

THOMAS DUBAY, S.M.

FIRE WITHIN

St. Teresa of Avila,
St. John of the Cross,
and the Gospel—on Prayer

IGNATIUS PRESS SAN FRANCISCO

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
1 A Question of Relevance	1
2 The Woman and the Man	13
3 The Experience of God	39
4 Creation and Meditation	49
5 What Is Contemplation?	57
6 The Teresian Mansions	73
7 Conditions for Growth: St. Teresa	III
8 The Freedom of Detachment	131
9 Fire in the Nights	159
10 The Transforming Summit	175
11 The Universal Call	199
12 Miscellaneous Matters	217
13 Discerning Growth	235
14 Locutions and Visions	243
15 Friendship	271
16 Spiritual Direction	289
17 Liberating Completion	305
Notes	313
Index	345

Cover art by Gary Hoff
Cover by Roxanne Mei Lum

With ecclesiastical approval
©1989 Ignatius Press, San Francisco
All rights reserved

ISBN 0-89870-263-1

Library of Congress catalogue number 89-83653
Printed in the United States of America

CHAPTER ONE
A QUESTION OF RELEVANCE

The Son, radiant Image of the Father's glory, proclaimed that He had come to cast a fire upon the earth and that He longed for it to burst into blaze. It was in the form of fiery tongues that the Holy Spirit of Pentecost descended upon a timorous group of men and women. Their minds and hearts having been enkindled with a burning love and ardent zeal, those who received the Spirit sparked the astonishing transformation of an unbelieving and corrupt civilization into a community of faith and love.

In our day the divine fire has not been extinguished. The consuming conflagration has not been contained. The proven incapacity of committees and clubs, speeches and surveys, electronics and entertainment profoundly and permanently to change vast numbers of people for the better has to be conceded. As the experience of the centuries attests, true transformations in the world and in the Church continue to come about only through the interventions of men and women on fire — that is, through saints. The evidence is overwhelming. It is also widely ignored, for it contains an otherworldly wisdom that this world does not welcome. For some, taking the evidence seriously presents a snag, since it implies striving for this same kind of transformation within oneself as a starting point for improving the world. Indeed, at this very moment, deep and lasting changes in the Church are being brought about by a faithful few who are burning interiorly as a consequence of the deep prayer given by the Holy Spirit, who renews the face of the earth in ways other than our own. These quiet, humble, unassuming individuals seldom write position papers, and they are not likely to appear on controversial television talk shows or to attract front-page headlines. They are not identified with any "ism", and they care nothing for a life of luxury or notoriety. They do not achieve popular acclaim by opposing ecclesial leadership and rejecting received doctrine. Rather, they are like the saints have always been. The burning ones are the unflickering light of the world, the savory salt of the earth, the lively leaven in the mass.

Thus, contemplative husbands and wives are examples of holiness to their children not unlike a Hedwig or a Thomas More. Prayerful clergy serve to inspire parishioners through soul-stirring homilies,

sound guidance in the confessional and comforting concern in times of need. Teachers who are aflame ignite their students by their contagious enthusiasm as well as by the attractiveness of the truth they proclaim. Nurses close to God have a healing influence on both soul and body. In the home, in the marketplace, in the cloister, the love steadily radiating from these simple ones permeates and invigorates the world around us. It is unmistakable evidence of God living in and among us, a clear manifestation to our world that the Incarnation has taken place.¹ Common folk instinctively grasp this, while it easily escapes the more sophisticated, who often fail to comprehend what transcends the tangible order of meetings and strategies and publicity campaigns.

Not long ago a layman engaged me in conversation after the Sunday liturgy, his face beaming with joy. "Father, I've never heard that before", he enthused. He was referring to a theme that should be commonplace in homilies. What was this happy discovery, this good news he had never heard before? For the most part, it was two remarks, one of a first-century man, the other of a sixteenth-century woman, interwoven with about fifteen minutes of commentary.

If this had been the only time I had met with this sort of reaction to this particular message, the incident probably would not have lingered in my mind. But as I regularly travel about in retreat and lecture work, it is usual for me to encounter individuals, lay and religious alike, who are yearning for the same message. Nonetheless, I hear repeatedly that this momentous message rarely receives mention and is never explained.

What is it that so many are hungering to hear? Who were the first-century man and the sixteenth-century woman? What did they say, and to whom did they say it? Was it of enduring value, or was it merely a fad, no more than a fanciful notion? What is the explanation for the enthusiasm it continues to evoke? The extensive answer to these questions constitutes the content of this book. In brief, the homily dealt with the universal call to holiness and to a deep prayer life. The man was Paul of Tarsus, and the woman was Teresa of Avila. St. Paul told his hearers, laymen and laywomen for the most part, that they should aspire to be "filled with the utter fullness of God".² St. Teresa, expressly writing of generous married people seriously living their Gospel obligations, forthrightly said that there is no reason why people in the world should not attain to the very highest mansions of prayer growth, to the transforming union.

Admittedly the idea is an attractive one, so attractive that many people assume that it is not something that can be realized in their own lives. Could lofty contemplation actually be meant for all men and women

in all vocations? We shall consider at length the answer that St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila give to this question, and we shall see that for anyone who looks carefully at all the evidence (not just one or two isolated texts), it is completely clear that their response is resoundingly affirmative. What is even more compelling is that the contemporary Church, in her liturgy, in Vatican II and in the new canon law repeatedly takes it for granted that "contemplation", "mystical treasures", an "abundance of contemplation", "the experience of divine things" and "an assiduous union with God in prayer" are meant for each and every person in the Church.³ In the official liturgy the Church places on the lips of all the faithful the petition that we would be "fed with her [Teresa's] heavenly teaching" and that all of us would "imitate John [of the Cross] always".⁴ These two saints have been declared Doctors of the universal Church precisely for what they have to say about contemplative prayer and the way to reach it. Universal teachers are of course universal, intended for all classes and conditions. Teresa and John present the Church's mind about mystical prayer, about the deep things of God, about a complete love immersion in Him. They are addressing any and all who desire a serious prayer life and aspire to live the Gospel with the totality characteristic of the saints.

It is sometimes held to be proof against the universal call to contemplation that in the case of some saints we lack external evidence of advanced infused prayer. This argument lacks substance for two reasons. The first reason is that a saint is characteristically inclined to avoid drawing attention to outstanding favors from God, and especially to keep hidden what has transpired in the innermost recesses of the heart in the most intimate of all relationships. Louis Bouyer, in support of the universal call, observes that Jacques and Raissa Martain have "pointed out quite rightly that this mystical development of every Christian life carried to holiness will be more or less conscious according to the innate tendency and capacities of the subject for reflex consciousness of what is going on within him. Thus saints who at first sight do not seem to be mystics actually live a mystical life without talking about it."⁵

The second reason that the argument fails is that its premise is simply false: there is external evidence in every saint of lofty infused prayer, namely, heroic virtue. Such remarkable virtue cannot be hidden, at least not entirely. As we shall explain in its proper place, it is the gradual growth toward the heights of transforming union and nothing less that produces an accompanying heroic holiness. Both Teresa and John hold strongly that sanctity blossoms along with the development of infused contemplation. There is a mutual causality. Without the second passive

night that proximately purifies one for the perfect sanctity of the seventh mansions, there cannot be the holiness that the Church canonizes in her saints.

Because we are all without exception called to the heights of holiness, this volume is emphatically intended, also without exception, for all men and women in every way of life. When later we examine the inner reasons why this must be so, it shall become clear why our two saints are accurate in their assessment and fully in accord both with Scripture and the mind of the Church.

Hedonism has never begotten happiness, and our disillusioned contemporaries are learning this lesson with a vengeance. While the pleasure seekers often make a shallow show of their self-satisfaction for the media and thus foster a false impression among the young, those who do let down their defenses admit the emptiness of lives lived without transcendent ideals and hopes. This phenomenon is common not only in Europe and the Americas but also in any materialistic society. One social critic writing from Australia describes the now middle-aged "baby-boomers" as the me generation who center their attention and energies on self-development and self-gratification. He cites Manning Clark, a historian, who considers that "they are probably the first generation who don't believe in anything at all. Previous generations have held firm beliefs, whether they were religious beliefs or just the hope of better things from humanity, but this generation are nihilists." Not surprisingly, they have found that their egocentrism has yielded only a vast inner void: "The greed and titillation culture has proved empty and hollow."⁶

Even though it almost goes without saying, perhaps the obvious should be emphasized: a philosophy that produces nothingness has issued from nothingness, that is, from no intellectual principles rooted in reality. "From their fruits you shall know them." This volume deals with a "philosophy" that produces not only contentment but also a perduring, unspeakable joy even on earth, a foretaste of eternal joy. This claim is verifiable in experience for anyone willing to pay the price of pursuing it. There will be those, of course, who will read in these words a sheer utopianism or an incredibly naïve enthusiasm born of ignorance of the real world. Yet facts are facts, and one cannot fly in their face except at great loss to oneself. Disregard for life's ultimate realities, life's most enriching experiences as epitomized by the saints, is runaway escapism. For reasons less than noble some people choose to reject, perhaps angrily, always selfishly, what is incompatible with their chosen life-style.

No one may contest the testimony of Ss. Teresa and John unless he has himself been where this woman and this man have been (and where others who follow their teaching also arrive). These two Carmelites have been to the summit of the mountain: they know what it is like and how to get there. Unlike oriental gurus who promise much but produce at best an apersonal state of awareness, or at worst immoral chaos, these two saints point to nothing but what the Gospel already promises: "A joy so glorious that it cannot be described" . . . a delight that is complete . . . such that "hearts will be full of joy" that no one can take away.⁷

A book on advanced prayer is a book on advanced joy. It is a love story, a book about being loved, and loving, totally. It is a book on holiness, the heights of holiness to which the Gospel invites everyone.

Still, we must face the fact that there are people who think the message is too good to be true. Strange as it may seem, among these people are not a few contemporary priests and nuns. It is regrettable, but understandable, that there are those who reject it out of ignorance, men and women who may know of our two saints only from hearsay, not close contact. Not infrequently, among these are religious who were told in their early formative years that Ss. Teresa and John "are not for you" and who could not find these saints' works in the convent library, for they were erroneously judged as dangerous. Others, very likely, have heard stray bits about the *nada* doctrine and supposed it was only one spirituality among others that one could take or leave with impunity. Invariably these are people who have so tenuous a grasp of the New Testament that they would be astonished to learn that these two Carmelites say nothing significant that is not already in the Gospels and the canonical Letters of Paul and Peter, James and John. It is one of the tasks of this volume to show this last point to be true.

But how do we face the further fact of people who have read the sanjuanist and teresian works and who either misunderstand the message or forthrightly reject it? Few if any of these are serious scholars, but they do include some nuns, friars and priests. It may be useful to listen to their objections and respond briefly to them before proceeding further.

Perhaps the most frequent objection bears on the *nada* doctrine, the drastic detachment taught by both Teresa and John but especially emphasized by the latter. Death to one's senses and desires is unhealthy if not impossible, it is said, and we understand better today that we can find God not in negation but in affirmation, joy and celebration. Mortification, penance and self-denial are considered to be of the old

school, whereas an emphasis on delight and jubilation is more appealing nowadays.

The full response to this objection may be found positively explained in our chapter on freedom, for thorough understanding is the best answer to partial views. A few short comments will suffice for now. People who argue against detachment and self-denial are perhaps unaware that they are simultaneously rejecting the same teaching found in the New Testament. Jesus lays it down that to be his disciple, anyone and everyone must "renounce *all* that he possesses", not just part or most of it.⁸ In Titus 2:12 we read that "what we have to do is give up *everything* that does not lead to God". John and Teresa ask not a whit more . . . or less. Texts like these could be multiplied. We must further note that in our human, finite condition, every choice necessarily entails negations. If I spend money for one thing, I cannot spend it on something else. No man can love two women with his whole heart. No one can serve God and mammon. No one can attain an ecstatic joy in God without giving up paltry, self-centered pleasures in things less than God. People who reject Gospel detachment cannot have clearly thought it through. Like the adolescent who sees little value in Dante or Shakespeare or Michelangelo because comic strips have captured his fancy, the adult who discounts evangelical detachment cannot have experienced the sublime infused love found in advanced prayer. One can only wonder if this individual has ever tasted even a morsel of it. Can he know what St. Paul meant when he spoke of rejoicing in the Lord *always*⁹ or "having nothing, possessing all things"?¹⁰ Does this person believe what Jesus himself taught, namely, that it is a hard road and a narrow gate that lead to life and that there is no other way to happiness on earth?¹¹

Reflecting on it, one readily notices that the reinterpretations and rejections of St. John of the Cross (and thus of the Gospel) are inherently implausible even on the merely natural level. If a single one of the substitute teachings advocated greater self-denial or more heroic sacrifices, the proposals would be less obviously self-serving and slightly more persuasive. This same implausibility appears in the current dilutions of principled sexual morality. Not only are the dissenting foundations in consequentialism and proportionalism intellectually bankrupt (one may recall, among others, the devastating and unanswered critiques of John Finnis and Germain Grisez), but the unflinching widening of the gate and easing of the road renders this approach suspect from the start. So also the persisting lack of understanding and appreciation in certain circles for our two saints has in our day reached the point of pathology. These are hard words, yes, but they are not directed

toward people of goodwill who wish to acquire a better understanding but need help to do so. It is for these especially that this volume is intended. Rather, I refer to those who have had ample opportunity to study, to see, if they will, that the Gospel demands remain eternally valid and, despite this, tout contrary teachings. Indeed, the unpopular path of cross-to-resurrection traveled by all the saints is the sole way to life.

A rejection of the *nada* doctrine is a failure to see that the dark night of faith

is in no sense a nothingness; it reflects the radiance of the invisible stars of love. It is itself the fluidity that is in itself already the glory of God, so that it is only a question of time, of patient, expectant vision, before this obscure glory is transformed into a manifest, self-glorifying splendour.¹²

There is another segment of individuals who have dabbled in Christian and oriental mysticisms and consider that they are more or less indistinguishable. An expert will not, of course, make this astonishing mistake, but others notice similarities (for example, an asceticism, an imageless awareness, a reaching out for the transcendent), while they fail to recognize vast gulfs between the two. Buddhist "contemplation" is impersonal, not a love matter at all, whereas that represented by Teresa and John is preeminently a profound personal love union with God. The Buddhist writer neither affirms nor denies God; he simply has nothing to say about communing with the supreme Being.¹³ There are other major differences between the two mysticisms, but we may be content here to note that the differences between personal and nonpersonal, between theism and agnosticism, are vast. They are neither minor nor a mere matter of taste. The same must be said of Hinduism. While this latter system is theistic, not agnostic as is Buddhism, yet the contemplation of its adherents is far removed from Christic communion. "In Hinduism," remarks Louis Bouyer, "as in many other Far-Eastern spiritualities more or less closely related to it, like Chinese Taoism, the spiritual man tends toward an absorption of his proper personality in a deity which is itself impersonal."¹⁴ While John and Teresa insist on the incomparable closeness of divine-human union in the seventh mansions, they likewise insist, as do all authentic Christian mystics, that God and the individual remain unambiguously two distinct beings: the one is not absorbed and lost in the Other. Speaking of the Hindu mystic, Sankara, Bouyer notes that "whatever the personalist expressions that Sankara used, he tended toward nothing other, in the final analysis, than an absorption or a reabsorption of

himself in a great whole that was no one . . . and in spite of the images of fusion, or loss of self, or extinction of the T.¹⁵ People who confuse the mysticism of Paul, Augustine, the Gregorys, Teresa and John with what oriental writers discuss have only a surface-level grasp of their subject.

Equally inept are psychological explanations of the teresian missions. One will hear it said that the phenomena of the stages of prayer described by St. Teresa are purely psychological experiences, or one will find that attempts are made to explain these stages according to Carl Jung. The best response to these preposterous ideas is experience, the experience of advanced contemplation. Anyone who knows the reality from the inside, that is, in more than an academic manner, can only smile at the naïveté of the proponents of such theories. But even those who lack experience can detect the basic inadequacy of naturalistic explanations by weighing everything Teresa and John say. We may select one example out of a dozen possible ones: the progressive growth in holiness that is part and parcel of infused prayer and its developments cannot be accounted for on any natural basis. Only one who has not studied the transforming union closely and carefully would even begin to think of equating the burning sanctity found in it with either pagan examples of virtue or the goodness possible through active prayer. The reader may test for himself whether what we describe in the course of this volume bears any natural explanation.

Does infused contemplation occur with any frequency today? Some think not. These people range from one extreme that maintains that prayer in solitude is a waste, that we get to God only through dealing with our neighbor, to another extreme that admits that mystical prayer is the ideal, but it just does not happen much in our day. Other prayer forms have largely replaced it. Once again the complete answer to both of these views and the variations that lie between them is the entire picture as sketched within this volume. However, given the nature of these allegations, it may be useful for me to add a few observations derived from three decades of giving retreats and renewal lectures combined with the considerable number of spiritual direction encounters this work entails.

One of the many things I have learned is that advanced infused prayer is well and thriving among those who live the Gospel with entire generosity. This has always been the case through the centuries, and it is the case today. Retreat masters and others who say they seldom meet advanced contemplation in the people they deal with can speak for themselves. I cannot vouch for those they serve. However, I likewise may speak from my own experience: among both active and cloistered

religious I meet infused prayer frequently, and I find that Teresa and John remain the best guides we have to the mystical experiences that continue to flourish among our saintly laymen, sisters, brothers and priests. If others do not find what I find, several questions might be asked.

Are the people to whom they speak wholeheartedly living Gospel humility, poverty, obedience and commitment to the Church in the way that saints live these virtues? If not, they will not, of course, find much infused prayer. Do these retreat masters teach these virtues? If not, they should not expect advanced contemplation in their listeners. Without humility, detachment and sound doctrine there is no deep communion with the Lord. There could not be, for quality of prayer correlates with quality of life, that is, of evangelical life, not a naturalistic substitute. Do these spiritual directors understand advanced prayer well enough in both its delicate beginnings and its profound growth to recognize it when they do meet it? Do they by the example of their lives and their teaching inspire others to approach them about matters of deepening prayer? One needs little imagination to understand that people will not discuss a matter as intimate as their communion with God if they sense that the retreat master is tinged with worldly views or does not give proper priority to prayer.

A second thing I have learned is what St. Teresa herself learned regarding the sanctity and prayer of her companions in the early years of the reform: they were saintly women, and most of them had lofty infused prayer. That combination, holiness of life and radiant contemplation, is no mere coincidence. So it is today: men and women in any vocation who live the revealed word as Thomas More (married man), John Vianney (diocesan priest) and Catherine of Siena (consecrated virgin) lived it do enjoy a profound intimacy with the Lord they serve so completely and untiringly. Life-style and prayer grow or diminish together. If people today or in any age lack mystical prayer, it is not because it has been tried and found lacking. It is the Gospel that has not been tried.

More disturbing than isolated aberrations is the widespread indifference to contemplation in the formation and education of priests and other clergy. Despite the fact that Jesus Himself declared in the Martha-Mary episode that drinking undividedly of the Lord is the "one thing", the overriding necessity in any human life and of greater importance than activity,¹⁶ the academic training of our clergy bears almost exclusively on work. Despite the fact that the apostles themselves considered their duty to be prayer first of all, and then proclaiming the word,¹⁷ seminaries rarely, if indeed ever, direct serious course atten-

tion to equipping the students to lead the faithful to drink deeply, to taste and see how good the Lord is¹⁸ and to do the same themselves. Despite the fact that Vatican II laid it down that for all men and women "action is subordinated to contemplation",¹⁹ rare is the seminary that pays much attention to the latter, to the "one thing". The results of this enormous vacuum (which seems to worry almost no one in officialdom — the Popes are notable exceptions: they do worry about it) are predictable and obvious. Everywhere I meet sincere people who are hungering for something deeper than what they hear in the Sunday homily. Over and over men and women tell me that they never hear of contemplation in their parish churches and rarely in retreats. In the latter they may hear on occasion a few passing references to the subject, but nothing adequate. Repeatedly I am told that competent spiritual direction for growth in prayer is simply not available. It is no wonder that some of these people turn to faddish gurus, occidental and oriental.

This volume does not have a polemic purpose. But if it does propose a thesis, I would have to insist that it derives from no preconceived idea I set out to prove but from one that gradually emerged after some years of immersion in the writings of our two saints. The thesis is that the teachings of Teresa and John are nothing more or less than the integral Gospel. I can think of nothing significant in their works that cannot be found in Scripture as understood and explained according to the mind of the Church and the best of exegesis, past and present. If this statement appears to be an exaggeration, I merely invite the reader to proceed. A superficial acquaintance with either the inspired word or with our saints is not enough. The more one delves into all three, the more one finds a remarkable identity of message. Each one illumines the other two.

I am well aware of those who dip a bit into St. John of the Cross, promptly put him aside as "too much" and then declare that they prefer either "the simple Gospel" or some other saint or else a popular contemporary writer. These people likely enough feel that they have "really tried John" and that there are other viable choices of spirituality that dispense with a detachment emphasis. While there are surely diverse spiritualities in the great Tradition of the Church, no valid approach can or does depart in the least from evangelical teaching. What is so terribly shallow in this view is that those who hold it apparently do not realize that all saints concur exactly with what John and Teresa teach about sacrifice and detachment. They are unaware that John is, as Pius XI remarked, "pure Gospel". If the reader wishes a rapid confirmation of this simple truth, he may turn to Chapter 8, which deals with the *nada* doctrine.

Because men and women of heroic virtue are fully responsive to the Holy Spirit, they are the best exegetes of the divine word inspired by the same Spirit. One has only to compare the biblical commentaries of Augustine or Bernard to the often jejune explanations of mere technicians. The latter may excel in philology or archeology, they may summarize a variety of opinions offered through the ages and in our own day as to what this or that text means, but they are no match for the personal depth and wisdom found in the patristic commentaries and in the concrete lives of the saints, whether these latter were scholars or not. In fact, as I was writing these lines I referred to several contemporary exegetes for their insights into four texts we shall touch upon in the next few paragraphs. These passages deal with our deep interpersonal immersion in God, indeed, with our transformation into the trinitarian life. I found no sufficient explanation of a single text. One exegete made no comment whatsoever on Ephesians 3:19, even though he was prolix about its preceding context — a remarkable omission. The impression this gives is that while he and the others show some facility with factual details, they are at a loss and strangely silent in matters pertaining to deep communion with God.

"I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I would that it were already blazing."²⁰ How perfectly this captures the contents of this book. The radiant Image of the Father's glory²¹ has come to light a fire in us, a burning love, a consuming yearning. There is nothing lukewarm about the God of revelation. Always radical and total, never does He reduce what He expects of us to fractions. Our communion with Him is to become a blazing fire, a perpetual ecstasy. These strong words will sound strange and exaggerated only to those who have not tasted that the Lord is good. They may have studied and read, but they have not drunk deeply.

Reflecting like mirrors the very brilliance of the Lord, we are even in this life to be "transformed from one glory to another into the very image that we reflect — this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit."²² This text, too, is an excellent summation of much of this present work, namely, the gradual but inevitable transformation of a generous person that accompanies parallel growth in depth of communion with the indwelling Trinity. They who think that fullness of contemplation is meant to be confined to an elite few do not understand the contents of Sacred Scripture. Nor do they understand the great patristic commentators (e.g., St. Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century) who join with John and Teresa in writing of this transformation.

"Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it dawned upon our human imagination what things God has prepared for those who love him."²³ This pauline statement, astonishing however one understands

it, refers not only to our final destiny in beatific vision and risen body but also to the unspeakable, indeed unimaginable, gifts God has in store on earth for totally generous lovers. Once again, without the teaching of saints like Teresa and John we would be at a loss to suggest what Paul actually had in mind. This, no doubt, is why the mere biblical technician can say so little about ideas like this one. It is only in the perspective of what the mystics say of the culmination of contemplation on earth that we come to see in concrete terms what the apostle had in mind.

In another equally astounding text Paul, himself a mystic, writes that as we grow in the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge we are to be "filled with the utter fullness of God."²⁴ Scripture commentator Max Zerwick finds this to be "a thought of bewildering magnitude."²⁵ No doubt. The thought cannot be exaggerated. That I, of myself a puny nothing, am to be filled *utterly* with boundless beauty, power, joy and love staggers the imagination. Zerwick is surely correct, but it is interesting to note that he goes on to remark that "there is much in this section which remains obscure. In these last verses, Paul soars off on a lofty flight which leaves us far, far behind, bewildered and astonished."²⁶ Yes. Precisely because we ordinary people are far, far behind, bewildered and astonished, we need reliable guides like Ss. Teresa and John, who can familiarize us with the path to the spiritual summit and help us discover how we too can become disposed for the inflowing of divine fullness, the fire within.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WOMAN AND THE MAN

Genuine prayer, liturgical or contemplative, does not happen in a vacuum. Depth of communion with the indwelling Trinity occurs only in a person intent on living the Gospel totally, one who is humble and patient, temperate and obedient, pure and kind, free of selfish clings. It is not accidental that our very best explanations of contemplative prayer have their origin in a woman and a man of marvelous sanctity. To appreciate this assertion one would have to read the depositions for the canonization processes together with other current accounts of Ss. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. We cannot, of course, detail in a single chapter the external happenings of their lives, but we do wish to present a personality sketch of each saint, and that for two reasons.

We have already noted in passing that saints are the best exegetes we have of Scripture. They not only lived the revealed word well; they also have lived it heroically well. Both the biblical word and their lives are inspired by the one Holy Spirit. While scriptural commentators often contradict one another in their explanations (and as logic points out, in a contradiction one of the two parties must be mistaken), saints do not contradict one another in the ways in which they concretize the Gospel. True enough, each is unique, and all together they present a multifaceted and complementary diversity in their various life situations. St. Thomas More lived Gospel poverty as a husband and a father, in a manner different from that of St. Francis of Assisi or St. Robert Bellarmine. This kind of complementarity enriches, whereas the contradictory type is damaging to the mistaken party, for error puts one out of touch with a given reality.

The lives and traits of Teresa and John tell us far more about contemplative prayer than many of us imagine. We tend to think that their messages about communion with God are confined to their written words. Not so. Their lives and their writings are mutual commentaries. We understand John's (and Teresa's) teaching about detachment not only from studying his explanations but also from seeing how he applied the doctrine in his own circumstances. We derive a great deal of light about the practicalities of growing through the advanced mansions of prayer not only by studying *Interior Castle* but also by know-