

# *Outline of the Writings of St. Teresa of Avila*



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## *Preface*

This outline of the works of St. Teresa of Avila aims at providing a handy guide to her teaching on prayer and the mystical life. With St. John of the Cross, she is a Doctor of the Church, mainly because of the richness and completeness of her teaching on prayer. She writes in a lively, conversational style which has been admired by generations of readers in the five centuries that have elapsed since her birth.

In the following pages you will find a summary each of her works as set out in `The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila` translated by Kieran Kavanaugh ocd and Otilio Rodriguez ocd, ICS, Washington, published in three volumes. No attempt will be made to treat her voluminous letters, also translated by Kieran Kavanaugh in two volumes.

Volume 3 of The Collected Works also include Teresa's Constitutions for her nuns and instructions On Making a Visitation as well as two additional items. The volume concludes with a selection of 31 of Teresa's Poems translated by Adrian J. Cooney ocd.

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## 1. *The Book of Her Life*. (1562)

The work known as *The Book of her Life* an autobiography by St. Teresa of Avila, has an interesting pre-history.<sup>1</sup> In the Collected Works we find a section entitled *Spiritual Testimonies*. The first two of these might be considered the beginnings of the *Life* as we now have it. They sketch out for her confessor the stage she was at in her prayer life. One of her confessors, Garcia de Toledo, asked her to expand on this kind of ‘testimony’ and so Teresa wrote a longer account in the form of a letter which we may regard as the first draft of the *Life*. This has now been lost. Sensing her potential for elaborating the mysteries of the life of prayer, Garcia de Toledo asked her to write a still longer account of her spiritual life. In addition he asked that she include in it an account of the foundation of the first convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns at St. Joseph’s in Avila.<sup>2</sup> This second manuscript was greatly expanded and Chaps. 11 – 21 constitute an independent and valuable treatise on prayer.

After writing a self-deprecating prologue, Teresa launches into the story of her infancy in Chap.1, describing her pious and God-fearing parents. Firstly she tells us her father was a most charitable man and that her mother also possessed many virtues. A beautiful woman, she suffered much in her life, bearing twelve children and dying at the age of thirty three. The most colourful anecdote recorded by Teresa about her

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<sup>1</sup> We might cite as a ‘post-history’ the fact of Edith Stein taking up this book lent her by a friend and reading it at one sitting ( into the night ). When finished she is said to have remarked, ‘This is the truth.’ That truth led her to follow Teresa into Carmel and the path she chose took her to martyrdom in Auschwitz.

<sup>2</sup> This she does in Chapters 32-36. Then in the remaining four chapters she reverts to discussing the ‘favours’ granted to her in prayer. She will devote a whole book to the complete account of her new convents, called ‘The Book of her Foundations’. This is a little longer than her *Way of Perfection* and much longer than *The Interior Castle*.

early life concerned her desire for instant martyrdom in order to see God. She conspired with her brother Rodrigo to invite the Moors to do them this honour but they had only got as far as the 'Four Columns' outside Avila when they were returned home by a sharp-eyed uncle.<sup>3</sup>

Chap. 2 opens by referring back to a habit of reading books of chivalry or romance which she and her mother enjoyed. With hindsight she considered this a dangerous pastime, and while insinuating that it was an imperfection in her mother, she excused her on the ground that it was a form of escapism from her many sufferings.<sup>4</sup> As her father was very much against this kind of diversion, the reading had to be done clandestinely. He himself preferred to read books like 'The Consolations of Philosophy' by Boethius. At this point Teresa also castigates herself for the frivolous friendships she engaged in with her young cousins, both male and female, and one in particular, though this cousin was female. She refers to another male cousin with whom she was friendly when she was about fifteen or sixteen. This cousin was seeking her hand in marriage, so she had cleared with her confessor the fact that there was nothing wrong with such a friendship.

### *School Days.*

By this time Teresa was attending a convent school and one of the nuns spoke to her about God and taught her to pray. At the same time she had no desire to be a nun herself but she also admits she had a certain fear of embracing the married state. This fear may have been related to Teresa's latent

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<sup>3</sup> These were known as the Quatro Postes.

<sup>4</sup> In Don Quixote, Ch. 6, Cervantes has an amusing discussion of these books of chivalry where he recounts a book burning session by a priest, a barber and a housekeeper. The first handed to him was 'The Four Books of Amadis of Gaul,' as being the origin of all others of the genre. Amadis of Gaul was first printed in Spain in 1508.

‘feminism’ than for other reasons. Later on she would tacitly approve of a young lady who had no desire to live a life of subjection to someone – ‘to love, honour and obey a husband’! However her reluctance to become a nun lessened with time, but she would not opt for the convent where she attended school. She resolved instead to become a nun in the convent where a friend was a member of the community gradually grew stronger. However she immediately encountered the opposition of her dearly loved father. Here we have a striking similarity with what her famous spiritual daughter, Thérèse of Lisieux, would experience three centuries later, though Louis Martin did not oppose his daughter’s vocation. Rather the similarity lies in the love these two women had for their fathers, realizing that leaving them would cause them such heartbreak. Here however Teresa’s iron will comes to the fore and she resorted to a ruse to gain entry to the convent. She persuaded one of her brothers to become a friar and left early one morning in his company, supposedly heading for the Dominican friary. Teresa’s destination however was the door of the convent of the Incarnation. Nevertheless the wrench she experienced leaving her father’s house was so intense that she compared it to dying. Gradually it seems her father reconciled himself to what had happened.

### *Mysterious illness.*

It wasn’t long before Teresa’s health, prone as she was to illness since childhood, broke down completely. It was decided that she, accompanied by her friend Joanna Suarez from the convent, should travel a distance of about fifty miles to enlist the services of a quack doctor. On the way there her uncle gave her a copy of ‘The Third Spiritual Alphabet’ by Francis de Osuna, an influential book which dealt with the prayer of recollection.

Before the ‘cure’ treatment was scheduled to start at a

certain place, there was an intervening period of several months and they were able to reside at her sister's house which was in the vicinity. Teresa grew in her dedication to prayer, and at this point in Chap. 4 she has a short digression on meditation, discursive reasoning, meditative reading and so on. She made rapid progress on the way of prayer and experienced the 'prayer of quiet' and sometimes briefly the 'prayer of union.' These were technical terms for such states that she would learn about in later life. Teresa tells us here what her approach to prayer was this: 'I tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ our God and our Lord present within me and that was my way of prayer.' (Chap.14) She was drawn to solitude and contemplation from an early stage.

Teresa tells us that she found it almost impossible to go through the exercise known as meditation. Perhaps it was partly her feminine intuition and partly a kind of 'premature progress' which made her ripe for the kind of loving contemplation about which John of the Cross writes. Because of her inability and disinclination to meditate discursively, she found it helpful to have a book with her at prayer to anchor her thoughts. The very fact of having the book to hand was enough to spark off a deep sense of recollection. Rather surprisingly the condition persisted for eighteen years of her life until she was thirty-eight years old.

In a style typical of Teresa, at the beginning of Chap. 5 she refers back to an experience early in her novitiate that she had forgotten to relate. The matter concerned a nun in the community who suffered from a repugnant disease – or certainly the other nuns found it repugnant. Teresa says she admired her patience and this inspired her to, 'Ask God to give me the illnesses by which He would be served.' This is very reminiscent of the English mystic Julian of Norwich in the 14<sup>th</sup> century who made a similar prayer to God. Julian writes:

‘.....I deliberately wanted to be ill to the point of death.’<sup>5</sup> Her prayer was answered! So too was Teresa’s prayer answered, and answered very definitely over the next three years, as Teresa tells us with a hint of humour. She suffered a long and painful illness which completely crippled her.

### *Influence For Good.*

In Chap. 5 we have another ‘aside’ on an incident that occurred due to the circumstances in which she found herself. At this time she began to confess to the local cleric and after a while Teresa tells us: ‘He became extremely fond of me.’ This is not altogether surprising, given what we know of Teresa’s beauty and charm which are well attested. Perhaps due to her transparent goodness, this cleric began to confide in her, revealing something of his own less than exemplary lifestyle. It seems that for many years he had been involved in a liaison with a local woman and she had persuaded him to wear a ‘charm’ around his neck to bind him to her. Teresa’s telling of this story reveals more about herself than the forgotten country cleric she encountered. Quite ingenuously she tells us: ‘Once I knew about this charm, I began to show him more love.’ It would be very difficult to unravel the tortuous psychology behind Teresa’s telling of this story. We need to remember she was reliving her life from a point in the very distant future to the events she narrates. Somewhat on the lines of Delilah extracting from Samson the secret of his strength, Teresa got her hands on the ‘charm’ and threw it in the river. This signaled the cleric’s spiritual rehabilitation. Just one year after first meeting him, the priest died.

Meanwhile the drastic treatment got under way, which consisted of daily purges which reduced her to a skeleton. Her father soon had the good sense to take her back to regular

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<sup>5</sup> *Revelations of Divine Love*, Mother Julian of Norwich, Hodder and Stoughton, 1987



doctors but the damage had been done. Before long she was on the brink of death and indeed given up for dead, as she afterwards discovered wax on her eyelids.<sup>6</sup> Eventually after much suffering of an excruciating kind, and despairing of the power of earthly doctors to cure her, Teresa turned to St. Joseph. She was convinced she was cured of this illness through his intercession. 'Those who cannot find a master to teach them prayer should take this glorious saint for their master and they will not go astray.'<sup>7</sup>

Here again we have a parallel with the case of her spiritual daughter Thérèse so many years later. Thérèse attributed her cure from a crippling illness to the smile of Our Lady which beamed on her from the little statue in her sick room.

### *Frivolous Friendships.*

Even after these experiences of healing, renewal and growth in prayer, Teresa accuses herself of continued infidelity to her calling, by becoming involved in useless friendships. At the beginning of Chap.7 she tells us: 'Since I thus began to go from pastime to pastime, from vanity to vanity, to place myself so often in serious occasions, and to allow my soul to become spoiled by so many vanities, I was then ashamed to return to a search for God by means of a friendship as special as is that found in the intimate exchange of prayer.'<sup>8</sup> She felt that by simply engaging in the usual vocal prayers she fulfilled her obligation and need not seriously apply herself to mental prayer and intimacy with God. However her protestations of indifference are not to be taken too literally, for she does admit that she often withdrew into solitude to pray and read, and she conversed a lot about God with her friends. She tells us that she

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<sup>6</sup> It was a Spanish custom to seal the eyes of the deceased with wax from the blessed candle in the sick room.

<sup>7</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa, pp. 80-81, *ibid.*, V.1, p. 82.

continued for a long time somewhat divided in her approach – neither wholly belonging to God nor wholly given to the world. Consolation in prayer was one of her sharpest trials because it underlined for her the extent of her ingratitude to God. Teresa makes a strong plea that people who take prayer seriously engage in dialogue with others with similar leanings so as to encourage one another to grow spiritually. She feels she has to make an apology for this against people who insist that the desire for sharing involved ‘vain glory.’ Evidently this practice of sharing was frowned on in the spiritual climate of her day.

### *Perseverance.*

Teresa sums up her own dilemma during this almost twenty year period of her life: ‘When I was experiencing the enjoyments of the world, I felt sorrow when I recalled what I owed to God. When I was with God, my attachments to the world disturbed me.’<sup>9</sup>

Teresa feels that the desire to hold on to prayer, come what may, is the real lifesaver. She writes again in Chap. 8: ‘I recount this also that one may understand how, if the soul perseveres in prayer, in the midst of sins, temptations and failures of a thousand kinds that the devil places in its path, in the end I hold as certain, the Lord will draw it forth to the harbor of salvation as – now it seems – he did for me.’

Teresa goes on to make a powerful appeal to us to immerse ourselves in prayer. During the course of this appeal she makes the wonderful observation: ‘For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.’<sup>10</sup>

The whole object of prayer is for us to accommodate ourselves to a patient Lord who waits for us to grow spiritually.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 94-95

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 96

In spite of our unfaithfulness, all that's necessary is to want to spend some time each day in the company of this loving Lord. Under the inspiration of St. Teresa, two hours meditation each day, one in the morning and one in the evening became the norm for Carmelite communities, both of men and women. We need also to remember while reading her life that Teresa felt the necessity to put up a defence of mental prayer which was under suspicion in her day.

### *Conversion.*

In the year 1554 when Teresa was 39 years old, she had a touching spiritual experience which she calls her 'conversion.' One day when she entered the oratory she saw a statue of the 'Ecce-Homo' which aroused in her deep devotion. Presumably she had noticed this statue previously but it didn't impact her until this particular day. The statue in question can still be seen at the convent of the Incarnation in Avila. The sight of the suffering Christ caused her heart to break. She threw herself down at his feet and vowed she would not rise until she had obtained the grace to change. In this experience Teresa identified herself with Mary Magdalen at the feet of Jesus.

A great deal has been written in books on prayer and spirituality about 'method' and how to proceed in making meditation. At this point Teresa tells us what her method was. She tried to picture Christ within her because of her inability to reflect discursively, and she favoured scenes such as Jesus alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. Though she found no help in the traditional discursive methods of meditation, she was helped in other ways. 'It helped me to look at fields or water or flowers. In these things I found a remembrance of the creator.' This is very reminiscent of St. John of the Cross in the way he praises the beauty of creation in the *Spiritual Canticle*. In her encounter with the Lord in prayer at this time, Teresa gives us a striking image of her experience: 'I was like one who is blind

or in darkness; he speaks with and sees that that person is with him because he knows with certainty that he is there, (I mean he understands and believes that he is there, but does not see him); such was the case with me when I thought of our Lord.’

<sup>11</sup> About this time someone gave Teresa a copy of the ‘Confessions’ of St. Augustine to. This book had a great influence on her and she felt, as in the case of Mary Magdalen, that she identified with him in his conversion experience in the garden. We find in her life now a renewed application to prayer to spending time with the Lord, as she would put it.

### *Progress.*

Now in Chap.10 of her *Life* Teresa begins to relate what happened when she gave herself unreservedly to God. When she was engaged in prayer, a feeling of the presence of God would come on her unexpectedly and this feeling would carry deep conviction of its authenticity. It was the conviction of a kind of mutual presence to and in each other. This is a mystical experience by which the person is drawn outside her or himself. For Teresa, this feeling resulted in a great suffusion of tenderness, accompanied by a liberal shedding of tears. She felt herself the recipient of great gifts from the Lord and she says that it’s important to recognise we’re being loaded with gifts by the Lord.

### *Markers Of Progress.*

Teresa now plans to give an anonymous account of the mystical graces with which God showered her after she had made her final surrender to him. The better to communicate this to us, however, she first proposes to give a more ordered account of prayer itself and this will interrupt the narrative of her life.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

## *St. Teresa on Prayer (Life, Chaps.11-21)*

### *Prayer of the Four Waters - First Water.*

From Chaps.11 - 21, we're dealing with a separate unit which in itself is a little classic on prayer. '...(T)hose who are beginning to be the servants of love' that's how St. Teresa describes people who are resolved to devote themselves to a life of prayer. This resolve directs us to 'Him who has loved us so much.'<sup>12</sup> Teresa then asks why this strong resolution doesn't bring us immediately to the possession of complete love. This failure she attributes to a lack of generosity on our part. We should do all we can to obtain this blessing, especially by preparing ourselves to receive it. We need to make a full surrender of ourselves to God. God will give Himself to anyone who keeps trying. The Lord will also supply the necessary courage to face the inevitable obstacles placed in our way by the devil who wishes to inhibit the possibility of spiritual development in the individual.

The preliminary stages of prayer, then, are the most difficult and involve the greatest degree of application. She writes: 'In the other degrees of prayer the chief thing is fruition, although, whether in the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the road, all have their crosses, different as these may be. For those who follow Christ must take the way which He took, unless they want to be lost.'<sup>13</sup>

Teresa searches about for some way of describing this whole process and she hits on the comparison of someone cultivating a garden. A garden can be irrigated in any of four different ways: first, simply by taking water from a well; second, by the use of a water-wheel and buckets; third, by a river or stream, and fourth, by heavy rainfall.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.110.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.112.

In the *Book of Her Life*, Teresa sees the development of prayer life happening in four stages. She will explain the four stages or degrees of prayer by reference to four different methods of watering a garden. In this way we have the well known description of the ‘prayer of the four waters.’

Teresa presupposes the Lord has cleared the ground for the beginner and sown the necessary plants of virtue. What’s needed now is that the seedlings be cultivated. Beginners in prayer need to work hard at the task of drawing water from the well. By this she means some effort must be made to keep the senses recollected or concentrated on God. This can be difficult because of the distractions we allow ourselves. Then they, (beginners), have to try to meditate on the life of Christ, and this, she thinks can fatigue their minds. Thus far we can make progress by ourselves – of course with the help of God – for without that, as we know we cannot think a single good thought. Teresa thus insists on the need for divine grace in the spiritual enterprise. She shows herself aware of the Lord’s words in the discourse at the last supper: ‘For cut off from me you can do nothing.’ (John.15.51).

The beginner will inevitably encounter difficulty and will sometimes feel completely inept and dry. Not alone that, but she or he may experience a positive dislike and distaste for engaging in the meditation. This could be a critical point of growth. Many people won’t want to continue pursuing a line of action contrary to what their feelings dictate. But Teresa sees this as a temptation and says that at this point it will be necessary to recall that Jesus had a difficult life and endured the suffering of the cross. This whole process is part of our testing-time and a preparation for a deeper spiritual life.

The main thing is ‘to desire to be alone and commune with God.’ If we try to be indifferent to the presence or absence of emotional satisfaction when we pray, that’s a mark of growth. We must try to give rather than receive, ‘for it is in

giving that we receive.’ The reason why some people make no headway is that they refuse to embrace the cross from the beginning. It doesn’t matter if our meditation is intellectually unsatisfying, what’s important is that we long to think about God and love God. Nor is there any point in forcing ourselves when we feel out of sorts; we can always engage in activity that will benefit others at such a time. Teresa even suggests a walk in the country at this point!

### *Beginnings.*

In Chap.12 she continues to discuss the first stage of prayer. We should keep in mind, of course, that Teresa is looking back on her own spiritual development from a very advanced stage. Consequently she feels that at the outset a certain amount is left to our own initiative. But all the same she is careful to point out that everything is a gift of God. What the person can do is to reflect on the sufferings of Jesus and on other themes such as future glory or the resurrection of Christ. It’s possible for the person to imagine being in an intimate relationship with Christ, and engage in a loving dialogue with him: ‘Ask him for the things it has need of, make complaints to him of its trials, rejoice with him in its joys and yet never allow its joys to make it forgetful of him.’<sup>14</sup>

This is an approach which is suitable and necessary at all stages of the spiritual journey. No formal prayers need be said but we should use whatever is subjectively found best. We must not try to force ‘supernatural’ effects; this would show a lack of humility in the spiritual life and could only result in harm. After all we’re already getting more than we deserve from the Lord! What Teresa means in this context is that we must not try to enter a passive stage of the spiritual life until the Lord leads us into it. This means that we must continue working normally with our minds, reflecting and dwelling on

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.120.

the topics suggested.

Teresa begins Chap.13 by warning us against certain pitfalls. Initially, she says, we should try to appear happy and free. 'There are some people who think that devotion will slip away from them if they relax a little.' So here she delivers some homely advice, and very wisely talks about the need for relaxation when discretion dictates. Then she very characteristically appeals for courageous effort. We need to have dreams and desires if we are to achieve anything. It would be a misunderstanding of humility to want to dampen our ardour in relation to God.

Teresa here indicates another trap common with beginners: they want everyone to be extremely spiritual! A similar temptation is to feel distressed at the failings of others. The corrective for this type of censoriousness is to look at the attractive qualities in our neighbour while keeping our own defects before our eyes. The ideal in fact is to consider everyone else better than yourself. Teresa rounds off her treatment of this first water by advising people not to spend the whole period of prayer in the actual work of meditating, even when they find it going well. She would prefer if they would sometimes just remain quietly in the presence of Christ. 'If we can we should occupy ourselves in looking upon Him Who is looking at us; keep Him company; talk with Him; pray to Him; humble ourselves before Him; have our delight in Him..' <sup>15</sup>

### *Second Water:*

We now move on to speak about the second degree of prayer. Here we have to presuppose that a great deal of growth has taken place. For St. Teresa this is the prayer of the second water. At this point, much of the laborious undertakings of the first stage can be dispensed with. Here some labour-saving devices are employed for watering the garden. Teresa now

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 133.



talks about using a pulley and buckets whereby the garden receives more water with less effort. This means that a great deal of progress has been made in the art of meditation. The shape of one's prayer has now merged into what can be described as the 'prayer of quiet.' She visualises the person becoming absorbed by the love of God or Christ. I suppose one could accurately describe this as 'being in love' with God. This stage of the prayer life Teresa describes in Chaps.14 and 15 of her *Life*. She tells us tersely that it is a concentration of the faculties within the person. She assures us that the will becomes captive, 'Allowing Him to imprison it as one who well knows how to be the captive of its lover.'<sup>16</sup>

Teresa tells us that what's experienced in this recollected form of prayer has tremendous effects in helping one to behave in a more Christ-like way. There's a very pronounced growth discernible here. She says that the Lord begins to communicate himself to the person. She tells us this is 'true joy'. She's emphatic that this feeling of satisfaction is not self-acquired. God is the giver and the Lord seems to be very near. She certainly underlines the experiential nature of this state – it's not so much that we know God understands us, but that we realise He understands us.

Teresa discusses the fact that she doesn't know whence or how this satisfaction comes to her. Teresa would like to deal in somewhat more detail with this state as it was insufficiently dealt with in the books with which she was familiar. She repeats the little phrase 'these things are verging on the supernatural.' There's also an element of struggle involved in this state no less than in the first. 'The soul suffers many trial for the Lord wants the poor gardener to think that all the trouble he has taken in watering the garden and keeping it alive is lost.'<sup>17</sup> The chapter concludes with Teresa lamenting the fact

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

that having experienced these favours from God and realised they were from God, yet she offended him again. There's a little scriptural phrase which might serve as a text for what Teresa deals with in these two chapters: 'Be still and know that I am God.' It's the Lord who bestows this repose and it's useless to try to prolong it. 'It dares not move or stir, for it thinks that if it does so this blessing may slip from its grasp.'<sup>18</sup>

### *No Turning Back*

Teresa has a very high opinion of this stage in prayer. She makes the interesting observation that many people reach this point but few pass beyond it. It seems that here you meet the temptation to return to the flesh-pots of Egypt. It's not so much the fact that you are liable to commit sin – this goes without saying, for Teresa, the temptation rather is to give up prayer. This is how Teresa describes this phase of prayer: 'This prayer then is a little spark of true love for the Lord, which He begins to enkindle in the soul, and His will is that it should come to understand the nature of this love with its attendant joy.' All effort must be put into nurturing this spark and one hopes it will survive and catch fire later. Teresa again issues a warning about overdoing mental activity at this point. It's better, she thinks, to throw a few straws on this spark than to pile on logs of wood – by which she means clever reflections. But in this transition period, mental and vocal prayer are not to be discarded; they still have a place alongside periods of complete quiet. It's possible to counterfeit this divine quietude, but this is one of the places where Teresa isn't particularly worried about deception. If the person is humble, the satisfaction will be thankfully received and the determination to endure hardship will act as a corrective to such deception.

Teresa says that although there's such a thing as spiritual growth, it's not like physiological growth and we are literally

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.139.

cut down to size occasionally! This means that there are times when we have to get back to basics. Strong foundations are needed in this business and Teresa appeals to Our Lord's injunction, 'Take up your cross and follow me.' One of the signs pointing to the Lord's presence is a divinely induced humility. The Lord gives a special light which produces this, but she doesn't say exactly how God does it. Another grace which God bestows is an intense desire to make progress in prayer whatever the obstacles. There's an awareness of a love for God developing within one, and a tendency to want to be on one's own occasionally in order to enjoy the Lord's presence.

### *Prayer Is The Key.*

Teresa's last word in this connection is that this prayer is the beginning of all blessings. There's such a vivid awareness of God that you're sure God is with you. However the consciousness of failings and weaknesses, again induces a feeling of fear and apprehension. Here Teresa concludes her discussion of this stage of prayer and spiritual growth. It's a kind of interim period, perhaps, for a full-blown mystical life. I think this section is a very valuable part of her treatise on prayer. It's very pertinent to the needs of religious and lay-people who are trying to deepen their relationship with God.

The question arises of course why we baulk at this point and experience no further growth. Teresa confessed herself puzzled by this problem. She concludes that it's to be attributed to 'grave faults.' This seems rather harsh and perhaps her approach is coloured by her ardent Spanish temperament which tended to see things in black and white with very few shades of grey. For her it was all or nothing. The reality of the situation however is that not everyone is made of the same mettle as Teresa, and people can only respond to God according to their capacity. So we could say that failure to advance in a

spectacular way need not be due to ‘grave faults.’ Her ecstasies remind us of the outpourings of courtly love, which is simply the human Teresa responding fully to the torrent of divine love.

### *Third Water.*

The early stages of prayer as we have seen have involved quite a lot of labour. Teresa now feels that definite progress has been made. In the third degree the garden is watered much more abundantly as if by a river or stream. The Lord does more than merely help the gardener; in fact now the Lord seems to be the gardener, ‘for it is He who does everything.’ She describes this condition as a ‘sleep of the faculties’ in the sense that they are not really ‘lost.’ We are given to understand of course that this is a very delightful feeling indeed. The idea seems to be that the person’s energies are occupied with God or absorbed in God – ‘I live now not I, but Christ lives in me.’ The predominant theme of prayer here seems to be the urge to praise God continually and have others praise him also. It would fain be all tongue so that it might praise the Lord. She will echo this thought in her poetry. The tone here seems very elevated but the underlying motive is quite understandable; it’s simply that Teresa is in love with God and is gripped by a ‘heavenly madness.’ In one sense this is fairly common in St. Paul and in the saints and mystics. Teresa turns aside to wonder why it is that preachers do not stir their hearers more than they do. She writes, ‘They are not like the Apostles, flinging it all (worldly wisdom) aside and catching fire with love for God.’<sup>19</sup>

What happens in this state is entirely due to God’s initiative. In Chap. 18 Teresa refers to ‘visits of the Lord to the soul’ and she states that the gardener accomplishes in a moment what we couldn’t achieve by ourselves in twenty years. She calls this prayer a ‘union of the entire soul with

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.151.

God,' but the faculties enjoy and understand what God is doing. Moreover the person can be active here, it can be both Mary and Martha at the same time. She goes on to describe a deeper kind of union which involves a lot of turmoil on the part of memory and imagination. In this context she remarks that the person must take no more notice of the will than it would of someone deranged! Teresa concludes her description of the prayer of the third water by saying that the body shares in the soul's joy and delight.

#### *Fourth Water.*

In the fourth degree of prayer we're dealing with the rain that falls from on high. This means that it's completely the work of God, God's gift. In the preceding stages the individual had some hand in the task. A sense of indefinable rejoicing characterises this fourth stage, but the reason for the rejoicing eludes the understanding. Teresa tells us that this rejoicing engages all the senses to such an extent that they cannot express this rejoicing; the body is powerless and the soul cannot explain its happiness. The ability to communicate the experience or not is used as a kind of criterion; if the person cannot communicate this state then it is union of the faculties with God; if it can communicate it, then it's not union. Teresa confesses herself confused by the distinction between 'mind' and 'soul' or 'spirit' in her efforts to explain union of the faculties. She would like, however, to explain how the person feels at this time. Union, she says, is self-evident, 'Two different things becoming one.' We're reminded here of the scriptural use of the figure of marriage which of course the mystics are fond of employing as a metaphor for union with God. The onset of this union causes Teresa to express her gratitude to God in an intimate outpouring. She then refers to some phenomena which accompany the state she's describing. She first refers to elevation of the spirit and union as if they

were both the same thing, but immediately goes on to suggest that the elevation or flight of the spirit is more conducive to spiritual growth than union.

The symptoms accompanying union are quite severe! There's the onset of a kind of delightful fainting fit and though outward strength diminishes, that of the soul increases. There's a feeling of great delight and the whole condition lasts about half an hour. One day as Teresa was wondering what the person does during such an experience, she heard the Lord saying to her, 'It detaches itself from everything, daughter, so as to abide more in me.'<sup>20</sup> We're told in Chap.19 that this state is accompanied by the gift of tears, tears which assure Teresa that it has not all been a dream. She also says that this blessing or favour of union brings a number of other benefits of which humility is noteworthy.

### *Greater Union.*

Another advantage of this state is that the person is ready to share his or her riches with others, and in fact goodness is indeed radiated by such a person. Teresa tells us that she herself was different in that she had not kept herself free from occasions of sin. For that reason weak souls like herself should take courage even if they should again commit sin. So if you have begun to practice prayer you mustn't vacillate with the thought, 'If I am going to fall again, it will be better for me not to go on practicing prayer...In any event,' she says, 'prayer is the one thing that will bring us to the haven of light.' Teresa says that she herself gave up prayer for a year and a half or at least a year. She now describes the joy of the repentant sinner who has turned for help to the powerful sacraments of the Church not only for healing, but to eradicate the evil within it. Comparing herself to other people who were better than herself but who didn't seem to receive as many blessings as she did,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

she comes to the conclusion that God is holding on to their reward to give it to them in a ‘lump sum.’ Her weakness, on the other hand, required more immediate assistance. It was in this connection that Teresa heard the words, ‘You just serve me and don’t interfere with this.’ This in fact sparked off the series of ‘locutions’ which she subsequently received. Teresa tells us of some misgivings she had – she felt that she oughtn’t aspire to a close friendship with the Lord. Afterwards she attributed this feeling to the devil. After all, she had thought, she wasn’t saying sufficiently well the divine office enjoined on her by the Church. The Dominican, Vincente Barron, helped her out of this predicament. She repeats, ‘To lose one’s way seems to be the same thing as giving up prayer.’

Teresa warns that even if you receive advanced graces in prayer you shouldn’t expose yourself to temptation. The trouble is you think that you now value God’s gifts above everything else but, Teresa says, the soul is like an unfledged bird not yet ready to fly.

In Chap. 20 she goes on to distinguish between union and some other kind of ecstatic experience. The latter is more beneficial, as she has already hinted in Chap. 18. The person feels lifted up by the Lord as the sun gathers up the vapours, and it hears secret things about God’s kingdom. The symptoms are much the same as before, but this time the divine action is more irresistible.

### *Spiritual Delight.*

There’s hardly any need to add that this is a delightful feeling. Teresa says it’s like being ‘carried away’ and in addition there may be the unusual experience of levitation. One of the effects of God’s presence on Teresa was that she realised that God was all-powerful. The other effect is that the detachment involved here extends to the body as well, whereas

union effected only a spiritual detachment. This detachment issues in a painful experience which she now describes. The essence of this seems to be a kind of impenetrable solitude. John of the Cross is reminded of the Psalmist singing about ‘the lone sparrow on the rooftop.’ This aloneness finds expression in the words, ‘Ubi est Deus tuus.’ It’s interesting that Teresa recited this verse in the divine office and understood its meaning, although it was only afterwards she realised that in the vernacular it did in fact mean ‘where is your God.’ A fairly severe picture of inner and outer distress follows, so that even the very bones become disjointed. Teresa tells us that this purifying suffering was the greatest blessing given her by God.

In Chap. 21 Teresa continues to discuss ecstasy. The Lord can work powerfully in one during the time of receiving such a divine communication. ‘Everything was a means by which I was enabled to know and love God the better, to realise what I owed Him and to be grieved at having been what I once was.’<sup>21</sup>

Teresa then concludes this remarkable treatise on prayer by assuring us that the Lord’s favours are only a foretaste of the reward we shall receive in the life to come.

### *St. Teresa of Avila – Life, Chaps. 23-37. Sacred Humanity.*

After treating of the four degrees of prayer leading up to the highest contemplation, Teresa deals with a problem that had cropped up in her own spiritual experience. The difficulty concerned the role to be accorded to the sacred humanity of Christ in the life of the contemplative.

Some writers of Teresa’s acquaintance had advised that a person should try to transcend bodily images of every kind so as to contemplate the divinity alone. This counsel is even extended to images that referred to the sacred humanity of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 190.



Christ. Teresa takes exception to this teaching and proceeds to explain the mistake she made in her own personal life in regard to this. Her subsequent religious experience of visions and words or locutions from Christ convinced her that she had fallen into error in this matter. 'What more do we desire than to have a good friend at our side, who will not abandon us in our labours and tribulations, as friends in the world do.'<sup>22</sup>

Teresa then advises against any conscious effort to transcend images such as those of Jesus Christ in order to be immersed in the divinity. Such an effort, she says, would betray a lack of humility. 'The more a soul lowers itself in prayer, the more God raises it up.' We should wait patiently for God's initiative and not try to hurry up the process. In any case we have no power to induce God's favours. When God desires it, 'He carries off the spirit as a giant would pick up a piece of straw' – any resistance notwithstanding. So whenever we think of Christ Our Lord we should think of someone who gives with utter love, and that should serve to arouse our love in return, for 'love begets love.'

### *A Question.*

Teresa now addresses a query to Fr. Garcia de Toledo for whom she is writing this account of her life. She wants to know why it is that when God puts the soul in the state of perfect contemplation it doesn't in fact become perfect immediately. In reality it experiences a development from one degree to another with each additional favour or rapture.

In musing on this problem she then gives a comparison herself saying that it's like partaking of food – if you only eat a little you won't derive as much strength and nourishment as when you eat progressively more!

In Chap. 23 of her *Life* Teresa begins to take up again the account of the development of her prayer life at the point

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

where it begins to enter the passive stages. She now began to have an habitual experience of what she terms the 'prayer of quiet' and also of the more advanced stage of 'prayer of union.' She had some apprehensions about these new experiences because of what she had heard concerning some women who were said to have been deceived by the devil.

What she experienced was a 'wonderful delight' coupled with the conviction that this feeling of delight came from God. The conviction was very strong at the actual moment of prayer but it began to wear off soon afterwards with a consequent return to a state of unease. Teresa felt that her prayer was either very good or very bad and she realised that the best course would be to live in purity of conscience and try to obtain guidance from people like the Jesuits. One counselor had already increased her fears that she might be a victim of self-deception, and indeed after some consideration of the matter he told her that the devil was at the root of her spiritual experience. However she was soon reassured by another Jesuit who left her consoled and encouraged. She was advised however to resist the feelings of divine consolation that she was having. This however she found impossible, as she was overwhelmed by a sense of divine favours. The advice to resist these graces was however reversed by St. Francis Borgia who visited Avila at this time. Her next confessor, also a Jesuit, was instrumental in being the occasion of Teresa receiving a special grace. On his advice she was praying about attachments, when she was seized by a rapture and heard the words, 'No longer do I want you to converse with people but with angels.' Teresa goes on at this stage to deal with another phenomenon, that is 'received words' or 'locutions' a subject to which she would return in her great book of the 'Mansions.' St. John of the Cross in his *Spiritual Canticle* commends Teresa's treatment of those divine favours and for that reason himself foregoes saying too much about them. However he does write about

them at length in the Book 2 of the Ascent.

Divine locutions are for Teresa compulsive listening – you cannot escape hearing them even if you tried. Teresa is very clear on the difference between words which are merely the product of auto-suggestion and those that come from God. There is a world of difference between the two. For one thing words that come from God are effective, while those that proceed from oneself are not. She compares the difference between the two to that between speaking and listening. Moreover the words from God come at a time when the faculties are suspended and are incapable of composing speeches by themselves. There is a great authority and majesty about words that come from God. Such infused words are communicated so rapidly that Teresa cannot possibly see how one could make up these oneself.

When talking about a subject like this we should remember that Teresa is thinking in the context of a deep experience or encounter with God. There's also a difference in approach here between our two Carmelite teachers. Teresa distinguishes sharply between 'words' which seem to be objectively from God and therefore in the category of extraordinary favours and those which are formulated to oneself or by oneself. Only the former are considered by her to be genuinely divine. In the *Ascent* however, John would consider the latter as 'successive locutions' and treat them as a special grace. For Teresa words which have a prophetic dimension make the greatest impression and are in fact indelible. Again she comments that 'words' which proceed from a divine source are outside the control of the will, whereas those which are merely subjective can be manufactured at any time. Also as in the case of any other favours, either divine or simulated, those which proceed from an evil source always result in disquiet. Some of the words which Teresa heard gave her an inner assurance of victory over

the devil, the words calmed her and took away her fears.

### *Deeper Intimacy.*

In Chap. 27 Teresa moves on to talk about another form of mystical grace namely a vision. One day while engaged in prayer she observed: 'I saw or better I felt Christ beside me.' This experience had a profound emotional effect on Teresa. Her confessor questioned her closely as to what form the vision took, but she asserted that she didn't actually see him. But it was something more than the awareness a blind person has that a friend is beside him or her. Teresa, as we remember, had described for us earlier on in her life a feeling of God's presence related to her previous development, a presence that can be equated with the prayer of quiet or union. She now suggests that this latest experience is something above and beyond the first kind although it includes it. The additional element is the presence of the 'sacred humanity' and this fact is the key to her insistence on the role of Jesus which she talks about in Chap. 22 of her *Life*. The prayer of quiet and union only carried with it 'impressions of the divinity' but in this more advanced experience there was a complete conviction of the presence of Jesus Christ. For Teresa this was an empirical experience on a par with the evidence of her own eyes and ears.

Teresa, in her development of this theme goes on to combine with it what she's really getting at, namely that these new experiences are of a much more passive type than hitherto. God now takes the complete initiative and God does all the work. It's a question of simply recognising this fact. Everything is poured out into the heart, to echo the words of St. Paul about the Holy Spirit. This experience is productive of great fruits in the person, pointing to the Lord who 'communicates secrets to it and treats it with such friendship and love that one cannot describe this in writing.' (Chap. 27).

Teresa now gives us a sublime description of what's involved in this supernatural experience of dialogue with God. The experience is marked by a feeling of mutual understanding and acceptance. The nearest parallel we can find is the intuitional love between two people that doesn't require words but finds expression simply in a loving gaze. Leo Tolstoy in his novel 'Anna Karenina' describes Kitty and Levin together in these words: 'She and Levin had a conversation of their own – not a conversation but a sort of mystic communion which every moment bound them more closely together and stirred in both a sense of fear and joy before the unknown upon which they were entering.' (*Anna Karinina*, Chap. 4.11)

### *The Risen Lord Appears To Teresa.*

In Chap. 28 Teresa returns to a description of mystical graces after a short digression to sing the praises of St. Peter of Alcantara who had recently died. One day at mass Teresa tells us she had a vision of the risen Lord. This took place probably on Jan. 25, 1561 the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. This was the first time that the Lord appeared to her in this way and Teresa says she understands that this is the type known to mystical theology as an imaginative vision. In this vision she saw the risen Christ suffused in an unearthly beauty and soft white radiance. Teresa gropes for words to explain and identify her experience. As the visions increased in frequency they took different forms. Sometimes she felt that what she saw was an image, but at other times she asserts 'It was Christ himself by reason of the clarity with which he was pleased to reveal himself to me.' Again she asserts that if what she saw was an image it was a living image. Very often this experience occurred after Teresa had received Holy Communion. For this experience marks a new and high degree of love, and the person becomes absorbed in God. The presence of God fills the

memory and keeps the thoughts occupied. Teresa felt that her own spiritual life changed for the better as a result of these visions. There was a great increase in intimacy with Jesus and he became her constant companion in all her trials. She experienced an intense desire to see God and to be united with God. 'You hide yourself from me and afflict me with your love through a death so delightful that the soul would never want to escape from it.'<sup>23</sup> Teresa now experienced vehement impulses of love which were nevertheless gentle and in no way disquieting. St. John of the Cross has an almost identical treatment of impulses of love in Stanzas 8 and 9 of the Spiritual Canticle.

How do you endure my life,  
Not living where you live?  
And being brought near death  
By the arrows you receive  
From that which you conceive of your beloved!<sup>24</sup>

Teresa writes: 'You cannot exaggerate or describe the way in which God wounds the soul and the extreme pain this wound produces, for it causes the soul to forget itself.'<sup>25</sup> This is the sickness of love about which the mystics write. There's a keen desire to do penance in order to alleviate the torment. It was in this connection that Teresa had one of her rare corporeal visions in which she felt an angel plunging a fiery dart deep into her heart, leaving her on fire with love for God. 'The loving exchange that takes place between the soul and God is so sweet that I beg him in his goodness to give a taste of this

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>24</sup> Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, p.441.

<sup>25</sup> The 'wound of love' is famous in literature, music and art. It occurs in Arthurian legend in connection with the Grail. It has been worked by Wagner in his Opera Parsifal and many other sources.

love to anyone who thinks I am lying.’<sup>26</sup>

During the course of this chapter Teresa gives good spiritual advice on moderating a slightly different type of devotional feeling which is disquieting and causes fatigue in the head. This is more related to the lower part of our nature and needs to be controlled, so that things may proceed more gently and more interiorly.

### *Did It Really Happen?*

Besides the distress caused by self-doubt in regard to her visions, Teresa suffered darkness and trials from time to time. These were of such intensity as to obliterate the memory of her previous religious experiences. She often experienced a dark night of this kind during times like Holy Week. ‘Faith is then deadened and put to sleep as are all the other virtues – although not lost.’<sup>27</sup> At such a time<sup>[SEP]</sup> Teresa was unable to pray and felt irritable which is consoling for the rest of us mortals. At other times this trial takes a slightly different form, expressing itself in an inability to think a single good thought.

Occasionally she seems to be the victim of a great inner conflict, being torn apart within which gives her no peace.

Sometimes however there’s a kind of remission in this conflict and the person feels itself to be in a state of inertia, but with the will still focused on God and a sense of a steadily growing love developing. This would seem to be the same phase of spiritual growth as that described by John of the Cross in regard to purgative love in the *Dark Night*, Book 2, Chap. I3.

In Chap. 3I Teresa describes her encounters with evil in

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<sup>26</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa, V. 1, p.252. An occurrence in Teresa’s experience which she also describes in her book, *The Interior Castle*. In her *Spiritual Testimonies*, Number 12, Teresa refers to an experience of ‘transpiercing’ which occurred in Salamanca on April, 15/16, 1571.

<sup>27</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa, V. 1. p. 258.

very vivid terms. She experienced a loathsome presence under human form and she tried to deter this ‘presence’ by sprinkling holy water. This became a quite frequent happening in Teresa’s life. She finishes this chapter by describing a painful growth in an understanding of true humility or indeed of any virtue.

In Chap. 32 of her *Life* Teresa gives a harrowing description of her famous vision of hell. Even after the lapse of six years the memory of this vision was so chilling that it made her hair stand on end. During the vision itself Teresa experienced excruciating pain. The experience sparked off a desire on Teresa’s part to grow in zeal for the salvation of the world. She felt the pull to withdraw into greater solitude: she was inspired to take more seriously the Rule of the Carmelite Order to which she belonged.

### *Way Forward – Carmelite Reform.*

Interestingly enough it was by way of sequel to this spiritual experience that the first seeds of a possible reform of the Carmelite Order were sown in Teresa’s heart. She had been sharing with a group of friends and one of them mentioned the possibility of founding a new convent, consisting of a much smaller group of people who would revert to the unmitigated rule of the Order.

Teresa felt she had divine approbation for this new spiritual venture by means of a ‘locution’ which carried for her great conviction. She was under no illusions about the storm of opposition this undertaking would whip up. At the last minute just before the deed for a newly acquired house was to be signed, the provincial superior withheld the permission he had previously given. Thereupon Teresa’s confessor ordered her to withdraw from the project. It was some time before she was allowed to take up the matter again, and this time she wisely did so with greater secrecy. About this time something happened<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub> which Teresa took to be a providential occurrence.



The husband of a certain lady died and asked Teresa if she would come to console her and provide some support. This lady happened to be a friend and perhaps more pertinently from his point of view, a benefactor of the Carmelite Provincial Angel de Salazar. While she was staying there she had the opportunity of meeting again the Dominican Fr. Garcia De Toledo for whom she was in fact writing this account of her life. This turned out to be a very fruitful meeting, and she felt a great desire to pray intensely for his spiritual advancement. Teresa writes: 'It is a wonderful thing when a sick person finds another wounded with that same sickness, how great the consolation to find you are not alone.'<sup>28</sup> This highlights Teresa's appreciation of the need for sharing spiritual experience. She had the deep conviction that Christ himself is pleased when people so delight in speaking of him.

The next turning-point on the way to a Reformed Carmel came through a holy woman or 'Beata' as they were known in Spain. This lady had already gone to Rome and acquired patents for a new foundation. Her intention was that the house should be founded in poverty. Teresa loved this ideal but hadn't considered it in practice. Her great sense of humour comes across in this development. One priest wrote her a long theological tract outlining his objection against poverty. Teresa replied that she didn't want to benefit from theology if it didn't help her follow her vocation! Some of her friends first favoured the idea but quickly changed their minds. She commented that if they could change their opinions so quickly she would be happy to follow the first one!

### *Back To Avila.*

When an election of a new prioress in Avila was due, Teresa was put under pressure to return there. She found it a great wrench to leave the lady's house because of the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

dependence the latter showed on her. And<sup>[SEP]</sup>as we know Teresa was a loyal and faithful friend. This return was in itself providential, for on the day she arrived back the brief for a new foundation came from Rome. Moreover St. Peter of Alcantara was there briefly to urge on the foundation, and persuade the Bishop to co-operate. Indeed Peter of Alcantara died soon afterwards. The foundation went ahead with great secrecy and events conspired to aid Teresa. The house was founded on St. Bartholomew's day 1562 and four sisters received the Carmelite habit. The house was dedicated to St. Joseph and so the first chapel in his honour in Avila came into being.

When the work had been accomplished or at least a beginning had been made, Teresa was assailed by tremendous self-doubt as well as a bout of scruples. Perhaps she had gone against obedience and the project would not work out. This temptation developed into a real dark night experience for her. She comments: 'This state was accompanied by an affliction and obscurity and darkness of soul that I wouldn't know how to exaggerate.'<sup>29</sup> What was previously a motive for spiritual elation now became the source of deepest torment. Teresa recognised that this was going to be a period of suffering so she tried to reconcile herself to it. She decided in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament that she would try to move into the new house herself and arrange for it to have enclosure. This resolution was the means through which she recovered her peace of mind. There were also further difficulties ahead. Teresa had to put her case before the provincial and explain herself to members of her own Convent of the Incarnation. There was a public outcry in the city of Avila and this was a great cross for Teresa. She became involved in a legal wrangle that went on for a long time. However the foundation survived and the sisters lived a prayerful life. Teresa provided her daughters at St. Joseph's with the highest inspiration for

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.313.

following the ancient Carmelite rule. ‘The main disposition required for always living in this calm is the desire to rejoice solely in Christ, one’s spouse.’<sup>30</sup>

### *Different Types of Vision.*

Teresa in reflecting on the series of visions of which she was the recipient, doesn’t feel they are all of a homogeneous kind. They admit of varying degrees of intensity or glory, and the delight or consolation felt was in proportion to this. This, she feels, reflects the order of things in the risen life also. Teresa always derived immense benefit from these spiritual experiences. The visions of Christ had striking effects on her; they lent impetus to that process whereby she became more detached from the people she loved. She had found that her friends had been engaging a great deal of her attention which would have been better employed in loving the Lord. The beautiful and luminous image of the Lord’s face caused other things to pale by comparison. The memory of that inward vision was so strong that it cancelled out all others. This led to a feeling of freedom in regard to people which was inevitably misinterpreted by others. People don’t realise that if you are attached to the Lord then you can love freely without being wrongly attached to the person involved.

The intimacy of Teresa’s prayerful dialogue with the Lord increased in intensity and she realised more and more how loving and compassionate God is. ‘I can speak with him as with a friend, even though he is Lord.’<sup>31</sup> This detachment increased in regard to objects that are treasured by people such as gold and jewels. She recalled the treasures her rich friend possessed and felt like laughing at the things people esteem so highly. Similarly in regard to the prospect of death, Teresa felt there was nothing to fear. Echoing the words of John of the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 325.

Cross in the *Living Flame*, she wrote: ‘And the death of those who truly love God and have despised the things of this world must be more gentle.’<sup>32</sup> The reality of the other world gained in sharpness like the image that comes into view when we adjust the focus button on the camera. ‘Everything seen with my bodily eyes seems to be a dream and a mockery. What I have already seen with the eyes of my soul is what I desire.’<sup>33</sup>

Teresa now relates the account of a very special grace which happened on the vigil of Pentecost, May 29, 1563. She was praying in a place of solitude and reading a volume by Ludolph of Saxony when she was seized by a loving impulse. She had a vision of a dove and soon her whole being was enraptured and this overflowing joy persisted for the whole of Pentecost. Another special favour which Teresa received several times was a vision of the human Jesus being taken into the bosom of the Father. This is a favourite theme of the evangelist John. It seemed to Teresa that this special grace hastened the purification of the sensual side of her nature. This would tie in with what John of the Cross talks about in the first part of the passive dark night of the senses. She compares the experience to a flame that burns steadily consuming the kind of desires that were opposed to spiritual growth.

### *Power Of Prayer.*

In Chap. 39 Teresa gives us some examples of the fruit of her earnest intercessory prayer on behalf of her friends. These ranged from physical cures to moral betterment – especially the latter. Teresa’s reflection on the ‘rewards’ she received from God in her life prompted her to acknowledge that they were out of all proportion to what she herself had contributed. One of the graces which made the deepest impression on Teresa was the ‘locution’ which she heard on more than one occasion;

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.332.

‘Now you are mine and I am yours.’

This reminds us of the words which we find repeated twice in the Song of Songs: ‘My beloved is mine and I am his.’<sup>34</sup> Teresa had many other experiences of vision and spiritual illumination regarding the after-life. In one such experience she seems to have been given some new infused understanding of the Christian doctrine of the Blessed Trinity.

The autobiography of St. Teresa consists of 40 chapters in all; the final chapter continues the theme of the three preceding ones which have dealt with an account of special ‘rewards’ she received from God. She now tells us of a new and deeper understanding she was given of divine truth. It had the effect of increasing in her a great sense of reverence towards God. This grace prompted her to try always to walk in the truth.

One interesting vision experienced by Teresa was that occasion when she tells us she had a totally clear representation of how all things are seen in God and how all are held in the Godhead. The illustration she suggests for this is that the divinity is like a clear diamond of great dimensions, or like a mirror in which absolutely everything, including sin, is contained and reflected. This image is strikingly like the vision recounted by Dame Julian of Norwich in Chap. 11 of her *‘Revelations of Divine Love’* in which the whole universe appeared in the hand of God no bigger than a hazel nut, and everything existed and remained in existence because God loved it.

By way of conclusion I may say, though greatly understated, that Teresa’s spiritual life reached heroic proportions and her whole life can be summed up in her own words, ‘Domine aut pati aut mori,’ ‘Lord, either to suffer or to die.’

So ends this remarkable book, a classic of autobiographical literature. When the philosopher Edith Stein,

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<sup>34</sup> Song of Songs, Ch. 2, 16a.

now St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, picked up this book on the shelf of a friend's house, she read it at a sitting and is reported to have remarked when putting it down, 'This is the truth.'

## *2.Spiritual Testimonies.*

Spiritual Testimonies is a short work consisting of 67 pages dealing with 65 *Testimonies* though of unequal length. As Teresa explains at the beginning of her *Life* the first three testimonies was her initial response to the command of her confessors to give an account of ‘the favors and the kind of prayer the Lord has granted me.’ The *Testimonies* range over a wide area of spiritual experience and various visions she experienced. Some of them treat of spiritual states of prayer such as Spiritual Marriage. It’s perhaps unnecessary to go into detail on individual testimonies except to say that they are all very valuable but have also been covered thoroughly in her major works. And of course like all of Teresa’s writings they make extremely edifying reading.

## *3.Soliloquies.(1569)*

The *Spiritual Testimonies* are followed by another short work of about the same length known as the *Soliloquies*. This is a beautiful piece of writing again typical of Teresa’s spirit of longing for God. This longing is often characterized by spontaneous prayers as the name of the pieces suggest. In other English editions of her works they’re sometimes called ‘*Exclamations of the soul to God*’ a name suggested by the great number of ‘Ohs’ they contain. In some ways they complement the account of her *Life* and for that reason Kieran Kavanaugh includes them in Volume 1 of her Collected Works. Teresa was familiar with a volume known as ‘The Soliloquies and Meditations’ attributed to St. Augustine, but seen as Pseudo-Augustinian.

#### *4. The Way of Perfection. (1566)*

##### *Camino.*

Teresa of Avila set up her convents of Carmelite sisters with the object of making them centres of prayer. This would achieve a double result – advance the progress of the individual in union with God and serve the Church's apostolate of bringing the saving grace of the gospel to the world.

News had reached Teresa at this time about the developing breakup of the Roman Catholic Church in France through Luther's Reformation and this partially motivated her to do everything she could to remedy matters. She wrote: 'All my longing was and still is that since He has so many enemies and so few friends that these few friends be good ones.'<sup>35</sup>

In her book then *The Way of Perfection*, we have a manual of spiritual instruction for her nuns at the recently founded St. Joseph's at Avila, Teresa takes her stand on the principle that the sisters should imitate the Lord and not have any possessions of their own. 'What do kings and lords matter to me if I don't want their riches.'<sup>36</sup> Teresa reminds Carmelites of the prescription of Primitive Rule namely that they must pray without ceasing. For her this includes all else, especially the penitential aspect of religious life.

##### *Preparing The Ground – Love One Another.*

As a preparation for embarking on a life of prayer, and in order to build on strong foundations, Teresa proposes to talk about some predisposing qualities. These are threefold: love for one another, detachment or freedom in regard to everything created and a proper perspective on self known as humility.

Teresa's first insight in regard to loving others is to

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<sup>35</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa, V.2, p. 41.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.45.



observe that you will put up with anything from people if you love them! As we know Teresa was a woman with a great capacity for love and friendship, and in *The Way of Perfection* she's writing from a background of what she considered her own excessive attachments to friends in the initial stages of her spiritual life. She's anxious that the heart be reserved for the Lord and not allow its love to be diluted by being poured out on friends. Teresa feels that the greatest return we can make to those who love us is to commend them earnestly to God. People who draw close to God are indifferent whether or not their love is returned. We're reminded of the prayer of St. Francis; 'O master grant that I may never seek, so much to be loved as to love with all my heart.' Genuine love for God is the only love that merits the name. The heart that is given to God cannot love or become attached to someone unless that person is sincerely trying to love God. To do so would be a contradiction in terms. But at the same time such a person will go to enormous lengths to foster a little of the love of God in the person to whom it is drawn.

For Teresa genuine mutual love in community approximates the love Christ has for us; it's a love that constantly seeks the other's improvement and progress in prayer and union with God. If we can find a friend motivated in this way then we should be very lucky, 'For a good means to having God is to speak with God's friends, for one always gains very much from this.'<sup>37</sup>

### *Decluttering.*

To facilitate a life of prayer, Teresa also counsels freedom in regard to everything created, including our very selves, and a corresponding giving of oneself to God the creator of all. This is the theme of Bk. 1 of the *Ascent* by St. John of the Cross. This need for freedom extends also to relatives and friends.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.67.

Teresa felt that in her own past life her attachment to her relatives had retarded her progress in prayer. She was however thinking of people outside one's immediate family.

### *True Humility.*

The third predisposition for genuine prayer that Teresa insists on is humility or a proper perspective on self. In the Spain of her day *honra* or honour loomed extremely large closely followed by a consciousness of rank. Teresa spends a big part of Chapter 13 labouring this point. She urges her sisters to put aside all thoughts of 'I was right' in community relationships and imitate the humility of Christ and his mother. In Chapter 15 Teresa insists that her sisters do not imitate herself, but refrain from making excuses for themselves.

Chapter 16 treats of growing intimacy with the Lord in prayer. Teresa uses the lovely image of the king in the game of chess surrendering to the queen who approaches him humbly. The three virtues she has in mind are a way of setting up the pieces on the chessboard. So humility together with love of neighbour and the freedom of spirit mentioned, is the spiritual conditioning needed for contemplative prayer. Teresa feels that the Lord draws people to himself and occasionally even gives them touches of contemplative prayer but this is only by way of a beginning.

Such an experience, she thinks, is meant to stimulate desire in the individual and prompt it to prepare itself for further progress. The Lord is only too ready to give himself to those who give themselves to him. However to be actually led into the ways of contemplative prayer is a gift from God. There are parallel paths which are no less exalted but perhaps entail more effort. The way of contemplation also carries its own trials which are by no means light. We should not be tempted to think that because it includes keen delight of a spiritual kind, it's thereby an easy way out. In St. John's gospel Jesus

promised to give living water to those who thirsted for it. Teresa sees in this an apt illustration of what she wants to tell us about prayer, especially in its passive forms. Prayer of this kind is a fire that burns steadily. The living water of the spirit poured out in it even serves to nourish this flame as we observe when water is sprinkled on a coal fire. You cannot achieve this prayer through a process of active meditation. This kind of love creates a thirst for God that's unbearable and that nothing but God can satisfy.

Teresa here alludes to the element of self-seeking that intervenes even in an apparently good desire. 'In desiring this water there is always some fault, since the desire comes from ourselves: if some good comes, it comes from the Lord who helps us.'<sup>38</sup> The level of desire may reach such a pitch that the person ought to reduce it somehow by alternative considerations. Teresa here is the soul of discretion and very wisely advises moderation in all things. She's very insistent that the Lord calls all to contemplation, that is to drink of the fountain of living water. To arrive there what's needed is courage and determination. There are many potential hazards to be faced and overcome on the path of prayer.

### *The Essence Of Prayer.*

St. Teresa tells us very clearly what in her opinion mental prayer is: 'If while praying I thoroughly understand and know that I am speaking with God and I have greater awareness of this than I do of the words I am saying, mental and vocal prayer are joined.'<sup>39</sup>

Before one begins to pray, Teresa asks us to consider just two things: 'Whom we are going to speak with, and what we ourselves are, so as to know how to speak with Him.' Before teaching us how to advance towards contemplative prayer,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.111.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.121.

Teresa sets out to persuade us to say our vocal prayers well, especially the Our Father, with the utmost attention and reverence. While doing this it's quite possible to have a peak experience of contemplative prayer.

Initially this kind of contemplation is somewhat undefined. It's like a people groping their way along a corridor during a power-cut. This is the familiar unknowing aspect of prayer that we find in the 'Cloud' group of writings and that John of the Cross deals with in the *Ascent – Night*.

### *St. Teresa's Paternoster.*

#### *Our Father Who Art In Heaven.*

From Chap. 27 to the end of *The Way* we have what is sometimes called 'St. Teresa's Paternoster' because these chapters make up a teaching on prayer by means of a commentary on the 'Our Father.' Moreover she liked to refer to it herself as the 'Paternoster.' The chapters are designed to encourage people who are put off by the idea of mental prayer or contemplation, to say the 'Our Father' (or Hail Mary, etc.) with all possible attention and devotion and this would infallibly lead them to a state of perfect contemplation. How should you then set about prayer and for a start let us confine ourselves to vocal prayer?

#### *Prayer of Recollection.*

All you have to do, she tells us, is to find some time to yourself and a place to yourself and then picture Jesus beside you as a friend. This is something that can be cultivated and that can very soon become a habit. What's required is that we pause for a while and simply 'look' at the Lord. This kind of beginning can soon develop into a more intimate heart-to-heart exchange with the Lord. This will be coloured by each one's subjective mood – speaking with the risen Lord at good times

and when things are not going well she invites us to dwell on his passion. By lovingly dwelling on the thought that we have a Father in heaven and uniting ourselves with Jesus as we do so, we tend to become deeply recollected. He is nearer to us than we are to ourselves and so we ought to experience a sense of God's nearness and try to stay close to him. Speak with him, 'as with a Father, or a brother, or a Lord or as with a spouse; sometimes in one way, at other times in another.'<sup>40</sup> This approach leads the person to what Teresa calls the 'prayer of recollection.' Here the energies and senses are no longer scattered and dissipated on the various things around us. In Chapters 28 and 29, Teresa elaborates on her teaching about the Prayer of Recollection. According to Teresa we can place ourselves in the Lord's presence freely and unrestrictedly at any time we wish and experience this prayer of recollection. It only requires that we concentrate our minds on his presence and try to exclude extraneous thoughts. At this point the Lord does not intervene directly to influence the mind and heart in its search for him. The person needs to proceed steadily, and frequently try to tune into the divine presence so as to immerse itself in him. This can be done by repeating slowly the words of the Our Father, trying to realise with whom we are engaged in speaking. This kind of spiritual activity belongs to the preliminary stages of the life of prayer, but it can be usefully employed also even when more progress has been made. The kingdom of God is one of truth and justice, of love and peace, as the preface for the feast of Christ the King says. Jesus has taught us in the Our Father to pray that such a kingdom may be realised on earth. As Teresa meditates on this fact she's reminded of the deep peace that can be experienced in prayer, as the kingdom of God grows within one. We then reflect something of the peace of the kingdom of heaven which we hope to enjoy more fully in eternal life.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.141.

*Hallowed Be Your Name. Your Kingdom Come.*

*Prayer Of Quiet.*

For Teresa God's kingdom will only be realized in its fullness in the next life when there will be an aura of glory and quiet among the blessed who are continually engaged in praising God. However we here on earth can try to emulate this state while we journey towards the kingdom. 'But there are times when,' she writes, 'tired from our travels, we experience that the Lord calms our faculties and quiets the soul.'<sup>41</sup> Teresa cites the example of a sister who recited the Our Father so fervently that she was raised to a state to state of 'pure contemplation.'

At this point, or as the person experiences a sense of peace and quiet in the presence of God we have the beginnings of contemplative prayer. The Lord himself here takes the initiative by pouring his love into the heart through the Holy Spirit. There's a vivid feeling of being close to the Lord in love and a sense that this feeling is becoming progressively keener. Teresa describes this stage of prayer like this: 'A person feels the greatest delight in his body and a great satisfaction in his soul.' (Chap. 31) Here there's obviously a deep concentration on God which carries with it a realisation of what's happening – it's an experience of the presence of God. (*Cfr., above Prayer of the Four Waters in Life.*).

The whole force of the appetitive faculty is drawn to God as if by a magnet. The will is indeed captivated by God's love. This kind of spiritual experience is strictly a gift from God so it never becomes the individual's property. It isn't something that can be switched on at will but only when the Lord wishes. Such a feeling is also quite compatible with the mind wandering in different directions at the same time. This is not

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.151.

yet a completely unitive type of prayer in which the person is inactive. In this prayer of quiet there's some work to be done, mostly trying to sustain the quiet by gently stirring the embers of love. What's especially needed at this point is a generous correspondence to God's initiative so as to ensure further spiritual growth. Diligent preparation is required to be the recipients of these divine 'rewards'.

In Chapter 31 Teresa goes into more detail about this prayer of quiet. She emphasises the fact that this kind of prayer is a gift from God, indicating that we are moving from our own active efforts to being 'fed' by the Lord. In her own words, 'The soul understands that through the exterior senses, that it is now close to its God and that not much more would be required for it to become one with Him in union.'<sup>42</sup> Teresa goes on to describe beautifully the sense of delight and satisfaction experienced at such a time. The person remains extremely still, 'not daring to stir.' There is more to come of course, so Teresa remarks that the loving person realises they are close to the fount and even if they don't drink from it they are satisfied. In the rest of Chapter 32 Teresa goes into great detail teasing out how the faculties operate during the prayer of quiet. The main point is that the will as the source of love should predominate and one should try to disregard the activity of the mind or understanding.

### *Your Will Be Done.*

To pray that the Lord's will be done in us involves a readiness to carry the cross with Jesus. This was the result of the prayer Jesus made in the garden – his willingness to face suffering and death. This is what is implied in the giving of ourselves to God. This moreover is the condition for drinking from the fountain of living water, and thus arriving at the term of our spiritual journey. As the person surrenders completely to

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.153.

the Lord's will, there's no more it can do until he himself draws it onwards. 'Not content with having made the soul one with himself, He begins to find his delight in it and reveal His secrets to it and rejoice that it knows what it has gained and something of what He will give it.'<sup>43</sup>

### *Give Us each Day Our Daily Bread.*

In the Eucharist Christ gives himself to us, reveals himself to the eyes of faith. This is a life-giving presence which nourishes and sustains the person. Faith can allow the individual to be really present with Christ in the Eucharist to the exclusion of all else. This is also a healing contact with the living Lord whereby we really 'touch' him in his sacred humanity. The Lord can let himself be known to us as we contemplate him in the Eucharist, and like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we can recognise him in the breaking of bread.

### *Forgive Us Our Sins.*

In the Our Father Jesus asks that we forgive others in order that we ourselves may be forgiven by God. Injury done by others if freely forgiven, ties up with a readiness to suffer something for God. Suffering is an integral part of the contemplative life. Very few people are prepared to accept this kind of suffering and so will not enter into the deeper contemplation of which Teresa speaks here. Even good people will draw the line here and definitely won't follow Teresa in what she proposes. It seems to ask too much of human nature.

### *Lead Us Not Into Temptation.*

Teresa is ever insistent that we need to be on our guard against the wiles of the devil. St. Paul says that the devil can turn into an angel of light in order to deceive people. One

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.164.



pitfall mentioned by Teresa is the possibility that consolation in prayer may proceed from an evil source. However if the individual cultivates humility this need not be something to be unduly feared. It may even have the altogether beneficial effect of causing the person to strive to be better. It would be more serious temptation to believe that one possessed virtues that were in fact non-existent. Genuine humility is not of the stressful kind but rather brings peace and quiet, whereas a humility that would make us doubt God's love is unsettling. Also any kind of self-assurance is dangerous because we're always liable to waver and relapse into sin and infidelity.

There are two things which afford most protection in every danger and these are the love and fear of God. Love of God must become evident in someone's life, it cannot remain concealed. Teresa reflects in these well known words of hers, '..for it will be a great thing at the hour of death to see that we are going to be judged by the one whom we have loved above all things.'<sup>44</sup> And again she echoes John of the Cross: 'How sweet will be the death of one who has done penance for their sins'.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.194.

## 6. *Meditations on the Song of Songs.*(1566)

The collect for the Saint's Feast pays her a unique tribute: 'Father by Your spirit You raised up our Mother Teresa of Avila to show Your Church the Way of Perfection. May her inspired teaching awaken in us a longing for true holiness.'

Pope Pius XI, has singled out for special mention that aspect of St. Teresa – her gift of stimulating the faithful along the path of prayer. It was a gift peculiar to her. She has a way of fostering, encouraging, even coaxing us to follow the better way. This quality fits in well with her role as Mother of Carmel, 'Mater Spiritualium.' Teresa was used to getting her own way in life, she could charm people, she could get the best out of them whether they happened to be prelates, Jesuits, or mule-drivers. She could manipulate them in the nicest possible way. Nobody ever seemed to object because they knew instinctively that her motives were literally for the honour and glory of God. It's this same quality, I think, that comes across in her writings. We know she's telling us to love God because it's worthwhile. She's speaking from experience. That must be the secret of her continued and widespread appeal.

We turn now to one of St. Teresa's shorter and lesser known works, minor work that is - her *Meditations on the Song of Songs*. As we know, Teresa was a reluctant writer, she simply didn't have the time for it. She would have preferred working at that spinning-wheel on display in her cell at the Incarnation convent in Avila. However, the tone of this little book is different – she actually enjoyed writing it. She says in fact: 'it consoles me to tell my meditations to my daughters.'

In looking at some of Teresa's thoughts here, I would like to refer to, and draw out a little, the sources for this loving

relationship with God in Holy Scripture and some writings from the Doctors of the Church.

First of all, let us refer back to the Old Testament book Song of Songs on which, or at least on part of which Teresa bases her meditations. We find it listed in the category of Wisdom Literature, although there doesn't appear to be anything particularly sapiential about this book. The Song itself has been the subject of much debate, not only in the Christian Church, but before that among the Jews themselves. The Rabbis settled eventually for the allegorical interpretation. This has also been the prevailing interpretation of the Song by the Church. Some scholars think it perfectly legitimate to apply it to the sacramental union of man and woman, in the love relationship of marriage. This seems acceptable when we consider how God blessed the union of man and woman in the opening chapters of the bible as found in the Genesis accounts of creation. We might also refer here, for example, to the nuptial theme of Psalm 44. In regard to the Song the Jerusalem Bible introduction says, with a great economy of language: 'Mystics like St. John of the Cross were wise to use the Song as they did!' Primarily the songs have been understood in Christian tradition to be applicable to the mutual love between Christ and the Church, between Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, or, by extension, to the union of the individual soul with Christ.

### *In the Bosom Of The Word.*

My next point is to draw attention to St. John's Gospel, Chaps. 13-17 containing the Discourse at the Last Supper. Here we find set out the marvellous themes of God's love incarnate in Jesus. The Discourse is sometimes referred to as the 'Johannine mysticism.' Teresa in her writings refers many times to other of the Evangelist's themes. We know how she loved the incident involving the Samaritan woman at the well

about the water of life that allays one's thirst. There was a painting depicting this scene in her father's house which now hangs in the convent of the Incarnation in Avila. She meditated particularly on the subject of the Divine Indwelling. For example she quotes John:17:20 several times in her books. This isn't bad for someone who had no access to vernacular translations of the bible. The verses run as follows, 'Father may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you... that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world may know that it was you who sent me.'

In the *Interior Castle* she writes in regard to union with God: 'And thus while Jesus Our Lord was once praying for His apostles – I don't remember where – He said that they were one with the Father and with Him, just as Jesus Christ is in the Father and the Father is in Him.'

In the Last Discourse when Philip had been making difficulties by looking for a closer manifestation of God along Old Testament lines, Jesus tells him, 'Philip, to have seen me is to have seen the Father.' Then he tells us that whoever listens to him and keeps his words is the one who loves him, and as a result the Father and Son will love them and take up their abode with them, and reveal themselves deep within each one's consciousness. That's the meaning of the word 'manifest.' Unfortunately only the saints, such as Teresa, realised the truth of these words of Jesus.

In regard to Teresa's theme we may note St. Bernard's 'Sermons on the Song of Songs.' I feel that both Teresa and John must have been influenced by this piece of writing. St. Bernard is very theological but also very lyrical. He had an extraordinarily complex Latin style that still has the commentators guessing. It's interesting to compare the beginning of Bernard's commentary with that of Teresa on the same book. They both hold that what's indicated in the opening

words is the fact that God is offering the kiss of peace to the individual. 'Though small in size' according to Kieran Kavanaugh, 'these meditations are fresh in insight. They merit all the attention given to other Teresian works.' (Intro.)

Teresa wrote this book in 1566. It's amazing to notice how fascinated both Teresa and John were by this particular book of Scripture, song of Songs. She begins by saying that for some years the Lord had given her great delight when she heard or read some words from the Song. She refers to these words as the things that pass between the soul and Our Lord.' That's the giveaway; the secret of divine intimacy to which she refers. So on second thoughts it's not really surprising that for her the contents of the Song are directly related to prayer. She says some people cannot understand the metaphorical language of the book. She tells us that some people she knew wouldn't even listen to it. She notes an amusing incident that happened when she was attending mass in a church one particular Holy Thursday: 'The priest was preaching about the mutual love between the bride and the bridegroom but the congregation only laughed at him.' And, Teresa asks: 'What else would he be talking about on an occasion like Holy Thursday'!

### *Singing A New Song.*

But Teresa herself found in the words of this book exactly what she was looking for, just what she needed. Using the third person as she usually does when referring to herself she says, 'She understood that it was possible for a soul in love with its spouse to experience all these favours, swoons, deaths, afflictions, delights and joys in relation to him.' After all most of her writings, especially *The Interior Castle* and the *Life* only discuss at length all these aspects of the life of prayer culminating in union with God. She is not surprised then that the language of the Song is daring: 'Being what we are', she writes, 'the love that He had and has for us surprises and

bewilders me more; for knowing that He has such love, I already understood that there is no exaggeration in the words by which He reveals it to us, for He has shown this love even more through His deeds.’ And she was thinking of course of his suffering and death on the cross. Indeed she mentions that explicitly in the very next sentence. Teresa, as always, has her feet firmly fixed on the ground, the ground of faith. She is reminded here of the wonder of the Incarnation, Christ truly God and truly man. The ‘kiss of peace’ she associates with the Blessed Eucharist. ‘I was even wondering if the bride was asking for this favour that Christ afterwards gave us.’ It’s worth pointing out again that Teresa is at one with the great St. Bernard in her interpretation of the Song as the longing of the Fathers for the Incarnation of the Son of God.

In Chap. 2 Teresa continues to show the down to earth nature of her spirituality by pointing out the various kinds of false peace it might be possible to have. By this she probably means being careless even about little things. We ought to feel these pin-pricks of conscience – that’s a sign that we’re spiritually alive.

She then goes on to list some of the things we should be careful about – riches, honours, praise and comforts. ‘The flesh is very fond of comforts’ she says. This of course is designed to make us feel distinctly uncomfortable! Her irony is seen to good effect; have we read in the lives of the saints that they had a comfortable life? Nowadays we should be aware of the needs of the poor, and the terrible poverty of the third world, and ask ourselves what kind of witness we ourselves provide by our lifestyle.

Teresa goes on to exhort us to work hard at cultivating the Lord’s friendship and tells us many people remain at the foot of the mount who could ascend to the top. She pursues at all times, here and in her other works, her great theme of progressive intimacy with the Lord. And, she says, courageous

thoughts lead to courageous deeds. We need to avoid offending God in any way. She wants us to guard against tepidity – and you remember the stricture in the book of Revelation against the tepid. For her this lukewarm attitude goes hand in hand with self-deception. In this connection she typically urges the need for humility. Then Teresa's impulsive and impetuous nature is seen in her criticism of a certain category of people – what you might call the calculating type. 'They will never throw themselves into the sea as St. Peter did.' she says.

On the other hand, true peace Teresa tells us in Chap. 3 is a union of our will with the will of God. This is a forgetting of oneself. The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing about. The rest of this chapter is a really inspiring call to closer friendship with God, a friendship that can be deepened through the Eucharist. 'Along how many paths' she writes, 'in how many ways, by how many methods You show us love. With trials, with a death so harsh, with torments, suffering offences every day and then pardoning.'

### *Prayer Of Quiet.*

Chap. 4 deals with the 'prayer of quiet' and as she says herself she had already written much about this in two books (*Life and Way*) and she was to do so again in the *Interior Castle*. She describes the prayer of quiet thus: 'In the interior of the soul a sweetness is felt so great that the soul feels clearly the nearness of its Lord.'<sup>45</sup> Her descriptions here are really marvellous: 'It's as though there were poured into the marrow of one's bones a sweet ointment with a powerful fragrance.' She tells us that the union between the two (God and the individual) is so close that there's nothing between them and the mind is greatly enlightened. She goes on to indicate a profound theological truth so prominent in the prayers and liturgy of the Church, based on this text from St. Peter: 'We are made sharers in the

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<sup>45</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa, V. 2, p.243.

divine nature.’ This reminds us of St. Gregory of Nyssa and the other Greek Fathers who taught the doctrine of our deification. Teresa’s words recall again the beloved disciple who leant on the breast of Jesus at the last supper. She says the experience is altogether delightful. Again we see how close Teresa is to the eminent Fathers of the Church; Gregory spoke of ‘sober inebriation’ Teresa calls it ‘divine intoxication.’

Teresa is speaking here out of her own experience of close union with God. Indeed she refers to the very words she heard from the Lord, that he would look after her things and she would look after his. ‘I am my beloved’s and He is mine.’

*‘Tis Only The Splendour Of Light Hideth Thee.’*

In the following chapter (5) she deals in more detail with this deep form of prayer. She tells us that the person is ‘engulfed and protected in this shadow and kind of cloud of divinity.’ It’s the Holy Spirit who enkindles this fire of love in the praying person and he is our mediator with God. A renewed growth ensues and the Lord provides fresh nourishment; the person understands how she’s obliged to serve and suffer. The whole tone of Teresa’s thought is that God is giving, giving, giving all the time, and wants to give more and more. All the Lord looks for is that the person reciprocates and give itself to God in return.

In Chap. 6 we read Teresa’s profound meditation on the text, ‘He set charity in order in me.’ The divine giving continues and increases. The individual has its fill of the choicest wines producing that ‘happy inebriation’ she talks about. The will is aflame with love for God which in turn results in virtue and living faith. Here we meet another characteristic Teresian note in regard to prayer already mentioned – the inability to grasp with the mind the favours of God. We don’t realise how much we become the objects of God’s love in his only Son – God is happy with us, Teresa tries



to convince us.

The delight God gives is intense and in Teresa's own experience was literally enough to kill her. But however, this feeling later changes into the desire to serve God and benefit one's neighbour – a very practical outcome indeed. Moreover she's not motivated now by self-seeking but only God's honour and glory.

We're near the end of this book then, the shortest of St. Teresa's works but very full of the kind of material that, as the Church says, should awaken in us a desire for true holiness. In this last chapter when Teresa comes to comment on 'the apple-tree' in the text she's reminded of the tree of the cross.

Teresa's writings are inspiring and often sublime but she always shows that she's never lost in some mystical empyrean. The pith of her doctrine is the gospel of Jesus. The cross is an integral part of the life of union with God. Not alone that, but Teresa maintains that people advanced in prayer pay a lot of attention to the needs of their neighbours. There's however the proviso that you don't try to benefit your neighbour prematurely, that is before being called to this service by the Lord.

So ends this book, a wonderful example indeed of Teresa's whole doctrine and style. And in my opinion we have here a compendium of her spirituality and her whole understanding of prayer.

## *5. The Interior Castle. (1566)*

### *The Splendour Falls On Castle Walls.*

The Interior Castle is considered to be St. Teresa's masterpiece and a classic among the spiritual literature of the western Church. The aim of this outline is to provide a kind of 'guided tour' of the castle in so far as that's possible. This famous image of the Castle suggests, I think, the magnificence of the walled city of Avila where Teresa was born. As Teresa was trying with some apprehension to set out her doctrine of prayer in obedience to her confessor, the Carmelite Jerome Gratian, who asked her to write it, she conceived the idea for the book as follows: 'It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places.'<sup>46</sup> Thus the book acquired its 'alternative' name 'Morades' or 'Mansions.'

Teresa took very seriously indeed the point made in the opening book of the Bible, namely that we are made 'in the image and likeness of God.' This is the source of our dignity and the reason we can say that each individual reflects from within the very beauty of God. Teresa wants us to centre our thoughts, to make a journey inwards, to enter the gates of the city of Avila and not wander around on the dry and arid embankment surrounding the walls. She wants us to have a full share in the life and activity and security within. Her point is that we can enter the holy place and there enjoy an audience with God. In Chap. 1 we find her first statement about prayer: 'The door of the castle is prayer and meditation.' Prayer and meditation sets us thinking along the right lines; through them we get the atmosphere and feel of the spiritual world in which

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<sup>46</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa, V. 2, p. 283.

God is everything and we are nothing. It's a question of priorities, and it should begin to dawn on us that we are made for God alone. People who keep on praying and meditating very soon make some progress - they enter the second mansion. They begin to hear the insistent voice of the Lord calling on them to approach nearer to him. We need to summon up all our resources of courage at this stage so as to keep at it and not abandon the effort to progress – or as Teresa would say - return to the first mansion.

Nobody has described spiritual joy better than Teresa, yet at this point she would advise people not to think too much about consolation. She wants us to travel further inwards and get used to the growing pains of the journey. Later on the individual will recognise that the voice it hears has been the voice of the bridegroom calling to the bride.

The problem encountered here and for some time to come is that the kind of consolation experienced is of a limited type, more sensual than spiritual, and so doesn't reach the centre of the personality where alone we can meet God. We're now at one of the 'growth points' of spiritual life and this is located at the transition from the second to the third mansion. Prayer seems to have run into the 'snag' stage where nothing seems to be happening. This is a well documented condition in spiritual literature. When you reach this kind of impasse the only thing you can tell yourself is, 'I cannot give up prayer.' After these initial phases of spiritual striving a marked development takes place. This new stage of spiritual growth would correspond to Teresa's description of herself and others in what she calls the third mansion. This phase, she tells us, is marked by a certain safeness, even calculation on the part of the individual, what Teresa calls a 'well-ordered life.' We may be interested to know that Teresa thinks most people who take prayer seriously, remain at this point all their lives. In treating of this stage of growth in her *Life* Teresa observes that they will never imitate

St. Peter and throw themselves into the sea. They will be so good and proper that they will be easily shocked by the snippets of scandal they hear from time to time. They will tell you how terrible the world has become and lament the complete breakdown in morality at the present time, worse, they think than at any previous period in history. People like this weigh everything carefully before they give it to the Lord; they parcel themselves out rather than deliver themselves wholly to him. They will never be guilty of the madness and spontaneity of a St. Francis of Assisi. There is absolutely no fear that they will kill themselves by penance. I think that we recognise that this whole approach betrays a creeping selfishness that will only yield to the surprises and fire of the Holy Spirit.

### *Over To God.*

In her *Interior Castle*, Teresa views the progress made through the first three mansions as something ordinary, something which is the fruit of sustained prayer. We presuppose always however, the grace and help of God. When she comes to treat of Mansion 4 Teresa introduces a distinction; the progress and effects we notice here are directly the work of the Holy Spirit.

At this stage for Teresa the heart is dilated by God's love. She says it's as if 'sweet perfumes were cast on a brazier in the interior depths of the soul.' She now begins to talk about a sense of deep stillness in the mind which tends to take different forms, such as the 'prayer of recollection' and the 'prayer of quiet.' Her descriptions are classic. 'The person retires within himself like a hedge-hog or tortoise withdrawing into itself.' Here the heart simply keeps silence, keeps watch and does nothing. As we continue to follow Teresa's guidance from the fourth to the fifth mansion we see that contemplative prayer takes a deeper hold on the soul. Teresa reminds her readers,

‘All of us who wear this sacred habit are called to prayer and contemplation.’<sup>47</sup> There’s a new confidence born in Teresa at this stage, a confidence that flows from closeness to God. This type of prayer yields immense satisfaction: ‘This joy penetrates to the very marrow of our bones.’(Mansion 5). There’s an unshakable conviction that this is none other than an experiential encounter with God in prayer. Both St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross refer to this advanced development in prayer as a union of the soul’s faculties with God. A transformation is taking place and here and to convey her meaning, Teresa uses the beautiful image of the silk-worm at work. Through the persistent industry of the silk-worm spinning its cocoon, a beautiful butterfly will eventually emerge. It’s important to notice however at this stage how close Teresa’s position is to the Gospel. She never becomes lost in some mystic dream world. She states: ‘Here in our religious life the Lord really asks two things; love of his majesty and love for our neighbour.’<sup>48</sup>

### *I Will Betroth You To Myself In Faith.*

Teresa prefers this to any kind of self-analysis as regards mystical states or any desire to determine the exact type of prayer that is being experienced. She now continues to talk about the fifth mansion in her progressive treatment of the life of prayer. She, in common with John of the Cross, and other mystical writers, employs the image of spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage to describe union with God. Here in this mansion Teresa is reminded of the growing intimacy between two people that leads to engagement and marriage. This she sees as wholly a gift from God and she describes what happens in terms of a visit by the Lord to the individual.

It’s obvious that Teresa considers the Sixth Mansion as

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 351.

the one requiring most elaboration in her treatment of prayer in the *Interior Castle*. She devotes almost as much space to this topic as the rest put together. All the other mansions are made up of four or less chapters; the sixth contains eleven. The corresponding stage of progress in the works of John of the Cross can be found in the *Spiritual Canticle* beginning with Stanza 12. (See a discussion of this stage in my *Outline of the Writings of St. John of the Cross*.)

Now we find that at the outset of the sixth mansion, Teresa regards the individual as someone ‘wounded with love.’ This theme is beautifully elaborated by John of the Cross in the ‘Spiritual Canticle’ where he calls this experience ‘Spiritual Betrothal.’ Teresa also uses the image of ‘betrothal’ here.

In Chap.1 of the Sixth Mansion, she lays great stress on suffering. There follows a great desire for perfect union with God, and Teresa vividly describes this growth in divine intimacy which is really the pain of love. There is now an overwhelming awareness of the Lord’s presence and nearness. This feeling can occur quite suddenly and without prior warning. Teresa describes this experience as like a spiritual fragrance that diffuses itself powerfully through all the senses.

At this point in her spiritual growth, Teresa heard words which communicated effectively to her such assurances as ‘It is I, fear not.’ She also talks about an experience of rapture which is literally a ‘breathless’ and ‘speechless’ state, and the individual loses touch with his or her surroundings. A variation or intensification of this experience is referred to by Teresa as ‘a flight of the spirit.’ She says she feels as if she had been in another world very different from this one.’

From the outset Teresa warns of the severe afflictions and trials people who are drawing close to God may expect, even of a physical kind as in her own case. She emphasizes the suffering proceeding from mini persecution of the devout person, even by friends and acquaintances. She thinks it

revolves around malicious gossip circulating about the prayerful person. Speaking in the third person as she usually does in similar situations, Teresa comments: ‘I know a person who had great fear that there would be no one who would hear her confession because of such gossip.’<sup>49</sup> But the other side of the coin is also the source of anguish – hearing oneself praised. And if the person does succeed in finding a confessor it’s likely that his fear and diffidence about these special graces will be an additional cause of great suffering; he won’t feel qualified to deal with such things. Such a confessor sees the devil around every corner. However there can be occasional compensations and Teresa hints that at times a burst of sunshine breaks through the dense and threatening clouds, bathing the wounded heart in its healing rays. The corresponding section in St. John of the Cross does not place this kind of emphasis on suffering, though he does refer to interior trials. For that we would need to refer back to his book the *Dark Night*.

### *Float Like A Butterfly.*

Chap. 2, Mansion 6 opens on a more upbeat note. We might note the neat inversion in the phrase, ‘...before He belongs to it completely.’ rather than the expected ‘..before it belongs to him completely.’ In either case a tender mutuality is indicated. She continues: ‘He makes it desire Him vehemently by certain delicate means the soul does not understand.’ Chap. 2.2 abounds in mystical paradox. Teresa reverts to speaking of the lover wounding the beloved:

It feels that it is wounded in the most exquisite way, but it doesn’t learn how or by whom it is wounded. It knows clearly that the wound is something precious, and it would never want to be cured. It complains to its Spouse with words of love, even outwardly, without being able to do

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.361.

otherwise. It knows that He is present, but He doesn't want to reveal the manner in which He wants to be enjoyed. And the pain is great, although delightful and sweet.<sup>50</sup>

Teresa now indicates that the Spouse is calling or rather whispering to it from the nearby Seventh Mansion where she says He dwells. The whole emphasis in this section lies in an effort by Teresa to explain the unexplainable and the paradox regarding exquisite pain tends to recur.

For Teresa a supreme benefit of this mystical grace is that it carries its own conviction. Unlike previous or lesser graces that often left her doubtful and anxious about deception, that's not the case here. The mystical teacher has her reasons for this conviction. Firstly she dismisses this as a diabolical intervention because she is sure deception couldn't result in such keen pain coupled with such spiritual quiet and delight. 'Secondly' she says, 'this delightful tempest comes from a region other than those regions where he (the devil) can be Lord. Thirdly the favour brings wonderful benefits to the person, the more customary of which are the determination to suffer for God, the desire to have many trials, and the determination to withdraw from earthly satisfactions and conversations and similar things.'

In the following paragraph, Teresa reinforces her message, maintaining that this favour cannot be faked because it simply doesn't happen if people try to acquire it at other times. She uses very realistic language to drive home her point that such an authentic experience is incompatible with doubt. She says it's the equivalent of 'as sure as I'm sitting here.' This kind of experience is also described in her *Life* Chaps. 29 and 30, but her treatment of it here is more magisterial and complete.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 367.



### *Locutions And Things.*

Chap. 3 of Mansion 6 continues to pursue the theme of this lofty mystical experience. She returns to the subject of various kinds of ‘locutions,’ which she examines in great detail. Some seem to be external in origin, others interior. Using the terms of the anthropological scheme she would have picked up from her scholastic confessors, she thinks others proceed from the ‘superior part of the soul.’ Her next category is more tangible - exterior locutions that come through the sense of hearing, such as ‘voices.’ Like everything else, pathology can occur here and indeed victims of delusion often appear in the courts, having carried out crimes suggested by the voices in their heads. This can be a result of psychological illness such as schizophrenia, or by drugs or other sources. Here Teresa like an analyst, wisely recognizes psychological illness – the very thing that secular humanists would posit as being at the root of all her visions and ecstasies.

In continuing her treatment of locutions, Teresa repeats her teaching in the *Life* and other places. Firstly, a genuine locution carries great authority. For instance if the person is distressed over some matter and hears the words, ‘it is I do not be afraid,’ the words actually effects what they signify – then it’s genuine. Secondly, a genuine locution results in a palpable feeling of peace and quiet and leads one to praise God. The third indication for Teresa is that the locution is semi-permanent, ‘engraved in our memory’ which doesn’t happen with information you pick up from other sources even the most impressive. Teresa sometimes found these kinds of locutions verified in the matter of some of her foundations. When all the indications pointed to inevitable failure in such and such a project, if a locution which Teresa felt to be genuine pointed in the opposite direction, then she held on to that and so it came about – the foundation took place against all the odds.

In paragraph 10 Teresa turns to locutions that proceed from one's fevered imagination. People would do well to follow her guidance here also. These kinds of locutions do not impart certitude, peace or joy. She is not sure if such locutions arise in a dreamlike state. In whatever context, the thing to watch out for is to be wary of a locution that tells you what you want to hear! She is not quite so clear on distinguishing a locution that comes from the devil rather than from God, but she is adamant that a confessor or well informed person should be consulted before any course of action is embarked upon as a result of the locution.

A more convincing kind of locution can occur in the context of an 'intellectual' vision, whereby she is quite sure it doesn't come from either one's imagination or from the devil. Another catch all test for Teresa is to ask whether the favour or locution leaves the person feeling more humble or not. If the answer is in the negative, then she would hold that the favour is not from God.

### *The Betrothed.*

In Chap. 4, Mansion 6, Teresa continues to discuss Spiritual Betrothal in detail and refers us to signs that accompany it. She indicates at the beginning that raptures, ecstasies and a feeling of being carried away are synonymous, and in particular a rapture, if genuine and not counterfeit, points to the person entering a state of Spiritual Betrothal. Again Teresa employs the language of deep intimacy with God. The immediate occasion of such a rapture could be simply hearing a word about God. As the divine touch increases she talks about an experience of union though we're not yet in the Seventh Mansion. We read: 'Now that it so pure, the Lord joins it with Himself, without anyone understanding what is happening except these two; nor does the soul itself

understand in a way that can afterward be explained.’<sup>51</sup> Here again Teresa resorts to paradox. Though the faculties and senses are suspended, the person has a new interior understanding of God’s greatness – unlike in someone having a fainting or convulsive fit. When she questions herself as to how she can know God in this way she frankly admits she doesn’t know how she knows – and she presumes nobody else does either – except God. During a time like this, Teresa experienced imaginative or intellectual visions. She insists that the faith convictions involved in these visions are etched in the memory, though again she’s at a loss to explain how this can be. In trying to give an example of what she’s talking about she suggests it’s like the time she had to visit the palace of the Duchess of Alba. She was ushered into a room containing a myriad of treasures. Though singularly underwhelmed by what she called that ‘conglomeration of things,’ she was quite sure she had visited that treasure trove but would be unable to describe any particular article she saw there. Similarly the Lord had taken her into a treasure house of grace, of that she was sure, was unable to recall the beautiful individual graces the Lord showered on her at such a time. Reflecting on all this she cries out in similar vein to John of the Cross in his *Spiritual Canticle*: ‘And if we hope to enjoy this blessing even in this present life, what are we doing?’<sup>52</sup>

*Withdraw Them Beloved, I Am Taking Flight.(John of the Cross.)*

In Chap. 5, Mansion 6, Teresa treats of a more intense form of rapture which she calls a ‘flight of the spirit.’ This form of prayers is impetuous and irresistible: ‘...for as easily as a huge giant snatches up a straw, this great and powerful Giant

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 379.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 383.

of ours carries away the spirit.’<sup>53</sup> Then she quickly changes the metaphor to one of a boat bobbing on the water or tossed about by waves. A variation on the ‘rapture of the spirit’ is a kind of out of the body experience which involves an imaginative vision. She talks about seeing things with amazing clarity with the eyes of the soul and in that ethereal light taking in an enormous amount of knowledge in an instant. She also talks of other variations on this which includes an intellectual vision whereby is represented ‘a multitude of angels with their Lord.’ In wrapping up her treatment of these various favours Teresa describes them as ‘the jewels the Spouse begins to give the betrothed ...’ Her next thought is to return to what she said at the beginning - great courage is needed to withstand this powerful incursion of the divine into the frail human recipient.

St. Teresa has devoted Chap. 6 to describing the pleasing effects of what she considers definite marks of divine favour. The prayerful person at this point is passionately in love with God and longs to be present with God and united to God. The individual feels alienated from worldly things and filled with an indefinable but real joy. There can be a desire for death itself so as to be free and be with Christ, to paraphrase St. Paul. The likelihood of raptures taking place in public and the further likelihood of these being misunderstood can cause great embarrassment to the individual. Again her earlier image of the fluttering butterfly crops up – unable to find rest anywhere. But with this second instance of butterfly in Chap. 6 we’re given another paradoxical opposite – the butterfly is so weighed down with chains that it cannot fly where it would like.

### *The Sacred Humanity.*

In the following chapter Teresa interrupts her descriptions of spiritual sweetness to insist on the need for continued and close contact with the sacred humanity of Jesus. Lest there be

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 387.

any temptation to rest exclusively in a rarefied type of mystical prayer, Teresa here makes her renowned plea for the place of Jesus even in advanced stages of spiritual growth. 'If she loses her guide, the good Jesus, she will be unable to find her way.' (Mansion 6, Chap. 7). Her devotion to the humanity of Jesus was coupled with a deep inner conviction of his presence by her side. She refers to this experience as 'an intellectual vision.' Teresa also gives us a graphic account of what she calls 'an imaginary vision' through which Christ was present to her. It is however not a dead but a living image that she speaks of.

The discussion on the sacred humanity of Christ leads naturally in Chap. 8 to Teresa trying to describe some visions by means of which she felt Jesus to be ineffably close to her. She writes: 'It will happen while the soul is heedless of any thought about such a favour being granted to her and though it never had a thought that it deserved this vision that it will feel Jesus Christ, our Lord, beside her.'<sup>54</sup> This is an 'intellectual vision.' Teresa is here writing somewhat retrospectively as she has already discussed this kind of vision in Chap. 4. But, as I say, here we have a follow-on from her discussion of the place of the humanity of Christ in her mystical life. Again she was riddled with doubt and anxiety about this vision and hastened to consult her confessor. The confessor was understandably at a loss how to deal with this and asked the question we might all like to ask in similar circumstances: 'How, since she didn't see anything, did she know it was our Lord; what kind of face He had?'<sup>55</sup> She told the confessor she didn't know and that doesn't get us very far. But Teresa is eloquent and confident as she discusses this exalted grace. For her the subject of the vision was not always Jesus, but sometimes Mary or one of the saints. But in all cases she enjoys absolute certainty regarding the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 405.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 406.

reality of the presence with her of Jesus, Mary or a saint. As before humility ought to follow in the wake of choice graces such as these, and if the person doesn't demonstrate humility in this area, this should be taken as a warning sign that some deception is afoot. This type of vision is also discussed in the *Life*, Chap. 26. In Chap. 9 Teresa pursues this subject, but turns now to imaginative visions.

### *Where Your Treasure Is*

Echoing the image she used earlier about the treasure in the palace at Alba, she asks us to imagine that this grace is like a jewel hidden away in a reliquary of which only the Lord possesses the key. It can be hugely beneficial to the lucky person who possesses it, though it's invisible, locked away. Occasionally however the Lord may open the jewel case to show it to his favourites. Seeing this splendid jewel will remain engraved on the memory of the person. And further confirming her emphasis on the sacred humanity from the previous chapter, she suggests the dazzling but transitory image displayed to the devout person might be Jesus as he appeared during his public ministry or after his resurrection. And for Teresa the word 'image' is very anemic for it's not like a portrait but something very alive. And although the vision is beautiful beyond words, it's also intimidating because of the sheer majesty of the Lord. In discussing the authenticity or not of a given vision, Teresa refers to a 'learned man' who held that the devil is a talented artist, so if he showed him an image of Christ he would reverence it. This is in line with St. Paul saying it doesn't matter who preaches the gospel as long as Christ is proclaimed. This director was also against contrary advice that recommended insulting the vision. The way to insult the vision was known as 'showing the fig.'<sup>56</sup> Allied to

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<sup>56</sup> Teresa is referring to the great Dominican, Dominic Banez. She uses the Spanish phrase 'den higas,' literally, 'making the fig' as a means of insulting

this was an experience deep within of the oneness of God with his creation. 'It realises how all things are seen in God, and how He has them all within Himself.'<sup>57</sup>

This reminds us very much of Dame Julian's vision in her 'Revelations of Divine Love.' Chap. 11 of that treatise begins: 'After this I saw the whole Godhead concentrated as it were in a single point and thereby I learnt that he is in all things.' (Cfr., *Ruysbroeck*. Book of Supreme Truth. Chap. 9).

Earlier on in her treatment of the sixth mansion we may remember Teresa spoke about 'the pain or wound of love.' Now she becomes more specific: there's a rapid growth of love in the soul and this sometimes expresses itself by means of a deep inner wound caused by a fiery arrow. We have a full account of this unusual phenomenon in the *Life of St. Teresa* written by herself. It occurs in Chap. 29 and the experience she describes there is known as the transverberation of her heart, an incident that, as we saw earlier, has been depicted by Bernini in his famous sculpture in Carmelite Church of Santa Maria de Vittoria in Rome.

We may compare what happens here with what John of the Cross talks about in Stanza 8 of the *Spiritual Canticle*. 'And being brought near death by the arrows you receive, from that which you conceive of your beloved.' John in his prose commentary has this to say: 'These touches (of God) so impregnate the soul that she can truthfully say she conceives.'<sup>58</sup> It would be hard to find bolder or stronger terminology than this in spiritual literature. The experience of transverberation could be accompanied by other physiological phenomena such as the disjoining of the limbs and a decreased pulse rate.

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someone. Teresa could not bring herself to offer this gesture to her vision of Jesus.

<sup>57</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa, V. 2, p.419.

<sup>58</sup> Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, p. 442.

### *Seventh Mansion – The Inner Sanctum.*

We now come to the final mansion of St. Teresa's masterpiece *The Interior Castle*. What she says here represents the summit of perfection. At the outset she asks God to move her pen so that she can say something about the unfathomable riches of God. Certainly she said sublime things in the previous mansion but now even more sublime things remain to be said about this ultimate stage of spiritual development. She now pursues the nuptial imagery which has here its closest application. The Lord is now prepared to enter into a special covenantal relationship of love with the lover in the terminology called Spiritual Marriage. For Teresa this takes place in the *interior castle* within the bounds of the seventh mansion.

This is how she tries to describe that peak moment on the spiritual journey when the person is brought into that dwelling place:

The Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons, through an intellectual vision, is revealed to it through a certain representation of this truth. First there comes an enkindling of the spirit in the manner of a cloud of magnificent splendour; and these Persons are distinct, and through an admirable knowledge the individual understands as a most profound truth, that all the Persons are one substance and one power and one God alone.<sup>59</sup>

Continuing in this way she's reminded of the words of Jesus in the gospel: 'Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we shall come to them and make our home in them.' (John 14:23) How this can be, again she is at a loss to know. Surprisingly as some might think and as Teresa suggests, this state will not absorb the person to the exclusion

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<sup>59</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa, V.2, p.430.



of all else. On the contrary such a person is extremely alert and attentive to her or his obligations, and when these have been fulfilled, will revert to a quiet enjoyment of the godhead within. And even though the divine presence is felt to be very real, there's a lessening in intensity as compared with the initial unitive embrace, because otherwise it would be impossible to carry on normally. Again she employs the illustration of sitting in a darkened room with friends – you cannot see them but you know they are there.

Chap. 2 of Mansion 7 opens with the remark that there's still more to come and indeed the fullness of Spiritual Marriage must await the life to come. Again Teresa refers to the sacred humanity of Jesus and tells us that the first time she experienced this favour it was like an Easter resurrection experience that we read about in the gospel. (She speaks of course in the third person – 'the person of whom we are speaking'!) In that first encounter she tells us about the intimacy of the exchange: The Lord tells her 'that now it was time that she consider as her own what belonged to Him and that He would take care of what was hers, and He spoke other words destined more to be simply heard than repeated.'<sup>60</sup> Here also she offers the comparison of the difference between Spiritual Betrothal and Marriage as that which prevailed in the Spain of her day; an arrangement between two people who are betrothed only 'and two who can no longer be separated' – except by death!

As Teresa understands it, the Lord reaches into the very depths of the human spirit and does not have to enter through any of the doors of the senses. She's reminded of the risen Jesus visiting the apostles through closed doors and greeting them with the words, 'Pax Vobis.' As to the delight this occasions, no comparison comes to mind. It's truly a foretaste of heavenly glory. 'For he has desired to be so joined with the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 433.

creature that, just as those who are married cannot be separated, he doesn't want to be separated from the soul.' (M. 7. Chap. 2). Again, she suggests it's like two wax candles being spliced, there is then only one flame. A further image is given: 'In the spiritual marriage the union is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be separated from the water of the river.'<sup>61</sup> Not content with these two graphic images she uses the two additional ones of a stream entering the sea or light entering a room with two opposite windows – the light merges in the centre.

Teresa is careful also to observe that no one, even the sublimest mystic is absolutely assured of salvation and there's never room for complacency. Another point she makes is that exterior trials and upsets and contradictions continue to impact the person but the centre holds: 'The King is in his palace and there are many wars in his kingdom and many painful things going on, but not on that account does he fail to be at his post.'

*'The Marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready,' (Apoc.19:6 foll.)*

Mansion 7, Chap. 3, goes on to celebrate the results of this deepest possible union with God. God's glory and honour is uppermost, that of the beloved is minimal. Suffering is greatly desired as we see in the case of Teresa's spiritual daughter Thérèse. Insults are laughed off and saintly people conceive a special love for those who ill-treat them. It's true that Oscar Wilde wasn't thinking of the highest contemplation at the time, when he quipped, 'Forgive your enemies, nothing will annoy them more'!

Working to extend God's kingdom becomes paramount in such a person's life. One of the most notable aspects of Teresa's mystical teaching here is that at this point raptures are

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 434.

very rare and so the former triggers of raptures – sermons, devotional images, music, etc, do not happen. Teresa has viewed such phenomena as indications of a certain ‘weakness.’ ‘It is now,’ she says, ‘that the bride receives the kiss of the bridegroom, for which she has been longing, here the wounded heart receives waters in abundance, here the soul delights in the tabernacle of God.’<sup>62</sup>

Chap. 4, Mansion 7 is the final chapter of this classic work of mysticism by St. Teresa of Avila. But her teaching has peaked in the previous chapter and now she simply winds down her work like a symphony that returns to its basic chords – love, service, suffering and humility on all occasions. Down to earth as always, Teresa will still not allow any flights of fancy, even of a mystical kind. ‘These favours,’ she writes, ‘are not merely to give the soul pleasure; they are given to strengthen our weakness, so that we may be able to imitate Christ in his sufferings; and this is the greatest thing God can do for us: grant us a life which is in imitation of that lived by Our Lord.’<sup>63</sup>

Finally a paraphrase of the Epilogue to the book may be in order here.

Remember that no one can enter these mansions by his or her own efforts. The Lord is a great lover of humility, and if you consider yourselves unworthy of entering even the third mansion, he will more quickly give you the will to enter the fifth, and if he should bring you into the last mansions you will find rest in everything, even in the things which most try you. There are many more mansions besides those I have described here, in which you will want to lose yourselves in praise of the great God who created you in his own image and likeness. I submit all here written to the judgement of the holy Roman Catholic Church, in which I wish to live and die. Amen.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 442-443.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 445.

## *7. The Book of Her Foundations. (1573-1576)*

In the Collected Works of St. Teresa *The Book of Her Foundations* comprises Volume 3 in the ICS edition, together with her Minor Works, namely *The Constitutions* (for her nuns), a treatise *On making the Visitation,* a short piece called *A Satirical Critique* and a similar piece called *Response to a Spiritual Challenge*. The final section on Volume Three includes St. Teresa's Poetry.

*The Book of Her Foundations* is a substantial volume of over 200 pages in 31 Chaps. Interestingly this account of her Foundations doesn't deal with the first and most important of them – St. Joseph's in Avila. To this she had already devoted five chapters towards the end of her *Life* which we have already covered.

### *Medina del Campo*

In the course of her lifetime St. Teresa opened seventeen new convents of enclosed Carmelite nuns throughout Spain. That amounted to a remarkable feat for those days, given the difficulty and hassle of travel. *Foundations* begins with an account of the opening of her second convent, also like the first, dedicated to St. Joseph in Medina del Campo, a large town some distance north of Avila. She ties in the beginning of her book with some edifying anecdotes concerning the holiness of her first group of nuns at St. Joseph's in Avila. This whole enterprise was not due to any desires for expansion on Teresa's part, but rather evolved from her zeal to promote the salvation of as many people as possible. The initial seed was sown by a friar called Maldonado who returned from the Indies and drew the attention of Teresa and her nuns to the immense needs of the missions. This was followed by a visit from the Superior General of the Carmelites in Rome, John Baptist, whom Teresa calls Rubeo the Spanish form of the name. He encouraged her

to continue the good work she had begun and develop more convents along the lines of St. Joseph's in Avila. The question of a Reform of the Friars arose at this time also, but Teresa notes that Rubeo sensed the resistance of members of the Order to this and so the matter was dropped. However Teresa was not someone to give up so easily and a few days later she wrote to the Fr. General begging permission to carry out a Reform of the friars. He gave permission, but with a sting in the tail, demonstrating typical Italian diplomacy – it would have to depend on the consent of the present and former provincial of the friars, which Teresa correctly sensed would not be readily forthcoming. Typically also Teresa saw the humour in her position – ‘weighed down with patents and good desires’ and very little else! (The Reform of the friars or rather a new beginning for ‘Teresian’ friars would not come about until later and would involve many trials for St. John of the Cross.)

This second venture beyond the walls of St. Joseph's stirred up some criticism. The first obstacle Teresa encountered was the opposition of the Augustinian friars who lived near the house Teresa had decided to rent, because she didn't have sufficient funds to buy one. However with keen foresight, Teresa had enlisted the help of a Carmelite prior in Medina, Anthony de Heredia, who managed to obtain a dilapidated house going cheap! (Again Teresa quipped that though it looked dilapidated when they arrived there at midnight, it was even more dilapidated looking with the benefit of morning light. She included an additional quip at Anthony's expense, saying the Lord must have allowed him to be quite blind if he thought this might be a fit habitation for the Blessed Sacrament! But to be fair to Anthony, he had warned her in advance that there was only one room in the house and the rest had collapsed. After many difficulties and misgivings on Teresa's part, the ruined house was eventually repaired and they were able to move in. In the meantime, good people in the

town had arranged temporary accommodation for the nuns.

While in Medina Teresa again broached the subject so dear to her heart – the Reform of the friars with Fr. Anthony. Her first surprise was when he announced his intention of being the first friar himself. However instead of being pleased, she was somewhat taken aback, because though she recognized his good qualities, he didn't appear to her to be the right man for the job. He didn't strike her as embodying the kind of austerity she envisioned in a founder. She excused this on the grounds of his 'fragile' health. She probably got another surprise when he told her he was thinking of joining the Carthusians. Rather than handing him an outright refusal, Teresa suggested they wait awhile and in the meantime he could practice the kind of life she had in mind. Not very long afterwards another young friar came along, a student of Salamanca University. His name was John de Yopez y Alvarez, later known as John of the Cross. This time Teresa's reaction was very different as she saw in him the pioneer she was looking for. Coincidentally he too intended to join the Carthusians. Teresa prevailed on him to put his plans on hold. He agreed provided he didn't have to wait too long!

### *Aside On Prayer.*

In some ways the bald title *Foundations* is misleading when we take up this book. As well as dry facts on finding benefactors and places to live in for a new convent, we also come across gems of teaching on prayer. We could be forgiven for thinking we were reading one of her treatises on prayer. For example Chap. 5 begins with no reference to 'foundations' either existing or still to come, but contains straightforward teaching on prayer. Later in the chapter we read that her idea of prayer is: 'to be alone thinking of Him and delighting in the delights He gives us.' <sup>64</sup>In any case, as in her other works,

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<sup>64</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa, V. 3, p.117.

Teresa often breaks off into a prayer to God or Jesus. Much of Chap. 5 is devoted to praising the virtue of religious obedience. In the following chapter Teresa continues to give advice on how to avoid self deception in one's prayer life. She deals particularly with a state she calls 'absorption' which, if not carefully monitored, may have dangerous consequences for the health of the person involved. Eminently practical as always, Teresa gives anecdotal details of what she was trying to explain. She cited two sisters who became convinced that they would die if they didn't receive Holy Communion every day. In those days of course daily Communion was unheard of. The pair obtained permission to receive daily but Teresa became deeply concerned by the thinking behind this particular devotion. Receiving Communion in those days was also bound up with the permission and compliance of one's confessor. Teresa visited the convent and was determined to take a strong stand, as she saw the whole affair as a deviation from the norm. She suggested that all three of them, that is the two sisters and herself should abstain for some time. If all three happened to die, she suggested this would be better than starting up a divisive custom in the community! Amusingly again, even when dealing with serious matters regarding high contemplation, Teresa tells us that the pair got through the first day without dying, but with some difficulty! The next day the difficulty had lessened somewhat. The eventual outcome was satisfactory. Teresa tells us, because 'within a short time both they and everyone else recognized that this had been a temptation,' something Teresa had suspected from the beginning. She offered another anecdote, but this time it concerned a member of a convent of Bernardines. One of the community became so 'absorbed' after Communion that she would fall on the floor and remain there for eight or nine hours. On being consulted for advice, Teresa told them to curtail her fasts and disciplines and 'distract' her. As a result she made a

complete recovery! Teresa herself was sensitive to these kinds of problems and not at all critical of the sisters involved. The reason was that she could see herself in these situations, and gave the example of a desire she once had to receive Communion when she saw others approach the altar, even though she had just received the Eucharist herself shortly before! After analyzing her spiritual feelings, she realized that her keen desire simply proceeded from the wish to experience the ‘sensible delight’ again. The bottom line in all this is that Teresa was on the lookout for signs of self-will and an indifference to obedience in the whole question of making spiritual progress. Chaps. 7 and 8 don’t mention her foundations either – the first gives advice on treating ‘melancholy’ a blanket term for depression and mental illness in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Chap. 8 is concerned with ‘visions and revelations’ topics covered in her other books.

### *Malagon.*

We now return to the story of her new foundations. This one would be situated in Malagon, a small town south of Avila. Providence has indeed interesting ways of bringing things about when we look at the facts in this case. It happened that a rich lady in the town who became attached to Teresa when she met her some time previously, wished to have a Carmelite convent where she lived. Though Teresa, for reasons of her own, was initially against the foundation, she was persuaded to go along with it. The foundation took place on Palm Sunday 1568 after a solemn Procession with the townspeople. Needless to say this convent was also dedicated to St. Joseph. Teresa stayed there two months but admits to being distracted by the thought of opening a convent not only in Valladolid but also in Toledo. Valladolid is a short distance north of Medina del Campo. In fact this new foundation had been on the cards some months before that at Malagon. It seems a rich young man had



offered Teresa a house with a large garden ‘a quarter of a league’ from the city, which she accepted. However when she arrived at the place she was dismayed to find it was near a river, which for her spelled sickness for the sisters. The house opened on August 15, Feast of the Assumption, and shortly afterwards Teresa’s fears were borne out – almost all of them fell sick. Fortunately it worked out well in the end. The convent was, by way of exception, dedicated to the ‘Conception of the Queen of Carmel.’ The sister of the Bishop of Avila became aware of their plight and offered them another house in exchange in a more suitable locality.

### *Valladolid.*

After Malagon, Teresa now set her sights on the ancient city of Valladolid, one time capital of Castile and later of all Spain. Teresa was not happy with the house which had been gifted to them, because it was near a river and she thought the nuns would be in danger of becoming ill there also. In this she was proved right again and eventually they moved to a new place nearer the city.

### *Enter Discalced Carmelite Friars. (Foundations, Chap.13.)*

### *Duruelo.*

After recounting some edifying stories of vocations to her own convents, Teresa turns to the historic beginning of the Reform of the Friars in 1568. The impetus for a humble beginning in a humble location came from a certain Don Rafael a gentleman in Avila. He owned a disused house in Duruelo near Avila, a remote area, scarcely a village. It was so remote that when Teresa and her companion went to look over the place they got lost several times. As anticipated, the place was most inadequate as Teresa’s companion was keen to point out. However when she got back to Fr. Anthony he was very

enthusiastic. In the meantime Teresa and John went to Valladolid where she had an opportunity to mentor John very fully regarding her vision for the whole Discalced Reform movement. Typically Teresa observes: ‘He was so good that I, at least could have learned much more from him than he from me.’<sup>65</sup> It now only remained to convince the present and previous Carmelite provincials, both of whose permission was required, to change their minds. With this in view Teresa marshaled all her powers of persuasion to bring about this outcome. She first went to see the current provincial Alonso Gonzalez, courageously putting the hard word on him and he capitulated. Rounding off her efforts, the Bishop of Avila and his sister, Dona Maria de Mendoza, swung things in her favour. (It helped a little that the former provincial, Angel de Salazar was awaiting a generous donation from Dona Maria which might have been jeopardized in the event of his refusal.) Meanwhile Fr. Anthony was busy trying to collect necessary items for the new foundation, but his efforts were largely unsuccessful. Teresa impishly remarked that the only items he had in abundance were clocks – five of them, which amused her greatly. His wish to have regular prayer times took precedence even over a bed to sleep in. Soon both he and John of the Cross were firmly ensconced in what Teresa referred to as ‘no better than the stable of Bethlehem.’ The first mass was said at the beginning of Advent 1568. Teresa visited the new house on her way to found a convent in Toledo the following Lent when she found Fr. Anthony sweeping out the chapel. It was then she made her famous quip: ‘What’s this, *mi padre*; what has become of your dignity?’ Anthony’s cheerful answer was: ‘Cursed the time I had any!’<sup>66</sup> Teresa was taken aback by the extreme austerity practiced there and the ubiquitous crosses and skulls! She made some efforts to get them to moderate this

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

austerity, fearing in her wisdom it might backfire, but she admits her efforts met with little success. However not long afterwards Fr. Anthony who was prior of the community, was prevailed on to transfer to a place called Mancera where there was a little chapel containing a widely venerated image. It seems that Anthony may have had water divining skills which unwittingly Teresa took to be miraculous. He had a stick in his hand which he waved about in the grounds of this place and then gave the instruction: 'Dig here.'

### *Toledo.*

In *Foundations* Chap. 15 Teresa begins to describe events surrounding her fourth convent for nuns in the city of Toledo. Like so many of her enterprises this one too turned out to have wheels within wheels. A wealthy merchant who was dying, decided to bequeath the means of setting up a convent for Teresa. Before he died he entrusted negotiations to his brother and his brother's son-in-law. The latter was 'a theologian' Teresa tells us. This man began to make difficulties and the foundation stalled. Furthermore the Archbishop was away and the Administrator refused to issue a licence for a foundation. It appears that a civil licence would also be needed, but the governor, influenced by his council refused. Not to be beaten Teresa resolved to buttonhole the governor herself. She went to a church near his home and sent messengers requesting him to come and speak to her. She prevailed. They had a long chat and she came away armed with a licence. When the initial negotiations failed, other doors opened for Teresa and her nuns, and they got settled into a nice rented house. However their troubles were not over as some members of the council didn't take too kindly at being thwarted. They complained to the canon (whom Teresa had informed in advance), 'astonished at such boldness that a useless little woman should found a monastery against their will'! The canon craftily sympathized

with them but informed them that she had founded convents in other cities with due authorization. The nuns began to live there in dire poverty in spite of the fact they had previously spent time in the house of Teresa's rich friend, but she didn't seem to notice their predicament. Amazingly also soon after this, the brother of the original deceased benefactor seems to have been won over and became a great benefactor of the convent.

### *Pastrana.*

Chap. 17 of the *Foundations* opens with the interesting account of the foundations made by Teresa for both nuns and friars in Pastrana, a town lying directly east of Madrid, capital of Spain. The idea for a foundation or foundations here came from the famous Ana de Mendoza, the young Princess of Eboli who had a palace in Pastrana. She subsequently proved to be a thorn in Teresa's side and that of her nuns – as well as many other people in Spain. She was married to Portuguese-born Ruy Gomez de Silva who was an influential person in the court of King Phillip 11. The actual invitation came at an inopportune time for Teresa, who had just completed the arduous work of the foundation in Toledo. It was the day of Pentecost and just as Teresa was hoping for 'some time with the Lord' on this feast, a servant of the Princess arrived with instructions to conduct her to Pastrana. To the dismay of the servant Teresa's first reaction was to refuse because she needed to instruct the new community. Then she sought to compromise by writing a nice diplomatic letter to the Princess. She went to the chapel to pray for inspiration, and an inner voice told her to go! As in similar situations Teresa would still look for confirmation from a confessor before she acted. So next day she set out with her companions by way of Toledo. Here a providential meeting was arranged which would take place on her journey towards Madrid. At the house of her

friend she was told that a certain hermit wished to see her. He was an Italian named Ambrosio Mariano de San Benito.

As a backdrop to this we should realize that Teresa was greatly concerned about the development of the friars and it was not happening – one house and two friars. As Duruelo was a ‘Residence’ only, as such they couldn’t take novices.

### *Scouting For Talent.*

Idelfonse Moriones ocd takes up the story: “Hence her joy when, in June 1569, she was told in Madrid (on her way from Toledo to found at Pastrana) that there was an Italian hermit there who was anxious to meet her. ‘As I had only two friars, it struck me that it would be great if this man became one too.’” Teresa wrote. The memorable meeting between Ambrosio Mariano Azaro, the hermit of Tardón, and the Mother Foundress has been immortalised in Ch.17 of *Foundations*. With Mariano, who henceforth called himself Mariano de San Benito, and his companion Juan Narduch, who became Juan de la Miseria, Teresa had what she needed to set the second foundation in motion.<sup>67</sup> ‘I made habits and white mantles and did all I could to get them to receive the habit immediately.’<sup>68</sup> The problem of finding a house for them was solved by Ambrosio himself; he decided to use the hermitage which Prince Ruy Gómez had placed at his disposal just outside Pastrana ‘for hermits of discalced friars.’ Teresa herself made the brown habits and white mantles for the friars. The famous preacher of Notre Dame in Paris, Henri Lacordaire was known to remark in this context, ‘You could easily see that the Carmelite habit had been designed by a woman.’ The inauguration took place on the feast of the Visitation, July 2, 1569, the provincial being represented by Fr. Muriel. The

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<sup>67</sup> It was Juan who painted a portrait of Teresa, about which she made the famous remark: ‘God forgive you Brother Juan, you have made me ugly and cross-eyed’!

<sup>68</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa,  
V.2, p. 184.

superior, to quote Teresa, was ‘a man advanced in years – not very old, but not young either - a very good preacher called Baltasar de Jesús.’

Just as she did in the case of John of the Cross, Teresa assured him when they met that he could live an eremitical life in her Reform movement. Mariano reflected on this overnight and surprised himself (but not Teresa) at how quickly he arrived at a decision. Again Teresa amusingly notes that part of his surprise was that he had allowed himself to be swayed by a woman, showing here more than a touch of 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish chauvinism. The way was now clear for a second foundation of friars, for which Teresa had permission from the Superior General of the Order, but she would also have to clear it with the provincial as in the case of the nuns. She shrewdly noted the fact that Duruelo and Pastrana were so remote that her friars there would be no threat to the established Carmelite Order.

Teresa proceeded to Pastrana and was cordially welcomed in their palace by the Prince and Princess of Eboli. Teresa spent three months in Pastrana, much of it under duress, as the whims of a Princess didn't sit easily with Teresa's spirituality. She was prepared to abort the convent planned for nuns, but Ruy Gomez, a man of much common sense, managed to rein in his wife, and Teresa went ahead with the foundation for nuns, especially as this would ensure a house of friars also. The Prince and Princess proved generous benefactors of the new convent, but Ruy Gomez died five years later in 1573. The young bereaved Princess decided to join the convent she had helped to found and that was the signal for trouble in the cloister. The Princess continued her aristocratic lifestyle in the convent and Teresa was at her wit's end as to what to do. It was obvious they would have to move. Eventually according to Teresa the wilful Princess left in high dudgeon but that was not

the end of trouble for the sisters, as she continued to interfere. (There was a rumour that the sisters left in the middle of the night, leaving the Princess to her convent!)

### *Salamanca.*

The next stop for Teresa was the university city of Salamanca where John of the Cross had completed his studies. Again the dreary round of tedious travel and hard work, including that of a physical kind. The house earmarked for them was being occupied by students who refused to leave until the last minute. They left eventually but also left the house in a mess. With notable understatement, Teresa says, 'They must not have had a gift for cleanliness!' Students generally have not changed noticeably in five hundred years or more. So more scrubbing into the small hours, as it was nightfall when they arrived. Teresa's companion was of a timid and fearful disposition and became obsessed with the idea that one of the disgruntled students was lurking somewhere in the house and posed a threat to them. It was the vigil of All Souls with bells tolling mournfully through the city. This fuelled her companion's imagination with further combustible material and she wailed, 'What would you do Mother, if I died now and left you alone by yourself?' Teresa responded: 'Sister, if that happens I'll think of what to do, now let me sleep'!<sup>69</sup> This foundation became a great headache for Teresa due to the difficulties raised by the owner. He was particularly furious over the alterations she made, but when she threatened to pull out he didn't want this either. The house became dedicated to St. Joseph. At the time of her writing the nuns had been there over three years and the purchase had not yet been finalized.

### *Alba de Tormes.*

Just two months after the new house in Salamanca opened,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

Teresa received a request from the Duke of Alba and his wife to found a convent in Alba de Tormes. Teresa relates quite an intriguing story in regard to this house. The 'Foundress' as Teresa calls her, was not the Duke or his wife but a lady named Teresa de Layz, whose husband was an official of the Duke. The house they eventually offered was not in the town but in a place called Tordillos, some distance away. Alba is about half way between Avila and Salamanca. The convent was opened on the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul 1571. It was dedicated to the Annunciation of Our Lady. Alba is significant as the place where Teresa would die in October 1582.

### *Segovia.*

The next foundation was made in Segovia, a city rich in associations with St. John of the Cross, where he lived for a time when the friars eventually made a foundation there also. It too had been the cause of a dilemma for Teresa in the following sense. The 'Apostolic Commissary' Pedro Fernandez had ordered Teresa to return to the Convent of the Incarnation some time before this to bring about some needed reforms there. In following up developments we have an example of Teresa's mystical life impinging on her practical work. She tells us: 'One day while I was there in prayer, Our Lord told me to go to Segovia and make a foundation.'<sup>70</sup> However she was aware that Fernandez didn't wish her to make any new foundations. But against that the Lord told her he himself would bring this about. What was she to do? She simply wrote a frank letter to the Commissary stating that Fr. General had given her permission to found convents when the opportunity arose and she felt the Lord would be served there. Fernandez then made no further objection. It looked as if things would run smoothly, but it was not to be. On the feast of St. Joseph the Blessed Sacrament was reserved and of course the house itself

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 204.



was dedicated to the saint. However the permission for the foundation had only been verbal from the Bishop, and in the absence of the Bishop, his Vicar General had other ideas. He stormed into the convent and suspended the celebration of mass. He was intent on taking the celebrant prisoner but didn't carry it through. (The celebrant seems to have been John of the Cross and he would in fact be taken prisoner later on in different circumstances.) Before leaving, he posted a guard at the door of the chapel which Teresa considered quite unnecessary. Teresa was unperturbed – she knew she was in possession of a site and would await developments. She briefed some of her influential friends and sent them to reason with the VG, explaining that the Bishop gave her permission for the foundation. (Afterwards it transpired that he was aware of this and was miffed that he had not been informed.) And a good thing too, Teresa noted wryly, or things might have been even more difficult! They had a qualified success – he agreed to let them stay but would not allow the Blessed Sacrament to be kept in the chapel. This was an experience to be repeated in her final foundation. On top of this ecclesiastical wrangle, various groups, especially religious orders, bombarded her with lawsuits which only ended when she agreed to pay up.

### *Beas.*

We now move on to the town of Beas, another place associated with St. John of the Cross. It was quite far south, much further so than Malagon, which itself was further removed from the main cluster of convents than Teresa would have wished. Moreover it was in the ecclesiastical province of Andalusia, a point Teresa only later realized. (Beas itself was north of the Andalusian border) Castilians and Andalusians belong to different ethnic groups, Andalusians having a strong Moorish influence. Teresa would not knowingly have gone to Andalusia. As it happened another foundation at Caravaca, a

place to the south-west of Beas, was in the offing. Notwithstanding this Teresa pressed ahead in spite of her misgivings in regard to the Apostolic Commissary. In this case however he cheerfully gave permission because, as Teresa tells us, he was aware that the Order of Knights, who had control of Beas, would refuse. At least they had consistently turned down other Orders up to now. But in fact they didn't object. The convent opened on the feast of St. Matthias 1575. It was dedicated to St. Joseph of the Saviour. Teresa goes on to narrate the story of two pious sisters, through whose instrumentality the foundation came about.

### *Seville.*

Chap. 23 begins to give an account of the foundation of St. Joseph of Carmel in Seville, which of course is much further south than Beas – fifty miles from the coast. Teresa now introduces us to one of the most significant members of the Carmelite Reform – Jerome Gracian. Though she had corresponded with him she had never actually met him. We can easily pick up from the fervent tone in which she speaks of Gracian that he became a great favourite of hers. While he was a good and dedicated Carmelite, he was also very suave and charming, qualities which were not noticeable externally in John of the Cross. Like John too he would also become a storm centre in the Reform. However Teresa was not the only prioress to be captivated by Gracian's charm. As she tells us his entry into the Order seemed accidental. He had gone to Pastrana to discuss the candidature of a particular girl there. The prioress immediately saw him as a candidate for the friars! To bring this about she set her nuns praying fervently for this outcome. And that's exactly what happened. It seems that Gracian reciprocated the trust Teresa placed in him and admits he opened his heart to her in ways that he had never done even with his confessors. It says a lot about Gracian's persuasive

powers that Teresa went ahead with a foundation of her nuns in Seville, in the heart of Andalusia, against her better judgement. The journey to Seville was nothing short of nightmarish and Teresa had plenty of other harsh journeys with which to compare it. To make matters worse, she endured one of the worst fevers she could remember. It was probably this journey also that inspired Teresa's famous remark, 'Life is like spending the night in a room in a bad inn.' One particular inn was so bad she decided she would be better off enduring the sun in the field than in that little room – so they got up and left. Naturally too the sun was not like her own Castilian sun but much more trying. It provided herself and her sisters with frequent reminders of purgatory or even hell! Another hair raising adventure occurred while crossing the moody Guadalquivir river on a barge. Apparently the people on the other side of the river let go of the rope with disastrous consequences for the barge.

### *Fun And Games.*

The group's experience at Cordoba was more along the lines of an episode from Don Quixote than anything else. They reached Cordoba in the early hours and thought they could attend a quiet mass without stirring up too much of a commotion. For this purpose they were directed to a church across a bridge. This was when things began to unravel. First they discovered they needed a licence to cross the bridge. This involved a delay of two hours when the issuer of licences arose from his night's sleep. This lapse of time allowed for curious crowds to gather around the wagon. In the meanwhile nobody had noticed that the wagon was too wide for the bridge. Some on the spot adjustments were made – with the help of a saw, Teresa thought. All this ensured that a full church awaited their arrival, it being a feast of the Holy Spirit. In spite of her love for the Eucharist, Teresa's impulse at this point was to bolt, but

Julian de Avila wouldn't hear of it. Here we have another tongue in cheek observation from Teresa, one that has given heart to moderate feminists: 'Since he was a theologian, we all had to follow his opinion'!<sup>71</sup> On hindsight I would have suggested they should have strode in, discarding the heavy veils over their faces. There's nothing like that kind of mystery to pique the curiosity of ordinary folk. Teresa observed that you would have thought a herd of bulls had entered the church! The whole farce had one positive result – she got such a rollicking from the crowd that her fever disappeared.

But there was worse to come. When they reached Seville they discovered that that Fr. Mariano had not obtained a licence from Archbishop Cristobel de Vela because he was adamantly opposed to a house being founded in poverty. Mariano and Gracian had been hoping that Teresa's presence alone would be enough to win him over. Indeed he had made favourable noises previously regarding Teresa's nuns. Eventually the Archbishop himself fronted up and in this interview we can see what mettle Teresa was made of. When the situation demanded it she had the courage of a lioness. We're reminded here of St. Mary Mackillop's courage in standing up to imperious ecclesiastics. 'I told him,' Teresa writes, 'about the harm he was doing us.'<sup>72</sup> He relented. But this did not solve their problems. She was extremely disappointed with the lack of response on the part of Sevillians. Soon she was called back north and there she met her wealthy brother Lorenzo who had returned from South America. He would provide financial help for the convent later acquired in Seville. As in so many other places theirs was no easy passage into their new convent. The occupants at first refused to move and the Franciscans nearby strongly objected. That difficulty was solved by Teresa as she usually did – by moving in at

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.226.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

night when the friars were sound asleep. Lorenzo himself came and adapted the house for the sisters which took him several weeks. When all was finished, Teresa hoped for a low-key opening but the local priest wouldn't hear of it. Even the Archbishop himself wished to come and install the Blessed Sacrament. The whole event took place with the greatest pomp and ceremony with procession and banners and lots of music making for which the Andalusians are famous. When it was over, perhaps in true Andalusian style there were artillery salutes and exploding firecrackers. In Chap. 26 Teresa tells a dramatic story of the first nun to join in Seville. It had all the elements of a gothic fantasy with maids conspiring to slander a child and do her out of her inheritance which they themselves thought they had secured.

### *Caravaca.*

While preparing for her work at Beas the question of Caravaca was still in Teresa's in-tray. Scarcely any of Teresa's foundations were carried off without some degree of drama, and in some cases melodrama. As in Seville two pious sisters were at the centre of proceedings, at Caravaca there were three devout young ladies involved. On the point of departing for Beas, a messenger arrived from Caravaca sent by a certain Dona Catalina. It appears that a Jesuit priest preached in the church which the young ladies frequented and lauded Teresa's work as a Foundress of strict convents. They decided to live an enclosed life in a room in Catalina's house, as remote preparation for a new foundation. Because the matter of Seville intervened in the meantime, Teresa had to shelve plans to visit Caravaca after Beas. Though impressed by the behaviour of the girls she was put off when she realized how remote a place Caravaca was, and that the road leading there was extremely bad. However she sent Julian of Avila and Antonio Gaytan to investigate, giving them plenipotentiary powers. They were

impressed. In another flash of humour Teresa commented, 'They never stopped talking about it, nor did they stop talking about the bad road.'<sup>73</sup> The licence was slow in coming so Teresa sent Antonio back along the bad road to make the necessary arrangements, turning the house into a temporary convent. The licence eventually arrived but contained a condition which would subject them to the Order of Knights and Teresa was not having any of that. So she wrote to King Philip 11 asking him to overrule them which he did. The young ladies were naturally finding the long delay very difficult, given their constricted lifestyle in one room. One of them in particular became mentally ill, or suffered from melancholy in Teresa's terms, and returned to her home. Though Teresa usually presided over the opening of each house she was caught up in Seville. Gracian however as Superior sent a community to Caravaca to join the two aspirants and the convent was founded on the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, 1576 and again, like the majority of her convents, dedicated to St. Joseph.

Following this tremendous expansion of her new Order, Teresa now had a quieter interlude of four years which brings us to the year 1580. We should recall that she had only two years to live at this point. As well as that her left arm was useless since she fell down the stairs in Avila in 1577 and broke her arm. The arm was set but not successfully. Then a botched repair job by an unqualified person, involving rebreaking her arm, just made it worse.

The Foundress was never really to enjoy prolonged periods of rest. Her unrest now stemmed from the way the Reform of the friars was panning out. As with many other saintly founders, and Mary Mackillop is one example, Teresa and her entire reform became the pawn of ecclesiastical politics, involving of course the ancient Order of Carmelites.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

The first sign of trouble to come was when the ‘Calced’ friars prevailed on the Rubeo (Rossi) to halt any expansion among the friars. On the other hand, Teresa’s confessors urged her to continue. Now she found herself between a rock and a hard place. The change in attitude to her by Rubeo whom she loved hurt her deeply. To compound the problem the ‘holy nuncio’ Ormaneto, sympathetic to Teresa died, and his successor Philip Sega spelt disaster in the short term for Teresa. Briefed by the Calced fathers he initiated a persecution of Teresa’s key friars, Fr. Anthony de Heredia, Jerome Gracian and Mariano. Sega’s approach is standard practice by dictators up to the present time – you imprison or exile those who oppose you. However the new nuncio had to reckon with King Philip 11 who admired Teresa’s work among the nuns and friars and he imposed four counselors on Sega, headed by his personal Chaplain. Another was Pedro Fernandez, whom we have met previously, sympathetic to Teresa.

### *Villnueva de la Jara.*

Meanwhile during a stay in Toledo, a request came from the town of Villnueva de la Jara, a small town north-west of Malagon. Here again there was an existing group of nine dedicated women living at the Shrine of St. Anne. The proposition didn’t appeal to Teresa in the least. Realist as always, the prospect of trying to mould so many women into her desired way of life seemed to her a non-starter. She consulted her confessor who gave her wise, if indecisive advice – not to turn it down immediately. So here we have Teresa caught in yet another dilemma. But Teresa’s friends were very persistent, including Fr. Anthony (whose period of exile had expired!) She was still hesitant about how the sisters would be provided for, and even more importantly as she now stated her problem baldly, she feared the nine would ‘band together against those others who would join them,’ aware that this

would not be the first time such a thing could happen. She took the unusual step of writing to the Calced provincial Angel de Salazar to block it. But the hard-headed mystic also brought the matter to the Lord in prayer. In one of her frequent 'locutions' Jesus not only told her to go ahead but also reprimanded her for dilly-dallying! So Teresa and her companions left for Villanueva on February 13, 1580. When they eventually arrived at the designated house they were met with great pomp and ceremony by the entire town. Teresa was sorry that the remarkable and holy lady who initiated it all had died in the meantime. She sings her praises in this chapter dealing with the foundation. The foundation was inaugurated on the first Sunday of Lent 1580.

### *Palencia.*

Chap. 29 of the *Foundations* begins the story of the next convent in Palencia, a town to the north of Valladolid. The impetus for this came from the local Bishop Alvaro de Mendoza, who was Bishop of Avila at the start of the reform. At the same time a foundation in Burgos further north was being mooted. Here again Teresa found herself less than enthusiastic about going ahead. It didn't help that she was desperately ill at his time. As usual she consulted a confessor, a Jesuit Fr. Ripalda, whom she had known previously in the same capacity. He proved to be something of a Job's comforter this time, suggesting that the reason for her timidity was that she was getting old! (Reflecting on that at the time of writing, Teresa said that could not have been the reason as at the time of writing she was even older and didn't have the same sense of timidity..) In this atmosphere of indecisiveness, Teresa again took the matter to the Lord in prayer. The resulting locution told her to proceed with both foundations (Burgos also) and gently chided her, 'when have I ever failed you?' At this point Teresa tells us that five nuns accompanied her and a sixth who



was a lay-sister, on whom she depended for everything in view of her paralysed arm. This was Anne of St. Bartholomew, afterwards famous in the Order. The first mass establishing the foundation was celebrated on the feast of 'King David' February 1580, under the name 'St. Joseph of Our Lady of the Street.' There were many complications regarding a final house for the nuns which caused no end of trouble for Teresa.

It was while she was staying in Palencia that an historic event took place in regard to the Teresian Carmelite friars. This was the setting up of a separate Province for the friars, coming after years of wrangling with the Calced, including the imprisonment of John of the Cross in Toledo. This was largely due to the intervention of Philip 11, obtaining a Brief from Rome for this purpose. The first Chapter met at Alcala and Jerome Gracian was elected provincial.

### *Soria.*

We're nearing the end of the book of the *Foundations* and the final Chaps, 30 and 31, deal with Teresa's last foundations – Soria and Burgos in the north of Spain. We are also approaching the end of Teresa's life. Bishop Velasquez of El Burgo de Osma near Soria had been an esteemed confessor of Teresa while she was in Toledo but had now been promoted. In asking Teresa to found a convent there he was responding to the wishes of a wealthy lady who requested it. The house offered by this lady was eminently suitable and commodious and moreover the Bishop would give the nuns a church nearby which could be reached by a covered way. So on the feast of St. Elisha, 1581 the first mass establishing the foundation was celebrated.

### *Burgos.*

The final foundation made by St. Teresa of Avila was in the city of Burgos, the most northerly of her foundations. A

foundation was also organized at this time in the most southerly city of Spain, Granada. This was authorized by Teresa but put into effect by John of the Cross and Ven. Anne of Jesus. The idea for a Carmelite presence in Burgos had been initiated by the Jesuit fathers six years previously. Teresa's friend, Bishop Mendoza agreed to put the matter before the Archbishop of Burgos and found him more than amenable. There was one snag however. The Archbishop warned her she would need the consent of the city authorities. Teresa sensed that there was trouble ahead as councils are seldom unanimous and it appears that there was an additional city body whose consent would be needed. However the initial shock came, not from either of these, but from the good Archbishop himself. Teresa was thoroughly perplexed. When Jerome Gracian went to see him he adopted an extremely angry tone, telling him they had come without his permission. When it was pointed out that he had invited them, he replied that he had meant Teresa should come alone to discuss the matter and not bring a crowd of nuns! (With some prescience, Gracian had previously asked Teresa if she had obtained permission from the Archbishop in writing?.' It seems that only verbal permission from a bishop was considered necessary, even according to the Council of Trent. The interview ended with His Grace telling Gracian that they could go back to where they came from. Teresa allowed herself a comment laden with the heaviest sarcasm she ever employed. 'And the roads were so good' she wrote, 'and the weather so beautiful.'(It was snowing most of the time.) Though begged to do so by two of his canons, the Archbishop adamantly refused to allow a priest to say mass for the nuns. Even when all the Archbishop's demands were met, regarding income and other matters, and an official document signed, the Archbishop passed it on to his Administrator, who it seems had the power to delay matters further by finding 'flaws' in the arrangements! Chiefly however it was back to square one –

they could not find a convent until they had their own house. At this stage Gracian was tempted to pull out, but Teresa was conscious of the divine inspiration she had received and believed it would end successfully. Temporary accommodation was arranged in a hospital and Teresa's friends scoured the city for a suitable house. Eventually they found one and made a quick purchase. Then a hue and cry was raised that it had been sold too cheaply. From bitter experience Teresa knew that she would have to act quickly and she and her nuns moved in immediately, even though there was a reluctant tenant there who was slow to move. The Archbishop was again angry that she had acted so promptly and criticized the fact that she had installed grilles and turntables. Though there was a chapel in the house he again refused to allow mass to be said there, so the sisters had to take to the streets every day. The stubborn opposition offered by this Archbishop of Burgos, initially favourable, beggars belief, though not unprecedented in the long history of the church. The blank licence remained on the Archbishop's desk and he was ably assisted by his Administrator in persisting to refuse to sign it. Providentially, it appeared to Teresa, the Administrator had to go on a trip and a more reasonable man took his place, she informed her friend the Bishop de Mendoza of Palencia. Teresa tells us the Bishop of Palencia was disgusted with his conduct, something she would never say herself. He wrote an open letter to the Archbishop including such home truths that, after consulting her confessor, Teresa decided it would be imprudent to hand over. He told Teresa that just as in the case of Jesus, former enemies Pilate and Herod had become friends, now she was the cause of the reverse – friends had become enemies! (There was a rumour that he challenged Archbishop de Vela to a duel!) Teresa begged him to write again and adopt a more friendly tone. To please Teresa he did so – and it worked. The first mass was said on April 19, 1582, the Octave day of Easter.

Afterwards he admitted that doing so was the hardest thing he had done for the Carmelites! Not everyone proved to be as charitable to the Archbishop as Teresa, and when she heard how people were taking him to pieces in conversation she began to feel sorry for him!

Teresa ends the Book of the Foundations with an Epilogue explaining how her first convent of St. Joseph in Avila came under the jurisdiction of the Discalced Carmelite friars. At the beginning of course there were no friars to direct them.

## 8. *Poetry.*

The final section of Teresa's writings that concerns us is her poetry. We need to remember that there is no comparison here with the poetry of St. John of the Cross and that for two reasons: firstly, John wrote his commentaries to explain his poetry while Teresa's work is completely independent of her major writings. Secondly John is a major poet of Spain but Teresa is not. Here is Teresa's own take on her poetry which we find in her *Life*.

O my God, what must that soul be when it is in this state? It wishes it were all tongue, in order that it may praise our Lord. It utters a thousand holy follies, striving continually to please Him by whom it is thus possessed. I know one who, though she was no poet, yet composed, without any preparation, certain stanzas, full of feeling, most expressive of her pain: they were not the work of her own understanding; but, in order to have a greater fruition of that bliss which so sweet a pain occasioned her, she complained of it in that way to God. She was willing to be cut in pieces, soul and body, to show the delight she felt in that pain.<sup>74</sup>

So it's obvious from this that Teresa didn't write poems for their own sake, but simply to give some form of release to the pent-up love within her. While this was also true of John of the Cross he simply had the gift of lyrical genius in addition.

Teresa also used her poetry as a means of instructing her daughters on the spiritual path of prayer. She also wrote poems to mark Feastdays of the church and she wrote several poems which she dedicated to her nuns on the occasion of a clothing or profession ceremony.

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<sup>74</sup> Collected Works of St. Teresa, V. 1, p. 149.

The first poem in *The Collected Works* is typical of not only her other poems but of her mystical strivings as a whole. It's called 'I live without living in myself.' and the final line of each stanza is a summary of her entire spiritual journey, 'I die because I do not die'.

## *Dilectus Meus Mihi* <sup>75</sup>

*Myself surrendered and given,  
The exchange is this:  
My Beloved is for me,  
And I am for my Beloved.*

*When the Gentle hunter  
Wounded and subdued me,  
In love's arms,  
My soul fallen;  
New life receiving,  
Thus did I exchange  
My Beloved is for me,  
And I am for my Beloved.*

*The arrow he drew  
Full of love,  
My soul was oned  
With her Creator,  
Other love I want not  
Surrendered now to my God.  
That My Beloved is for me,  
And I am for my Beloved.*

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<sup>75</sup> My Beloved is mine. (Song of Songs)

## *St Teresa's Bookmark*

*Let nothing disturb you,  
Let nothing frighten you,  
All things are passing;  
God only is changeless.  
Patience gains all things.  
Who has God wants nothing.  
God alone suffices.*