

21. VISIONS AND REVELATIONS

As we progress in this journey of learning more about the mystical experiences of the soul to its own center where dwells the king of Kings, we notice Teresa takes time to reflect well and give some concrete suggestions as to how the soul needs to keep its attention on the King and not on itself. This process will help the soul eventually to behold the King of Kings in the inner chamber of the soul. In this section of reflections on the IC we dwell on visions and revelations that will be gifted to the ardent soul on its journey.

Teresa and John of the Cross teach mysticism and emphasize infused contemplation in the process of growth in perfection. Vision, revelation, and heavenly visits and other phenomena are only secondary and accidental that can either enhance their experience and/or can become stumbling blocks on the way. They are not essential to growth in spiritual life and are non-essential for union with God. They may even be obstacles to pure faith, love and trust. During the time of Teresa there was an over emphasis on visions and revelations among people and mystical writers who elaborated on them with the intention of making the faithful more ardent in their pursuit of such extraordinary experiences. The whole theology of Teresa here is that faith, hope and love directly lead us to God and visions and revelations which are not essential to mystical union sometimes may mislead the soul. Mystical contemplation is at the core of the spiritual life and it is granted to a person who is well grounded in virtues; theological and moral. This is infinitely more important than visions and revelations. Even though “This is evident in the ways and modes by which His Majesty communicates himself to us and shows us the love he bears us. He does this through some very wonderful apparitions and visions” (IC VI,8,i) both the saints give less importance to such phenomena. Actually John of the

Cross in his writings specifically mentions to take a negative attitude towards all visions and revelations, which according to him are mere distraction than a help; whereas Teresa draws some positive conclusions as to benefit from these experiences as coming from God who wants to strengthen the soul on its journey into interior castle.

Visions and Revelations

According to St. John of the Cross, visions and revelations are simply a distraction than a help. Hence, he strongly advises the souls to ignore them: Speaking of visions in general, and in particular of the danger of desiring them, he writes "It is always well, then, that the soul should reject these things, and close its eyes to them, whencesoever they come. For, unless it does so, it will prepare the way for those things that come from the devil, and will give him such influence that, not only will his visions come in place of God's, but his visions will begin to increase, and those of God to cease, in such manner that the devil will have all the power and God will have none. So it has happened to many incautious and ignorant souls, who rely on these things to such an extent that many of them have found it hard to return to God in purity of faith; and many have been unable to return, so securely has the devil rooted himself in them; for which reason it is well to resist and reject them all. For, by the rejection of evil visions, the errors of the devil are avoided, and by the rejection of good visions no hindrance is offered to faith and the spirit harvests the fruit of them." (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel* II,11,viii,xii). Continuing the argument Teresa specifically says as follows:

"Not three or four only, but a large number of people have spoken to me on the subject, and therefore I know by experience that there are souls which, either because they possess vivid imaginations or active minds, are so wrapped up in their own ideas as to feel certain that they see whatever their fancy imagines. If they had ever beheld a genuine vision, they would

recognise the deception at once. They themselves fabricate, piece by piece, what they fancy they see: - no after effects are produced on the mind, which is left less moved to devotion than by the sight of a sacred picture (IC VI,9,vi).

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