and this common sense becomes the receptacle and archives of these forms.²⁶ Hence this common sense, or feeling, of the soul, which has become the receptacle or archives of God's grandeurs, is illumined and enriched according to what it attains of this high and enlightened possession.

once obscure and blind,

70. That is, before God enlightened and illumined it. To understand this it should be known that there are two reasons the sense of sight loses its power of vision: either because of obscurity or because of blindness.

God is the light and the object of the soul. When this light does not illumine it, the soul dwells in obscurity even though it may have very excellent vision. When it is in sin or occupies its appetites with other things, then it is blind; and even though God's light may shine on it, because it is blind it does not see its obscureness, which is its ignorance. Before God illumined it by means of this transformation, it was in obscurity and ignorant of so many of God's goods, as the Wise Man says he was before wisdom enlightened him: He shed light on my ignorance [Ecclus. 51:26].

71. Spiritually speaking, it is one thing to be in obscurity and another to be in darkness. To be in darkness, as we said, is to be blind in sin. Yet one can be in obscurity without being in sin, and this doubly: regarding the natural, by not having light or knowledge about certain natural things; and regarding the supernatural, by not having light or knowledge of supernatural things. The soul says here that before reaching this precious union

its feeling was in obscurity concerning both.

Until the Lord said, fiat lux²⁷[Gn. 1:3], darkness was over the face of the abyss of the caverns of the soul's feeling [Gn. 1:2]. The more unfathomable and deep-caverned is the feeling, the more profound are its chasms and its darkneses regarding the supernatural, when God who is its light does not illumine it.

Thus it is impossible for it to lift its eyes to the divine light, or even think of doing so, for in never having seen it, it knows not what it is. Accordingly, it will be unable to desire this light; it will rather desire darkness because it knows what darkness is, and will go from darkness to darkness, guided by that darkness. One darkness cannot but lead to another. As David says: The day overflows into the day and the night teaches knowledge to the night [Ps. 19:2]. Thus one abyss calls to the other abyss [Ps. 42:7], that is: An abyss of light summons another abyss of light, and an abyss of darkness calls to another abyss of darkness, each like evoking its like and communicating itself to it.

The light of grace that God had previously accorded this soul (by which he had illumined the eye of the abyss of its spirit, opened its eye to the divine light, and made it pleasing to himself) called to another abyss of grace, which is this divine transformation of the soul in God. In this transformation the eye of the soul's feeling is so illumined and agreeable to God that we can say God's light and that of the soul are one. The natural light of the soul is united with the supernatural light of God so that only the supernatural light is shining; just as the light God created was united to the light of the sun and now only the sun shines even though the other light is not lacking [Gn. 1:14-18].

72. Also, it was blind insofar as it was enjoying something else. The blindness of the rational and superior feeling is the appetite that, like a cataract and cloud, interferes with and hangs over the eye of reason so things present cannot be seen. Insofar as the appetite proposed some satisfaction, the feeling was blind to the grandeurs of the divine riches and beauty on the other side of the cataract. Just as something in front of the eye, no matter how small, is sufficient to obstruct its vision of things before it, no matter how large, so a small appetite and idle act of the soul is enough to impede all these divine grandeurs that stand behind the soul's appetites and gratifications.

73. Oh, who can tell how impossible it is for a person with appetites to judge the things of God as they are! If there is to be success in judging the things of God, the appetites and satisfactions must be totally rejected, and these things of God must be weighed apart from them. For otherwise one will infallibly come to consider the things of God as not of God, and the things that are not of God as of God.

Since that cataract and cloud shrouds the eye of judgment, only the cataract is seen, sometimes of one color, sometimes another, according to the way the cataract appears to the eye. People judge that the cataract is God because, as I say, they see only the cataract that covers the faculty, and God cannot be grasped by the senses. Consequently the appetite and sensory gratifications impede the knowledge of high things. The Wise Man indicates this clearly with these words: The deceitfulness of vanity obscures good things, and the inconstancy of concupiscence overturns the innocent mind [Wis. 4:12], that is, good judgment.

74. Those who are not so spiritual as to be purged of appetites and satisfactions, but still keep in themselves something of the animal self, believe that things most vile and base to the spirit (those closest to the senses, according to which they are still living) are highly important; and those that are loftier and more precious to the spirit (those further withdrawn from the senses) are considered to be of little value and are not esteemed by them. They will even regard them sometimes as foolishness, as St. Paul clearly indicates: The animal self does not perceive the things of God; they are foolishness to it and it cannot understand them [1 Cor. 2:14]. By the animal self he means here the person who still lives with natural appetites and gratifications. Even though some satisfaction overflows from the spirit into the senses, that person has no more than natural appetites who desires to become attached to it. It matters little that the object or cause is supernatural, if the appetite arises naturally and finds its roots and strength in nature. It does not thus cease being a natural

appetite, for it has the very substance and nature it would have were it to deal with a natural object or cause.

75. You will say to me: "Well, it therefore follows that when the soul desires God, it does not desire him supernaturally, and thus its desire will be unmeritorious before God."

I reply that it is true that the soul's desire for God is not always supernatural, but only when God infuses it and himself gives the strength for it. This is far different from the natural desire, and until God infuses the desire there is very little or no merit. Thus when you of your own power have the desire for God, your desire amounts to no more than a natural appetite; neither will it be anything more until God informs it supernaturally. When you of yourself become attached to spiritual things and bound to their savoriness, you exercise your natural appetite and thus you put cataracts before your eyes and become an animal self. You are then able neither to understand nor judge the spiritual self, which is above every natural feeling and appetite.

If you have any further doubts, I know not what to say, except that you reread this and perhaps you will understand. For the substance of the truth has been said, and this is not the place to enlarge on it.

76. This feeling, then, of the soul that was once obscure, without this divine light and blind through its appetites and affections, has now together with the deep caverns of its faculties become not only bright and clear, but like a resplendent light.

now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,
both warmth and light to their Beloved.

77. When these caverns of the faculties are so wonderfully and marvelously pervaded with the admirable splendors of those lamps that are burning within, they give forth to God in God with loving glory, besides their surrender to him, these very splendors they have received. Inclined in God toward God, having become enkindled lamps within the splendors of the divine lamps, they render the Beloved the same light and heat they receive. In the very manner they receive it, they return it to the one who gave it, and with the same exquisite beauty; just as the window when the sun shines on it, for it then too reflects the splendors. Yet the soul reflects the divine light in a more excellent way because of the active intervention of its will.

78. "So rarely, so exquisitely," means: in a way rare or foreign to every common thought, every exaggeration, and every mode and manner.

Corresponding to the exquisite quality with which the intellect receives divine wisdom, being made one with God's intellect, is the quality with which the soul gives this wisdom, for it cannot give it save according to the mode in which it was given.

And corresponding to the exquisite quality by which the will is united to goodness is the quality by which the soul gives in God the same goodness to God, for it only receives it in order to give it.

And, no more nor less, according to the exquisite quality by which it knows in the grandeur of God, being united to it, the soul shines and diffuses the warmth of love.

And according to the exquisite quality of the divine attributes (fortitude, beauty, justice, and so on) that the Beloved communicates, is the quality with which the soul's feeling gives joyfully to him the very light and heat it receives from him. Having been made one with God, the soul is somehow God through participation. Although it is not God as perfectly as it will be in the next life, it is like the shadow of God.²⁸

Being the shadow of God through this substantial transformation, it performs in this measure in God and

through God what he through himself does in it. For the will of the two is one will, and thus God's operation and the soul's are one. Since God gives himself with a free and gracious will, so too the soul (possessing a will more generous and free the more it is united with God) gives to God, God himself in God; and this is a true and complete gift of the soul to God.

It is conscious there that God is indeed its own and that it possesses him by inheritance, with the right of ownership, as his adopted child through the grace of his gift of himself. Having him for its own, it can give him and communicate him to whomever it wishes. Thus it gives him to its Beloved, who is the very God who gave himself to it. By this donation it repays God for all it owes him, since it willingly gives as much as it receives from him.

79. Because the soul in this gift to God offers him the Holy Spirit, with voluntary surrender, as something of its own (so that God loves himself in the Holy Spirit as he deserves), it enjoys inestimable delight and fruition, seeing that it gives God something of its own that is suited to him according to his infinite being. It is true that the soul cannot give God again to himself, since in himself he is ever himself. Nevertheless it does this truly and perfectly, giving all that was given it by him in order to repay love, which is to give as much as is given. And God, who could not be considered paid with anything less, is considered paid with that gift of the soul; and he accepts it gratefully as something it gives him of its own. In this very gift he loves it anew; and in this re-surrender of God to the soul, the soul also loves as though again.

A reciprocal love is thus actually formed between God and the soul, like the marriage union and surrender, in which the goods of both (the divine essence that each possesses freely by reason of the voluntary surrender between them) are possessed by both together. They say to each other what the Son of God spoke to the Father through St. John: *Omnia mea tua sunt et tua mea sunt et clarificatus sum in eis* (All my goods are yours and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them) [Jn. 17:10]. In the next life this will continue uninterrupted in perfect fruition, but in this state of union it occurs, although not as perfectly as in the next, when God produces in the soul this act of transformation.

Clearly the soul can give this gift, even though the gift has greater entity than the soul's own being and capacity; for those who own many nations and kingdoms, which have more entity than they do as individuals, can give them to whomever they will.

80. This is the soul's deep satisfaction and happiness: To see that it gives God more than it is worth in itself, the very divine light and divine heat that are given to it. It does this in heaven by means of the light of glory and in this life by means of a highly illumined faith. Accordingly, "the deep caverns of feeling now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely, both warmth and light to the Beloved."

It says "both warmth and light," because the communication of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in the soul is combined; they are the light and fire of love in it.

81. Yet we should note briefly the refinement with which the soul makes this surrender. In this respect it should be known that, since it enjoys a certain image of fruition caused by the union of the intellect and affection with God, and is delighted and obliged by this inestimable favor, it makes this surrender of God and of itself to God in marvelous ways. With regard to love, the soul's presence before God is of rare and exquisite excellence, and so too in regard to this vestige of fruition, and also in regard to praise and to gratitude.

82. Concerning the first, there are chiefly three exquisite qualities of love. The first is that the soul here loves God, not through itself but through him. This is a remarkable quality, for the soul loves through the Holy Spirit, as the Father and the Son love each other, according to what the Son himself declares through St. John: *That the love with which you have loved me be in them and I in them* [Jn. 17:26].

The second exquisite quality is to love God in God, for in this union the soul is ardently absorbed in love of God, and God in great ardor surrenders himself to the soul.

The third exquisite quality of love is to love him on account of who he is. The soul does not love him only because he is generous, good, glorious, and so on, to it; but with greater intensity it loves him because he is all this in himself essentially.

83. In regard to this image of fruition, it has three other exquisite qualities that are precious and principal ones. The first is that it enjoys God, for it enjoys him by means of himself. Since it unites its intellect to the omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, and so on, although not clearly as it will in the next life, it delights in all these attributes, which are understood distinctly, as we mentioned above.²⁹ The second exquisite quality of this joy is that the soul delights with order in God alone, without any intermingling of creature. The third delight is that it enjoys him only on account of who he is without any admixture of its own pleasure.

84. There are three exquisite qualities in the praise the soul renders God in this union. The first is that it praises him as its duty, for it sees that God created it for his own praise, as he asserts through Isaiah: This people I have formed for myself; it will sing my praises [Is. 43:21]. The second exquisite quality of praise is that the soul praises God for the goods it receives and the delight it has in praising. The third exquisite quality is that it praises God for what he is in himself. Even though the soul would experience no delight, it would praise him because of who he is.

85. As for gratitude, it has three other exquisite qualities. The first is gratefulness for the natural and spiritual goods and blessings it has received. The second is the intense delight it has in praising God, for it is absorbed with extreme ardor in this praise. The third is praise only because of what God is, which is a much stronger and more delightful praise.

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STANZA 4

How gently and lovingly
you wake in my heart,
where in secret you dwell alone;
and in your sweet breathing,
filled with good and glory,
how tenderly you swell my heart with love.

Commentary

1. The soul here addresses its Bridegroom with deep love, esteeming him and thanking him for two admirable effects sometimes produced by him through this union, noting also the manner in which each is wrought, as well as another effect that overflows in it from this union.

2. The first effect is an awakening of God in the soul, brought about in gentleness and love. The second is the breathing of God within it, and this is brought about through the good and glory communicated to it in this breathing. And what overflows in it is its being tenderly and delicately inspired with love.

3. And thus it is as though the soul were to say: How gentle and loving (that is, extremely loving and gentle) is your awakening, O Bridegroom Word, in the center and depth of my soul, which is its pure and intimate substance, in which secretly and silently, as its only lord, you dwell alone, not only as in your house, nor only as in your bed, but also as in my own heart, intimately and closely united to it. And how delicately you captivate me and arouse my affections toward you in the sweet breathing you produce in this awakening, a breathing delightful to me and full of good and glory. The soul uses this comparison because its experience here is similar to that of one who on awakening breathes deeply. The verses follow:

How gently and lovingly
you wake in my heart,

4. There are many kinds of awakening that God effects in the soul, so many that we would never finish explaining them all. Yet this awakening of the Son of God that the soul wishes to refer to here is one of the most elevated and beneficial. For this awakening is a movement of the Word in the substance of the soul, containing such grandeur, dominion, glory, and intimate sweetness that it seems to the soul that all the balsams and fragrant spices and flowers of the world are commingled, stirred, and shaken so as to yield their sweet odor, and all the kingdoms and dominions of the world and all the powers and virtues of heaven are moved; not only this, but it also seems that all the virtues and substances and perfections and graces of every created thing glow and make the same movement all at once.

Since, as St. John says, all things in him are life [Jn. 1:3-4], and in him they live and are and move, as the Apostle declares [Acts 17:28], it follows that when, within the soul, this great Emperor moves (whose principality, as Isaiah says, he bears on his shoulders [Is. 9:6] - which consists of the three spheres, celestial, terrestrial, and infernal [Phil. 2:10], and the things contained in them - upholding them all, as St. Paul says

[Heb. 1:3], with the word of his power), all things seem to move in unison.

This happens in the same manner as when at the movement of the earth all material things in it move as though they were nothing. So it is when this Prince moves, who himself carries his court, instead of his court carrying him.¹

5. Even this comparison is most inadequate; for in this awakening they not only seem to move, but they all likewise disclose the beauties of their being, power, loveliness, and graces, and the root of their duration and life. For the soul is conscious of how all creatures, earthly and heavenly, have their life, duration, and strength in him, and it clearly realizes what he says in the Book of Proverbs: By me kings reign and princes rule and the mighty exercise justice and understand it [Prv. 8:15-16]. Although it is indeed aware that these things are distinct from God, insofar as they have created being, nonetheless what it understands of God, by his being all these things with infinite eminence, is such that it knows these things better in God's being than in themselves.

And here lies the remarkable delight of this awakening: The soul knows creatures through God and not God through creatures. This amounts to knowing the effects through their cause and not the cause through its effects. The latter is knowledge a posteriori, and the former is essential knowledge.²

6. How this movement takes place in the soul, since God is immovable, is a wonderful thing, for it seems to the soul that God indeed moves; yet he does not really move. For since it is the soul that is renewed and moved by God so it might behold this supernatural sight, and since divine life and the being and harmony of every creature in that life, with its movements in God, is revealed to it with such newness, it seems to the soul that it is God who moves and the cause assumes the name of the effect it produces. According to this effect, we can assert that God moves, as the Wise Man says: For wisdom is more movable than all movable things [Wis. 7:24]. And this is not because she moves but because she is the principle and root of all movement. Remaining in herself the same, as he goes on to say, she renews all things [Wis. 7:27]. Thus what he wishes to say in this passage is that wisdom is more active than all active things. We then ought to say that in this movement it is the soul that is moved and awakened from the sleep of natural vision to supernatural vision. Hence it very adequately uses the term "awakening."

7. Yet God always acts in this way - as the soul is able to see - moving, governing, bestowing being, power, graces, and gifts on all creatures, bearing them all in himself by his power, presence, and substance. And the soul sees what God is in himself and what he is in his creatures in only one view, just as one who in opening the door of a palace beholds in one act the eminence of the person who dwells inside together with what that sovereign is doing.

Therefore what I understand about how God effects this awakening and view given to the soul (which is in him substantially as is every creature) is that he removes some of the many veils and curtains hanging in front of it so that it might get a glimmer of him as he is. And then that countenance of his, full of graces, becomes partially and vaguely discernible, for not all the veils are removed. Because all things are moving by his power, what he is doing is evident as well, so he seems to move in them and they in him with continual movement. Hence it seems to the soul that, in being itself moved and awakened, it was God who moved and awakened.

8. Such is the lowliness of our condition in this life; for we think others are like ourselves and we judge others according to what we ourselves are, since our judgment arises from within us and not outside us. Thus the thief thinks others also steal; and the lustful think others are lustful too; and the malicious think others also bear malice, their judgment stemming from their own malice; and the good think well of others, for their judgment flows from the goodness of their own thoughts; and to those who are careless and asleep, it seems that others are too.

Hence it is that when we are careless and asleep in God's presence, it seems to us it is God who is asleep and neglectful of us, as is seen in psalm 43 where David calls to him: Arise, Lord, why do you sleep? Arise [Ps.

44:23]. He attributed to God what is characteristic of humans, for since they are the ones who are fallen and asleep, he tells God to arise and awaken; although he who watches over Israel never sleeps [Ps. 121:4].

9. Yet, since everything in human beings comes from God, and they of themselves can do nothing good [Jas. 1:17], it is rightly asserted that our awakening is an awakening of God and our rising is God's rising. It is as though David were to say: Let us arise and be awakened twice, because we are doubly asleep and fallen. Since the soul was in a sleep from which it could never awaken itself, and only God could open its eyes and cause this awakening, it very appropriately calls this an awakening of God, saying: "You wake in my heart."

Awaken and enlighten us, my Lord, so we might know and love the blessings that you ever propose to us, and we might understand that you have moved to bestow favors on us and have remembered us.

10. What a person knows and experiences of God in this awakening is entirely beyond words. Since this awakening is the communication of God's excellence to the substance of the soul, which is its heart referred to in the verse, an immense, powerful voice sounds in it, the voice of a multitude of excellences, of thousands of virtues in God, infinite in number.³ The soul is established in them, terribly and solidly set in array in them like an army [Sg. 6:4], and made gentle and charming with all the gentleness and charm of creatures.

11. Yet a doubt will arise: How can a soul endure so forcible a communication in the weakness of the flesh? For in point of fact it does not have the capacity and strength to undergo so much without dying. Merely at the sight of King Ahasuerus clothed in royal garments and resplendent with gold and precious stones, seated awesomely on his throne, Queen Esther feared so much that she fainted. She confesses there that she fainted because of the fear his great glory caused her, for he appeared like an angel and his countenance was full of graces [Est. 15:9-17]. When glory does not glorify, it weighs heavily on the one who beholds it. But what greater reason does the soul have for fainting in this awakening; it does not see an angel but God, his countenance filled with the graces of all creatures, awesome in power and glory, and with the voice of a multitude of excellences. Job says of this communication: When we have heard scarcely a drop of his voice, who will be able to endure the greatness of his thunder? [Jb. 26:14]. And in another place he declares: I do not desire that he commune and deal with me with much strength lest he overwhelm me by the weight of his grandeur [Jb. 23:6].

12. There are two reasons a person does not faint or become afraid in this awakening that is so powerful and glorious.

First, the soul that is in this state of perfection, in which the lower part is highly purged and in conformity with the spirit, does not feel the pain and detriment commonly experienced by souls unpurged in their spirit and senses and undisposed to receive spiritual communications. Yet this is insufficient to prevent the suffering of some detriment in the presence of such grandeur and glory. Even though what is of nature may be very pure, this communication would nevertheless overwhelm it by exceeding it, as would an object that causes intense physical sensation overwhelm its respective faculty. The passage of Job we referred to has this meaning.

The second reason is the important one; it is what the soul mentions in the first verse, that is, that he shows himself gently. As God shows the soul grandeur and glory in order to exalt and favor it, he aids it so no detriment is done, fortifying what is natural and unveiling his grandeur gently and with love, without using the natural, so that a person does not know whether this happens in the body or out of it [2 Cor. 12:2]. He who with his right hand fortified Moses, so his glory could be seen by him, can do this very easily [Ex. 33:22].

Thus the soul experiences in him as much gentleness and love as it does power and dominion and grandeur, for everything in God is one. The delight is strong; and the protection is strong in gentleness and love so the soul might endure the strong delight, and instead of fainting stand powerful and strong. If Esther fainted, it was because the king did not at first show himself to her favorably, but, as it says there, disclosed

with burning eyes the furor of his heart [Est. 15:7]. Yet she came to herself after he favored her, held out his scepter and touched her with it, and embraced her and told her that he was her brother and not to fear [Est. 15:8-12].

13. The soul no longer fears, since from henceforth the King of heaven acts in a friendly way toward it, as its brother and equal. In revealing his powerful strength and his good love to it in gentleness and not in furor, he communicates strength and love to it from his heart, going out to it from his throne, which is the soul itself, like the Bridegroom from his bridal chamber [Ps. 19:5], where he was hidden and turned toward it, touching it with his scepter and embracing it as a brother. There we find the royal garments and their fragrance, which are God's admirable virtues; there, the splendor of gold, which is charity; there, the glittering of the precious stones of knowledge of the higher and lower substances; there, the face of the Word, full of graces, which shines on the queen, which is the soul, and clothes it in such fashion that, transformed in these attributes of the heavenly King, it is aware of having become a queen, and that what David says of the queen in the Psalm can indeed be said of it: The queen stood at the right in garments of gold and surrounded with variety [Ps. 45:9]. Since all this occurs in the intimate substance of the soul, it adds:

where in secret you dwell alone;

14. The soul says he dwells in its heart in secret because this sweet embrace is wrought in the depths of its substance.

It should be known that God dwells secretly in all souls and is hidden in their substance, for otherwise they would not last. Yet there is a difference, a great difference, in his dwelling in them. In some souls he dwells alone, and in others he does not dwell alone. Abiding in some he is pleased; and in others, he is displeased. He lives in some as though in his own house, commanding and ruling everything; and in others as though a stranger in a strange house, where they do not permit him to give orders or do anything.

It is in the soul in which less of its own appetites and pleasures dwell where he dwells more alone, more pleased, and more as though in his own house, ruling and governing it. And he dwells more in secret, the more he dwells alone. Thus in this soul in which neither any appetite nor other images or forms nor any affections for created things dwell, the Beloved dwells secretly with an embrace so much closer, more intimate and interior, the purer and more alone the soul is to everything other than God. His dwelling is in secret, then, because the devil cannot reach the area of this embrace, nor can the human intellect understand how it occurs.

Yet it is not secret to the soul itself that has attained this perfection, for within itself it has the experience of this intimate embrace. It does not, however, always experience these awakenings; for when the Beloved produces them, it seems to the soul that he is awakening in its heart, where before he remained as though asleep. Although it was experiencing and enjoying him, this took place as with a loved one who is asleep, for knowledge and love are not communicated mutually while one is still asleep.

15. Oh, how happy is this soul, which ever experiences God resting and reposing within it! Oh, how fitting it is for it to withdraw from things, flee from business matters, and live in immense tranquility, so that it may not, even with the slightest speck of dust or noise, disturb or trouble its heart where the Beloved dwells.

He is usually there, in this embrace with his bride, as though asleep in the substance of the soul. And it is very well aware of him and ordinarily enjoys him. Were he always awake within it, communicating knowledge and love, it would already be in glory. For if, when he does waken, scarcely opening his eyes, he has such an effect on the soul, what would things be like were he ordinarily in it fully awake?

16. Although he is not displeased with other souls that have not reached this union, for after all they are in the state of grace, yet insofar as they are not well disposed his dwelling is secret to them, even though he does

dwell in them. They do not experience him ordinarily, except when he grants them some delightful awakening. But such an awakening is not of this kind and high quality, nor is it comparable to these or as secret to the intellect and the devil, which are still able to understand something through the movements of the senses. For the senses are not fully annihilated until the soul reaches this union, and they still have some activity and movements concerning the spiritual, since they are not yet totally spiritual.

But in this awakening of the Bridegroom in the perfect soul, everything that occurs and is caused is perfect, for he is the cause of it all. And in that awakening, which is as though one were to waken and breathe, the soul feels a strange delight in the breathing of the Holy Spirit in God, in which it is sovereignly glorified and taken with love. Hence it says in the subsequent verses:

and in your sweet breathing,
filled with good and glory,
how tenderly you swell my heart with love!

17. I do not desire to speak of this spiration, filled for the soul with good and glory and delicate love of God, for I am aware of being incapable of doing so; and were I to try, it might seem less than it is. It is a spiration that God produces in the soul, in which, by that awakening of lofty knowledge of the Godhead, he breathes the Holy Spirit in it in the same proportion as its knowledge and understanding of him, absorbing it most profoundly in the Holy Spirit, rousing its love with a divine exquisite quality and delicacy according to what it beholds in him. Since the breathing is filled with good and glory, the Holy Spirit, through this breathing, filled the soul with good and glory in which he enkindled it in love of himself, indescribably and incomprehensibly, in the depths of God, to whom be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen.

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