

## Handout for Lessons : 7 and 8 The Theological Acts:

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Here starts the second part of the Course (lessons 7 to 11 (sometimes we add one more lesson)). This second part could be called: “The theological life” which means: how to live a life being connected with God. “theological” means: “that connects us directly to God” (see below). This part deals with the day to day life.

### Lesson 7 : The Theological Acts : Faith, Hope and Love

**1-** First, we need to understand the place of the spirit (upper part of the Soul) in spiritual life. How all the graces we receive come to the soul and body through the spirit. The spirit is first nourished, and should be transformed from being “half-dead” to being “alive”, restoring in it the Likeness of God (from the deflated form, to the “round” form).

**2- Introduction to the Theological Acts.** The theological acts are of absolute importance. They are the ones which drive our spiritual life ahead. We have three faculties/“muscles” in the soul (mind, memory, will) and they need to grow. Drawing: the upper part of the soul with the spirit, having in the spirit the three “muscles” that need to be activated.

These acts are called “theological” because they connect us directly with God (no intermediate).

A virtue is: a good habit (vice is a bad habit). If a habit is a series of acts then a virtue is formed by a series of repeated “good acts”.

We need then to focus more on the acts than on the virtues in order to learn how to do them. Why? Because in Baptism God infuses in us the theological virtues, but they are like seeds of his grace sown in us, and we need to let them grow, until they become a very big tree. Activating the Graces of Faith, Hope and Love depends on us, not on God. There is a difference between the initial (passive) gift of the virtue (like a small seed) and the final result (a big tree) of it. Since the acts will produce the virtues, we need to learn how to do them. Great attention is required here.

**The Act of Faith.** Faith is inner “eyes”, that develop in the soul and allow us to “see” the spiritual realm (God, Jesus, Mary, the Holy Spirit), i.e. what the naked eye can’t see. Example: on how the mind operates in a daily life: replying to aggression: the mind starts by breaking the instinctive reaction of kicking back, → it ponders (the positive use of the mind) → it thinks of Jesus words → it starts to have a real dialogue with Jesus, present. This illustrates the different stages (step by step) of an act of faith, how the mind opens to the work of the grace of God. (Drawing: the mind is like a mirror closed in itself, then it opens, step by step, until being flat, it reflects God’s light.)

**Note:** The Catholic balance in the relationship between mind and the light of faith is the right balance between two extremes: rationalism (the human being/the mind can do everything) and fideism (God will do everything, i.e. blind faith).

**The Act of Hope:** hope is “hands” opened to receive the object of Jesus’ Promise: Union with Him. This Promise happens and is given on the Cross (remember the three layers of the Cross, especially the deepest third layer, where we already appear embraced by Jesus in his spirit, in the light and union). Importance of distinguishing between Hope (the theological act) and Hopes (tomorrow will be better); “espérance” and “espoir”. We need to learn to “use a tooth-comb” in order to check if our act of Hope is made correctly; we need to become aware of our “hopes”, and drop them in order to increase our desire to get the object of Jesus’ promise. We need to empty our hands of false promises (even if they are humanly good). We need to do things, as if we are not doing them, keeping all the energy of our heart, and our hopes in the act of Hope only. Accepting the empty actual state, and the growth of the desire of Union with Jesus. We need to learn how to do, as St Paul says: the ones who possess live as if

they do not possess (see 1 Cor 7:29-32). Jesus never lies, he is faithful and fulfils his Promise. Remember his Promise before the Transfiguration: “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” (Matthew 16:28). This applies to us.

### **The Act of Love:**

**1- The inner act of love: to say to Jesus “I love you”.** Words realise in us a real act. Proof we can't say these same words to the devil. However, we can say them as much as possible to Jesus. It opens our heart to the Action of the Holy Spirit.

**2- Lectio divina is a real act of love:** “whoever loves me will put into practice my commandments” (John 14:23). It helps us love God (by listening to Him and doing what he says, by his grace (“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”)) and God leads us to love our neighbour, his Body.

**3- The Prayer of the heart is a real act of love:** where we receive God's love. We will deal with it in the last third of the Course. One can read the end of the act of Oblation of saint Thérèse: “in order to live in one single act of perfect love”. We need to practise it during the day and dedicate as well a specific time for this Sacred meeting with God.

Living under Mary's veil allows us in a much easier way to practise the acts of Faith, Hope and Love until Mary's faith becomes our own. This will be studied in the Second Level Course.

## **Lesson 8: Ups and Downs, Temptation, Synergy**

The three topics of lesson 8 derive from lesson 7 (the theological acts).

### **1- Ups and downs in spiritual life**

We need to distinguish between the normal ups and downs in spiritual life (psychological ones) and the spiritual ones.

Once we commit to a fervent spiritual life, God triggers ups and downs. We feel that he is close to us, helping us, consoling us (faith is palpable), and then three days after, or three hours after, we feel as if we are in hell, the memory of the “feeling of God” faded completely. We have the impression of being in hell, full of doubts, in the dark. Why is that?

The best image that can help us understand why God does this to us is “teaching a baby to walk”. We hold his hands, helping him to walk, and then at a certain point we leave his hands, expecting him to try to do it by himself, activating his blood in his muscles, his sense of balance...

Once we commit to a fervent spiritual life, we have two types of functioning: the old man functioning (which is predominant, based on the sensation, feeling, emotions,..) and the new man functioning (very small, and weak, a vulnerable little seed, based on the theological acts). We are like a woman pregnant with twins (the new man and old man). God wants us to activate the upper part of our being (top of the soul and the spirit), by activating the theological virtues: the new man will grow. He gives us his grace and wants us not to lean on the old man mechanism (sensation, feelings emotions) but on the acts of Faith, Hope and Love. So, when we are in a “down”, it is as if God has stopped holding our hands and is saying to us: it is the right time now to make a theological act, to count on my Grace which I am providing you with, activating your 3 upper muscles.

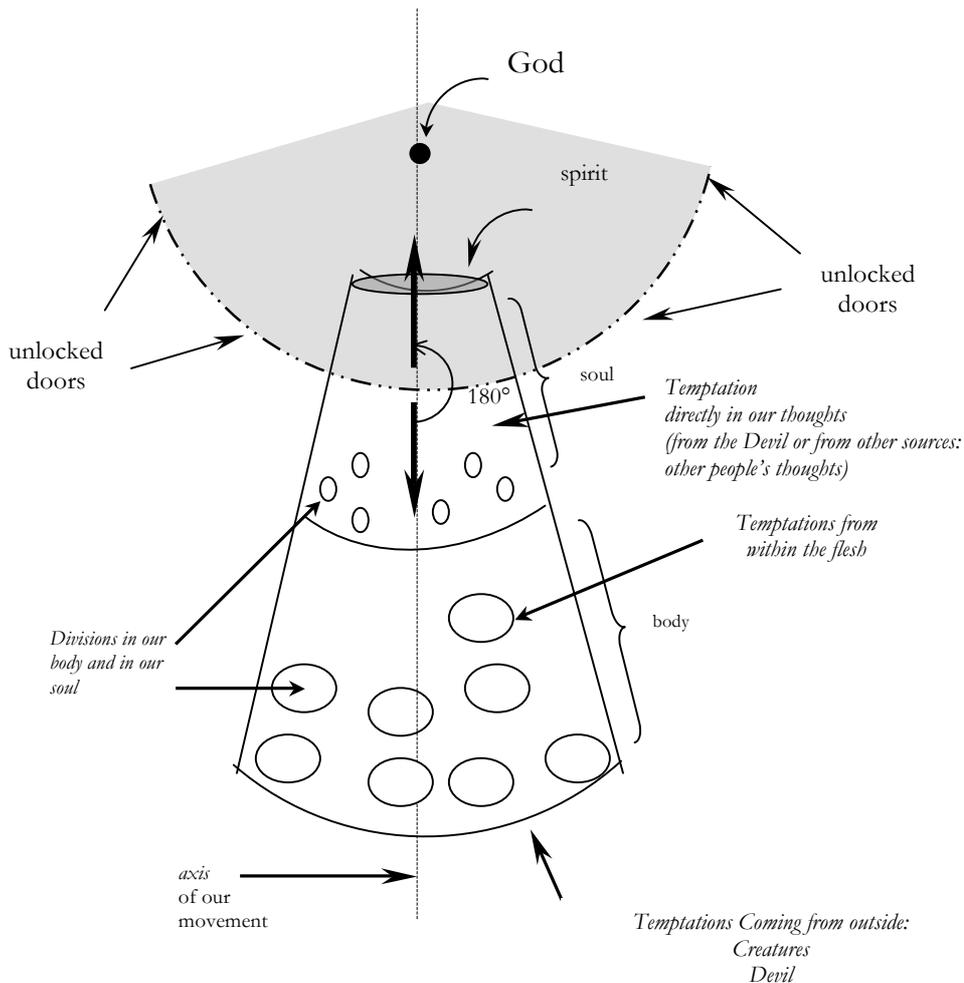
We notice that the more we exercise the theological acts, the more the influence of the ups and downs diminishes (the waves fade). Like when we are in the sea on the surface of the water, we are under the up and down movement of the waves. The more we dive, closer to God, the more we escape the changing influence of the waves and we reach a deep peace and a new influence from God, coming from our centre and not from outside.

The more we remain in Mary rooted in her indomitable faith, the less we are influenced by the changing waves of the old man. The more we entrust ourselves to her, the more she keeps all the graces we receive safe and we grow faster in her.

### **2- The mechanism of Temptation**

It is important for us to understand the mechanism of Temptation, and its real significance in our daily life (why it happens and how to get out of it). It is embodied in the demand we make in the Our Father:

“lead us not into temptation”, which doesn’t mean: “keep any temptation away from us”, but “when temptation comes (because of us going out too much toward creatures) gives us your grace, so we can do a 180° turn, run and throw ourselves into your arms”. *“Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith”* (1 Peter 5:8-9). How can we define our attitude in spiritual life? We are either spiritually active, i.e. we are striving toward God or we are tempted: we are striving toward creatures (humans, possessions, pleasure). In order to visualise that movement one can imagine a virtual axis that crosses our being vertically (spirit, soul, body) from the top (God who dwells in our centre) to the bottom (outside, the creatures): in fact we move along this axis, either toward the outer world (Creatures), or toward the Creator, God who is at the centre of our being.



### Understanding Temptation

Our being is like a garden shed. If we give too much importance to creatures, putting our heart in what we do, this makes us go out toward the creatures, becoming attached to them. It is as if we extend a hand or a foot out of the window or the door of the garden shed. The garden shed is in the middle of a wild forest. What will happen? The lion will arrive and will bite us. *“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith”* (I Peter 5:8-9). This means that we went outside too far. We ask humbly for the grace of God to help us make a 180° turn, and run and throw ourselves in the arms of Jesus. Notice the “resist him with Faith”; it doesn’t say: “deal with him”, but “make an act of Faith”, i.e. go to God.

We don't have to deal with the devil (1- we would lose, he is a spirit, 2- we would lose time and energy). We should just leave him where he is (outside) and turn and run toward Jesus, with the help of the Grace of God.

The more we remain in Mary, the more we are drawn toward God, and the less we are exposed to temptation, because we are not in the hands of creatures.

### **3- The synergy between us and the action of the Holy Spirit**

First and foremost we need to know that we count on God's Grace in everything and all the time. We need to know that God gives us the "general help of his grace" and the "particular help of his grace" (we will be seeing this in great detail in the last third part of the Course on the Prayer of the heart). We need to know that God's grace precedes us (invites us), and accompanies us (supports us), and completes the action, back to God.

Fr Marie Eugene said that there is a huge difference between committing to God (like the solemn vows in religious life) and committing ourselves to the Holy Spirit. In the first case, a few minutes after pronouncing our vows, we possess ourselves again. While in the second case, the Holy Spirit is constantly with us, inviting us to come out of ourselves. He is a Living being.

To lead a "theological life" we need to learn how to sense the Holy Spirit, to correspond to His action.

As a first step in this process we need to understand that there are 3 different ways of answering Jesus' call to follow him during the day. In order to understand them we will take the example of the dance. Jesus is asking us to dance with him and we have three ways of answering his invitation.

**1-** we think that since he is God, he is all powerful and that the perfect way to obey is to obey like the dead corpse of a puppet. We say to him: ok, you take me from my seat, and hold me up, and move me as you want, with your power and where you want. This attitude is total passivity or "negative passivity". This option is wrong. It denies our being, our will, our active collaboration.

**2-** another way to reply to Jesus' invitation is to stand up, reply to his invitation, but tend to direct the dance, choosing where to dance (on a more solid, safe, secure, known ground), preferring one place instead of another (preferring to dance far from certain people, in a cosy place,...). In fact there is not total trust and surrender to Jesus, we are not looking him in the eye, we do not let him lead: we lead and decide where to go. It is as if we took the car, and invited Jesus to sit beside us, but we decide where we are going, and we are even praying to Jesus for it to work well, and almost menace him by saying: if doesn't work, I will be upset with you, watch out! This option is "activism". We create and decide our activity and our commitment in the church in our parish, or movement, we put a banner on it: "service of the Church", but in fact we are the one who decides everything. The Christian part of it is just like nail polish, not penetrating the substance of our being. We think we are "good Catholics" /Christians, but we are fooling ourselves and doing a lot of damage.

**3-** one can guess by now that the best way to correspond to Jesus' invitation and the Constant Action of the Holy Spirit is to listen to Jesus, to follow him, to trust him, to look him in the eye, to follow his directions, without any conditions. When we look to highly trained dancers, we notice the amazing ease and grace with which they dance, but we know how many hours, days and months of training it required for them to reach such harmony and seeming effortlessness.

Being in Mary, under her Veil, in her spiritual womb, allows us to be more in tune with the Holy Spirit. In her the Holy Spirit works best, with no obstacles. So if we want to have this perfection of action of the Holy Spirit, if we want to be perfectly under His action, we need to remain in her.

**Conclusion:** with these three points, we can better why we have ups and downs, how to react to them, that we need to apply the three theological acts. We saw as well how Temptation is the sign that we went in the opposite direction of the theological acts, we went toward the creatures instead of the creator, we activated our old man instead, this is why temptation arose. We understand that the Grace of God leads us always toward God. We saw as well, how, during the day we can come out of our own "comfort zone" in order to love, to follow the Holy Spirit, Jesus' presence with us, his directions.

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