

15. SIXTH MANSIONS

(Locutions and Mystical Experiences)

Mystical life is entirely the work of God in the soul. Each time God initiates a new experience in the heart of the soul and leads it to higher levels of mysticism the soul feels deeper pain and abandonment. This is because of the pure nature of God who cannot be approached with the imperfections of the soul, as it was stated clearly to Moses in Exodus: ““You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” (Ex 33.20).

Reorganizing the Text

When we look at the whole Sixth Mansion, Teresa had another purpose in expanding so much on these dwelling places. It was because her writing on the topic had been poorly organized in her *Life*. She had written that book twelve years previous to this, when she was still in the midst of these graces without realizing fully where they were leading.

These Sixth dwelling places deal with material covered in her *Life* (chs. 16-21 and 23-40), and the Seventh dwelling places with material present in her *Spiritual Testimonies* (nos. 31-65). But neither in her *Life* nor in the *Spiritual Testimonies* was the subject matter arranged as well as it is in these pages of IC.

Experiencing the wounds

Here Teresa describes how God can awaken the soul to love and an awareness of him is given. God does this in such a way that the soul feels that it is wounded in the most exquisite way, but it doesn't learn how or by whom it was wounded. Teresa explains that she knows that the experiences she is talking about will not be clearly understood except by those who have experienced them.

Locutions

Teresa discusses locutions, which she says might seem a greater favor than some others she has mentioned, but which she says can be more dangerous. The danger is that the locution can be an illusion, especially in persons with a weak imagination, or in those who are melancholic. Teresa advises treating these types of persons kindly, but they should be told to pay no attention to the experiences. Teresa says that locutions can be from God, from the devil, or from one's own imagination. Teresa warns that the safest path is to pay little attention to them (Cfr. IC VI,3,i-iv).

Teresa describes a locution in which the Lord speaks to the soul through an intellectual vision. The locution takes place in the intimate depths of the soul, and *the person seems to hear the words with the ears of the soul, from the Lord himself*. This type of locution is accompanied by certitude that it comes from God and also by wonderful effects left in the soul. (IC VI,3,vi-xii).

Discerning Locutions

Discernment at this stage is very crucial and any mistake in finding out the source of these supernatural phenomena can be detrimental to spiritual growth. Therefore Teresa sternly warns her sisters to make an examination of all the experiences and find out if they are authentically coming from God. She recommends the following criteria to authenticate the experiences: *First*, it is so clear that the soul remembers every syllable. *Second*, the locution comes unexpectedly and often refers to things about the future that the person never thought of. *Third*, the locution comes as something heard from another and is not simply composed in the mind to suit what a person wants to be told. *Fourth*, the words are very different, and with one of them much is comprehended. *Finally*, in a way Teresa says she can't fully explain, the person understands more than would be possible without words. After giving these signs, Teresa adds that often these experiences are accompanied by doubts. She repeats what she said

earlier (in IC VI,3,xi), that the safe path is not to act on any locution without consulting one's confessor.

Practical Conclusion

For people of faith everything works unto good. In this modern world of science, psychiatry and medical research a lot of importance to spiritual experience has been neglected or ignored.

The writings of St John of the Cross show that his era was able to identify aspects of voices and visions that have been neglected by the modern biological/medical model. St John was well aware of positive, useful voices, such as 'voices that save', as well as voices that give novel and original information, which have been mainly ignored by psychiatry today. When voices and visions become medically interpreted there is the risk that all such experiences are seen as worthless symptoms of an illness. Thus, it may be that it is only once we step outside the biological/medical model that we can really start to understand voices and visions

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