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The structure of human being and the possibility of mystical experience. A Thomistic view

In the present investigation I try to explicate the Thomistic concept of soul as a principle of psychosomatic unity of man. Among powers or “potencies” of the soul we find “inner senses” which are to be well differentiated from the intellect. Such a distinction allows us to proof the spirituality of human soul and also to explain the possibility and the nature of spiritual and mystical experience. A paradigmatic testimony of such an experience we find in the writings of S. Teresa of Avila. In order to interpret her spiritual texts we need also well understand the distinction between the sensory appetitive powers, i.e. emotive powers, and the spiritual appetitive power, which is the will. Teresa does not lead us from the sphere of intellect to that of emotionality, as commonly seen, rather in the opposite sense: the center of gravity of spiritual life moves from the sphere of imagination and emotionality to that of the intellect and the will. In the contemplative prayer the will is fixed in the mystery of God through mediation of divinely illuminated intellect. And it is the will that engages, finally, also the sensory part of the soul.