

CULTIVATING
THE SPIRITUAL
LIFE

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THE BEGINNINGS OF THE LIFE OF GRACE &
MYSTICISM AS TOLD BY THE SAINTS

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Compiled by TAN Books

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*Cultivating the Spiritual Life: The Beginnings of Grace & Mysticism
as Told by the Saints* © 2022 TAN Books

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Foreword

Tanquerey's *The Spiritual Life* ranks as one of the very best treatises written in English to give guidance and formation to one entering on the spiritual life in the Catholic tradition. Truly, with a synthesis of the teaching of the Fathers, Saint Thomas, and the mystics both of the sixteenth century and the French school of spirituality, Tanquerey's work is indeed timeless—useful to any Catholic in any age.

Cultivating the Spiritual Life takes the springboard and foundation of this great work, the first few sections titled *Organism of a Christian Life*, and organizes it into daily readings for the entire year. In the course of these readings, we have added a theme from a saint, a further reading which serves as a commentary on the same subject to open up considerations and applications to our daily lives. Tanquerey's work is in general more scholastic, though written at a less academic level, and thus these additional readings are intended to be easier and more devotional. Some are from saints, others from mystics and theologians from the tradition. All are drawn from public domain sources.



We hope the reader will take in these readings and meditations deeply so as to begin the journey of the spiritual life, which, though it will never be complete in this life, nevertheless requires exercise, direction, and meditation so that one may obtain a truly unitive life of communion with God.

—Editor

PART I

Graces, Virtues, and Gifts





Habitual Grace

Day 1

God out of His infinite goodness wills to lift us up to Himself in the measure that our weak nature allows, and for this purpose gives us a principle of supernatural life; a Godlike, vital principle, which is habitual grace. It is called created grace in contradistinction to uncreated grace, which is the indwelling itself of the Holy Spirit within us. Created grace makes us *like unto God* and unites us to Him in the closest manner: *“this deification consists, in so far as is possible, in a certain resemblance to God and union with Him.”* These two points of view we shall explain presently by giving the *traditional definition* and by determining precisely the nature of the union that grace produces between God and the soul.

—*The Spiritual Life*, 105



It is on humble souls that God pours down His fullest light and grace. He teaches them what scholars cannot learn, and mysteries that the wisest cannot solve He can make plain to them.

—St. Vincent de Paul

Let us not fear to lose ourselves in this ineffable union with God. We are lost in an unfathomable abyss, an abyss, not of annihilation and darkness, but one of the greatest glory and happiness. We lose ourselves only to find ourselves again in God, or to find God Himself with His whole glory and beatitude. For the more we belong to God, the more He belongs to us; the more we live in Him and for Him, the more He lives in us and for us. Is a branch lost when it is grafted onto a more excellent tree and begins to receive its life from this superior tree? Left to itself, it would have a much less perfect life, but now it can boast not only of the life which it draws from the tree, but also of the life and perfection which the root and the trunk possess for themselves. Thus, when we are united to God by grace, we not only obtain and direct into our soul a ray of divine glory, a small stream of divine life, but we may also consider as our own the divine Sun Itself, the fountain of divine life, and we may rejoice at God's perfections as though they were ours. Hence, by the very fact that we are deified in a twofold manner, we also partake in a twofold manner of the divine beatitude: first, by beholding the beauty and bliss of God as He Himself beholds and enjoys it; secondly, by possessing through grace this glory and bliss and calling it our own.

—Matthias J. Scheeben,
The Glories of Divine Grace



Day 2

Sanctifying or habitual grace is commonly defined as a supernatural quality inherent in the soul which makes us partakers of the divine nature and of the divine life in a real and formal, but accidental manner.

Grace is a reality of the supernatural order, but not a substance, for no created substance could be supernatural. It is but a mode of being, a state of the soul, a quality inherent in the soul's substance that transforms it and raises it above all natural beings, even the most perfect.

Grace is a permanent quality remaining in the soul as long as we do not forfeit it by mortal sin. "It is," as Cardinal Mercier says, on the authority of Bossuet, "a spiritual quality infused into our souls by Jesus Christ, which penetrates our inmost being, instils itself into the very marrow of the soul and goes forth (through the virtues) to all its faculties. The soul that possesses it is made pure and pleasing in the eyes of God. He makes such a soul His sanctuary, His temple, His tabernacle, His paradise.

—*The Spiritual Life*, 106

This is the business of our life. By labor and prayer, to advance in the grace of God, till we come to that height of perfection in which, with clean hearts, we may behold God.

—*St. Augustine*

Through grace, the aid of the Holy Spirit becomes natural to us, because Sanctifying Grace clothes us with a heavenly nature. It is given as a staff in our hand that will never be taken away from us, unless we ourselves cast it away. It surrounds us always as the light of the sun surrounds our eye and never withdraws itself from us,



except when we close our eyes or tear them out. It knocks continually at the door of our heart in order to stir us on to good; it speaks to us in order to lead us to all truth; it inclines us to all good and restrains us and holds us back from sin; it strengthens us in the hour of danger and holds us upright when we are about to stagger and fall. That which Moses sang of Israel holds also in regard to us: “He led him about and taught him: and he kept him as the apple of his eye. As the eagle, enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, he spread his wings, and has taken him and carried him on his shoulders” (Deut. 32:10–11).

—Matthias J. Scheeben,
The Glories of Divine Grace

Day 3

This quality, according to the forceful expression of St. Peter, makes us “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Ptr. 1:4). According to St. Paul, it causes us to enter into communion with the Holy Spirit, “the communication of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:13), and St. John adds that it establishes a sort of fellowship between us, and the Father and the Son. It does not make us the equals of God but it changes us into Godlike beings, makes us like unto God. Nor does it give us the life of the Godhead itself which is incommunicable, but it imparts to us a life similar to God’s.

—*The Spiritual Life*, 107

Teach us to guard carefully the gifts of grace, striving ever after sanctity, so that, being made like unto the image of your beauty, we may be worthy to become the sharers of your eternal happiness. Amen.

—*St. Paschasius*



Let us approach God, therefore, with full confidence, and take His hand, that He may save us. How quickly the unfortunate one who has fallen into a well grasps at the saving rope that is cast to him; how he clings to it, forgetting everything except the fear that it might break! This care is for us superfluous. “A threefold cord is not easily broken” (Eccles. 4:12). The life-rope that is thrown to us is made up of the mercy of the Father, the sacrifice of the Son, and the love of the Holy Spirit. Let us grasp it with faith, cling to it with hope, hold fast to it with perseverance and we are saved. But let us not think that the task of hope is already finished when we have once cast ourselves into the hands of divine mercy, that it may draw us out of the sea of our sinfulness. No, we need this virtue on all the paths of our life. And who knows but that, later on, we may need it still more than in the beginning!

—Matthias J. Scheeben,
The Glories of Divine Grace

Day 4

God’s own life consists in direct self-contemplation and love of Himself. No creature whatever, no matter how perfect, could of itself contemplate the essence of the Godhead, “who dwells in the light inaccessible: but God, by a privilege, gratuitous in every sense of the word, calls man to contemplate this divine essence in heaven. As a man is utterly incapable of this, God lifts him up, makes his intelligence transcend its natural capacities, and confers on him this power through the *light of glory*.”

—*The Spiritual Life*, 108



The more we conquer ourselves the more He gives us of His grace; and if today we have had power to overcome one difficulty, tomorrow and the day after we shall be able to surmount others that are much greater and more distressing.

—St. Vincent de Paul

The Saints would soon have quit the way of perfection without the spirit of penance. This it was that strengthened them and made them capable of heroic deeds and sacrifices. It is certain that there is no one in Heaven who did not have the spirit of penance, and one can say of most of the citizens of Heaven that they owe their heavenly reward more to penance than to their other works. What shall we say, then, we who know that there are only two ways to happiness, that of innocence and that of penance—we who have long ago left the way of innocence! Let us therefore be eager for penance—we who have more reason for penance than the Saints. And if sometimes, conscious of our weakness, we wonder if we are doing all that is fitting as children of God, let this be an admonition for us to do penance so much the more zealously, as becomes sinners. Then we shall not have to fear that we may fail to attain our sublime goal.

—Matthias J. Scheeben,
The Glories of Divine Grace

Day 5

St. John the Evangelist says: “We shall be like Him: because we shall see Him as He is.” We shall see, adds St. Paul, no longer through the mirror of creatures, but face to face with luminous clearness: “We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then



face to face.” Since we shall know and love God as He knows and loves Himself, we shall also share in God’s own life, even if it be in a finite way. Theologians explain this by saying that the divine essence will come and unite itself with the soul’s inmost being, so as to allow us to contemplate the Divinity directly, with the aid of no image or of any created intermediary.

—*The Spiritual Life*, 108

This is the business of our life. By labor and prayer, to advance in the grace of God, till we come to that height of perfection in which, with clean hearts, we may behold God.

—*St. Augustine*

It is not visible because it is a wonder wrought in the soul and not in the body. We cannot see it because we cannot see God, with whom we are united by it. As God would not be the infinitely great God if we could see Him with our bodily eyes, so grace would not be so great and admirable if it were visible to us.

—Matthias J. Scheeben,
The Glories of Divine Grace

Day 6

Habitual grace is already a preparation for the Beatific Vision and a foretaste, as it were, of that unspeakable boon; it is the bud that needs but to open to show forth the flower. Habitual grace and the Beatific Vision are, then, one in kind and one in nature.

—*The Spiritual Life*, 109



Christ made my soul beautiful with the jewels of grace and virtue. I belong to Him whom the angels serve.

—St. Agnes

In the Beatific Vision grace makes us share in the divine happiness by raising us up to the immediate enjoyment of the infinite and highest good. As much as the Divine Nature is above ours, so much the divine beatitude must surpass that which is attainable by and suitable to our nature. The animal is not capable of the same enjoyment as man; it can only delight in the things of the senses. Man takes delight in spiritual things, in order, harmony and beauty, especially as these are found in truth and virtue. In like manner, the joy and beatitude of God has an object accessible only to Himself, whose beauty and loveliness eye has not seen, nor ear heard and which has not entered into the heart of man, but is evident only to God Himself, to His own infinitely good, glorious, beautiful being.

—Matthias J. Scheeben,
The Glories of Divine Grace

Day 7

This participation in the divine life is *formal*; it is not simply virtual. Virtual participation means that we share a quality in a *different way* from that in which it is possessed by the principal where it is found. Thus, reason is simply a virtual participation in the divine intellect, because reason gives us a knowledge of truth, but vastly different from that knowledge of truth which God possesses. Mindful then of disparity and distinction, we can say that such is not the case between the Beatific Vision and faith.



Both cause us to know God as He is, not in the same degree, it is true, but the knowledge acquired through either of them is the same in kind.

—*The Spiritual Life*, 110

What does it avail to know that there is a God, which you not only believe by Faith, but also know by reason: what does it avail that you know Him if you think little of Him?

—*St. Thomas More*

“I cannot express, O my God,” says St. Anselm (Proslog.), “how happy Your elect will be; certainly, they will rejoice according to the measure of their love, and they will love after the measure of their knowledge. But how great will be their knowledge, and how great their love? Certainly, no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered, in this life, into the heart of man, how much they will know and love You in the life to come. I beseech You, O God, that I may know You, love You, rejoice in You; and if I cannot do this perfectly in this life, that I may at least progress from day to day, until I arrive at this perfection. Let my knowledge of You progress here and become perfect there; let my love increase here and be perfect there: that my joy may be great in hope here and perfect in possession there.”

—Matthias J. Scheeben,
The Glories of Divine Grace

Day 8

The participation we have in God’s life is *accidental*, not *substantial*. It is thus distinct from the generation of the Word, who



receives the whole substance of the Father. It is likewise distinct from the hypostatic union, which is a substantial union of the divine and human natures in the person of the Word. In our union with God we keep our personality, and therefore, this union is not substantial.

—*The Spiritual Life*, 111

Grace, being altogether above human nature, can neither be a substance nor the soul's substantial form. It can only be its accidental form.

—*St. Thomas Aquinas*

We shall therefore be perfect partakers of the Divine Nature only when, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we participate also in its sanctity. The holy Fathers identify this partaking of the holiness of the Divine Nature with a great and potent fire which seizes our imperfect nature, penetrates it, transforms it and cleanses it from all dross and stain, so that our goodness is, as far as possible, as pure and perfect as the divine. “Even the princes and powers of Heaven,” says St. Basil, “are not by nature holy. The iron lying in the furnace does not lose the nature of iron; and yet, by intimate union with the fire, the iron becomes fiery itself, is penetrated by the whole nature of fire, and even assumes its color, warmth and power. In the same way, by their union with God, the Angels and souls of men have this sanctity inoculated and implanted into their whole being. There is only this difference; the Holy Spirit is by nature holiness, but the holiness of angels and men is a participation in His natural sanctity.”

—Matthias J. Scheeben,
The Glories of Divine Grace



Day 9

Bearing in mind that this union is not substantial, we steer clear of pantheism and still conceive a very exalted idea of the nature of grace. It reveals itself to us as a *likeness of God* stamped by Him on our souls: “*Let us make man according to our image and likeness.*”

—*The Spiritual Life*, 111

Our Lord does not come down from Heaven every day to lie in a golden ciborium. He comes to find another heaven which is infinitely dearer to Him—the heaven of our souls, created in His Image.

—*St. Thérèse of Lisieux*

If a man would give himself entirely to this sensuous life, he would evidently renounce his noble, spiritual nature and the natural likeness of God in his soul and would degrade himself to the level of the brute—and even beneath this level. The animal leads a sensuous life because it cannot do otherwise; it is called and qualified for no other. By such a life, however, man drags into the mire all the high and noble qualities with which God endowed him. By throwing himself with his greater strength into the sensuous, he does not confine himself to the limits which nature has placed for the brute, but sinks deeper than that level. Therefore, our nobler nature struggles against such conduct. The spirit opposes the flesh, says the Apostle, and the shame that covers our cheeks is witness thereto.

—Matthias J. Scheeben,
The Glories of Divine Grace



Day 10

In order to help us to understand this divine resemblance the Fathers have employed various comparisons. Our soul, they say, is like to a living image of the Most Blessed Trinity, for the Holy Spirit Himself impresses His features on us as a seal does on molten wax, stamping and leaving there the divine likeness.

—*The Spiritual Life*, 112

Grace can do nothing without the will and the will can do nothing without grace.

—*St. John Chrysostom*

Since God is a spirit, material things reveal themselves as the work of His hands and bespeak His wisdom and power, but they do not represent His nature. Our souls, however, and all pure spirits, are by their very nature a certain image of the Divine Nature; they are, like God, spiritual, rational, endowed with free will. Yet their nature is finite, created out of nothing, and therefore very different from the Divine Nature. They are similar to the picture of a man which a painter has painted on a canvas in various colors. This picture reveals to us the form, the features, and the complexion of the person represented, but it always remains far inferior to the likeness that a mirror reflects. For in a mirror the person appears by his own light and not by that of another. He appears in his whole natural beauty, freshness and life. In like manner the rational creature then only becomes perfectly similar to God when it has become a true mirror of the Divinity, reflecting It in Its own peculiar beauty. The rational creature becomes perfectly similar to God when it has been penetrated and glorified by the divine fire; when, in a manner, it



has been transformed into God, as a bright crystal globe that collects the rays of the sun appears like the sun itself.

—Matthias J. Scheeben,
The Glories of Divine Grace

Day 11

The fathers conclude that the soul in the state of grace possesses an entrancing beauty since the author of that image is none other than God Himself who is infinitely perfect: “Behold your likeness, O man; see your likeness beautiful, made by your God, the Great Artist, the Master-Painter.” They rightly reason that, far from disfiguring or destroying such resemblance, we must perfect it more and more. At times they compare the soul to those transparent bodies that receiving the sun’s rays become all aglow and reflect in turn a marvelous light all around.

—*The Spiritual Life*, 112

Love tends to union with the object loved. Now Jesus Christ loves a soul that is in a state of grace with an immense love; He ardently desires to unite Himself with it.

—*St. Alphonsus Liguori*

Why have the saints become so great and so glorious if not because they have cooperated with, and in their whole life expressed the image of, that grace which we all may acquire? All true Christians who are in the state of grace, are called saints by the Apostle, because they have been sanctified in the waters of regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit, and possess, so to speak, the substance of holiness. We all may and ought to become saintly as they, if not in