

# CHAPTER VI

## Distractions and Dryness

*As it has been such a troublesome thing for me, it may perhaps be so for you as well, so I am just going to describe it.<sup>1</sup>*

In speaking of the prayer of recollection, Saint Teresa makes the following remark:

This method of praying in which the mind makes no reflections means that the soul must either gain a great deal or lose itself—I mean by its attention going astray.<sup>2</sup>

Neither the most vital methods, nor the best ordered prayers, nor even assiduous spiritual reading can make one wholly secure against distractions and dryness in prayer. This is a heavy trial, ignorance of which contributes towards increasing the suffering and the dangers involved in it, notes the Saint. In this connection she writes:

The worst of it is that, as we do not realize we need to know more when we think about Thee, we cannot ask those who know; indeed we have not even any idea what there is for us to ask them. So we suffer terrible trials because we do not understand ourselves; and we worry over what is not bad at all, but good, and think it very wrong. Hence proceed the afflictions of many people who practise prayer, and their complaints of interior trials—especially if they are unlearned people—so that they become melancholy, and their health declines, and they even abandon prayer altogether.<sup>3</sup>

To get more light on so important a subject, we must study the nature and the causes of distractions and dryness, so as to discover the remedies.

<sup>1</sup> IV Mansions, i; Peers, II, 235.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, ix; Peers, I, 55.

<sup>3</sup> IV Mansions, i; Peers, II, 233-4.

### A. Nature of distractions and of dryness

"Recollected and distracted are two adjectives that are in opposition," has been correctly said.<sup>4</sup> Recollection is a condition for prayer. Distractions in prayer, then, are in general in inverse ratio to recollection. While recollection is a concentration of the activity of our faculties on a supernatural reality, distraction is an evasion of one or of all the faculties towards another object, which interrupts recollection.

Not every evasion of one or of several powers is, however, necessarily a distraction. On this point, Saint Teresa invites us to a psychological analysis that will help us in finding the precise nature of distractions. Frightened by the wandering of her faculties in various directions, the Saint consulted some learned men who confirmed what her experience had taught her about distraction and the independent activity of the faculties of the soul:

I have sometimes been terribly oppressed by this turmoil of thoughts and it is only just four years ago that I came to understand by experience that thought (or, to put it more clearly, imagination) is not the same thing as understanding. I asked a learned man about this and he said I was right, which gave me no small satisfaction.<sup>5</sup>

That the powers of the soul may have an independent activity and that certain ones may separately evade recollection yet without destroying it: those are the truths that consoled Teresa.

Which are the powers whose wanderings may be merely annoying, without endangering distraction?

In the first place, the external and internal senses that can

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dr. Laignel-Lavastine, professor at the Faculty of Medicine of Paris, in his article: "Les distractions dans la prière; étude physio-psychologique," *Etudes Carmélitaines*, April, 1934, pp. 120-42.

We refer to this remarkable study in which the eminent professor, a member of the Academy of Medicine, for the sole purpose of furthering the spiritual life, summed up the results of penetrating physio-psychological analyses, to help us struggle against distractions in prayer.

<sup>5</sup> IV Mansions, i; Peers, II, 233.

perceive or experience impressions without putting a stop to recollection. I might, for instance, while taking a walk in the country, see a familiar landscape, hear the song of birds, experience some physical sufferings or pain of soul, and yet continue my mental prayer on some subject from the Gospels, apart from all these perceptions and sensations. Abstraction from the senses is frequent in recollection. While writing the *Interior Castle*, Saint Teresa notes:

As I write this, the noises in my head are so loud that I am beginning to wonder what is going on in it. As I said at the outset, they have been making it almost impossible for me to obey those who commanded me to write. My head sounds just as if it were full of brimming rivers, and then as if all the water in those rivers came suddenly rushing downward; and a host of little birds seem to be whistling, not in the ears, but in the upper part of my head. . . . All this physical turmoil is no hindrance either to my prayer or to what I am saying now, but the tranquility and love in my soul are quite unaffected.<sup>6</sup>

The imagination, whose activity is so closely bound up with that of the senses, can also stray away, leaving the soul to the supernatural realities that hold it captive.

Let us turn again to Saint Teresa whose experiences throw such good light on these delicate problems:

It exasperated me to see the faculties of the soul, as I thought, occupied with God and recollected in Him, and the imagination, on the other hand, confused and excited.<sup>7</sup>

What will be the state of the understanding, that is, the discursive intelligence considered as distinct from the intellect which penetrates its object with a simple and direct intuitive gaze?

Saint Teresa points out that while the will is sweetly bound in the prayer of quiet and enjoying the divine delights, the understanding may be agitated and restless:

The other two faculties [understanding and memory] help the will so that it may become more and more capable of enjoying so great

<sup>6</sup> IV Mansions, i; Peers, II, 234.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*; 233.

a blessing, though sometimes it comes about that, even when the will is in union, they hinder it exceedingly. . . . These faculties come and go, to see if the will will give them some part of what it is enjoying.<sup>8</sup>

All the texts that we have quoted up to now to show the mutual independence of the activity of the powers of the soul, describe states that are definitely contemplative. In effect, it is in contemplation, when God lays peaceful hold on one or more powers and leaves the others in agitation, that the distinction of the powers appears much more clearly and is perceived experimentally.

Although it becomes more clearly evident during contemplation, the distinction of the faculties is an abiding psychological fact; consequently, it exists at all the stages of the spiritual life. We must note, however, that the direct intervention of God in the activity of the faculties, which produces supernatural contemplation, modifies considerably the laws of recollection during that period.

While it is sufficient during contemplative prayer that the will allows itself to be gently held by God, even though all the other powers are in agitation; yet in the active phase, the voluntary attention of the soul to a supernatural reality that is not experienced, seems not to be possible without an application of the intellect to that object, either by reasoning or by a simple gaze.

In the active phase that we are considering, we can say then, that attention and recollection are dispelled when the intellect is diverted. Moreover, in this same phase, mutual distinction of the activity of the powers—which is less easily perceived—is also less real. The perceptions of the senses and the wanderings of the imagination will more easily hinder the application of the intellect and, consequently, recollection.

Distraction is called voluntary when, willingly and with full intention, the mind turns from the supernatural reality to give its attention to another object. It is involuntary when this

<sup>8</sup> *Life*, xiv; *Peers*, I, 84.

movement is produced involuntarily or without full intention, ordinarily by yielding to the attraction of a sensation or an image.

When distraction during prayer is no longer just something passing, but, because of the restlessness of the intellect and its inability to remain fixed on any subject whatever, distractions become almost habitual, this constitutes a state of dryness. Dryness is accompanied usually by sadness, a certain helplessness, diminution of the ardors of the soul, and by the disturbance and enervation of the faculties.

Distractions are a trial; dryness gives rise to a state of desolation. Both these sufferings were most keenly felt by Saint Teresa. She shares with us her experiences in this regard, to encourage us. For long years, she says, speaking of the "first way of watering the garden" by drawing the water with a bucket—which corresponds to the first degrees of mental prayer—she knew the fatigue "of lowering the bucket so often into the well and drawing it up empty." It often happened that, even for that work, she was unable to move her arms

. . . unable, that is, to think a single good thought. . . . And when I was able to draw but one drop of water from this blessed well, I used to think that God was granting me a favor. I know how grievous such trials are and I think they need more courage than do many others in the world.<sup>9</sup>

And here is another admission from the sainted mother of mental prayer, which will certainly comfort us in our own painful inabilities:

It was about these things that I used to think whenever I could; and very often, over a period of several years, I was more occupied in wishing my hour of prayer was over, and in listening whenever the clock struck, than in thinking of things that were good. Again and again I would rather have done any severe penance that might have been given me than practice recollection as a preliminary to prayer. . . . Whenever I entered the oratory I used to feel so depressed that I had to summon up all my courage to make myself pray at all. (Peo-

<sup>9</sup> *Life*, xi; Peers, I, 66-7.

ple say that I have little courage, and it is clear that God has given me much more than most women, only I have made bad use of it.)<sup>10</sup>

The suffering inherent in such a state of helplessness and in the weariness that accompanies aridity of the faculties, is intensified by the feeling of the utter futility of all our efforts; we have the impression of definite failure in the ways of mental prayer and consequently in the spiritual life. The soul aspiring to prayer needs to be enlightened and fortified. No way to do this is more useful than an exposition of the causes of dryness and its remedies.

#### B. Causes of distractions and dryness

Our inquiry will not bear on the voluntary causes of distractions and of dryness, such, for instance, as negligence in putting them out of mind during prayer or even complacency in entertaining them; notable neglect of spiritual reading and of the preparation necessary to secure for prayer its sustenance; dissipation of life and habitual lack of mortification of the senses. For these, it is easy indeed to state the remedy. Not to apply it, would be to condemn oneself to culpable failure.

We are concerned, rather, with indicating the causes that make the struggle against distractions more difficult and at times ineffectual and which, consequently, do not derive directly from the human will.

##### I. THE NATURE OF SUPERNATURAL TRUTHS

The very nature of supernatural truths is the primary cause of distractions and dryness. These truths are proposed to us in dogmatic formulas which are their most human expression. The dogmatic formula states in human concepts, analogously, a divine truth that remains a mystery, being of an order superior to those concepts.

In mental prayer, a loving faith assents to the truth itself which is essentially obscure to us; any clearer manifestation of it here below will come only at a later stage, in the experience

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, viii; 51.

of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But in the first phase, the mystery remains in complete darkness. At the same time, the understanding assents to the dogmatic formula, penetrates the concepts, reasons about them, marvels at them, and tastes them with delight. This occupation of the mind with the most exalted truths is of incomparable interest. And yet, our intellect's power to penetrate them being so strictly limited, it soon enough has drawn from them all the light it can; and so, finding itself once more with the same formulas and without new light, it loses its taste for them: *assueta vilescunt*.

## 2. THE INSTABILITY OF THE POWERS OF THE SOUL

The instability of the powers of the soul is another cause of distractions and dryness. The sense powers as well as the understanding whose activity is so closely bound up with that of the senses, are unstable and fickle. The will can direct them to an object and hold them to it; but as soon as the will lets go its grasp, they reassert their independence and follow their bent. They give themselves up to an apparently disordered activity, yielding to the attractions of external stimuli or phantasms of the memory.

A patient and persevering discipline, the asceticism of recollection, can make them more docile to the action of the will and habituate them to the silence of recollection, but it cannot change their nature. Saint Teresa says in this regard:

It is the Lord's will that . . . the soul and the will should be given this power over the senses. They will only have to make a sign to show that they wish to enter into recollection and the senses will obey and allow themselves to be recollected. Later they may come out again, but it is a great thing that they should ever have surrendered.<sup>11</sup>

Neither the purification of the senses, which makes the senses amenable to the spirit, nor even the profound purification of the spirit itself—as the statements of Saint Teresa just quoted, prove—bring these fickle powers into complete submission.

<sup>11</sup> *Way of Perfection*, xxviii; Peers, II, 116.

It is only in the sacred humanity of our Saviour and in Our Lady that we find the sense faculties marvelously developed and yet at the same time perfectly submissive to the will.

Original sin created disorder, depriving us of the preternatural gifts which brought harmony into our human nature by making the lower powers subject to the higher, and ordering them all to God. Since then, the independence of the powers declares itself strongly in us. The duality of our nature, composed of matter and spirit, reveals itself in an interior experience that is more and more painful until it is asserted finally in death, the last consequence of original sin: *stipendium peccati mors est*.<sup>12</sup> The wages of sin is death.

Saint Teresa laments this disorder inherent in our nature wounded by sin, that makes recollection difficult:

I often think of the harm wrought in us by original sin; it is this, I believe, that has made us incapable of enjoying so much good all at once, and added to this are my own sins . . . but sometimes I know quite well that my poor bodily health is having a great deal to do with it.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. ILLNESS

This last observation of the Saint draws attention to the harm that illnesses can cause to mental prayer; and to these, we can add the pathological tendencies or the defects that are imbedded in our character or temperament.

All intellectual activity is influenced to a certain extent by the physical states. Those who must use their minds much, know this well; without experiencing any definite sickness, they feel themselves incapable of carrying on a determinate intellectual work at certain times in the day or at certain periods, and are obliged to distribute it according to the quality of the intellectual energy that it requires.

At mental prayer the mind is occupied with truths that are very high and hidden in mystery. To make this prayer well,

<sup>12</sup> Rom. 6:23.

<sup>13</sup> *Life*, xxx; Peers, I, 202.

one must be in good form. It is true that here, to love is of much more importance than to think; but the affections are more intimately connected with the body than is the understanding and more immediately share in its vicissitudes. And so we are not astonished to hear this testimony from Saint Teresa:

The other afflictions which we bring upon ourselves serve only to disturb our souls. . . . I have a great deal of experience of this and I know that what I say is true, for I have observed it carefully and have discussed it afterwards with spiritual persons. The thing frequently arises from physical indisposition, for we are such miserable creatures that this poor imprisoned soul shares in the miseries of the body, and variations of seasons and changes in the humours often prevent it from accomplishing its desires and make it suffer in all kinds of ways against its will.<sup>14</sup>

She goes on to say that a change in the time of prayer perhaps gives some relief from these maladies. One could not be more sanely realistic nor more maternally attentive in guiding beginners in the ways of mental prayer.

More troublesome than these passing indispositions, can be the pathological tendencies and defects that are rooted in temperament. Saint Teresa alludes to the tendency some have to melancholy; and also to the "times when our heads are tired, and, however, hard we try, we cannot concentrate."<sup>15</sup> She takes care to divert from mental prayer certain persons who because of psychical weakness cannot stand the least shock without fainting.

Indeed modern psychiatry has made a penetrating study that would have delighted Saint Teresa of constitutional defects that can have a very profound influence on the development of the spiritual life.<sup>16</sup> The clinical cases are almost exclusively the domain of the doctor. But the borderline cases are many. Every

<sup>14</sup> *Life*, xi; Peers, I, 69.

<sup>15</sup> *Way of Perfection*, xxiv; Peers, II, 102.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the article quoted by Dr. Laignel-Lavastine in *Etudes Carmélitaines*, April, 1934.

one in fact is said to have such or such a tendency more or less evolved.<sup>17</sup>

Although these tendencies are scarcely noticeable in an ordinarily active life, they manifest themselves in all their strength in one given to prayer. The melancholic type who is forever accusing himself; the scrupulous person, continually preoccupied with his doubts; the highly imaginative, who cannot check his mental wanderings; the restless and excitable, whose faculties are always in movement; these find special difficulties in the way of recollection.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. THE DEVIL

"When the distractions and disturbances of the understanding are excessive . . . the devil is their author," declares Saint Teresa. Often, she had experience of this:

In particular it used to come during Holy Week. . . . The devil suddenly lays hold on my understanding, sometimes by making use of things so trifling that at any other time I should laugh at them. He confuses the understanding and does whatever he likes with it, so that the soul, fettered as it is and no longer its own mistress, can think of nothing but the absurdities which he presents to it—things of no importance. . . . It has sometimes seemed to me, indeed, that the devils behave as though they were playing ball with the soul, so incapable is it of freeing itself from their power.<sup>19</sup>

The Saint lays special emphasis on worry, which is a sign of the presence of the devil and causes trouble of mind:

Besides being left in a state of great aridity, the soul suffers a disquiet . . . of such a nature that one cannot discover whence it comes. The soul seems to resist it and is perturbed and afflicted without know-

<sup>17</sup> In the borderline cases of which we are speaking, these tendencies do not vitiate a temperament nor destroy the fruitfulness of a life. It is important that the soul adapt itself to them if it cannot destroy them. Supernatural obedience is one of the best compensators to check the baneful effects of a tendency.

<sup>18</sup> The purifications, which cause these tendencies finally to disappear or at least notably attenuate them, bring them first to their maximum tension, and these pose a delicate problem in religious psychology.

<sup>19</sup> *Life*, xxx; Peers, I, 198-9.

ing why. . . . I wonder if one kind of spirit can be conscious of another.<sup>20</sup>

The presence of the impure spirit could be perceived only by a spirit already purified. It seems, too, that this violent action of the devil is very rare; that he reserves it for strong souls from whom he has much to fear. Nevertheless, these descriptions are most useful, for they indicate to us his habitual tactics and mode of action.

It is natural enough that the devil should use his great power and take advantage of the relative weakness of beginners in prayer, to stop them in their journey towards God by causing in them, as far as he is able, as much dryness and distractions as he can. That he thus intervenes—often successfully—in the prayer of beginners seems certain; and, although using on them much more benign procedures than on Saint Teresa, these are probably much more effective.

#### 5. THE ACTION, AT LEAST PERMISSIVE, OF GOD

The action of these natural and preternatural causes enters into the plan of God who uses everything for the good of those whom He loves. Supernatural light and grace, fruits of the Passion and death of Christ, cannot penetrate deeply within a soul unless it shares in that redemptive suffering and death. Such sufferings give it light on its own self and establish it in humility:

I believe it is for our good that His Majesty is pleased to lead us in this way so that we may have a clear understanding of our worthlessness; for the favours which come later are of such great dignity that before He grants us them He wishes us to know by experience how miserable we are, lest what happened to Lucifer happen to us also.<sup>21</sup>

They are a trial that brings to light the valiant:

I believe myself that often in the early stages, and again later, it is the Lord's will to give us these tortures, and many other temptations which present themselves, in order to test His lovers and discover if

<sup>20</sup> *Life*, xxv; *Peers*, I, 160.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, xi; 67.

they can drink of the chalice and help Him to bear the Cross before He trusts them with His great treasures.<sup>22</sup>

These words of the Saint set before us the providential design that governs and uses wisely all activities, even those that are free and hostile, for the sanctification of souls.

Even in the case of beginners this dryness is often accompanied by an intermittent ray of divine light which itself produces contemplative dryness.

For this reason we think it certain that, in the case of Saint Teresa, the powerlessness of the understanding came from the graces of union that she had previously received; for those who have been elevated to perfect contemplation "can no longer meditate upon the mysteries of the Passion and the life of Christ."<sup>23</sup> Her long seasons of aridity in prayer, with the sentiments of humility and sadness that afflicted her, could not but be states illumined by a strong divine light that was adjusting sense to spirit and preparing her soul for the marvelous graces that she was to receive.

Certainly, one could not say as much for all the aridities of beginners; yet, it does not seem too presumptuous to consider that contemplative dryness is possible, intermittently, in the majority of fervent souls, even in their early stages in the ways of prayer.

### C. Remedies

It is to souls that have proved their good will by faithfulness to recollection, to spiritual reading, and to prayer, that Saint Teresa addresses her advice as to the remedies for dryness. She wants to teach them how to fight against the involuntary causes of distractions and aridity.

#### I. DISCRETION

An examination of the causes of distraction shows us that there are several that we cannot overcome even by violent ef-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> VI Mansions, vii; Peers, II, 305.

fort. When there is question of the weakness of the faculties in the face of supernatural truths, of their natural instability, of physical maladies, or of the action of the devil, we understand that violent efforts would be foolish. This conviction will serve to direct the whole struggle against distractions and will make us cultivate discretion which alone can overcome the obstacles. But let us listen to our wise spiritual mother:

The very suffering of anyone in this state will show her that she is not to blame, and she must not worry, for that only makes matters worse, nor must she weary herself by trying to put sense into something—namely, her mind—which for the moment is without any. She should pray as best she can: indeed, she need not pray at all, but may try to rest her spirit as though she were ill and busy herself with some other virtuous action.<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere she says:

The more we try to force it [the soul] at times like these, the worse it gets and the longer the trouble lasts. But let discretion be observed so that it may be ascertained if this is the true reason: the poor soul must not be stifled. Persons in this condition must realize that they are ill and make some alteration in their hours of prayer; very often it will be advisable to continue this change for some days.

They must endure this exile as well as they can, for a soul which loves God has often the exceeding ill fortune to realize that, living as it is in this state of misery, it cannot do what it desires because of its evil guest, the body.<sup>25</sup>

The Saint sums up her advice thus:

At such times the soul must render the body a service for the love of God, so that on many other occasions the body may render services to the soul. Engage in some spiritual recreation, such as conversation (so long as it is really spiritual), or a country walk, according as your confessor advises. In all these things it is important to have had experience, for from this we learn what is fitting for us; but let God be served in all things.<sup>26</sup>

We quote at length, less to gather precise counsel on what to do—for cases differ widely—than to learn from Saint

<sup>24</sup> *Way of Perfection*, xxiv; Peers, II, 102.

<sup>25</sup> *Life*, xi; Peers, I, 69.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*; 70.

Teresa in what spirit to carry on the battle against distractions. One can easily see that to overcome certain obstacles to prayer, more than discretion in prayerful efforts may at times be needed. The collaboration of a spiritual director and a medical doctor may, in some cases, become necessary and contribute effectually to health of body as well as to the progress of the soul.

## 2. PERSEVERANCE

Prudence in our efforts at prayer should result in perseverance and not in idleness. "This is the most necessary thing here,"<sup>27</sup> proclaims Saint Teresa; and she never tires of repeating it. Had she not written on a bookmark: "Everything passes. Patience obtains all things." This is true especially of mental prayer. It was through perseverance that she herself obtained her supernatural riches: "Not many days would pass without my spending long periods in prayer, unless I was very ill or very busy."

The greatest temptation of her life was to remain a year or more without praying, because to refrain from prayer seemed to her more humble.<sup>28</sup>

Perseverance will have for its object not only the exercise of prayer itself, but also the asceticism of recollection that must accompany it. We must keep a guard over the senses during the day, abstain from dissipating frivolities, and turn our minds and hearts to the Master as frequently as possible by ejaculatory prayers or acts of the theological virtues.

Distractions and dryness in prayer enlighten the soul. They show it its deep-seated weaknesses and the precise causes of its distractions. There may be some recurring attachment or antipathy; an impression that is troubling still; such or such an image that clamors for attention; or a memory that is hindering recollection. Better than by detailed examens, the soul

<sup>27</sup> *II Mansions*, i; *Peers*, II, 214.

<sup>28</sup> *Life*, vii; *Peers*, I, 42.

thus discovers the exact point to which it must apply the efforts of its asceticism to acquire recollection.

Let the soul persevere, Saint Teresa assures us, and even though one be a sinner, God will be merciful:

I cannot conceive, my Creator, why the whole world does not strive to draw near to Thee in this intimate friendship. Those of us who are wicked, and whose nature is not like Thine, ought to draw near to Thee so that Thou mayest make them good. They should allow Thee to be with them for at least two hours each day, even though they may not be with Thee, but are perplexed, as I was, with a thousand worldly cares and thoughts. In exchange for the effort which it costs them to desire to be in such good company (for Thou knowest, Lord, that at first this is as much as they can do and sometimes they can do no more at all) Thou dost prevent the devils from assaulting them . . . and Thou givest them strength to conquer.<sup>29</sup>

In short, only perseverance can make sure of success in prayer.

### 3. HUMILITY

A patient and trusting humility must accompany perseverance:

What, then, will he do here who finds that for many days he experiences nothing but aridity, dislike, distaste and so little desire to go and draw water that he would give it up entirely if he did not remember that he is pleasing and serving the Lord of the garden; if he were not anxious that all his service should not be lost, so say nothing of the gain which he hopes for from the great labour of lowering the bucket so often into the well and drawing it up without water? . . . What, then, as I say, will the gardener do here? He will be bold and take heart and consider it the greatest of favours to work in the garden of so great an Emperor; and, as he knows that he is pleasing Him by so working (and his purpose must be to please, not himself, but Him), let him render Him great praise for having placed such confidence in him; . . . let him help Him to bear the Cross and consider how he lived with it all His life long; let him not wish to have his kingdom on earth or cease from prayer; and so let him resolve, even if this aridity should persist his whole life long, never to let Christ fall beneath the Cross. The time will come when He shall receive his whole reward at once.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Life*, viii; Peers, I, 50-1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, xi; 66-7.

Such dispositions of loving and patient humility are already one of the fruits of spiritual dryness. Because they bring the soul to share in the providential design that permits and uses aridities for the sanctification of the elect, they very soon obtain high favors from God:

These trials bring their own reward. . . . It has become clear to me that, even in this life, God does not fail to recompense them highly; for it is quite certain that a single one of those hours in which the Lord has granted me to taste of Himself has seemed to me later a recompense for all the afflictions which I endured over a long period while keeping up the practice of prayer.<sup>31</sup>

Jesus conquered by a humble and loving patience. And this same disposition will assure the soul a triumph over the interior and exterior obstacles that hinder it from union with God.

In the *Interior Castle*, Saint Teresa sums up this doctrine:

As it has been such a troublesome thing for me, it may perhaps be so for you as well, so I am just going to describe it, first in one way and then in another, hoping that I may succeed in making you realize how necessary it is, so that you may not grow restless and distressed. The clacking old mill must keep on going round and we must grind our own flour: neither the will nor the understanding must cease working.

This trouble will sometimes be worse, and sometimes better, according to our health and according to the times and seasons. The poor soul may not be to blame for this, but it must suffer none the less. . . . And as we are so ignorant that what we read and are advised—namely, that we should take no account of these thoughts—is not sufficient to teach us, it does not seem to me a waste of time if I go into it farther and offer you some consolation about it; though this will be of little help to you until the Lord is pleased to give us light. But it is necessary (and His Majesty's will) that we should take proper measures and learn to understand ourselves, and not blame our souls for what is the work of our weak imagination and our nature and the devil.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; 67.

<sup>32</sup> IV Mansions, i; Peers, II, 235 f.