

**PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY  
SAINT PATRICK'S COLLEGE MAYNOOTH**

**THE CENTRALITY OF THE EUCHARIST IN THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST OF  
SAINT TERESA OF JESUS**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Theology in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement  
for the PHD Degree in Theology**

**By**

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## DECLARATION

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to explore two aspects of the Christological experience<sup>1</sup> of Teresa of Jesus (1515-1582), and to argue for the centrality of the Eucharist in these aspects of her experience of Christ.

### Research Question

This exploration will seek to answer to main research questions as follows:

1. What are the two aspects of Teresa's Christological experience?
2. How does the Eucharist inform these aspects of Teresa's experience of Christ?

The Christological experience of Teresa of has two aspects: the ascetical and the mystical.<sup>2</sup> The former consists of the experience of Christ she attained through her efforts in prayer, which includes meditating on the events of the earthly life of Christ (especially on his Passion), and in representing him (in keeping him present) within herself. The latter consists of the experience of Christ she attained without any effort of her own; an experience that was gratuitously given to her by God. This experience denotes divine activity in a person; when God takes complete possession of one's life. It is, according to Carlos Eire, "a state in which

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<sup>1</sup> The word *experiencia* (experience) features very frequently in Teresa's writings. According to *Concordancias de los escritos de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, it appeared 185 times. She also used it in the past tense as *experimentado* (experienced) 9 times, and in a verb form as *experimentar* (to experience), 26 times. In the wider sense, Teresa used the word experience to refer not to sensations or emotions, but to a field of knowledge; to a particular (natural) way of knowing. Her understanding of experience according to Edward Howells, "is that of 'being experienced in' something or 'having experience of' something, as opposed to the more commonly used modern sense of the sensory apprehension of an object." Apart from Teresa's reference to experience from the wider viewpoint, she also refers "to the more specific levels or states of development by which experience is gradually transformed from the natural way of knowing to the mystical way of knowing." The natural way of knowing through experience is the stage in which human efforts prevail, while the mystical way of knowing through experience is the stage in which divine action dominates. It is neither provoked nor acquired, but given. See Juan Luis Astigarraga and Agustí Borrell, eds. *Concordancias de los escritos de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, vol. 1 (Roma: Editoriales O.C.D., 2000), 1118-1121. Also Edward Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila: Mystical Knowing and Selfhood* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 94-95. And St. Teresa of Ávila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Ávila*, vol. 1 (*The Book of Her Life*), trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1987), 13:12 and 14; 20:23; 30:4 and 12; 34:11. Henceforth further references to *The Book of Her Life* in this work will only be cited as *Life*.

<sup>2</sup> For the use of these terms please refer to the glossary at the end of this thesis. See pages 337-340.

God reaches out to the soul and makes his presence felt directly.”<sup>3</sup> At this stage, the Christ Teresa longed to encounter through her efforts in prayer, made himself known to her through some extraordinary mystical experiences such as locutions and visions.

Teresa’s experience of Christ, therefore, involves a journey from the ascetical to the mystical; from going in search of Christ in prayer (by meditating on the life of Christ, and in making him present within her), to Christ coming in search of her by revealing himself to her through the mystical phenomena of locutions and visions. Through these experiences, she heard Christ speak to her in the depths of her soul, and perceived him through a series of visions in which she saw him appearing to her in his risen and glorified humanity.

Much scholarly work has been done on both the ascetical and the mystical aspects of Teresa’s Christological experience,<sup>4</sup> but there has not been the same attention paid to the central importance of the Eucharist in these aspects of her experience of Christ. In this work therefore, we shall attempt an attentive exploration of the centrality of the Eucharist in Teresa’s experience of Christ in prayer and in her mystical experiences of him through locutions and visions. We will demonstrate how the Eucharist informs these aspects of her experience of Christ. It is my goal that this study contributes to a better and a deeper understanding of the central place of the Eucharist in Teresa’s experience of Christ in prayer

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<sup>3</sup> Carlos Eire, “Ecstasy as Polemic: Mysticism and the Catholic Reformation,” in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, vol. 83 (2018) 3-23.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Tomás Álvarez, in *Living with God: St. Teresa’s Concept of Prayer*, divided Teresa’s experience of Christ into the ascetical and the mystical stages. While the former, according to him, involves Teresa’s efforts at reaching Christ in prayer through meditating on his passion and on some “gospel characters and scenes which could bring her nearer to Christ,” and in making him present within her, the latter stage did not involve any effort of hers. It was a gift from God. Secundino Castro in *Cristologia Teresiana*, treated extensively Teresa’s experience of Christ in prayer, and her mystical experiences of him in locutions and visions. For his part, José Arcesio Escobar in *La Experiencia Cristocéntrica de Teresa de Jesús*, explored Teresa’s (ascetical and mystical) experiences of Christ and how they transformed her life. Mario Caprioli, in *Col Cristo di Teresa: Itinerario Cristologico dell’orazione Teresiana*, presented Teresa’s spiritual experiences as a journey from the ascetical to the mystical. See Tomas Alvarez, *Living with God: St. Teresa’s Concept of Prayer*, trans. Christopher O’Mahony & Dominica Horia (Dublin: Carmelite Centre of Spirituality, 1980). Also José Arcesio Escobar, *La Experiencia cristocéntrica de Teresa de Jesús* (Colombia: Editorial San Pablo, 2006). Mario Caprioli, *Col Cristo di Teresa: Itinerario Cristologico dell’orazione Teresiana* (Firenze: Edizioni OCD, 1982). And Secundino Castro, *Cristologia Teresiana*, Segunda Edición (Madrid: Editorial Espiritualidad, 2009).

and in her mystical experiences of him in locutions and visions. In this study I also wish to explore Teresa's mystical experiences related to the Eucharist and her Eucharistic teaching. These two have received little attention to date.

### **Research Structure**

This work is in five chapters. The first chapter will look at the life and times of Teresa, exploring her human and spiritual development especially in relation to her family upbringing, her entry into Carmel, her discovery and practice of prayer (of recollection), her spiritual awakening (second conversion), and the deepening of her relationship with Christ in prayer. This chapter will also situate Teresa in the context of 16<sup>th</sup> Century Counter-Reformation Spain, exploring the social-political and religious situation of that time, highlighting particularly the challenges of this period and how they shaped her thought and its transmission.

Chapter two will treat of Teresa's experience of Christ in prayer and demonstrate how her prayer at this stage was primarily directed to Jesus Christ in his sacred humanity. Teresa prayed in order to encounter the person of Christ. She sought to experience his presence through the concrete events of his earthly life, by meditating on the gospel scenes (especially on the Passion of Christ), and striving to relate with Christ in her prayer as some characters in Scripture did. She also sought to make him present within herself in faith. This became for her the means of experiencing the presence of Jesus Christ in his humanity.

Chapter three will examine Teresa's mystical experiences of Christ; how after persistent and intense efforts in meditating on the life of Christ, and in keeping him present within herself, Christ reached out to her and revealed himself to her in extraordinary ways. Our study will limit itself to Teresa's mystical experiences of Christ through locutions and in visions, whereby she heard from him and saw him in his risen and glorified humanity. These phenomena will be considered from the point of view of their positive effects on Teresa's

life; on how they helped her in the practice of the theological virtues and in her understanding and expression of the Christian faith.

Chapter four will explore Teresa's Eucharistic experiences, how the Eucharist informs her experience of Christ in prayer and in her mystical experiences. The time after the reception of Communion was Teresa's intense moment of encounter and communion with Christ (in prayer), and also the occasion of many of her mystical experiences.

Chapter five will survey Teresa's teaching on the Eucharist. This teaching is rooted in the Church's belief in the Eucharist as the real presence of Christ. The core of Teresa's Eucharistic teaching is contained in chapters 33-35 of *The Way of Perfection* devoted to the commentary on the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." She interprets this petition from a Eucharistic point of view. She believes that in it, Jesus was asking the Father that he be allowed to remain always with us in the Eucharist. For her, "our daily bread" is the Eucharist; an extension of Christ's "bodily" presence on earth.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE LIFE AND TIMES OF TERESA OF JESUS

The context in which Teresa of Jesus<sup>5</sup> lived had a profound impact on her. For a proper understanding of her life and experience, this chapter will situate Teresa in the context of 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain in which she lived; and will explore the social–political and religious situation of Counter-reformation Spain, underlining above all the challenges she encountered in this period and their impact on her life and teachings. It will also demonstrate how the situation of her time brought Teresa to an experience of Christ, and how this experience not only empowered her, but also shaped her response to these challenges.

Thus, we will begin this chapter by presenting Teresa’s biography with special emphasis on her early life and struggles, her human and spiritual development; especially on the foundation of her practice of prayer, her devotion to the humanity of Christ and her mystical experiences of Christ especially in the Eucharist. This will lead us to the next stage where we will situate Teresa’s life and experience in the context of her times.

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<sup>5</sup> At different times in her life, Teresa was known by different names. She was baptized as Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada (a combination of both her father’s and mother’s family names). As a Carmelite nun in the Convent of the Incarnation in Ávila, she was called Doña Teresa de Ahumada; a name which linked her with the minor nobility status of her mother’s family. As a Discalced Carmelite nun in 1562, she took the name (religious name), Teresa de Jesús. Henceforth, (until her death in 1582), she signed all her correspondence and texts with Teresa de Jesús or Teresa de Jesús Carmelita. After her death and canonization, she came to be known as “Teresa of Avila,” a name which was meant to associate her with her place of birth. It was also used especially by the French and Belgians to distinguish her from Thérèse of Lisieux, a Carmelite nun, who was beatified and canonized in the 1920s. For the purpose of this work, we shall be using “Teresa of Jesus,” because it emphasised the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ in her life, and the personal relationship she had with him; a relationship that was nurtured by a life of prayer (especially by meditating on the Passion of Christ) and of devotion to the Eucharist (as Christ’s abiding presence with us), leading to union with him in the mystical marriage, which is what we intend to portray in the whole of this work. For more on the names of Teresa, see Juan Bosco, “A la recuperación de un nombre perdido: Teresa de Jesús,” in *Monte Carmelo*, 90 (1982), 266-304. Also. Juan Bosco, “Identidad literaria de una española: ¿ ‘Teresa de Ávila’ o ‘Teresa de Jesús’?” in *Actas del Congreso Santa Teresa y la literatura mística hispánica*, ed. Manuel Criado Del Val (Madrid: EDI-6, 1984), 117-121.

## 1.1 Early Years: Childhood and Adolescence Period

Teresa of Jesus, Spanish mystic, Saint and Doctor of the Church, writer and reformer of the Discalced Carmelite Order, was born in Ávila, Spain on March 28, 1515. Her father Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda (1471-1543), was the son of Juan Sánchez de Toledo Cepeda (1440-1507), a wealthy Toledan merchant, and a *converso* (converted Jew).<sup>6</sup> In 1505 Alonso Sánchez married Catalina del Peso y Henao (1485?-1507) but two years later she died, leaving him with two children. He re-married again after two years, to Doña Beatriz de Ahumada (1495-1528). This marriage produced ten children, of which Teresa was the third. In all, there were twelve children, as Teresa herself stated: “We were in all three sisters and nine brothers.”<sup>7</sup> Teresa’s parents were both pious and virtuous Catholics and they inspired her to take up a life of prayer and piety.

My father was fond of reading good books, and thus he also had books in Spanish for his children to read. These good books together with the care my mother took to have us pray and be devoted to our Lady and to some of the saints began to awaken me when, I think, six or seven years old, to the practice of virtue. It was a help to me to see that my parents favoured nothing but virtue.<sup>8</sup>

As a child Teresa spent time in silent prayer and was dedicated to doing good works: “I gave what alms I could...I sought out solitude to pray my devotions, and they were many, especially the rosary, to which my mother was devoted; and she made us devoted to it too.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Juan Sánchez de Toledo Cepeda (Teresa’s paternal grand-father), was one of the many Jews who became Christians under duress in the process of unifying the different kingdoms and religions of Spain into one unit and one faith; the Roman Catholic faith. With time it was discovered that some of these Jews including Juan Sánchez were secretly practicing their former religion. This was considered a very serious offence. In 1485 (seven years before the final expulsion from Spain, of the Jews who refused to renounce their religion), the Tribunal of the Inquisition granted pardon to those who confessed being secret Judaizers. As penance, they went in procession on seven consecutive Fridays to all the Churches in Toledo, wearing the *sambenitos*—a knee-length yellow penitential garment with crosses painted on it. Juan Sánchez and his family took part in this penance. As a result of the humiliation and the trauma of this exercise, he relocated with his family to Ávila, where he continued his trade, and dropped “de Toledo” from his name. There, he raised his then young son Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda who became the father of Teresa of Jesus who was born in Ávila. For more on this, see Gareth A. Davies, “Saint Teresa and the Jewish Question,” in *Teresa de Jesús and Her World*, ed. Margaret A. Rees (Leeds: Trinity and All Saints’ College, 1981), 51-73. Also, Linda Martz, *A Network of Converso Families in Early Modern Toledo: Assimilating a Minority*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 134-140.

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, 1:3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:1.

<sup>9</sup> *Life*, 1:6.

Following the footsteps of her parents who enjoyed reading, Teresa began to read at an early age. She became fascinated by the account of the lives of the saints and the martyrs she read in the *Flos Sanctorum* (Lives of the Saints). The lives of these holy men and women inspired in her a deep longing for martyrdom. She shared this childish desire and plans with her brother Rodrigo de Cepeda (1511-1557), who also had the same aspiration.

I had one brother about my age. We used to get together to read the lives of the saints. When I consider the martyrdoms the saints suffered for God, it seemed to me that the price they paid for going to enjoy God was very cheap, and I greatly desired to die the same way...And my brother and I discussed together the means we should take to achieve this.<sup>10</sup>

At the age of seven, she and her brother Rodrigo, ran away from home to die as martyrs in the land of the Moors. “We agreed to go off to the land of the Moors and beg them, out of love of God, to cut off our heads there.”<sup>11</sup> Their greatest aspiration was to suffer and die for Christ as the martyrs did, so as to attain the reward that awaits the martyrs in heaven. But they did not go far in their adventure, for according to the Jesuit Spanish theologian and Teresa’s first biographer, Francisco de Ribera (1537–1591), they had hardly crossed the river (called Adaja) which runs through Avila, “when an uncle met them and took them back home to their mother.”<sup>12</sup>

Deprived of their desire for physical martyrdom, Teresa and her brother tried making hermitages in a garden in their backyard, pretending to be hermits. “When I saw it was impossible to go where I would be killed for God, we made plans to be hermits. And in a garden that we had in our house, we tried as we could to make hermitages piling up some little stones...”<sup>13</sup> Commenting on this passage, Carol Slade said that since Teresa and her brother did not succeed in achieving the physical martyrdom they desired, they:

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<sup>10</sup> *Life*, 1:4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> See Francisco de Ribera, *La Vida de Santa Teresa de Jesus: Nueva Edicion Aumentada con una Introduccion, Copiosas Notas y Appendices*, ed. P. Jaime Pons (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1908), 96.

<sup>13</sup> *Life*, 1:5.



Then tried out the mode of spiritual suffering represented by the hermit saints, whose experience does occur in liminal space. In contrast with the public drama of martyrdom, the suffering of the hermit takes place in solitude, sometimes becoming known to the world only when another hermit seeking a cave finds the corpse along with evidence of self-imposed deprivation and suffering. The first move toward this sainthood is a flight from society...The prospective saint then shows the capacity to endure suffering by taking little, if any, food and water on the journey to the site of the hermitage, usually a natural cave rather than a human construction of any kind.<sup>14</sup>

They also failed in their attempt at becoming hermits, as some little stones they piled up for making a hermitage in their garden “afterward would quickly fall down again.”<sup>15</sup> Teresa abandoned this plan, and switched over to playing with other girls pretending to be nuns in a monastery. Although she still preferred the hermit life. “When I played with other girls I enjoyed it when we pretended we were nuns in a monastery, and it seemed to me that I desired to be one, although not as much as I desired the other things I mentioned (martyrdom and hermit life).”<sup>16</sup>

Though the desire for martyrdom remained with Teresa all through her life, it acquired a new meaning in her experience and writings as time went on. She came to see martyrdom not in a literal sense, (as in shedding of one’s blood), but as an alternative means of pursuing a virtuous life.<sup>17</sup> This alternative means of martyrdom was characterized by the practice of virtues and in dying to self and the world. Writing to her Discalced Carmelite nuns years later, she proposed these to them as an ideal:

The least that any of us who has truly begun to serve the Lord can offer him is our own life. Since we have given the Lord our will, what do we fear? It is clear that if you are a true religious or a true person of prayer and aim to enjoy the delights of God, you must not turn your back on the desire to die for God and suffer martyrdom. For don’t you know yet, Sisters, that the life of a good religious who desires to be one of God’s close friends is a long martyrdom? A long martyrdom because in comparison with the martyrdom

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<sup>14</sup> Carol Slade, *St. Teresa of Avila: Author of a Heroic Life* (London: University of California Press, 1995), 80-81.

<sup>15</sup> *Life*, 1:5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:6.

<sup>17</sup> Carlos M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 402.

of those who are quickly beheaded, it can be called long; but all life is short, and the life of some extremely short.<sup>18</sup>

Here Teresa affirms the religious life as a spiritual and long martyrdom in contrast to the actual martyrdom which occurs in a trice. Spiritual martyrdom is long because it entails an ongoing witnessing to Christ through ones' goodness of life, practice of virtues and struggles with temptations and sin.

The idea of religious life and the practice of virtues as an alternative to actual martyrdom had its origin in the writings of the fathers of the Church who lived many centuries before her (though Teresa did not read their works, she might have got their teachings through her spiritual directors and the learned men she consulted). For instance, Pope St. Gregory the great (540-604), in his *Homilies on the Gospels*,<sup>19</sup> contrasts between spiritual martyrdom and actual martyrdom:

There are in truth two kinds of martyrdom: one in the heart, the other in heart and action at the same time. And so we can be martyrs, even if we are not slain by anyone's sword. To die at the hands of a persecutor is unmistakably martyrdom; to bear insults, to love one who hates us, is martyrdom in our secret thought.<sup>20</sup>

He reiterates this in his *Dialogue* as follows: "There are two kinds of martyrdom, Peter, one that is secret and one that is public. Martyrdom is secret or hidden whenever the soul is eager

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<sup>18</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, vol. 1 (study edition), trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2000), 12:2.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory's teaching on spiritual martyrdom is contained in two of his works: *Homilies on the Gospels* and *Dialogues*. These works were among the most widely read revered texts of the Middle Ages. *Homilies on the Gospels* is a collection of forty homilies on the gospels he preached to the people in the early years of his papacy (between 590-591). They were delivered during the significant seasons of the liturgical year or the feasts of titular martyrs in various churches in Rome. *Dialogues* was written around 593-94, and presented as a discussion with his sub-deacon Peter, a member of his inner circle. Though Teresa did not read Gregory's *Homilies on the Gospels or Dialogues*, she read another of his works, *Moralia in Job* (a two-volume work of moral commentary on *The Book of Job*) titled *Los Morales de San Gregorio Papa, Doctor de la Iglesia*, a Spanish translation from the Latin, by Alonso Alvarez de Toledo and published in Seville in 1514 and 1527. She recounts as follows: "It greatly profited me to have read the story of Job in *St. Gregory's Morals*. For it seems the Lord prepared me by this means, together with my having begun to experience prayer, so that I could be able to bear the suffering with so much conformity to his will." See. *Life*, 5:8.

<sup>20</sup> Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. David Hurst (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), Homily 35.

and ready for suffering even if there is no open persecution.”<sup>21</sup> Martyrdom is possible without public persecution or an execution by the sword of the executioner. “For even without submitting our necks to the metal sword, still we are putting to death the carnal desires in our hearts with a spiritual sword.”<sup>22</sup> He attributes a lot of this to the practice of virtues. Thus, he regarded as martyrs “those who through their practice of virtues and continuous acts of self-denial have sacrificed themselves to God on the altar of their hearts.”<sup>23</sup> Alfred C. Rush summed up Gregory’s teaching on alternative (spiritual) martyrdom as “a hidden asceticism of the practice of virtue and the overcoming of vice, a process in which the person overcomes not the pagan tyrant but the tyranny within himself.”<sup>24</sup>

Teresa’s mother died in 1528, when she was 13 years old leaving her afflicted and distressed at the void she felt. She told of her despair and how she turned to the image of the Virgin Mary for solace and protection:

I remember that when my mother died I was twelve years old or a little less. When I began to understand what I had lost, I went, afflicted, before an image of our Lady and besought her with many tears to be my mother. It seemed to me that although I did this in simplicity it helped me. For I have found favour with this sovereign Virgin in everything I have asked of her, and in the end she has drawn me to herself.<sup>25</sup>

Teresa at this stage (the period following her mother’s death) was on the threshold of adolescence. According to Jean-Jacques Antier, “For a girl, age thirteen signalled a great change: the passage from childhood to adolescence.”<sup>26</sup> This stage of transition brought Teresa to a new awareness of herself and her God-given qualities, which was to lead her far from God and her childhood piety. She described it as follows: “As I grew older, when I began to

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<sup>21</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, The Fathers of the Church, vol 39, trans. Odo John Zimmerman (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1977), Dialogue 3, 26.

<sup>22</sup> Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, Homily 1.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 3, 26 and 28.

<sup>24</sup> Alfred C. Rush, “Spiritual Martyrdom in St. Gregory the Great,” in *Theological Studies*, vol 23, Issue 4, (1962), 569-589.

<sup>25</sup> *Life*, 1:7.

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Jacques Antier, *Teresa of Avila: God Alone Suffices*, trans. Claire Quintal (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2007), 18.

know of the natural qualities the Lord had bestowed on me (which others said were many), instead of thanking him for them, I began to make use of them all to offend him.”<sup>27</sup>

It was a very critical and challenging time for her. A time when as Joseph Chorpenning puts it: “The happiness, security, and peace of her childhood home are threatened by the absence of a mother to guide Teresa through the troubled years of adolescence, by Teresa’s friendship with a frivolous female cousin, and by the presence of unscrupulous servants.”<sup>28</sup> It was during this stage of development as she narrated in the second chapter of the *Book of her Life* that she lost some of her childhood piety and religious zeal. She mentioned three factors that contributed to her adolescent crisis and the loss of her childhood fervour. The first was her love for books of the romances of chivalry.<sup>29</sup> She started reading more of these books as a teenager, and became completely carried away by them.

I began to get the habit of reading these books...I didn’t think it was wrong to waste many hours of the day and night in such a useless practice, even though hidden from my father. I was so completely taken up with this reading that I didn’t think I could be happy if I didn’t have a new book.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, there was a shift in her readings; from reading the lives of saints and holy martyrs of the *Flos Sanctorum* and other pious books, to reading stories of romances of chivalry. These books did her more harm than good; for by reading such fantasies, she “started to grow cold” in her desires “and to fail in everything else.”<sup>31</sup> The second factor was her excessive concern about her appearance, her dress, her feminine charms and her desire to please others: “I began to dress in finery and to desire to please and look pretty, taking great care of my hands and

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<sup>27</sup> *Life*, 1:8.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph F. Chorpenning, *The Divine Romance: Teresa of Avila’s Narrative Theology* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992), 52.

<sup>29</sup> Books of chivalry (considered as the literature of the day) were very popular in Spain in the first half of the 16th century. It contained adventure stories, mostly of medieval tales of knighthood. Teresa was first introduced to this books by her mother who was fond of them and used them as pastime. “My mother loved books of chivalry...and we used to read them together in our free time...Our reading such books was a matter that weighed so much upon my father that we had to be cautioned lest he see us.” *Life*, 2:1. For more on the chivalric romances of the Spanish Golden Age, see Daniel Eisenberg, *Romances of Chivalry in the Spanish Golden Age* (Newark, Delaware: Juan de la Cuesta, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> *Life*, 2:1.

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

hair and about perfumes and all the empty things in which one can indulge, and which were many, for I was very vain.”<sup>32</sup> The third factor was the bad influence of cousins on her. She recounted how she became very friendly with some of her cousins and how they influenced her negatively.

I had some first cousins who often came to our house, though my father was very cautious and would not allow others to do so; please God he had been inspired to do likewise with my cousins...they were about my age—a little older than I—and we always went about together. They liked me very much, and I engaged in conversations with them about all the things that pleased them. I listened to accounts of their affections and of childish things not the least bit edifying; and, what was worse, I exposed my soul to that which caused all its harm.<sup>33</sup>

These cousins were children of her wealthy aunt Doña Elvira de Cepeda (1465), the widowed sister of her father. Their upbringing was not in harmony with Teresa’s family’s moral standard. They were more inclined to worldly pleasures than Teresa and her immediate family members. So, Teresa’s father had some misgivings about her closeness to these cousins, and did his best to discourage it. Though in a very mild way, for according to Stephen Clissold, he “was bound to his sister not only by family affection but by gratitude for the financial help she had given him, and it was impossible to slam the door in her children’s face.”<sup>34</sup>

Of all her cousins, Teresa was particularly very friendly to one of them, who visited their house regularly, and liked to associate with her always. But she influenced Teresa badly, by leading her to a way of life she was not used to before. A life devoid of virtues and characterized by pastimes such as gossips, frivolous conversations, and vanities. She expressed the situation as follows:

I imitated all that was harmful in a relative who spent a lot of time in our house...she was so frivolous that my mother tried very hard to keep her from coming to our home...this relative was the one I liked to associate

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 2:2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Clissold, *St. Teresa of Avila* (London: Sheldon Press, 1979), 18.

with. My talks and conversations were with her, for she encouraged me in all the pastimes I desired and even immersed me in them by sharing with me her conversations and vanities.<sup>35</sup>

Teresa was not used to these pastimes and vanities. In fact, it was a new and strange way of life that was far from her honest and pious upbringing. As Elizabeth Hamilton puts it, Teresa was “initiated into pastimes she had not known before—into a world that had little in common with that of the Don Alonso’s household.”<sup>36</sup> This relationship did not edify Teresa by any means. On the contrary, it made her situation worse as she recounted: “And indeed this conversation so changed me that hardly any virtue remained to my naturally virtuous soul. An I think she and another girl friend of the same type impressed their own traits upon me.”<sup>37</sup> Her father and her sister made several attempts at dissuading her from this friendship, but to no avail. Teresa attested that “their careful efforts were useless, for I was strikingly shrewd when it comes to mischief.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, she continued with the unhealthy and undesirable friendship with her cousins, but in secret. “I used every effort to keep my actions secret...”<sup>39</sup> Resorting to secrecy was mainly because of her fear of losing her reputation and also of endangering the reputation of her father (who was regarded as a very honest man) and her entire family.<sup>40</sup> But in all these, she did not involve herself in any great evil as she stated:

I was never inclined to great evil—for I naturally abhorred indecent things—but to the pastime of pleasant conversation; yet, placed in the occasion, the danger was at hand...from all these occasions and dangers God delivered me in such a way that it seems clear to me. He strove, against my will, to keep me from being completely lost...<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Life*, 2:3.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, *Teresa The Great* (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), 24.

<sup>37</sup> *Life*, 2:4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Life*, 2:7.

<sup>40</sup> Teresa was born and raised in a traditional Spanish Catholic society with a lot of emphasis on preserving one’s honour and reputation. The code of honour of her society as it was, comprises not only in upholding female chastity, but also in promoting and maintaining family reputation. Conscious of this reality, Teresa did everything she could not to jeopardize her family’s honour and reputation.

<sup>41</sup> *Life*, 2:6.

Worried about Teresa's friendship with her cousins and their bad influence on her, her father sent her to the Augustinian convent of Our Lady of Grace,<sup>42</sup> where she could study with other girls from well-to-do families, and also stay away from the bad company (*mala compañía*) of her cousins. Her first week in this environment was a very difficult one. She was completely restless and sad, firstly because of her "being in that convent school," and secondly, "because of my suspicion that they knew about my vanity,"<sup>43</sup> and were probably talking about her and why she was sent away from her father's house. This really troubled her. But she settled down in a short while, and even admitted being happier than she had been at home. "Although at the beginning I was very unhappy, within eight days—and I think even less—I was much more content than when in my father's house."<sup>44</sup> As time went by, the nuns became very pleased with Teresa and loved her very much, while she in turn developed a strong affection for them. "All were very pleased with me," she wrote, "for the Lord gave me the grace to be pleasing wherever I went, and so I was much loved."<sup>45</sup>

Teresa was particularly fond of Doña María de Briceño (1490-1584), the nun in charge of the pupils; a very pious, caring and dedicated woman. It was through her as Teresa said, "that the Lord wished to begin to give me light."<sup>46</sup> Her friendship with this nun as Stephen Clissold observed, "quickly effaced the memory of the mondaine cousin, and reminders of her former life, in the shape of messages and notes which her friends tried to smuggle in to her, were intercepted or had little effect."<sup>47</sup> Teresa was very pleased with the piety and goodness of María de Briceño, and liked listening to her "good and holy

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<sup>42</sup> Our Lady of Grace was a convent of the Augustinian nuns in Ávila. The nuns in this convent ran a preparatory boarding school for girls from wealthy families. Teresa was enrolled into this school in 1531 at the age of sixteen, and remained there for eighteen months. She was forced to leave due to illness. For more on this, see Efrén Montalva and Otger Steggink, *Santa Teresa y su tiempo*, vol.1 (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia, 1982), 149-154.

<sup>43</sup> *Life*, 2:8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:10.

<sup>47</sup> Clissold, *St. Teresa of Avila*, 20.

conversation,” for she “spoke well about God and was very discreet and saintly.”<sup>48</sup> She drew Teresa’s attention to the reward that awaits those who sacrificed all things for the Lord. With time, Teresa’s association with this nun began to yield positive results. According to her, “this good company began to help me get rid of the habits that the bad company had caused and to turn my mind to the desire for eternal things...”<sup>49</sup>

While in this convent, she revived her prayer life, reciting lots of vocal prayers and beseeching all to commend her to the Lord for directions on the path to follow. She needed to make a choice, but she was very confused and indecisive; not sure of the way of life to follow—religious life or marriage life. For according to her, “I had no desire to be a nun, and I asked God not to give me this vocation; although I also feared marriage.”<sup>50</sup> She was unable to make up her mind concerning her future; not willing to become a nun, at the same time afraid of married life. Given that religious life and marriage were but the only two options available for women of her class, she would have no choice but to go for either. Despite not being completely inclined to becoming a nun, she conceived that the religious life was her calling, though she was not sure she could put up with the demands of being a nun. She toyed with these thoughts within herself for three months and still could not make a decision on the way forward.<sup>51</sup> Her inner struggle and indecision took a toll on her health. Consequently, she became ill with “a serious illness,”<sup>52</sup> and had to return to her father’s house.

When her health improved, she was sent to convalesce in her half-sister’s house in Castellanos de la Cañada, northwest of Ávila. This period gave Teresa the time and the space to think deeper about her vocation, and on how to go about it. On her way to Castellanos, she stopped at the hamlet of Hortigosa to visit her uncle Don Pedro de Cepeda

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<sup>48</sup> *Life*, 3:1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* For more on Teresa and Doña María de Briceño, see Miguel Cerezal, “Santa Teresa de Jesús y la Madre María de Briceño,” in *Ciudad de Dios* 100 (1915), 107-120.

<sup>50</sup> *Life*, 3:2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:5-6.

<sup>52</sup> Teresa described her illness as “a serious illness” and did not say much about it. Nothing is known about the nature of her illness, though she wrote about having “a high fever” and “great fainting spells.” See *Life*, 3:7.



(1477-1533), a widowed brother of her father. He was a very religious man, who spent much of his time reading religious books, and talked most often about God and the vanity of the world. She spent a few days with him, which was decisive for her future life. He made her read aloud the spiritual books to him, and though there were not to her taste, she did not hesitate. “He asked me to read these books to him; and, though I did not like them, I pretended to.”<sup>53</sup> As she read, and listened to Don Pedro’s conversation, especially on his constant emphasis on the vanity of the world, she became aware once again of the truth she knew as a child. “Although the days I remained there were few, because of the good company and the strength the words of God—both heard and read—gave my heart, I began to understand the truth I knew in childhood.”<sup>54</sup> She benefited greatly from the time she spent with her uncle. It returned her particularly to reading good books, which helped her a lot in the struggles over her vocation; among these books was *Letters of St. Jerome*.<sup>55</sup> This book made a decisive impact on her. In fact, it strengthened her courage to make a decision to become a nun, and subsequently to communicate it to her father.

At that time, I had, together with a high fever, great fainting spells; for I always had poor health. My fondness for good books was my salvation. Reading the *Letters of St. Jerome* so encouraged me that I decided to tell my father about my decision to take the habit, for I was so persistent in points of honor that I don’t think I would have turned back for anything once I told him.<sup>56</sup>

This news was far from what her father had expected to hear from her. He didn’t take it lightly. He was heart-broken and refused to give his consent because she was his favourite daughter, and he would not want to lose her to the convent. He preferred her to go after his

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<sup>53</sup> *Life*, 3:4.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:5.

<sup>55</sup> The *Letters of St. Jerome* which Teresa read, had been translated into Spanish by Juan de Molina and first published in Valencia in 1520 as *Las Epístolas de san Jerónimo* (The Letters of St. Jerome). Tomás Álvarez mentioned that Teresa was greatly influenced mainly by two of Jerome’s Letters. Letter 14 addressed to Heliodorus and letter 60 addressed to Eustochium (368-419), the daughter of St. Paula (347-404). In both Letters Jerome had encouraged them to leave their father’s house and follow the religious life by becoming hermits. Teresa followed Jerome’s instructions, but opted to leave her father’s house not for the desert life of the hermits, but for the contemplative life of Carmel. See Tomás Álvarez, *Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on her Life and Work* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2011), 183-184.

<sup>56</sup> *Life*, 3:7.

death. “So great was his love for me that in no way was I able to obtain his permission or achieve anything through persons I asked to intercede for me. The most we could get from him was that after his death I could do whatever I wanted.”<sup>57</sup>

Aware that further delay might weaken her new found desire, and possibly expose her again to the grip of the world and its vanities which she had to contend with earlier on, she decided to act otherwise. “I was afraid of myself and my frailty and of backing down; and since I could not wait so long, I tried to do it by another way.”<sup>58</sup> Determined to have her way, she stole away from her father’s house in the winter of 1535, accompanied by her brother Antonio de Ahumada (1520-1546), this time not to seek for martyrdom in the land of the Moors (as she attempted with her brother Rodrigo when they were children), but to dedicate her entire life to serving God as a nun in the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation in Ávila.

She was in a great distress after leaving her father’s house. She felt greatly the pain of separation from her family; most especially because her love of God was not yet sufficient to make up for her love of her father and family she was leaving behind to enter the convent. Of this painful experience she writes:

I remember, clearly and truly, that when I left my father's house I felt that separation so keenly that the feeling will not be greater, I think, when I die. For it seemed that every bone in my body was being sundered. Since there was no love of God to take away my love for my father and relatives, everything so constrained me that if the Lord hadn't helped me, my reflections would not have been enough for me to continue on. In this situation he gave me such courage against myself that I carried out the task.<sup>59</sup>

Teresa had to force her way to make her Carmelite vocation come true. According to Tomás Álvarez, “she had to use force with herself; for the love of God, who helped her to force

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 4:1.

herself.”<sup>60</sup> This echoes what Teresa said about her tough journey towards discovering her Carmelite vocation. “Oh, God help me! What means his Majesty was employing to prepare me for the state in which he desired to make use of me! For without my desiring it, he forced me to overcome my repugnance.”<sup>61</sup>

## 1.2 Religious Life in the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation

Teresa entered the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation in Ávila on November 2, 1535, at the age of 20. She lived in this convent for about twenty-seven years (1535-1562), though she was not in the convent most of the time. As Jodi Bilinkoff said, “she was absent from the convent for prolonged periods.”<sup>62</sup> These periods ranged from her going to receive treatment from an illness or convalescing outside the convent,<sup>63</sup> taking care of her father during his final illness and assisting him in his death in 1543,<sup>64</sup> her making a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe,<sup>65</sup> her going to live for three year, (from 1555-1558) in the house of her widow friend and benefactress, Doña Guiomar de Ulloa (b.1529), and back again in 1559 while Doña Guiomar was arranging for her to meet with Peter (Pedro) of Alcántara.<sup>66</sup>

She was away another time when she stayed for six months in the house of Luisa de la Cerda (d. 1596), in Toledo near the end of 1561 up to June of 1562.<sup>67</sup> She also went out

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<sup>60</sup> Álvarez, *Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on her Life and Work*, 95.

<sup>61</sup> *Life*, 3:4.

<sup>62</sup> Jodi Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 115.

<sup>63</sup> *Life*, 4-6

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:14-16

<sup>65</sup> Four of Teresa’s brothers fought in the battle of Iñaquito which took place in the outskirts of Quito (present-day capital of Ecuador). While Hernando de Ahumada (1510) and Lorenzo de Cepeda (1519), survived with serious injuries, Antonio de Ahumada, died of the wounds he sustained in the battle. On receiving this news, and worried about the safety of her other brothers in America, Teresa embarked on a pilgrimage in the spring of 1547, to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe (*Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*) in the Extremadura region of Western Spain, to pray for them. See. Álvarez, *Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on her Life and Work*, 30 and 63.

<sup>66</sup> See Daniel de Pablo Maroto, *Santa Teresa de Jesús: nueva biografía (escritora, fundadora, maestra)* (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2014), 145-147.

<sup>67</sup> Doña Luisa de la Cerda was a daughter of Juan de la Cerda (1485-1544), 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Medinaceli, and a wealthy widow of Don Antonio Arias Pardo de Saavedra (d.1561)—one of the wealthiest nobleman in Castile. Following her husband’s death in 1561, she went into depression and was inconsolable. Worried over her condition, her family asked the then Carmelite Provincial, Ángel de Salazar (1519-1600), to allow Teresa to stay with her in the palace to assist her in her time of grief.

frequently with some nuns who desired her company. “Some persons to whom the superiors couldn’t say ‘no’ liked to have me in their company; and when urged, the superiors ordered me to go. So, by reason of their commands I wasn’t able to remain in the monastery much.”<sup>68</sup> Teresa’s constant absence from the convent was because her convent (as with most convents at the time), followed the mitigated rule which allowed laxity and much freedom for the nuns to leave the convent for some time on visits, to entertain guests in the parlour and to receive gifts. They in fact had no vow of enclosure, as Teresa said, “in the convent where I was a nun, there was no vow of enclosure.”<sup>69</sup> Nuns could stay with their families or friends in times of sickness and convalescence or when they were in need of financial support. Bilinkoff notes that “economic resources at *la Encarnación* became so strained that as many as fifty nuns at a time would live away from the convent.”<sup>70</sup> In line with this, Bárbara Mujica also observed that “because the convent was teeming, nuns were encouraged to take meals with their families and accept food gifts from visitors.”<sup>71</sup> All these constituted a distraction to those who genuinely wanted to dedicate their lives to serving God in Carmel.

Teresa was very passionate in her early years as a young religious in the convent of the Incarnation. After years of struggles and difficulties in discerning her religious vocation, she was finally in the place she desired to be. Unlike her early days with the Augustinian nuns of our Lady of Grace, she was calm and happy with life in the convent of the Incarnation. She expressed her feelings as follows:

As soon as I took the habit,<sup>72</sup> the Lord gave me an understanding of how he favours those who use force with themselves to serve him...Within an

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<sup>68</sup> *Life*, 32:9. Jodi Bilinkoff believes that Teresa’s “innate good humour, tact, and verbal skills” are the reason why her superiors sent her on special assignments. Several times she was sent to console bereft aristocratic ladies (who are actual or potential benefactors to the nuns), and to raise funds for the convent. See Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 115-116.

<sup>69</sup> *Life*, 4:5.

<sup>70</sup> Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 115.

<sup>71</sup> Bárbara Mujica, *Teresa de Ávila: Lettered Woman* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>72</sup> Teresa took the habit on November 2, 1536, and was received into the novitiate by Doña Francesca del Aguila, the prioress of the convent of the Incarnation. See Alvarez, *Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on her Life and Work*, 98.

hour, he gave me such great happiness at being in the religious state of life that it never left me up to this day, and God changed the dryness my soul experienced into the greatest tenderness. All the things of religious life delighted me.<sup>73</sup>

She never for a moment regretted being a nun. She loved and cherished her every moment in the convent, and was profoundly happy in being a nun.<sup>74</sup> But this happiness was short-lived, for no sooner had she made her profession,<sup>75</sup> than her health began to deteriorate. She attributed her illness to the change in food and life-style. “The change in food and life-style did injury to my health; and although my happiness was great, this was not enough. My fainting spells began to increase, and I experienced such heart pains that this frightened any who witnessed them; and there were many other illnesses all together.”<sup>76</sup> How Teresa describes the symptoms of her illness, makes it difficult to ascertain the exact nature of her rather mysterious illness. There were lots of speculations on the nature of her ailment, but we cannot say more than what she described in the *Book of Her Life*.<sup>77</sup> Given the deteriorating condition of her health, and the inability of the doctors in Ávila to provide a cure for her, her worried father decided to send her to a little town of Becedas, about fifty miles southwest of Ávila for treatment. She was accompanied by a nun from their convent on this journey. Though this journey did not bring any cure to Teresa, it brought about a transformation in her life; the discovery of prayer and the deepening of her relationship with Christ.

### **1.3 Discovery of Prayer: Influence of Francisco de Osuna’s *Third Spiritual Alphabet***

On her way to Becedas, Teresa broke her journey to visit her uncle Don Pedro de Cepeda and spent some time in his house. While in his house, Don Pedro gave her a copy of the popular

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<sup>73</sup> *Life*, 4:2.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:1.

<sup>75</sup> Teresa took her religious vows on November 3, 1537, after completing her novitiate. Doña Francesca del Aguila, the prioress of the Incarnation received her vows. On Teresa’s reminiscence of her religious profession, see *Life*, 4:3.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:5.

<sup>77</sup> For more on Teresa’s illnesses, see Efrén de la Madre de Dios y Otger Steggink, *Tiempo y vida de Santa Teresa*, (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968), 108-34. Also Marcella Biró Barton, “Saint Teresa of Avila: Did She Have Epilepsy?” in *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 68, no. 4 (October, 1982), 581-598.

devotion guide *The Third Spiritual Alphabet*,<sup>78</sup> by the Franciscan writer and mystic, Francisco de Osuna (1492-1540?). Osuna described in this book a method of prayer based on the practice of recollection (*recogimiento*). This method which was promoted by the Franciscans, placed much emphasis on “the importance of interiority, the following of Christ in his humanity and divinity, the interrelatedness of the active and contemplative life (and the relative importance of the latter); annihilation and quietude; love derived from contact with God, without prior study; and a focus on prayer of the heart.”<sup>79</sup>

Osuna’s book (following the Franciscan teachings on prayer), taught that God dwells within the soul, and in order to reach him, the individual must withdraw from worldly concerns and distractions, free the mind from all images and all ideas of the intellect; then enter inward through prayer and meditation, especially on the passion of Christ, until one reaches union with God who dwells within the soul.<sup>80</sup> This book was of great importance to Teresa’s spiritual growth. It introduced her to the practice of recollection which led her to a profound experience of Jesus Christ present within her. She tells us that before discovering Osuna’s book, she did not know how to practice recollection. “And although during this first year I read good books...I did not know how to proceed in prayer or how to be recollected.”<sup>81</sup> But this changed when she read Osuna’s book. She was very delighted with his teaching and decided to take the book as a guide. “I was so happy with this book and resolved to follow that path with all my strength...I began to follow that path, taking the book for my master.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *The Third Spiritual Alphabet (Tercer abecedario espiritual)*, published in Toledo in 1527, was one of the popular spiritual classics of the time published in the vernacular in Spain during the early part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as part of an open movement for spiritual renewal and reform championed by Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436-1517).

<sup>79</sup> Julienne McLean, “The Third Spiritual Alphabet, Guide of St. Teresa (1): A Learning Hidden Deep in the Heart” in *Mount Carmel*, vol. 62, no.4 (2014), 60-66.

<sup>80</sup> For more on this, see. Francisco de Osuna, *The Third Spiritual Alphabet*, trans. Mary E. Giles (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 6:1-4. Our citation from this edition, signifies treatise and chapter numbers, e.g. we cited from chapters one to four of treatise six.

<sup>81</sup> *Life*, 4:7.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

Following Osuna's teachings, Teresa turned her attention inward to the presence of Christ within her: "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. If I reflected upon some phrase of his passion, I represented him to myself interiorly."<sup>83</sup> Thus, Osuna's book was of great importance to Teresa's experience of Jesus Christ, for according to Daniel Chowning, "it impressed upon her that the God she sought was not abstract or diffused but truly personal—the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, living within her."<sup>84</sup> So, the seemingly distant and abstract God became real for her in the person of Jesus Christ. Following Osuna's method of prayer brought a big turn-around in Teresa's life. She "began to take time out for solitude, to confess frequently, kept away from committing mortal sin."<sup>85</sup> Consequently, she received many favours from the Lord. She was granted the prayer of quiet and occasionally the prayer of union,<sup>86</sup> which though was momentary ("lasting within the space of a Hail Mary"), it made such a huge impact on her, that "even though at this time" she was no more than twenty according to her estimation, "it seems I trampled the world under foot."<sup>87</sup>

Her sojourn in Becedas for treatment was not successful. She spent three months there in excruciating pain, because the cure was too strong for her system. She described her condition thus:

The severity of the heart pains, which I went to have cured, was more acute. For sometimes it seemed that sharp teeth were biting into me, so much so that it was feared I had rabies. With the continuous fever and great lack of strength (for because of nausea I wasn't able to eat anything, only drink), I was so shrivelled and wasted away (because for almost a month

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Daniel Chowning, "Jesus Christ, Friend and Liberator: The Christology of St Teresa of Jesus" in *A Better Wine: Essays Celebrating Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D.*, (*Carmelite Studies*, vol. 10), ed. Kevin Culligan (Washington, D.C: ICS Publications, 2007), 3-61.

<sup>85</sup> *Life*, 4:7.

<sup>86</sup> Prayer of quiet and prayer of union are among the degrees of prayer Teresa spoke about in her writings. She dealt respectively with these degrees of prayer in chapters 11-22 of *The Book of Her Life*.

<sup>87</sup> *Life*, 4:7.

they gave me a daily purge) that my nerves began to shrink causing such unbearable pains that I found no rest either by day or by night.<sup>88</sup>

Seeing that she was not responding to treatment and that her condition had worsened, her father brought her back to Ávila where doctors could come and treat her; but all to no avail. Then on August 15, 1539, she went in to a coma for four days and was given up for dead (most people believed that Teresa went into a cataleptic state). She received the last rites, a grave was opened for her in the convent, and the nuns awaited the arrival of her body for burial. She said that “they were so certain I was dead that afterwards I even found the wax on my eye”<sup>89</sup> She went through a lot of sufferings and pain for over three months. Reading St. Gregory’s *Morals on the Book of Job* was of great support to her at that time. It helped her above all, to put-up with her sufferings following the example of Job; the model of patience.

It greatly profited me to have read the story of Job in St. Gregory’s *Morals*. For it seems the Lord prepared me by this means, together with my having begun to experience prayer, so that I could be able to bear the suffering with so much conformity to his will...I kept these words of Job very habitually in my mind and recited them: *Since we receive good thing from the hand of the Lord, why do we not suffer the evil things?*<sup>90</sup> This it seems gave me strength.<sup>91</sup>

Subsequently, Teresa returned to the convent. But not fully recovered; for she was still a shadow of herself. “I was in such a hurry to return to the convent that I made them bring me back as I was. The one they expected to be brought back dead, they received alive; but the body, worse than dead, was a pity to behold...The paralysis, although it gradually got better, lasted almost three years.”<sup>92</sup>

Teresa’s prolonged recovery time brought her even closer to God. It increased her trust and her submission to the divine will of God. During this time, according to her, “I was very conformed to the will of God, and I would have remained so even had he left me in this

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 5:7.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 5:9. Kavanaugh believed that, Teresa was “referring to the popular custom still practiced today in some small Castilian towns; of closing the eyes of the dead with wax from the candle used during the death agony.” See Kavanaugh, *The Collected works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol 1, 470, note no. 9 of chapter 5.

<sup>90</sup> See. Job, 2:10.

<sup>91</sup> *Life*, 5:8.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 6:2.



condition forever.”<sup>93</sup> In this period, also she desired more solitude, conversed and spoke a great deal about God with others, received the Eucharist and confessed much more often, read good books and was filled with remorse, “after having offended God.”<sup>94</sup> She later recovered fully after entrusting herself to the intercession of St. Joseph. “I took for my advocate and lord the glorious St. Joseph and earnestly recommended myself to him...For he being who he is brought it about that I could rise and walk and not be crippled.”<sup>95</sup>

#### **1.4 Relapse in Prayer and Spiritual Fervour: Battling Between Two Worlds**

When she regained her health, Teresa returned to the normal convent life. But far from helping her to grow and maintain her new found spiritual path, convent life became a source of distraction and spiritual stagnation for her. She abandoned Osuna’s path and became engrossed with convent’s “social life and worldly affairs,”<sup>96</sup> going “from pastime to pastime, from vanity to vanity, from one occasion to another,” and exposing herself time and again to “very serious occasions...”<sup>97</sup> She observed that her convent at the time was a place “where worldly honours and recreations are so exalted,”<sup>98</sup> “where there are two paths—one of virtue and religious life, and the other of a lack of religious life, and the greater number take the more imperfect path.” It was a place where true religious life is so poorly lived, and where nuns who are determined to follow their call, “must be more cautious and dissimulating in speaking about the friendship they desired to have with God than in speaking of other friendships and attachments that the devil arranges in the monastery.”<sup>99</sup> She went for the latter path, and became involved in the gossips, frivolous conversations and constant chatter that goes on in the convent believing it to be normal. “Now then, I engaged in these

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 6:4.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 6:6;8.

<sup>96</sup> Mujica, *Teresa de Ávila: Lettered Woman*, 29.

<sup>97</sup> *Life*, 7:1.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 7:4.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 7:5.

conversations thinking that since this was the custom, my soul would not receive the harm and distraction I afterwards understood comes from such companionship.”<sup>100</sup> She continued in this form of noxious recreation for many years since it did not seem to her to be bad and did not belittle her honour.

She was particularly fond of her one of her friends whose friendship was more a distraction to her. “No other friendship was as much a distraction to me as this one of which I am speaking, for I was extremely fond of it.”<sup>101</sup> She believed that the Lord did not approve of her friendship and conversation with this person, for on one occasion he appeared to her showing his disapproval of it.

While I was once with this person, the Lord at the outset of our acquaintance desired to make me understand that those friendships were not proper for me and to counsel me and give me advice in the midst of such thorough blindness. With great severity, Christ appeared before me, making me understand that he regretted the friendship. I saw him with the eyes of my soul more clearly than I could have with the eyes of my body. And this vision left such an impression on me that, though more than twenty-six years have gone by, it seems to me it is still present.<sup>102</sup>

Though this vision frightened and disturbed Teresa to the extent that she never wanted to see her friend again, she admits that she returned “to the same conversation and also at other times to other conversations.”<sup>103</sup> With time, Teresa’s excessive involvement in the convent’s social life, began to affect her prayer life. For out of guilt for her vanities and a false sense of humility she began to fear the practice of prayer, and abandoned it completely as time went by.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 7:6.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 7:7. Once again, Teresa had found herself in the similar situation like the one before her entering the convent; a situation that kept her away from God, and made her dependent on her friends and unable to respond to God’s call. She was in the midst of an inner conflict between friendship with God and friendship with the world and its vanities. Elizabeth Obbard, described her situation as that of “trying to serve two masters while receiving full payment from neither.” Elizabeth R. Obbard, *La Madre: The Life and Spirituality of Teresa of Avila* (Middlegreen, TY: St. Pauls, 1994), 39.

<sup>102</sup> *Life*, 7:6. There were lots of speculation regarding this vision. Daniel Chowning believes this vision “may have been of a hallucination caused by the anxiety Teresa experienced due to her conflict.” See Chowning, *Jesus Christ, Friend and Liberator*, 59, note, 18.

<sup>103</sup> She believed she was deceived by the devil into thinking there was nothing wrong in being friendly with such a person, and that such friendship will not compromise her honour, but rather will enhance it. Hence, she kept returning to such conversations. See. *Life*, 7:7.

It seemed to me that, since in being wicked I was among the worst, it was better to go the way of many, to recite what I was obliged to vocally and not to practice mental prayer and so much intimacy with God, for I merited to be with the devils...For thinking it was the more humble thing to do, I had gone a year and more without prayer. And this...was the greatest temptation I had, because on account of this, I was heading just about straight to perdition.<sup>104</sup>

Francis Gross believes that by abandoning prayer, Teresa not only got herself into a bind, but also “had abandoned the very means which had helped rescue her sanity and sense of self from a sense of guilt and unworthiness.”<sup>105</sup>

Shortly after her father’s death in 1543, Teresa went to her father’s confessor, the Dominican Vincente Barrón,<sup>106</sup> to make her confessions and to seek direction from him. He encouraged her to receive communion on a regular basis (every fifteen days), and to return to the practice of mental prayer which she had abandoned. “He told me not to let it go, that it could in no way do me anything but good.”<sup>107</sup> In obedience to Barrón’s directions, she returned to prayer and never abandoned it again. Though it was hard sometimes for her to maintain the practice of prayer, because she discovered increasingly at prayer her faults and her failure in responding to God’s call. She was having great trouble during prayer, for according to her, “my spirit was not proceeding as lord but as slave. And so, I was not able to shut myself within myself (which was my whole manner of procedure in prayer); instead, I

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<sup>104</sup> *Life*, 7:1&11.

<sup>105</sup> Francis L. Gross and Tony P. Gross, *Making of a Mystic: Seasons in the Life of Teresa of Avila* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 31.

<sup>106</sup> Not much is known about Vincente Barrón, except from what Teresa said about him in the *Book of her Life* and in her *Spiritual Testimonies*. She described him in *Life*, 5:3, as a “Dominican Father,” and a “very learned man,” who “enlightened” her “about many things.” In *Life*, 7:16-17, as a “Dominican,” “a very good and God-fearing man,” who has been her father’s confessor for some years. And in her *Spiritual Testimonies*, she described him as “her confessor for a year and a half in Toledo, a consultant to the Inquisition, and a very learned man.” Thus, he was Teresa’s confessor in her early years, and also in her later life (between 1569-1570), when she was making her foundation in Toledo. See St. Teresa of Ávila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Ávila*, vol. 1 (*Spiritual Testimonies*), trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1987), 58:8.

<sup>107</sup> *Life*, 7:17.

shut within myself a thousand vanities.”<sup>108</sup> But this time, she persevered refusing to give up prayer entirely, and consequently, she received greater favours from God.

### **1.5 Spiritual Awakening and Surrender to Christ: “Second Conversion”**

Teresa’s struggles and crisis came to an end in a manner she least expected. After she had failed in all her efforts, Jesus intervened in her helpless situation and brought her freedom. “He gave me the freedom that I, with all the efforts of many years could not attain by myself, often trying to so force myself that my health had to pay dearly.”<sup>109</sup> This took place in the form of an experience she had in the oratory before a statue of the wounded Christ, an *ecce homo* (in Catholic Spain these statues are lifelike and profoundly touching) in 1554; an incident that came to be known as her “second conversion.”<sup>110</sup> This was how she described her experience.

It happened to me that one day entering the oratory I saw a statue they had borrowed for a certain feast to be celebrated in the house. It represented the much wounded Christ and was very devotional so that beholding it I was utterly distressed in seeing him that way, for it represented what he suffered for us. I felt so keenly aware of how poorly I thanked him for those wounds that, it seems to me, my heart broke. Beseeching him to strengthen me once and for all that I might not offend him, I threw myself down before him with the greatest outpouring of tears...I then said I would not rise from there until he granted what I was begging him for. I believe certainly this was beneficial to me, because from that time I went on improving.<sup>111</sup>

This experience marked the beginning of Teresa’s profound spiritual awakening and transformation. For acknowledging her weakness, she submitted herself to the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Her life took a different turn from this moment, with Christ taking control of her life, and his sacred humanity becoming the object of her prayer and the centre

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 24:8.

<sup>110</sup> This experience is traditionally called her “second conversion,” because she was already a Christian and a nun. This conversion thus, was mainly about moving from an ordinary Christian way of living into a daily personal relationship with the Risen Christ.

<sup>111</sup> *Life*, 9:1and 3.

of her new life. Deidre Green described this experience as “the full awakening of her spiritual life that placed her firmly upon the mystical path.”<sup>112</sup>

Following her conversion experience, she began to read *The Confessions of St. Augustine*,<sup>113</sup> and found a lot in his life that related to her own life and struggles. Reading this book became a source of inspiration and a great help in her new way of life.

As I began to read the *Confessions*, it seemed to me I saw myself in them. When I came to the passage where he speaks about his conversion and read how he heard that voice in the garden (*Confession* 8, ch. 12.), it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called. I remained for a long time totally dissolved in tears and feeling within myself utter distress and weariness.<sup>114</sup>

Moved by her experience before an image of the wounded Christ and reading of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, Teresa gradually began to change her way of life in the convent. She kept away from the parlour, and avoided occasions of sin. Her prayer life and her desire to spend more time with Christ intensified, and she started having new and unusual (mystical) experiences in her relationship with Christ in prayer. A feeling of the presence of God would come upon her unexpectedly so that she could not doubt he was within her or that she was totally immersed in him.<sup>115</sup> Teresa at this stage began to experience the presence of God within her in a passive way. This unexpected and sudden experience of a deep consciousness of God’s presence was the beginning of mystical prayer or contemplation. She sensed herself

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<sup>112</sup> Deidre Green, *Gold in the Crucible: Teresa of Avila and the Western Mystical Tradition* (Longmead: Element Books, 1989), 15.

<sup>113</sup> The copy of Augustine’s *Confessions* Teresa read was first translated into Spanish by the Portuguese Augustinian Friar Sebastián Toscano (1515-1583), and published at Salamanca in 1554. Teresa was very fond of St. Augustine from the days she spent with the Augustinian nuns of Our Lady of Grace. Also as she said, “because he had been a sinner, for I found great consolation in sinners whom, after having been sinners, the Lord brought back to himself.” See. *Life*, 9:7. Teresa’s struggle from her adolescence until the age of 39, was similar to the experiences of St. Augustine. Like him, she was caught up between her friendship with God and her affection for the things of the world. Thus, in reading Augustine’s *Confessions*, Teresa identified with his struggles because they reflected her own experience. Having identified with him, she began to commend herself “very much to this glorious saint.” See. *Life*, 9:8.

<sup>114</sup> *Life*, 9:8.

<sup>115</sup> See *Ibid.*, 10:1.

through this experience, according to Tomás Álvarez, as being “invaded from within, and immersed from without in the presence of God.”<sup>116</sup>

After a long digression—from chapters 11 to 22, (when she interrupted the flow of her account of her life, to talk about the degrees of prayer), she returned to it again from chapter 23, relating the impact of the above-mentioned experience on her.

I now want to return to where I left off about my life, for I think I delayed more than I should have, so that what follows would be better understood. This is another, new book from here on—I mean another new life. The life dealt with up to this point was mine; the one I lived from the point where I began to explain these things about prayer is the one God lived in me—according to the way it appears to me—because I think it would have been impossible in so short a time to get rid of so many bad habits and deeds. May the Lord be praised who freed me from myself.<sup>117</sup>

With this new life, the Lord began to grant her favours in prayer. “His Majesty began to give me the prayer of quiet very habitually—and often, of union—which lasted a long while.”<sup>118</sup> She “evolved into a mystic very quickly, in leaps rather than mere steps,”<sup>119</sup> and began to experience visions and locutions mostly of Christ in his humanity. She saw him in his risen and glorified body and heard him speak to her.

While she felt deep within her that these graces were from God, (given the wonderful delights that accompanied them, and their fruits in her life), she was afraid and thought she was being deceived by the devil; “since at that time,” she said, “other women had fallen into serious illusions and deceptions caused by the devil.”<sup>120</sup> She was also worried that the devil was using these experiences to stop her from prayer and meditation. “I began to fear and wonder whether the devil, making me think the experience was good, wanted me to suspend

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<sup>116</sup> Álvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on Her Life and Work*, 115.

<sup>117</sup> *Life*, 23:1.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 23:2. Unlike her experience of prayer of quiet and union in *Life*, 4:7, which was momentary; lasting within “the space of a Hail Mary,” her prayer experience at this stage was more regular and prolonged, leading to a transformation in her life.

<sup>119</sup> Carlos Eire, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 20.

<sup>120</sup> *Life*, 23:2. She was referring to the cases of some women visionaries and mystics at the time, who after thorough investigations by the Inquisition were found to be influenced by the devil. We shall discuss more of these in detail later on.

the intellect so that he could draw me away from mental prayer and so that I will not think upon the passion.”<sup>121</sup> At this stage it had dawned on Teresa that she needed a spiritual director. “This fear increased in such a way that it made me diligently seek out spiritual persons to consult.”<sup>122</sup> She sought for the counsel of both learned and spiritual men mostly from the Jesuits, the Dominicans and the Franciscans. We shall consider some of these men and their impact on Teresa’s spiritual development.

### **1.6 The Influence of Confessors and Spiritual Directors on Teresa’s Spiritual Evolution**

Realizing the need for a spiritual guide, Teresa turned to a saintly married layman and a friend, Don Francisco de Salcedo (d.1580) (he had studied theology at the Dominican college of Santo Tomás in Ávila, and later on after the death of his wife became a priest), who in turn arranged for her to meet with the learned diocesan priest Maestro Gaspar Daza (d.1592). To aid them in accompanying her spiritually, she prepared a written account of her life. “I gave an account of myself that they might enlighten me.”<sup>123</sup> Having read through her account, they came up with a conclusion that her experiences were caused by the devil. This left her devastated and confused. In her state of uncertainty, she came across the kind words of St. Paul in a book she found in the oratory (that she believed was God–sent) which says, “that God was very faithful, that he would never let those who love him be deceived by the devil.”<sup>124</sup> This consoled her greatly.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 23:3.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 23:13.

<sup>124</sup> See Ibid., 23:15 and 1<sup>st</sup> *Corinthians*, 10:13.

Though Daza and Salcedo's decision was hard for Teresa to take, it also had a positive result, for they recommended she "should take the matter up with a priest from the Society of Jesus," (for they were thought to be very experienced in spiritual matters),<sup>125</sup> and urged her to give a sincere account of her whole life and state to him by a general confession. With hope that God will enlighten him by the power of the sacrament of confession.<sup>126</sup> This marked the beginning of her meeting with the Jesuits who became of great help to her in her spiritual development and journey.

### **1.6.1 Teresa and the Society of Jesus (The Jesuits)<sup>127</sup>**

The Jesuits were believed to have started in 1534, when Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), and six of his companions (all University students in Paris), took the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in a small chapel in the village of Montmartre north of Paris, and called themselves *Compañía de Jesús*, (Company of Jesus).<sup>128</sup> From the beginning all novices who joined the order were required to make the *Spiritual Exercises*,<sup>129</sup> for according to John O'Malley, "they would help the individual tap his inner resources for the motivation that lifelong commitment entailed, and they provide clear yet flexible principles for his own

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 23:14. John W. O'Malley also suggested that Teresa was asked to consult the Jesuits because they were known at that time for their ability and their willingness to direct women and to teach them how to meditate using the *Spiritual Exercises*. Also that since the Jesuits were famous for their ability to perform exorcisms, they could also exorcise her of any demonic influence. For more on this, see John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 147-148; 267-268.

<sup>126</sup> *Life*, 23:14.

<sup>127</sup> Our discussion on Teresa and the Society of Jesus relies upon Terence O'Reilly's article "St. Teresa and her First Jesuit Confessors," in *St Teresa of Ávila: Her Writings and her Life*, eds. Terence O'Reilly, Colin Thompson and Lesley Twomey (Oxford: Legenda, 2018), 108-123.

<sup>128</sup> The Spanish word *compañía* would be translated into Latin as *societas*. Hence, the Jesuits came to be known as *Societas Jesu* in Latin and Society of Jesus in English.

<sup>129</sup> *Ejercicios espirituales* as they are called in Spanish is a four week retreat manual composed by Ignatius of Loyola. According to Terence O'Reilly, "the *Ejercicios* were first printed in 1548, in Rome, eight years after the foundation of the Society of Jesus, but their beginnings lie in Spain, two and a half decades earlier, when Ignatius abandoned his life as a courtier, and withdrew to practice penance and prayer in Manresa, in the Crown of Aragón. There, in the summer and autumn of 1522, he composed a draft of the *Ejercicios*...The draft was refined and extended over the years that followed, reaching its final state c.1541." See Terence O'Reilly, "Early Printed Books in Spain and the *Ejercicios* of Ignatius Loyola," in *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, vol lxxxix, no.4 (2012), 635-664.



spiritual journey and the journey of those he wanted ‘to help.’”<sup>130</sup> These *Spiritual Exercises* thus, became for the Jesuits “an instrument of ministry” in giving spiritual guidance and in directing retreats.<sup>131</sup>

The Jesuits arrived in Ávila in 1554 and established a *colegio* (school) named after San Gil for educating young men. Teresa mentioned that she had already heard about the Jesuits who were at the moment in Ávila, and though without knowing any of them, “she was very fond (of them), only from hearing about the mode of life and prayer they followed.”<sup>132</sup> Though she was greatly attracted to them, she “didn’t feel worthy to speak to any of them or strong enough to obey them.” In the course of her life, she met eleven Jesuits who were her directors and guides at different times and places. In the account of her spiritual life which she presented to the Inquisition of Seville in 1576, she named nine of the eleven Jesuits she consulted.<sup>133</sup> We shall limit our discussion here to Teresa’s first two young Jesuit spiritual directors (including Baltasar Alvarez whose name appeared in her list), because they were the ones who intervened at the most critical stage of Teresa’s spiritual life and development, offering her a more extensive direction and guidance.

Teresa’s first Jesuit spiritual director was Diego de Cetina (1531-1568), a young man of about twenty-four years, and newly ordained after graduating from the University of Salamanca.<sup>134</sup> He was sent to Ávila for a break after his ordination due to his poor health

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<sup>130</sup> O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 37.

<sup>131</sup> John W. O’Malley, “Ignatius of Loyola (1491? -1556),” in *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 298-310.

<sup>132</sup> *Life*, 23:3.

<sup>133</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 58:3. She omitted in this account the first two young Jesuit spiritual directors she consulted. Daniel de Pablo Maroto, believes that she deliberately omitted them because they were young, inexperienced and not famous. Given that she was writing this account for the Inquisition who were investigating her at the time, she wanted to show that she had consulted learned confessors and eminent theologians regarding her mystical experiences. This will add credence to her testimony, and validate her way of prayer and her mystical experiences. See Daniel de Pablo Maroto, *Lecturas y maestros de Santa Teresa* (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2009), 231.

<sup>134</sup> It is difficult to ascertain when Teresa first met Cetina. Maroto, believes it was certainly after 1554, when the Jesuits started the *colegio* (school) of San Gil in Ávila, while Cándido de Dalmases thinks it was most likely in the early summer of 1555. See Maroto, *Lecturas y Maestros de Santa Teresa*, 230. And Cándido de Dalmases, “Santa Teresa y los Jesuitas” in *Archivum Historicum Societatis* 35 (1966), 347-378.

condition. Teresa was not discouraged by his age and lack of experience, rather she took his directions seriously and was encouraged by his words. “After I spoke with that servant of God (referring to Cetina)—for he was very much so and most wise—all about my soul, as to someone who well knew this language, he explained to me what I was experiencing and greatly encouraged me.”<sup>135</sup> He assured her that her experience was not from the devil that “it was very recognizably from God’s spirit.” He then encouraged her to “return again to prayer, that the prayer did not have a good foundation,”<sup>136</sup> and that she is yet to understand the nature of mortification as the basis of an authentic spiritual life. Accordingly, he asked her to meditate each day on a scene of the passion; to focus only on the humanity of Christ, and to try to resist as much as possible “those supernatural experiences of recollection and consolation.”<sup>137</sup> He also instructed her to practice some mortifications which according to her “were not pleasing to me” (*no muy sabrosas para mí*),<sup>138</sup> but she obeyed him, believing that God commanded it through him. Complying with Cetina’s instructions her spiritual life improved. “I started again to love the most sacred humanity. Prayer began to take shape as an edifice that now had a foundation; I grew fond of more penance...”<sup>139</sup>

As a further help to her, Cetina arranged for Teresa to meet with Francisco Borja (1510-1572),<sup>140</sup> who was visiting Ávila “later that year (1555) for the official opening of San Gil.”<sup>141</sup> He confirmed that her mystical experience came from the Spirit of God. “After he

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<sup>135</sup> *Life*, 23:16.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 23:16.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 23:17.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 24:2.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 24:2.

<sup>140</sup> Francisco Borja was once among the most powerful men in Spain. He became the 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Gandía after the death of his father in 1543. Following the death of his wife (Eleanor) in 1546, he renounced his title and estates and joined the Jesuits. He later became the Jesuits’ third Superior General in 1565. Teresa used his authority and the prestige attached to his name to get the approval she lacked from those around her. See Elena Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography: Authority, Power and the Self in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Spain* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2005), 112. For more on Teresa’s encounter with Francisco Borja, See Bárbara Mujica, “Encuentro de santos: Francisco de Borja y Teresa de Jesús,” in *Francisco de Borja y su tiempo: política, religión y cultura en la edad moderna*, ed. Enrique García Hernán, y María del Pilar Ryan (Valencia: Albatros Ediciones, 2012), 745-53.

<sup>141</sup> Mujica, *Teresa de Ávila: Lettered Woman*, 32.

had heard me, he told me that my experience was from the Spirit of God and that it seemed to him it would no longer be good to resist it.”<sup>142</sup> For before now it was right in accordance with Cetina’s advice for her to resist, but he believed it was time to allow God to act. Thus, he asked her to “always begin prayer with an event from the Passion, but that if afterward the Lord should carry away the spirit, I ought not resist him but let His Majesty bear it away—and not strive to do so myself.”<sup>143</sup> Barbara Mujica thinks that because Borja was very influential and highly esteemed both in the Church and in society, “his endorsement legitimized Teresa’s experiences, enabling her to advance spiritually, and eventually to launch the reform.”<sup>144</sup>

Cetina’s method (of recommending that Teresa meditates each day on a scene of the passion and to focus only on the humanity of Christ), probably introduced Teresa to the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. In the *Exercises*, Ignatius placed a great deal of emphasis on meditation on the humanity of Christ and on his Passion. He urged the retreatant “to consider that which Christ our Lord is suffering in his humanity, or wants to suffer,” and to identify with his suffering through penance and mortification.<sup>145</sup> In saying this, he did not lose sight of the Divinity of Jesus or bifurcate his two natures. He rather drew attention to the union of human and the Divine natures in Christ, the creator who became a human being. “Imagine Christ our Lord suspended on the cross before you,” he said, “and converse with him in a colloquy: How is it that he, although he is the creator, has come to make himself a human being? How is it that he has passed from eternal life to death here in time, and to die in this way for my sins?”<sup>146</sup> He taught that not even the death of Jesus on the cross and his burial could separate this (hypostatic) union. For according to him, “after Christ died on the cross,

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<sup>142</sup> *Life*, 24:3.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Mujica, *Teresa de Ávila: Lettered Woman*, 173.

<sup>145</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. George E. Ganss (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992), 195:1. The numbering here refers to paragraph and number (s); e.g. para 195, no. 1. Henceforth all citations of this work will only be *The Spiritual Exercises*.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 53:1.

his body remained separated from his soul but always united with his divinity. His blessed soul, also united with his divinity, descended to hell.”<sup>147</sup>

Teresa was very pleased with her encounter with Cetina for she felt at peace and supported under him. She also praised his tender approach in directing her. “He guided my soul by stressing the love of God and allowed freedom and used no pressure if I didn’t set about doing things out of love.”<sup>148</sup> He indeed followed the method recommended in the *Spiritual Exercises* for directing vulnerable people like Teresa. Ignatius suggested that “If the giver of the *Exercises* sees that the one making them is experiencing desolation and temptation, he or she should not treat the retreatant severely or harshly, but gently and kindly. The director should encourage and strengthen the exercitant for the future...for the consolation which will come.”<sup>149</sup>

Cetina directed Teresa only for a few months before he was transferred out of Ávila to another place. Teresa was very devastated by his departure. “I felt his transfer very keenly, for I thought I would return to my wretchedness; it didn’t seem to me it would be possible to find another like him. My soul was left as though in a desert, very disconsolate and fearful.”<sup>150</sup> Not long after that, a widow friend of hers, Doña Guiomar de Ulloa (1527), “who practiced prayer and was a very close friend” of the Jesuits, introduced Teresa to her own Jesuit confessor, Juan de Prádanos (1529-1597). He was twenty-seven years old; a few years older than Cetina, and was newly ordained like him when he met Teresa. He began by leading her to a greater perfection. “He told me that to please God completely I must leave nothing undone.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 219:1.

<sup>148</sup> *Life*, 24:1.

<sup>149</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, 7:1-2.

<sup>150</sup> *Life*, 24:4.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 24:5.

Unlike Cetina and Borja who placed much emphasis on mortification, Prádanos was much concerned about helping Teresa to detach from certain friendships she had, “by seeking God’s illumination in prayer, rather than by following an intense ascetic programme.”<sup>152</sup> Teresa was in a very difficult and confusing situation concerning her friendships. She was not able to strike a balance. She had some friends (who probably visited her in the convent parlour), to whom she was very attached, and felt it would be “ungrateful” for her to abandon them on the ground that it was not offensive to God. She wanted to know Prádanos’ opinion about these friendships and why she should give them up for she believed she was not offending God by them. Instead of asking her to mortify herself by keeping away from these friends, he recommended she prays about it. “Since my confessor saw me so attached in this matter, he didn’t dare to say definitely that I should give up such attachments. He had to wait for the Lord to do the work.”<sup>153</sup> He asked her to put the matter to God for some days and to recite the hymn *Veni Creator*, that God might enlighten her on the right thing to do. Mary Luti believed that Prádanos “knew that conversion could not be commanded and that, although not negligible in the life of a disciplined spirit, no directional insistence, penance, technique, or strategy could succeed altogether in *forcing* the requisite reordering of her relational and affective life.”<sup>154</sup>

While praying and reciting the *Veni Creator*, she had a mystical experience of rapture and locution which strengthened and liberated her definitively “from her unchanneled affectivity.”<sup>155</sup> She narrates her experience as follows:

One day, having spent a long time in prayer and begging the Lord to help me please him in all things, I began the hymn; while saying it, a rapture came upon me so suddenly that it almost carried me out of myself. It was something I could not doubt, because it was very obvious. It was the first time the Lord granted me this favour of rapture. I heard these words: “No

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<sup>152</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*, 128.

<sup>153</sup> *Life*, 24:7.

<sup>154</sup> Mary Luti, *Teresa of Avila’s Way* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 85.

<sup>155</sup> Chowning, *Jesus Christ, Friend and Liberator*, 22.

longer do I want you to converse with men but with angels.” This experience terrified me because the movement of the soul was powerful and these words were spoken to me deep within the spirit...although on the other hand I felt great consolation when the fear that, I think, was caused by the novelty of the experience left me.<sup>156</sup>

According to Terence O’Reilly, this experience, as Teresa describes it, corresponds with what Ignatius mentioned in a letter he wrote in 1536 to Sor Teresa Rejadell, a nun of the Santa Clara Benedictine convent in Barcelona: “It often happens that our Lord moves and impels our soul to one action or another by opening our soul, that is, by speaking inside it without any noise or voices, lifting up everything to his divine love, so that even if we wished to resist this meaning, we could not do so.”<sup>157</sup>

Through the above-mentioned experience (of rapture and locution), the Lord transformed the life of Teresa and enabled her to overcome her attachment to friendships which had come in between her longing for, and her intimacy with God. For a long time, she had wrestled with her spirit that longed for God and her body that desired human affections. This experience (especially the words she heard), brought an instant breakthrough in her life which her many years of effort could not bring. She writes:

...Nor did I think that I could succeed in this matter; I had already tried it, and the distress it caused me was so great...Now in this rapture the Lord gave me the freedom and strength to perform the task...May God be blessed forever because in an instant he gave me the freedom that I with all my efforts of many years could not attain myself, often trying so to force myself that my health had to pay dearly,<sup>158</sup>

Henceforth, her friendship was directed to God, and she parted with those friendships that distanced her from God. She did not give up human friendships entirely, rather they took a new turn, as Luti notes: “She had sought not the abandonment of human relationships, friendship, and intimacy but the ability to embrace them for the right reasons and without

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<sup>156</sup> *Life*, 24:5.

<sup>157</sup> Victoriano Larrañaga, *La espiritualidad de San Ignacio de Loyola: estudio comparativo con la de Santa Teresa de Jesús* (Madrid: A.C.N. de Casa de San Pablo, 1944), 95, quoted in O’Reilly, “St. Teresa and her First Jesuit Confessors,” 108-123.

<sup>158</sup> *Life*, 24:7-8.

self-seeking...not withdrawal from human discourse but the transformation of discourse and friendship.”<sup>159</sup> She could only entertain friendships and discourse that are rooted in the love and service of God and not on vanity. This was in fact the fruit of her experience as she puts it: “These words (referring to the words she heard during her rapture) have been fulfilled, for I have never again been able to tie myself to any friendship or find consolation in or bear particular love for any other persons than those I understand love Him and strive to serve Him.”<sup>160</sup>

Later in 1558 Prádanos took ill and Teresa got another Jesuit confessor; Baltasar Álvarez (1533-1580),<sup>161</sup> a young man of twenty-six years and just one year ordained at the time he met Teresa. He directed her for six years, from 1559-1565. Alvarez was very insecure and afraid of going against the directives his harsh superior Dionisio Vásquez (1527-1589), “who gave him strict orders to be very severe with his new penitent, as she was at the time the talk of all Ávila owing to the frequency of her visions, divine locutions and raptures.”<sup>162</sup> In line with his superior’s command, he became over cautious in dealing with Teresa, and that hindered him from making decisions and in helping her as he had wanted to do.

For since he who was my confessor had a superior, and members of the Society (the Jesuits) have this virtue to the extreme that they will not stir unless what they do is in conformity with their superior’s will, he didn’t dare, for sufficient reasons that he had, come to a decision about some things, although he understood my spirit well and desired that it make much progress.<sup>163</sup>

He was a good man and Teresa described him as “very discreet and deeply humble,”<sup>164</sup> but because of the pressure on him, and the restraint from his superior, he became very tough on her, subjecting her to rigorous mortifications and great trials. She was tempted several times

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<sup>159</sup> Luti, *Teresa of Avila’s Way*, 86.

<sup>160</sup> *Life*, 24:6.

<sup>161</sup> For more on the life and works of Baltasar Álvarez, see Luis de La Puente, *Vida del padre Baltasar Álvarez* (Barcelona: Red ediciones S.L, 2016).

<sup>162</sup> James Brodrick, “St. Teresa and the Jesuits,” in *Saint Teresa of Avila: Studies in her life, doctrine and times*, ed. Father Thomas and Father Gabriel (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds, 1963), 222-235.

<sup>163</sup> *Life*, 33:7.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 28:14.

to leave him, but was held back by an inner rebuke. “I had some temptations to leave him because it seemed to me the affliction he caused me hindered my prayer. Every time that I was determined to change, I then heard that I should not do so and a rebuke that grieved me more than the confessor did.”<sup>165</sup>

Álvarez was acting based on the criticisms from some quarters against their method of dealing with Teresa. Carrera observed that “their (the Jesuits) sympathetic methods were seen as an inappropriate way of dealing with her visions by Daza and Salcedo, who were joined by three other men—Hernandálvarez, Gonzalo de Aranda and Alonso Álvarez Dávila—in the judgement that her prayer was demonic.”<sup>166</sup> Accordingly, they mandated Álvarez to adopt a strict measure on Teresa, by placing “her on a more extensive programme of ascetic practices as a way of increasing her virtue and keeping the devil at bay.”<sup>167</sup> As part of this measure she was asked to stop receiving communion frequently, and that she should endeavour to distract herself in such a way that she would not be alone.<sup>168</sup> They believed that mortification will help to keep her spirit under control “ensuring that she walked the ascetic path rather than taking dangerous mystical flights.”<sup>169</sup> They also warned Álvarez to be careful of her and not allow the devil deceive him by anything she told him. In all these, Teresa still admired Álvarez a lot. She regarded him as the one who helped her the most, and who “suffered many great trials in many ways on” her account.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 26:3.

<sup>166</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography*, 129.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> See *Life*, 25:14.

<sup>169</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography*, 130.

<sup>170</sup> The whole situation later changed for good when in 1561, Dionisio Vásquez was removed from his post as rector of the Jesuit College of San Gil in Ávila and replaced by Gaspar de Salazar (1529-1593), who was to become Teresa's friend and supporter. He was at ease with her and Álvarez (her confessor). Teresa described it as follows: “The new rector didn't restrain my confessor, but rather told him to console me; that there was no reason for fear, and not to lead me by so confining a path; that he should let the spirit of the Lord work...” *Life*, 33:8.



## 1.6.2 Teresa and the Dominicans

Being made to believe (from the assessment of her previous confessors and others) that her experiences were from the devil, and in a bid to ascertain their authenticity, Teresa turned once again to the Dominicans of Santo Tomás for guidance.<sup>171</sup> Known for their learning and knowledge of spiritual matters, they provided authoritative advice and spiritual guidance and direction to Teresa at the time she was in great need of them. It was in the convent of Santo Tomás that Teresa met Pedro Ibáñez (+1565), whom she described as “a most learned man and a very great servant of God of the order of St. Dominic.”<sup>172</sup> He was then a professor of theology at the Dominican College of Santo Tomás in Ávila; a man of prayer with vast experience in spiritual direction. She bared her soul to him and sought his advice:

I discussed this with my Dominican Father who, as I say, was so learned and I was able to feel fully assured with what he told me. I told him then as clearly as I could about all the visions and my manner of prayer and the great favour the Lord granted me. I begged him to consider my prayer very carefully and tell me if there was something opposed to Sacred Scripture and what he felt about it all. He assured me very much, and, in my opinion, it benefited him.<sup>173</sup>

After listening to Teresa and examining the written account of her spiritual life, he wrote his report on the state of her soul; approving her account as credible and in conformity with the teaching of Scripture and the doctrine of the Church. He maintained that her visions and revelations are from God, because “it is so rare especially in our days to see spiritual edification and virtue so wonderfully displayed.”<sup>174</sup> He believed that Teresa’s mystical experiences drew her nearer to God, and increased in her the virtues of humility and

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<sup>171</sup> Teresa knew the Dominicans from her childhood, for they were already established in Ávila even before she was born. Her family home was very close to the Dominican priory of Santo Tomás in Ávila, and her father Don Alonso went there for confessions and direction under Padre Vincente Barrón. It was Teresa’s confession to Padre Barrón after her father’s death in 1546, that brought a turnaround in her spiritual life after more than seventeen years of “blindness.” See. *Life*, 5:3; 7:17. He was Teresa’s first Dominican confessor. She later on met other Dominicans who served as her confessors at different times in her life. We will limit our discussion here to the three main confessors who helped her at the crucial stage of her life when she was in need of a theologian and a confessor to authenticate her mystical experiences and to direct her soul and her writings.

<sup>172</sup> *Life*, 32:16.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:5.

<sup>174</sup> Pedro Ibáñez, “Statement on the Spirit of Saint Teresa,” in *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, vol 3, trans. Allison Peers (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), 313-333.

obedience, especially in submitting herself to be guided by her confessors and some learned men (theologians). Elena Carrera stated that, “as expected of a Dominican, Ibáñez used his knowledge of scholastic theology and resorted to the authority of St. Thomas to argue that Teresa’s revelations were from God because they increased her virtues of humility and obedience.”<sup>175</sup> Teresa needed this affirmation, for it came at the time when almost everybody believed she was deluded by the devil.

As a competent theologian and a very learned man, Ibáñez defended Teresa’s experiences, guided her on the path to perfection, and directed her to write the first draft of her autobiography (*The Book of Her Life*), and her first two *Spiritual Testimonies* which she addressed to him.<sup>176</sup> He was later on influenced by Teresa to take up prayer seriously, becoming deeply spiritual. “For although he was very good, from then on he dedicated himself much more to prayer and withdrew to a monastery of his order where there was much solitude so that he could practice prayer better.”<sup>177</sup> He made a lot of spiritual progress while in solitude, and became better when he came back as Teresa testified: “Because previously he assured me and consoled me only by his learning, but now he did so also through his spiritual experience, for he was receiving a number of supernatural experiences.”<sup>178</sup>

After her time with Ibáñez, she went to Toledo in 1562 to stay with Doña Luisa de la Cerda who had lost her husband and needed Teresa to keep her company in the palace. It was there she met another Dominican, García de Toledo (1515-1590), who became her confessor. He was a distinguished theologian and a learned aristocrat; a nephew of the Count of Oropesa and the Viceroy of Peru, Francisco Álvarez de Toledo (1515-1582). He held different offices in his order both in Spain and in Peru where he became a provincial. Teresa had met him before in Ávila where he had been the sub-prior of Santo Tomás, but after that, they never

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<sup>175</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*, 130.

<sup>176</sup> See *Spiritual Testimonies*, 1 and 2.

<sup>177</sup> *Life*, 33:5.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:6.

saw each other again for years. She was delighted to meet him again in Toledo and to have him as her confessor. She describes her encounter with him as follows:

While I was there (at Toledo), it happened that a certain religious came to that city, a person from the nobility with whom I had sometimes conversed many years previously. Once, when attending Mass at a monastery of his order near the place where I was staying, there came over me a desire to know the condition of his soul since I wanted him to be a great servant of God; and I rose to go to speak with him... We began to question each other (for it was many years since we had met), about our lives.<sup>179</sup>

García became Teresa's trusted friend and confessor whom God used to sustain and to nourish her spiritual growth and to advance her writing career. It was he who directed Teresa to write the second and a more extensive version of *The Book of Her Life* to include an in-depth description of the stages of prayer (chapters 11-22), an account of the foundation of St. Joseph's—her first foundation in Ávila (chapters 35-37), and her other numerous mystical experiences (37-40). He went through them offering necessary corrections and suggestions.

Though García was Teresa's confessor and the one to whom she had entrusted her soul, he also benefited from her prayers and from the spiritual ideas and experiences she shared with him. She noted that she was "very embarrassed" because she "saw him listening with so much humility to some things I was saying about prayer,"<sup>180</sup> for he was a man of great learning that should be listened to, and not the other way round. Through her prayers and influence, he resolved very sincerely to dedicate himself to prayer," and turned so completely to God "that he no longer seemed to live for anything else on earth."<sup>181</sup> This brought him to a deeper experience and understanding of spiritual matters; helping him to transcend beyond the level of the intellect to the realm of experience through grace.

Another Dominican friar who accompanied Teresa in her spiritual development was Domingo Báñez (1528-1604); a prominent theologian (who held the Chair of theology at

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 34:6.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 34:15.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 34:11. For more on Teresa's relation to García de Toledo, See Esteban Inciarte, "Santa Teresa y la orden Dominicana," in *Teología espiritual* 6 (1962), 443-468.

different universities, including the University of Salamanca), that served as Consultor to the Holy Office in Valladolid. He was greatly esteemed for his intellectual prowess and his sound doctrinal authority. Teresa first met him in the spring of 1562 when the fate of her reformed convent of St. Joseph's in Ávila was at stake. He defended Teresa before the gathering of the city councillors and some ecclesiastical authorities in Ávila who wanted to put an end to her project. Since meeting Teresa, "he had acted as her confessor and protector of her reputation and that of her reform."<sup>182</sup> He stood up for Teresa in 1575 by issuing a report (*censura*) in defence of her autobiography (*The Book of her Life*), "which had been denounced to the Valladolid Inquisition in 1574 as a book full of *visiones, revelaciones, y doctrinas peligrosas*"<sup>183</sup> (visions, revelations, and dangerous doctrines).

As a fine theologian he was very objective and critical minded in his assessment and report on Teresa's spiritual life and teachings. He did not seek to favour her, but to uphold the truth as it is, for the glory of God and the good of the Church. He began his report with these words:

I have read with great attention this book in which Teresa of Jesus, a Carmelite nun and foundress of the Discalced Carmelite nuns, sets down a plain account of all that takes place in her soul, so as to have the instruction and guidance of her confessors. In the whole of it I have found nothing which to my mind is erroneous teaching, while there is much good and edifying counsel for people who engage in prayer. For the great experience of this nun, and the discretion and humility which have always led her to seek enlightenment from confessors and profit from their learning, enable her to write well concerning prayer, as the most learned men are sometimes unable to do for lack of experience.<sup>184</sup>

Having certified her teaching to be free of heretical ideas, and praised her discretion and humility in seeking help and guidance from learned men, he also expressed his reservations on something contained in her book.

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<sup>182</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography*, 2.

<sup>183</sup> Enrique Llamas Martínez, "Santa Teresa de Jesús y la Inquisición Española," in *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 13 (1962), 518-565. Quoted in Carrera, *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography*, 2.

<sup>184</sup> Domingo Báñez, "Report on the Spirit of Saint Teresa and on the Autograph Narrative of her Life," in *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, vol 3, trans. Allison Peers (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), 333-336.

There is only one thing in this book with which, after it has been fully examined, fault can fairly be found—namely, that it says a great deal about revelations and visions, which are always very much to be feared, especially in women, who are more apt to believe that they come from God and to attribute to them a sanctity which they may not possess. They are to be regarded rather as trials full of peril to those who are striving after perfection, for Satan is wont to transform himself into an angel of light and to delude souls that are curious and lacking in humility, as we have seen in our own times.<sup>185</sup>

Though he believed Teresa's visions and revelations to be from God based on their effects on her (her growth in virtues), he was worried that readers without theological background (including Teresa's enclosed nuns), could misinterpret them and be deluded by them. Hence, he resolved that the "book should not be shown to all and sundry, but only to men of learning and experience and Christian discretion."<sup>186</sup> He concluded his report guaranteeing the genuineness of the whole of Teresa's enterprise and solicited support for her. "I am quite certain—as far as certainty is humanly possible—that she is not a deceiver; and it is only right, in view of the clarity with which she has written, that everyone should help her in her good purposes and good works."<sup>187</sup>

Báñez was an outstanding teacher and guide, "who enlightened Teresa's ignorance in matters of faith and theology."<sup>188</sup> He was very supportive of her writing career and guided her against errors. She submitted the second version of *The Book of Her Life* (which was finished in 1565) to him for assessment and corrections. It was also at his authorization that she wrote her second book, *The Way of Perfection* (a treatise on prayer for her nuns).<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. Following Báñez's verdict, the manuscript of Teresa's *Book of Life*, was confiscated by the Inquisition in 1575, and all concerted efforts made to return it proved abortive. Teresa never set her eyes on it again until her death in 1582. Then in 1586, Teresa's companion Venerable Anne of Jesus (1545-1621), got it back from the Inquisition, and handed it to Fray Luis de León (1527-1591), who edited it and it was then published in Salamanca in 1588.

<sup>187</sup> Báñez, *Report on the Spirit of Saint Teresa*, 333-336.

<sup>188</sup> Maroto, *Lecturas y Maestros de Santa Teresa*, 167.

<sup>189</sup> "The sisters in this monastery of St. Joseph have known that I received permission from the Father *Presentado*, Friar Domingo Báñez, of the order of the glorious St. Dominic, who at the present is my confessor, to write something about prayer." See *The Way of Perfection*, Prologue, 1.

### 1.6.3 Teresa and the Franciscans

Because Teresa had no theological training, she relied heavily on the available books on prayer and mystical life at the time. A good number of these books were written by some of the Spanish Franciscan spiritual writers who contributed immensely to the development and spread of mysticism in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain. According to Carrera, “these authors had in the 1520s codified and taught the Franciscan method of prayer of *recogimiento* (recollection), which had been practiced by the Franciscans of the Strict Observance since around 1470.”<sup>190</sup> They placed much emphasis on mental prayer (which involves an inward conversation with God by recollecting the senses and meditating on passages from the Scriptures, especially on the passion of Christ) over vocal prayer (which involves reciting certain prayers approved by the Church). Teresa was guided by these authors both in her prayer life and in the early stages of her mystical life. We shall consider some of these authors and their impact on Teresa.

We begin with Francisco de Osuna (1492-1541), Teresa’s first teacher of prayer. He was the author of the *Third Spiritual Alphabet* (*El tercer abecedario*), which contains a treatise on the method of prayer of recollection. Teresa read this book around 1538, and it taught her the prayer of recollection which was very influential in her spiritual formation. She spoke of her dependence on this book for guidance in her practice of prayer in the early days of her religious life, and how it became her “master.” “I was so happy with this book and resolved to follow that path (the path of recollection)...taking the book for my master.”<sup>191</sup> She considered Osuna’s method of prayer of recollection as the best in the ascetic stage of spiritual life,<sup>192</sup> that could lead to union with God—the *terminus ad quem* of the prayer life of

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<sup>190</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*, 47.

<sup>191</sup> *Life*, 4:7.

<sup>192</sup> See Maroto, *Lecturas y Maestros de Santa Teresa*, 193.

the mystics. She attained the prayer of quiet and union by following Osuna's teaching, and drew on it in her teachings on the practice of prayer recollection in *The Way of Perfection*.<sup>193</sup>

Teresa was also influenced by the writing of Fray Bernardino de Laredo (1482-1540), *La Subida del Monte Sión (The Ascent of Mount Zion)*,<sup>194</sup> which she read in the early stage of her mystical experiences, when she was experiencing the beginnings of the prayer of quiet and union. With no experienced director to guide her, she was completely ignorant of these phenomena and could not explain it to her confessors either. And because her confessors did not understand it, they became fearful and wary about it, and made her believe it was from the devil. Thus, she resorted to seeking help and clarification from de Laredo's book:

Since this gentleman (referring to Francisco de Salcedo), told me about his fears, and with the fear I already had, I felt greatly afflicted and shed many tears. For, certainly, I desired to please God, and could not persuade myself that the devil was the cause...Looking through books in order to see if I could learn how to explain the prayer I was experiencing, I found in one they called *Ascent of the Mount*, where it touches upon the union of the soul with God, all the signs I experienced in that not thinking of anything.<sup>195</sup>

De Laredo's *Ascent of Mount Sion* "helped her to see clearly into her own experience," for she discovered that his description of prayer of union in this book, was exactly the same with what she was experiencing at prayer.<sup>196</sup> "This was what I was most often saying: that when I experienced that prayer I wasn't able to think of anything."<sup>197</sup>

De Laredo's book is divided into three parts: the first part deals with the means of attaining self-knowledge through discursive meditation, the second part treats of the following of Christ through affective meditation, and the third part which he described as entirely mystical, deals with the prayer of quiet and pure contemplation. De Laredo taught in

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<sup>193</sup> See *Way of Perfection*, 24-26; 28-29.

<sup>194</sup> *La subida del Monte Sión*, (a treatise on mystical life), was first published in Seville in 1535, and revised in 1538. For more on the life and works of Fray Bernardino de Laredo, see Allison Peers, *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, vol. 2 (London: The Sheldon Press, 1930), 40-76.

<sup>195</sup> *Life*, 23:12.

<sup>196</sup> Paul Mommaers, *The Riddle of Christian Mystical Experience: The Role of the Humanity of Jesus* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2003), 68.

<sup>197</sup> *Life*, 23:12.

his book that at a certain point in the spiritual journey, one's "meditation (especially on the mysteries of the life of Christ) is transformed into quiet contemplation." (which for him, is the summit of Mount Sion, the union of the soul with its God by means of unitive love).<sup>198</sup> He said that in this manner of pure contemplation, the faculty (*potencia*) is suspended, "not in the least degree to function, and to occupy itself with love, but that it has no understanding of what it does, nor is conscious of the least degree of noise."<sup>199</sup> In this stage of prayer, the soul is in the state of *no pensar nada* 'not thinking of anything,' completely "stilled in its God" in what he called *un sueño de las potencias* (a sleep of the faculties).

This idea belongs to the negative way (*via negativa*), or the apophatic mysticism, for it entails ridding the mind (at higher level of prayer) of all corporeal images and concepts (including the image of Christ's Humanity), and not thinking of anything so as to contemplate the Divinity. "The soul in this manner of sleeping in its interior quiet," according to de Laredo, "receives no operation from any of its faculties nor in its comprehension touches the created, but all is spiritual."<sup>200</sup> It contemplates only the Divinity.

Seeing that her experience of prayer of quiet and union conforms with the mystical teachings of de Laredo's *Ascent of the Mount*, Teresa underlined the relevant passages and gave the book to Francisco de Salcedo, so that he and Gaspar Daza, "might look it over and tell me what I should do."<sup>201</sup> They concluded that her experiences were from the devil and asked her to consult the Jesuits for direction and guidance as we saw already.<sup>202</sup>

In addition to de Laredo, Teresa was also influenced by another eminent and highly revered 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Franciscan mystic, Pedro de Alcántara (1499-1562).<sup>203</sup> Unlike Osuna and de Laredo whom she met through their writings, she was fortunate to encounter

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<sup>198</sup> Bernardino de Laredo, *Ascent of Mount Zion*, trans. Allison Peers, (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 75.

<sup>199</sup> Peers, *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, 65.

<sup>200</sup> De Laredo, *Ascent of Mount Zion*, 135.

<sup>201</sup> *Life*, 23:12.

<sup>202</sup> See pages 28-39 above.

<sup>203</sup> For a critical account of Pedro de Alcántara's life, See Arcángel Barrado Manzano, *San Pedro de Alcántara (1499-1562): estudio documentado y crítico de su vida* (Madrid: Editorial Cisneros, 1965).



Pedro de Alcántara in person. It was her widow friend and benefactress Doña Guiomar de Ulloa who arranged for her to meet de Alcántara when he came to Ávila in the summer of 1560. She writes:

Once she (Doña Guiomar de Ulloa), knew that this saintly man was in the city, without saying anything to me, she obtained permission from my provincial that I stay at her house for eight days so that I might be able to talk with him more easily. Both in her home and in some of the churches I spoke with him frequently during this first time he was here; afterward at various times I conversed with him a great deal. I gave him a summary account of my life and manner of proceeding in prayer as clearly as I knew how.<sup>204</sup>

Unlike her previous confessors who had difficulties in understanding her prayer and experiences, thus, compelling her to write detailed descriptions her prayer, de Alcántara did not put her through the stress of doing that, for according to her, “he understood me through experience.”<sup>205</sup> Because he was a mystic himself, and had received countless mystical experiences, he knew from experience what Teresa was going through, and was in a better position to help her.

De Alcántara played a very significant role in the spiritual life and in the reforming projects of Teresa.<sup>206</sup> He supported her through moments of fear and doubts about the nature and the source of her mystical experiences and her inability to understand them. Teresa explained how he used his knowledge of theology and his vast experience in the mystical life to clarify things for her, and confirmed the truth of her mystical experiences. She writes: “This holy man enlightened me about everything and explained it to me, and he told me not to be grieved but that I should praise God and be so certain that all was from his spirit that with the exception of the faith nothing could for me be truer or more believable.”<sup>207</sup> His

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<sup>204</sup> *Life*, 30: 3.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 30:4.

<sup>206</sup> For more on this, See Gualberto Gismondi, “Santa Teresa e San Pietro d’Alcántara,” in *Santa Teresa: Guida all’amicizia con Dio*, estratto della *Rivista di Vita Spirituale*, 17 (1963), 420-457.

<sup>207</sup> *Life*, 30:5.

words left her greatly consoled and she felt secured in her prayer, “and not doubt that” her mystical experiences were from God.<sup>208</sup>

To further pacify her (for he believed she had “suffered one of the worst trials on earth, which is contradiction on the part of good men”<sup>209</sup>), he promised to speak with her confessor and her detractor.

He said that he would speak to my confessor (Baltasar Álvarez), and to the one who troubled me the most, for that was this married gentleman (Francisco de Salcedo), whom I have already mentioned...He spoke to both of them and gave them motives and reasons for feeling safe and not disturbing me anymore. My confessor had needed little assurance; the gentleman needed so much that the reasons were still not entirely enough, but they helped to keep him from frightening me so much.<sup>210</sup>

Teresa was so pleased by the spiritual benefits she got from de Alcántara that she recommended his book, *Tratado de la oración y meditación*, (Treatise on prayer and meditation), among the list of spiritual books her nuns should acquire. “The prioress should see to it that good books are available, especially *The life of Christ* by the Carthusian, *The Flos Sanctorum*, *The Imitation of Christ*...and those other books written by Fray Luis de Granada and by Fray Pedro de Alcántara.<sup>211</sup> She believed these books would nourish the soul in the same way that food nourishes the body.

### **1.7 Teresa in the Context of Her Times**

To understand Teresa’s fears and those of (some of) her confessors, it is important to consider the prevailing religious and social-political situation of 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain in which she lived. Following the fall of Granada (the last Muslim dynasty in Spain), in 1492, and the subsequent unification of the different entities of Spain into one (Catholic) nation by the Catholic

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<sup>208</sup> See Ibid., 30:7.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 30:6.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> St. Teresa of Ávila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Ávila*, vol 3 (*The Constitutions*), trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodríguez (Washington, D.C: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1985), 8.

Kings<sup>212</sup> Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452-1516) and Isabella I of Castile (1451-1504),<sup>213</sup> Spain “began to feel the effects of intellectual and religious change emanating from Italy, the Netherlands, the Rhineland, and elsewhere.”<sup>214</sup> As it opened itself to the various devotional works and spiritual movements emanating from these countries, the result was an awakened interest in spirituality and a deep longing for spiritual renewal, which according to Otilio Rodriguez, manifested itself in three basic ways: “A general longing for the interior life, the practice of mental prayer, and a very strong tendency towards high states of mystical experiences.”<sup>215</sup>

This spiritual rebirth and revival received a great boost from the Spanish Catholic reform championed by the Franciscan Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436-1517), who was Queen Isabella’s confessor, Archbishop of Toledo and primate of Spain and the grand Inquisitor.<sup>216</sup> Cisneros was very open to the northern influences particularly the writings of the Dutch humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536),<sup>217</sup> because of its focus on mental prayer, and piety which were consistent with his Franciscan mysticism.<sup>218</sup> The Franciscan’s teaching on mystical prayer involves a technique known as *recogimento*, which entails withdrawing from worldly concerns, and turning away from external distractions and gradually centring one’s soul on prayer, and meditation, especially, on the passion of Christ.<sup>219</sup> Cisneros was a great patron of learning who revolutionized scholarship in Spain, by establishing the University of Alcalá de Henares in 1508, “for the promotion of theological

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<sup>212</sup> Catholic kings or Monarchs (*Los Reyes Católicos*) was a title conferred on Ferdinand and Isabella by Pope Alexander VI in 1494, in acknowledgement of their successful re-conquest of Granada from the Moors, and their defence of, and strengthening of the Catholic faith within their kingdom.

<sup>213</sup> See J.H. Elliot, *Imperial Spain: 1469-1716* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 45-52; 99-110.

<sup>214</sup> Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 79.

<sup>215</sup> Otilio Rodriguez, *The Teresian Gospel: An Introduction to a Fruitful Reading of the Way of Perfection* (Darlington Carmel, 1982), 4.

<sup>216</sup> Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 104.

<sup>217</sup> Cisneros was a great admirer of Erasmus, and had invited him to Spain in 1517 to work on the Polyglot Bible, but he declined his offer. See *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>218</sup> Carol L. Flinders, *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (Harper Collins e-books, 2013), 159.

<sup>219</sup> See Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity* (Ithaca, New York: Conwell University Press, 1996), 10.

studies, and the publication of the great Complutensian Polyglot Bible, in which the Greek, Hebrew, and Latin texts were printed in parallel columns.”<sup>220</sup> This University also promoted the translation of spiritual/devotion books into Spanish.

Though his primary concern was the reform of his own religious order—the Franciscans (part of this reform was living a simple life and the practice of one and a half hour of mental prayer on a daily basis among the friars), it later on extended to the lay faithful; introducing them to the mystical way. Gillian Ahlgren observed, that “the flowing of mysticism in sixteenth-century Spain depended heavily on the spiritual revival of the Franciscan reform movement, initiated at the turn of the fifteenth century under Cardinal Francisco Ximénez de Cisneros (1416-1517).”<sup>221</sup> This reform was “grounded in the monastic reforms, humanist education, biblical study, practice of mental prayer and the translations of classics from the medieval mystical tradition,”<sup>222</sup> Cisneros ordered for instance, the Castilian translations of *The Spiritual Ladder* by St John Climacus (579-649), the works of Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) and Angela of Foglino (1248-1309), “and of the popular version of the Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Mystical Theology*, by Hugh of Balma translated as *Sol de contemplativos*,”<sup>223</sup> as well as the translation of Erasmus’ *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* into Spanish as *El Enchiridion o Manual del Cabellero Cristiano* published in 1526. These were in addition to the vernacular versions of the highly revered text of the *Devotio Moderna* (the *Imitation of Christ*) by Thomas a Kempis, that were already available “in Catalan since 1482, in Castilian since 1490, in Valencian since 1491.”<sup>224</sup> These books were made accessible to all and sundry, and they helped in their growth, and guided those who wanted to follow the mystical path.

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<sup>220</sup> Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 105.

<sup>221</sup> Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 9.

<sup>222</sup> Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, *Enkindling Love: The Legacy of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>223</sup> Alastair Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism in Sixteenth-Century Spain: The Alumbrados* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co, 1993), 13.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

Cisneros was very supportive of female piety, and did a lot in his monastic reform at making the religious life better for nuns and women tertiaries. He was, according to Alison Weber, “to the dismay of some of his biographers, devotee and defender of women visionaries who flourished as a result of his reforms.”<sup>225</sup> He was tolerant and open-minded to different kinds of spirituality and new forms of religious life for men and women. He was also very supportive of people seeking to follow the mystical way in the practice of mental prayer.

### 1.8 The Emergence of Heterodox and Heretical Teachings

Cisneros’s (Franciscan-inspired), spiritual renewal later on opened the way to “illuminism, mystical extremism, and syncretism and Protestantism.”<sup>226</sup> which had negative effects on the life and works of Teresa. These first became obvious when a group of lay men and women led by three charismatic women *beatas*<sup>227</sup> and Franciscan tertiaries: Isabela de la Cruz (who was considered as the “mother of the movement,” and the first to turn the ideas she got in the Franciscan convents into the doctrine of the *alumbrados*),<sup>228</sup> María de Cazalla, and Francisca Hernández (“known for her miraculous powers of healing,” and her ability “to provide brilliant expositions of the Scripture,” without formal education),<sup>229</sup> began to meet in private homes to read and discuss the Scripture. This group later came to be known as the *alumbrados* (the illuminists), for they claimed that one is capable of understanding the

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<sup>225</sup> Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 22.

<sup>226</sup> Iain Matthew, “St. Teresa: Witness to Christ’s Resurrection,” in *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition*, eds. Peter Tyler and Edward Howells (New York: Routledge, 2017), 82-96.

<sup>227</sup> *Beatas* were the late fifteen and early sixteenth centuries Spanish women who for different reasons could not join traditional religious orders, but chose to live the ‘religious’ life outside the monastery. They often times became lay members (tertiaries) of any of the known religious orders, following their rules or the rule they made for themselves. Some of these women were known to have mystical experiences and possessed miraculous powers, and had lots of followers and admirers, including priests, religious and prominent people in society. For more on the *beatas*, see Gillian T.W. Ahlgren, “Negotiating Sanctity: Holy Women in Sixteenth-Century Spain,” in *Church History* 64, no. 3 (1995): 373-388.

<sup>228</sup> Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*, 25.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

Scripture when inspired or directly illumined by the Holy Spirit who is the only teacher and master. This means that one does not need the help and the interpretation of theologians to understand the Scripture—which amounts to a denial of the church’s teaching authority, and the authority of Tradition. Furthermore, they believed it is in private inspiration and through direct and unmediated communication with God that one’s soul is nourished.<sup>230</sup> Hence, “they denied the ‘objective’ grounds on which Christian doctrine was based: the humanity of Christ, the basic stages of prayer, focus on the words and the images taught by the Church, and the guidance provided by its ministers and the devotional books it approved.”<sup>231</sup>

Taking the Franciscan practice of prayer of recollection (since a good number of them were trained in this method of prayer) to the extreme, a group of the *alumbrados* known as the *dejados* (literally, “the abandoned”)<sup>232</sup> came up with distorted views about prayer life and mysticism called *dejamiento* (self-abandonment). For while the Franciscans viewed prayer and meditation as a means of drawing the soul closer to God through an active recollection so as to attain union with God, the *dejados* in their prayer “stressed absolute passivity and total abandonment of the soul in all its faculties to God.”<sup>233</sup> They thought that for one to maintain mystical union with God attained through passivity and abandonment, one has to keep away from all activity, even from thinking about Christ in his humanity,<sup>234</sup> since these activities would be a hindrance to the divine presence in the soul. They also supposed that by practicing mental prayer one frees oneself from any religious act and obligations, such as fasting, penance and the practice of virtues. This position is similar to the Lutheran teaching

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<sup>230</sup> Pierre Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality: Later Developments, From the Renaissance to Jansenism*, vol 3 of 3. Classic Reprint Series (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 70.

<sup>231</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*, 65.

<sup>232</sup> The *alumbrados* are made up of two groups: the *recogidos* (the “recollected”) and the *dejados* (“the abandoned”). Though they shared a lot in common, these groups also have certain differences between them. For instance, while the former “attached highest importance to recollection,” the latter “built its spirituality on the idea of self-abandonment.” The Inquisition referred to both groups as *alumbrados*. See Kavanaugh, *Collected works of St. Teresa of Avila* vol 1, introduction, 22-23.

<sup>233</sup> Luti, *Teresa of Avila’s Way*, 25.

<sup>234</sup> Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*, 29.

of justification by faith alone without good works, because of its emphasis on interiority over external/charitable works. The teachings of the *dejados* according to Luti,

led to the conclusion that the abandoned one was not capable of sin, since his or her occupation was to remain passively in union with God, turning aside from all distraction, interior and exterior, including the act of moral decision-making. With the will captured by God, no moral consequences accrued to human action. The abandoned one was not capable of *consent to sin* and, therefore, could not be said to sin.<sup>235</sup>

These erroneous doctrines were denounced by the Inquisition most especially because they came from unlettered charismatic women (and their adherents) who portrayed themselves as independent of the Church and what she stands for.<sup>236</sup>

Furthermore, there was also a wide spread of claims to supernatural communication and mystical experiences among some *beatas* and women religious, which at the time was getting out of hand. Some of these women ecstasies and visionaries were very famous, and greatly supported and defended by the nobilities and some ecclesiastical authorities during the time of Cisneros. A notable example was the case of María de Santo Domingo (1486-1524), a famous visionary and Dominican tertiary also known as the *beata* of Piedrahita. Although she had no learning, her visions and ecstasies (which she often times displayed to impressed people), made her very popular and influential among nobles and churchmen who regarded her as a holy woman. Cisneros for instance, thought of her as the epitome of “living Christian doctrine,”<sup>237</sup> and even gave her the Franciscan girdle and asked for her prayers. The Duke of Alba, Fadrique Álvarez de Toledo (1460-1531), whom María won over to her side by displaying her raptures in the court, considered her a special soul highly favoured by God. She also won the support and approval of King Ferdinand of Aragon. Even though her visions and raptures were questionable (for instance, the then Master General of the

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<sup>235</sup> Luti, *Teresa of Avila's Way*, 25.

<sup>236</sup> See Antonio Márquez, *Los Alumbrados: Orígenes y Filosofía, 1525-1559* (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1972). 143.

<sup>237</sup> Vincente Beltrán de Heredia, *Historia de la reforma de la provincia de España (1450-1550)* (Rome: Institutum Historicum FF. Praedicatorum, 1939), 82. Quoted in Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of femininity*, 25.

Dominicans Thomas Cajetan (1469-1534) and many others thought her visions and ecstasies were influenced by the devil), and her activities and aberrant behaviours considered as unacceptable within the confines of orthodoxy, they were condoned by Cisneros and some nobilities who stood by her, and through whom she got away with them.<sup>238</sup>

She was just one in many who through the patronage of Cisneros escaped the weight of full condemnation by the Inquisition.<sup>239</sup> When their activities later on came under severe scrutiny, the result was alarming, as Alastair Hamilton observed: “Only some years after Cisneros’s death did ecclesiastical tribunals probe the sources of their inspiration and obtained repeated confessions of imposture and diabolical influences.”<sup>240</sup> Lamenting on the activities of these women, the famous Spanish Jesuit hagiographer Pedro de Ribadeneira (1527-1611), says: “It is indeed lamentable to see the multitude of deceived little women (*mujercillas engañosos*) who have appeared in our day in the most illustrious cities of Spain; women who with their ecstasies, revelations and stigmata have upset and fooled many people.”<sup>241</sup>

A well-known case was that of a famous visionary of Córdoba, Magdalena de la Cruz (1487–1560), former prioress of the Franciscan convent of Santa Isabel de los Ángeles in Córdoba, who had a reputation for holiness and was famous for her visions, revelation, miraculous powers and for bearing the stigmata. She had many devotees including the reputable spiritual master, Francisco de Osuna, the general of the Franciscan Order, Francisco de los Ángeles Quiñones (1482-1440), the archbishop of Seville and Grand Inquisitor,

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<sup>238</sup> For more on Sor María de Santo Domingo, see Jodi Bilinkoff, "A Spanish Prophetess and Her Patrons: The Case of Maria de Santo Domingo," in *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23, no.1 (1992):21-34. Also Jodi Bilinkoff, "A Charisma and Controversy: The Case of Maria de Santo Domingo," in *Archivo Dominicano* 10 (1989):55-66.

<sup>239</sup> For more on some of these women, see Marcel Bataillon, *Erasmus y España: estudios sobre la historia espiritual del siglo XVI* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1966), 68-71. Also Elizabeth A. Leffeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 162-170.

<sup>240</sup> Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*, 20.

<sup>241</sup> Pedro de Ribadeneira, "Tratado de la tribulación," in *Obras escogidos*, vol. 60 of Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, ed. Vincente de la Fuente (Madrid: Biblioteca de autores españoles, 1899), 439. Quoted in Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 159.



Alonso Manrique (1476-1538), and many aristocrats. Following an investigation by the Inquisition in 1546, she confessed to the disappointment of her admirers of being a secret devil worshipper; with whom she had a pact with at the age of five, and whose powers she used in deceiving the people. She was sentenced to life imprisonment in a convent in Andújar. Though she was punished accordingly by the Inquisition, her ability to fool priests, bishops and aristocrats stunned the Spanish Church. De Ribera described it as an event, that scared all of Spain, “*que puso espanto a toda España.*”<sup>242</sup>

Teresa was aware of this incident and was terrified by it; for it coincided with the time she was having frequent experiences of the mystical stages of the prayer of quiet and union, and she feared she might be a victim of such diabolical deception. “Since at that time,” she says, “other women had fallen into serious illusions and deceptions caused by the devil, I began to be afraid.”<sup>243</sup> This prompted her to seek guidance and to discern the source of her experience, as she testifies: “it made me diligently seek out spiritual persons to consult”<sup>244</sup>

### **1.9 The Action of the Inquisition**

The activities of these groups and some individuals (coupled with the discovery of some Lutheran groups in Seville and Valladolid in 1559), drew the attention of the Inquisition that stepped in to contain the situation.<sup>245</sup> They issued edicts against these groups; denounced, arrested, and imprisoned their prominent leaders. They also restricted the circulation and the use of mystical/suspect books; by prohibiting the import of foreign books, and creating “much stricter licensing regulations for books published in Spain.”<sup>246</sup> This culminated in the

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<sup>242</sup> De Ribera, *La Vida de Santa Teresa de Jesus*, 122.

<sup>243</sup> *Life*, 23:2.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> The Spanish Inquisition was originally established in 1478 by the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella to foster a common faith and a national unity in Spain, and to ensure religious orthodoxy among the *conversos*. But with time, they assumed a different role, by going after heretical and suspect Christians and in safeguarding Spain from the threats of the Lutherans. For more on the Spanish Inquisition and their activities, See Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>246</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography*, 80.

publication of the Index of Prohibited Books,<sup>247</sup> listing 253 titles, most of which were books on mental prayer and mystical life written by contemporary Spanish authors and other vernacular translations from classical writers. This move according to Carrera was aimed at “suppressing the increasingly popular affective spirituality and reinforcing the medieval ascetical practices of virtue and *desarraigo de vicios* (uprooting of vices).”<sup>248</sup> It was also “an attempt by the ecclesiastical authorities to regain some of the ideological control lost through the proliferation of devotional books in the vernacular.”<sup>249</sup>

One of the Inquisition’s major targets was the practice of mental (interior) prayer (especially by women who were considered susceptible to self-delusion and diabolical deceptions), and the proliferation of books that encouraged it. Mental prayer was thought of as a very dangerous practice; as a threat to the sacramental life of the Church and of the Church’s traditional pattern of prayer (vocal prayer). It was associated with *Alumbradism* and Protestantism, since most of those who practiced mental prayer, (as with the *alumbrados* and the Protestants), held the idea of unmediated experiences of God in prayer, and denied the intermediary role of the sacraments in our relation with God. Thus, those who practice mental prayer or teach others about it, were treated with suspicion and scorn.

Luti has it that the key frontmen “for the forces opposed” to the practice of mental prayer were “university theologians, particularly the Dominicans of Salamanca.”<sup>250</sup> This group known as the *letrados*, the “learned,” (a term commonly used at the time to refer to scholastic theologians), believed that the practice of mental prayer “was the first step to heterodoxy, not, subject to the control of the Church hierarchy nor grounded in sound

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<sup>247</sup> In 1559 Fernando de Valdés (1483-1568), Archbishop of Seville and the Grand Inquisitor published an Index of Prohibited Books most of which were spiritual and mystical books written in the vernacular, which the Inquisition considered not only harmful to the faithful, but also responsible for the spread of mental prayer and unorthodox and extremist ideas.

<sup>248</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*, 80.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>250</sup> Luti, *Teresa of Avila’s Way*, 52.

theological science.”<sup>251</sup> They were concerned that if mental prayer is allowed to be practiced by all, it will lead the people (especially women and the unlettered faithful) astray. For instance, the Dominican–cum–Salamanca theologian Melchor Cano (1509-1560)<sup>252</sup> held that allowing everyone to practice mental prayer will not only endanger “the Church, but civic society.” He was concerned that “if the contagion” is allowed the spread extensively, “we shall have to shut down our books, close our colleges and universities, stop all studying, and then we can all give ourselves to prayer.”<sup>253</sup> Another Dominican scholastic theologian of the *letrados* group, Domingo Soto (1494-1560), declares that he could not fathom “how those who were on their knees before the tabernacle for two hours (practicing mental prayer), could be thinking of God since God is invisible.”<sup>254</sup>

As a result of their misgivings on the practice of mental prayer, the *letrados* proposed that women and uneducated people should stick to vocal prayers and other devotions authorised by the Church, and keep away from all passive and interior prayer to avoid giving in to self-delusion and diabolic deception. This assertion did not go down well with the *espirituales*—a group (mostly Franciscans and Jesuits), that not only favoured and promoted mental prayer, but also believed to be true the knowledge of God obtained through it. They held that the *letrados* have little or no knowledge of spiritual life since they relied mostly on knowledge derived from books. They were also of the opinion that because the *letrados* have not experienced mental prayer, they are not in a better position to “understand or pass

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Melchor Cano was also a theologian of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), and consultant to both King Philip II (1527-1598) and the Inquisition.

<sup>253</sup> See Tomás Álvarez, “Santa Teresa e i movimenti spirituali del suo tempo,” in *Santa Teresa Maestra di Orazione* (Roma: Teresianum, 1963), 9-54, quoted in Matthew, “St. Teresa: Witness to Christ’s Resurrection,” 82-96.

<sup>254</sup> See Daniel de Pablo Maroto, *Dinámica de la oración*, 107. Quoted in Kavanaugh, “Introduction” in *The Way of Perfection*, 15. Domingo Soto also served as a theologian of the Council of Trent.

definitive judgement upon it” or on those who practice it.<sup>255</sup> Hence, they opposed the increasing prohibitions on the practice of mental prayer and attacks on those who practice it.

Teresa was on the side of the *espirituales* regarding the practice of mental prayer. Teofanes Egido maintained that though “Teresa was insistent on the value of the *letrados*,” had “easy congeniality toward them,” and a fruitful friendship with some of them...but being a ‘spiritual’ woman, “she had more in common with the contrary party.”<sup>256</sup> This is reflected in her statement regarding those (especially the *letrados*), who because of their lack of experiential knowledge of prayer, and out of fear about it, thought it was dangerous especially for women. She reacted to this view in chapter twenty-one of *The Way of Perfection* by encouraging her nuns to persevere in the way of prayer and never be distracted by people’s negative attitude towards women and their practice of prayer:

Those who want to journey on this road (path of prayer) and continue until they reach the end...must have a great and very determined determination to persevere until reaching the end, come what may...you will hear some persons frequently making objections: “there are dangers;” so-and-so went astray by such means;” “this other one was deceived;” “another who prayed a great deal fell away;” “it is harmful to virtue;” “it is not for women, for they will be susceptible to illusions;” “it is better they stick to their sewing;” “they don’t need these delicacies;” “the Our Father and the Hail Mary are sufficient...” Sisters, give up these fears; never pay attention in like matters to the opinion of the crowd. Behold these are not the times to believe everyone; believe only those who you see are walking in conformity with Christ’s life.<sup>257</sup>

Furthermore, she also defended women’s right to mental prayer for she believed it should be practiced by all without any restriction. She was against the idea that women should be confined only to reciting vocal prayer

If they tell you that prayer should be vocal, ask, for the sake of precision, if in vocal prayer the mind and heart must be attentive to what you say. If

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<sup>255</sup> Luti, *Teresa of Avila’s Way*, 52.

<sup>256</sup> Teofanes Egido, “The Historical Setting of St. Teresa’s Life,” in *Carmelite Studies* 1 (1980), 122-182. It is important to note, as Edward Howells pointed out, that “the *espirituales* and the *letrados* were not separate parties in the Spanish Church, but rather tendencies or movements among certain groups, often within the same religious order.” The two tendencies according to him, “could exist amicably side by side.” See Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila: Mystical Knowing and Selfhood*, 169-170, no. 15.

<sup>257</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 21:2 &10.

they answer “yes” –for they cannot answer otherwise–you will see how they admit that you are forced to practice mental prayer, and even experience contemplation if God should give it to you by such a means.<sup>258</sup>

Teresa was not only advocating women’s right to mental prayer, she was also according to Weber, “defending women’s right to choose the path of spiritual perfection.”<sup>259</sup> She believed that women are capable of mental prayer and of having an immediate relationship with God.

### **1.10 The Impact of the Situation of the Time on Teresa and Her Response to it**

Though the repressions and restrictions of the time had negative effects on Teresa, she thrived on them; for she not only wrote her (mystical) books (without formal theological education and teaching authority), but she also made new foundations when as a woman she was forbidden from doing any of those. How did she manage to get her way without being accosted or sanctioned by the Inquisition? Ahlgren argued that Teresa survived because of the rhetorical strategies she adopted, which was her way of responding “to the climate of suspicion that surrounded women’s mystical experience in her day.”<sup>260</sup>

Drawing on Weber’s *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, which attempts to demonstrate Teresa’s use of exceptional rhetorical skills to defend her ideas and works,<sup>261</sup> Ahlgren argues that Teresa used rhetorical strategies that were “complex, interconnected and effective,” to have her way. One of these strategies was that of subordination and self-bellitting through which she portrayed herself as a humble and obedient nun. She believed that Teresa’s humility and obedience was more of a strategy than a virtue, and that she used them to achieve her purpose. For “in constructing herself as a humble and obedient woman, Teresa disarmed many of her critics and carved out a unique place for herself in the Christian

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 21:10.

<sup>259</sup> Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 83.

<sup>260</sup> Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*,84.

<sup>261</sup> Weber was one of the first to categorize Teresa’s humility as more of a strategy than a virtue. She believes Teresa employed humility to further her personal agenda: “Teresa’s rhetoric of feminine subordination—all the paradoxes, the self-depreciation, the feigned ignorance and incompetence, the deliberate obfuscation and ironic humor—produced the desired perlocutionary effect.” See Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 159.

mystical tradition.”<sup>262</sup> Ahlgren thought that Teresa needed these strategies in order to overcome “the structures of her day, which would have prevented her (as they did to most women), from a public religious role, particularly any role that involves teaching.”<sup>263</sup> These strategies (especially her rhetoric of obedience), distanced Teresa and her teachings from that of the *alumbrados* and the *luteranos*, who at the time were sanctioned not only for their beliefs or practices but on how firmly they held on to them. Thus, she considered Teresa’s emphasis on humility and obedience as “a rhetorical strategy designed to present herself as no threat to a patriarchal and institutional church”<sup>264</sup>

Though Ahlgren made convincing arguments on Teresa’s intention and style, Carrera maintained that she exaggerated her belief in Teresa’s ability to choose her style as she pleased; she considers Ahlgren’s position “as a reaction to the previous view that, as a saint, she was incapable of deception.”<sup>265</sup> In line with Carrera’s position, Raquel Trillia believes that Ahlgren’s approach amounts to ascribing to Teresa’s works much more design than she intended.”<sup>266</sup> Though some scholars argued that Teresa used language and rhetorical strategies to further her personal agenda, Trillia maintained that some critics overstate Teresa’s intentions.<sup>267</sup> It is thus, unfair to assume that her expression of humility was just a strategy for getting what she wanted. It is important to remember that Teresa was a prayerful nun, and humility is a virtue that accompanies an authentic prayer life. It is also a requirement for a genuine Christian living, which she vowed to live. So humility for Teresa is a virtue and not a strategy. Mujica admits that humility for Teresa, “was more than a rhetorical ploy; it was an essential element of the way of perfection.”<sup>268</sup> It is a virtue she cultivated “as a way of

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<sup>262</sup> Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 83.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>265</sup> See Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*, 2 & 15, no. 6.

<sup>266</sup> Raquel Trillia, “The Woman or the Text: Reading Teresa of Ávila’s Rhetoric of Obedience,” in *Letras Hispanas*, 12 (2016), 22-45.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> Mujica, *Teresa de Ávila Lettered Woman*, 57.

becoming receptive to God's grace and thereby becoming increasingly confident that she could attain high things."<sup>269</sup>

Thus, unlike Ahlgren who argued that Teresa survived the situation of her time because of the rhetorical strategies she employed, we will show (that in addition to the strategies she used), that she survived because Christ was on her side. It was within the religious and social situation of her time, that Teresa's relationship with Christ developed. For instance, it was when the Inquisition banned many Spanish spiritual writings with the publication of Valdes' Index of forbidden books in 1559, that Teresa encountered Christ who became her teacher and her "living book." This experience not only empowered her, but also shaped her response to the challenges of her times. She writes:

When they forbade the reading of many books in the vernacular, I felt that prohibition very much because reading some of them was enjoyment for me, and I could no longer do so since only the Latin editions were allowed. The Lord said to me: "Don't be sad, for I shall give you a living book." I was unable to understand why this was said to me, since I had not yet experienced any visions. Afterwards, within only a few days, I understood very clearly, because I received so much to think about and so much recollection in the presence of what I saw, and the Lord showed so much love for me by teaching me in many ways, that I had very little or almost no need for books.<sup>270</sup>

Following this experience, Christ himself began to teach and to instruct Teresa as he had promised to do. She began to receive theological insights from him through direct revelation, which will form the basis and the content of her writings.<sup>271</sup> Affirming this, Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Letter declaring Teresa Doctor of the Church, states that "though she had repeatedly declared her lack of learning and her inability to teach, yet inspired by God, she

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<sup>269</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography*, 53.

<sup>270</sup> *Life* 26:5.

<sup>271</sup> Teresa also admitted that some of the things she wrote actually came from her personal insight. This means that her writings were a combination of both direct revelation and her own insight. "Many of the things I write about here do not come from my own head, but my heavenly master tells them to me. The things I designate with the words 'this I understood' or 'the Lord said this to me' cause me great scrupulosity if I leave out even as much as a syllable. Hence if I don't recall everything exactly, I put it down as coming from myself; or also, some things are from me...When I say 'coming from me,' I mean not being made known to me through a revelation." See *Life*, 39: 8.

was able to understand, to teach and to write on very profound subjects, considering Christ as the only source of her doctrine and, as it were, a living book.”<sup>272</sup> Thus, her writings and teaching ability for Pope Paul VI, was as a result of the divine knowledge she received from the Lord himself.

The banning of vernacular books on prayer would prompt Teresa to look for alternative means of teaching the practice of mental prayer to her nuns. Given that most of the books that formed and nurtured her in the practice of mental prayer were banned, and bearing in mind that her discalced nuns needed such (or similar) books for their spiritual growth and in the practice of mental prayer, she resorted to her own experiences and of the things she learnt from Christ her “living book,” in teaching them. This marked the beginning of her writings, as Ahlgren pointed out; “the prohibitions in the Valdés’ Index were a major motivation for Teresa to move from reading ‘books to writing them.”<sup>273</sup> What constituted her early writings (especially *The Book of Her Life*), were the written accounts of her way of prayer and her spiritual experiences she composed for her spiritual directors to read and to ascertain their validity. She described in this account “repeated reassurances she received directly from God about the authenticity of her prayer experiences as well as experiences that made Scripture literally come alive for her.”<sup>274</sup>

These experiences formed part of her first major work, *The Book of Her Life*, first written in 1562 at the request of her confessor, García de Toledo, and revised in 1565. This was to be followed by her three other major works: *The Way of Perfection* (1566-1567)—a manual of prayer for her nuns, *The Book of Foundations* (1581)—an account of her seventeen

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<sup>272</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Multiformis Sapientia Dei*, 27 September, 1970. Above is my translation of the Italian version which reads: “Infatti, sebbene avesse più volte dichiarato la sua incapacità di comprendere e di insegnare, tuttavia fu in grado di intendere, di insegnare e di scrivere, ispirata da Dio, su profondissimi argomenti, reputando Cristo l'unica fonte della sua dottrina e quasi libro vivente.” See. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_apl\\_19700927\\_multiformis-sapientia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19700927_multiformis-sapientia.html) (assessed 3 February, 2018).

<sup>273</sup> Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 41.

<sup>274</sup> Gillian Ahlgren, *Entering Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle: A Reader's Companion* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 6.



reformed foundations of the Carmelite nuns, *The Interior Castle* (1577)– her more matured teaching on the dimensions of mystical growth, and a number of minor works including about 450 letters still extant. Because Teresa wrote to defend her way of prayer and above all to authenticate her spiritual experiences in the atmosphere of suspicion in which she lived, she was very cautious and selective about what to say and how to say it, to avoid being classed among the heretics (especially the *alumbrados*), who were known for their false teachings and for disobeying the Church and what she stands for. Carrera said that, “Since the primary aim of her writing at this stage was to communicate her experience to people who would be able to discern its truthfulness, she had to emphasize her position both as a prayerful nun and as an obedient daughter of the Church.”<sup>275</sup> She sought always for the help and advice of experts in relation to her religious experiences. Luti observed that Teresa would time and again, “seek out influential, experienced, and educated men to testify to the authenticity of her experiences and to the orthodoxy of the truth she learnt from them and which she taught in her books.”<sup>276</sup> She also relied above all, on their help and expertise in formulating “the content of her experiences in acceptable terms.”<sup>277</sup>

Teresa also responded to the situation of her time by reforming the Carmelite order; by establishing monasteries that would follow the primitive rule of the Order instead of the mitigated rule which allowed laxity in living the Carmelite life.<sup>278</sup> They are to be houses where the nuns will be friends of Christ; spending more time with him in the practice of

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<sup>275</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography*, 145.

<sup>276</sup> Luti, *Teresa of Avila's Way*, 45.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> She wanted her reformed (Discalced) Carmelites to return to the primitive rule of 1247 promulgated by Pope Innocent IV and adopted by the Carmelites on their migration from the Middle East to Europe. As against the Mitigated rule of 1432 enacted by Pope Eugene IV in his Bull *Romani Pontifici*... “which allowed the friars to eat meat for three days a week and deemed it suitable for the friars to walk about in their ‘churches, cloisters and periphery.’” The primitive rule Teresa wanted to adopt is centred on living a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ. Thus, it called for a return to prayer, fraternal life, simplicity of life and fasting; especially on total abstinence from meat and a prolonged fast from September 14 (Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross), until Easter Day. See Peter Tyler, *Teresa of Avila Doctor of the Soul* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing: 2013), 58-66. Also *The ‘Primitive’ Rule of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel* Given by St. Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem and corrected, emended and confirmed by Pope Innocent IV.

mental prayer, and in praying for the Church in crisis as a result of the Reformation. She attributed the success of this enterprise to Christ who in 1562, gave her the mandate to found the first Discalced Carmelite monastery of nuns (St. Joseph's), in Ávila, and had promised to remain with them.

One day after communion, His Majesty earnestly commanded me to strive for this new monastery with all my powers, and he made great promises that it would be founded and that he would be highly served in it. He said it should be called St. Joseph and that this saint will keep watch over us at one door, and our Lady at the other, that Christ would remain with us...<sup>279</sup>

In all, she founded 17 new reformed Carmelite monasteries for women, and two for the friars in collaboration with St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), who was known then as Fray Juan de San Matías (Friar John of St. Mathias).

Teresa and John first met in Medina del Campo when John, whom Teresa described then as *un padre de poca edad*<sup>280</sup> (a young Priest), arrived in Medina after his ordination. During this time (in 1567), Teresa was making her second foundation of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Medina del Campo. She was also looking out for friars that would collaborate with her reform movement; for by this time she had been granted permission by the General of the Carmelite Order Giovanni Battista Rossi (1507-1578) to make more foundations of the Discalced nuns, and two monasteries of reformed Carmelite friars. Ahlgren argued that Teresa wanted specifically “a community of men to be part of the reform, especially because then, she and her sisters would have priests and confessors who were themselves well-formed in the mystical life.”<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> *Life*, 32: 11.

<sup>280</sup> Santa Teresa de Jesús, *Obras completas*, 5.<sup>a</sup> edición, Revisión textual, introducciones y notas: Enrique Llamas, Teófanos Egado, D. de Pablo Maroto, et al (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2000), *Libros de las Fundaciones*, 3:17.

<sup>281</sup> Ahlgren, *Enkindling Love*, 7-8.

Having expressed his desire and interest in becoming part of her project,<sup>282</sup> Teresa took John to her new foundation in Valladolid as a way of training him in the Discalced Carmelite way of life and of letting him see things for himself.<sup>283</sup> She mentioned that while they were waiting for the workmen to get the house in Valladolid ready, “before establishing the enclosure,” she seized the “opportunity to teach Father Fray Father John of the Cross about our way of life so that he would have a clear understanding of everything.”<sup>284</sup> John was thus instructed by Teresa about the spirit and the lifestyle of the Discalced (reformed) Carmelite Order she was establishing, and which he was to champion.

His time of apprenticeship over, he took up the task of beginning the first foundation of the Discalced Carmelite friars in Duruelo, in collaboration with Fray Antonio de Jesús (1510-1601),<sup>285</sup> who became the prior, while John of the Cross was the novice master. Thus, John and Antonio became the first Carmelite friars who joined the Teresian reform. Howells remarked that by joining Teresa’s reform movement, “they followed Teresa’s model in making new foundations for men, as Teresa was doing for women, according to a stricter version of the Carmelite rule than that used by the rest of the order, calling themselves ‘discalced’<sup>286</sup> Carmelites.”<sup>287</sup> John also played the role of spiritual director and confessor to the nuns. Teresa benefitted a lot from discussing spiritual matters with John whom she refers

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<sup>282</sup> John had initially wanted to join the Carthusians, but his encounter and conversation with Teresa (who persuaded him to be part of her reform of the Carmelite Order), changed his plans. She asked John to support this movement for she believed that through it, “much greater service would be rendered to the Lord.” See St. Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Foundations*, a Study Guide by Marc Foley (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2011), 3:17. Henceforth further references to *The Book of Her Foundations* in this work will be cited only as *Foundations*.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:4.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:5.

<sup>285</sup> Teresa had initially thought of recruiting Fray Antonio (known then as Fray Antonio de Heredia, and the prior of the Carmelite monastery in Medina de Campo), but all that changed when she met John of the Cross whose exceptional qualities and his love for solitude and prayer enthused her a lot. See *Foundations*, 3:16-17.

<sup>286</sup> Teresa referred to her new reformed Carmelite Order as “discalced,” an idea from Maria de Ocampo, (later known as Maria Baustista), Teresa’s niece, who suggested that they be called *Descalza* sisters like those founded in Madrid under the inspiration of St. Peter of Alcántara. See *Life*, 32:10. Also Tyler, *Teresa of Avila Doctor of the Soul*, 66. The word ‘discalced’ literally means without shoes. It is often used to refer to members of religious orders who go barefoot or wear sandals.

<sup>287</sup> Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila*, 66.

to as “the father of my soul and one from whom it benefitted most in its conversations with him”<sup>288</sup> He is according her, “a very spiritual man with much experience and learning.”<sup>289</sup>

In reforming the Carmelite Order (despite the strict oppositions she encountered from both civil and religious authorities), Teresa had achieved what women were forbidden from doing in her time. Luti summed it up as follows: “All the things a woman like Teresa ought not to have done in the rough times she lived in, she managed to do and still come out unscathed. She had, she was certain, been loyal and loving in the cause of Christ.”<sup>290</sup>

Teresa’s ability to respond to the situation of her time hinged on her relationship with the person of Jesus Christ and on her profound experience of encounter with him in prayer, visions and in the Eucharist. Meeting Christ and making him the centre of her life, increased her self-confidence and enabled her to discover and to appreciate her abilities as a woman irrespective of the weaknesses attributed to women in her time. Christ provided a welcoming atmosphere (especially in his Eucharistic presence and his indwelling presence in her soul), that drew Teresa to him. In his company she felt loved, supported and accepted, unlike with some of her confessors and members of the ecclesiastical authority who only judged and condemned her as an evil, self-deluded and disobedient nun.<sup>291</sup> Teresa had recourse to Christ as her teacher and friend. She learned a great deal from this Divine master by remaining close to him and creating a space within herself for him.

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<sup>288</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2 trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2007), 277:2 (November-December, 1578).

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Luti, *Teresa of Avila’s Way*, 59.

<sup>291</sup> For instance, the then Papal Nuncio to the Spanish Court, Felipe Sega (1537-1596), described her as a restless gadabout, disobedient and contumacious woman, who invented wicked doctrines and called them devotion, transgressed the rules of enclosure...and taught others, against the command of St. Paul, who had forbidden women to teach. See *Reforma de los Descalzos*, vol. 1, bk. 4, ch. 30, quoted in *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Avila*, vol. 3, trans. E. Allison Peers, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), 150, n. 2.

## **1.11 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to situate Teresa in the context of the social-political and religious situation of 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain in which she lived, and to explore the impact and challenges of this period on her. We began by looking at Teresa's biography with emphasis on her early life and struggles, her human and spiritual development; especially on the foundation of her practice of mental prayer, her devotion to the humanity of Christ and her religious/mystical experiences of Christ. Regarding Teresa's response to the challenges she faced in her time, we considered the position of Ahlgren who argued that this situation compelled Teresa to adopt some survival strategies given her condition as a woman and an enclosed nun. Though Ahlgren's argument were valid, but she seemed to overstate them by ascribing a lot more to Teresa's intention and style than she intended.

Instead of attributing Teresa's success and her ability to overcome the challenges of her time, to her use of strategies as Ahlgren did, we demonstrated that it was her experience of encounter with Christ and the friendship and support she found in him that made the difference in her life. This encounter empowered her to speak with authority, and to stand for the right of women to prayer and spiritual experiences. Above all, it enabled her not only to write (mystical books) and teach about mental prayer, but also to embark on reforming the Carmelite Order (making new foundations); an undertaking that was far beyond the reach of women in her time, for they were strictly forbidden from doing any of these.

In the next chapter we shall explore Teresa's experience of Christ in prayer. We shall consider her understanding of prayer, (as "an intimate sharing between friend"), and on how her practice of prayer (especially the prayer of recollection she learnt from Osuna), became for her a means of an experience of encounter with the person of Jesus Christ in his sacred humanity.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TERESA'S EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST IN PRAYER

In the first chapter we saw how Teresa's illness, which forced her to leave the monastery in search for a cure at Becedas became an opportunity for her to meet again with her uncle Don Pedro de Cepeda, and how in this encounter he gave her a book, *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* by the Franciscan spiritual writer, Francisco de Osuna.<sup>292</sup> This book introduced Teresa to the Franciscan method of prayer of recollection (*recogimiento*), and helped to secure her on the path of prayer and more especially on how to focus her attention during prayer on Jesus Christ who dwells within her.

In this chapter we shall demonstrate how Teresa inspired by Osuna's prayer of recollection formulated her own method of recollection, and how this method (in addition to her other ways of praying, some of which predated her discovery of Osuna's prayer of recollection), became her means of experiencing the presence of Christ in prayer. Given that the focus of this chapter is on Teresa's experience of Christ in (ascetical) prayer, we shall begin by considering her understanding of prayer, with special emphasis on mental prayer which she thinks of as "an intimate sharing between friend;" as taking time regularly to be alone with God. We shall also discuss (in the last part of this chapter), what Teresa considers as the role of the humanity of Christ in prayer.

#### 2.1 Teresa and Prayer

Teresa of Jesus is acclaimed in the Church as one of the prominent teachers of the theology of prayer.<sup>293</sup> The theme of prayer is spread throughout all her works. According to Secundino Castro, prayer is, without doubt, the most central and the core of Teresa's spirituality. It is

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<sup>292</sup> See pages 19-21 above.

<sup>293</sup> When Pope Paul VI named Teresa the first woman Doctor of the Universal Church on September 27, 1970 he emphasized her role as "teacher of the teachers of the spirit, who through her writings has given the essential message of prayer to the Church." See Paul VI, "Multiformis Sapientia Dei" (September 27, 1970), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 63 (1971), 185-192.

according to him, “the principle on which all her other teachings are based.”<sup>294</sup> Though the theme of prayer is scattered throughout her works, it is in her major works, (*The Book of Her Life*, *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle*), that she expounded it at length. Her major works contain the theology and practice of prayer. In them, she explains the dynamism of the journey of prayer which for her involves a progressive passage from the lowest stage of prayer, in which human action prevails, to the highest stage, when God does everything. It is a journey from the ascetical to the mystical. In chapters 11-21 of *The Book of Her Life* for instance, Teresa offers a small treatise on prayer, explaining the four grades of prayer using the allegory of the “four waters” or specifically, the four methods of watering a garden. She provides a theological description of the work of grace in the spiritual life, as one journeys from the lower stage (ascetical), to the higher stage (mystical) of prayer. In *The Way of Perfection*, which was written as a manual of prayer for the nuns, she also presents different degrees of prayer, with more emphasis on the ascetical grades of prayer. Her teaching on prayer here is based on her commentary on the Our Father, which according to her “contained the entire spiritual way, from the beginning stages until God engulfs the soul and gives it drink abundantly from the fount of living water...”<sup>295</sup> In *The Interior Castle* which is her most mature and systematized work, Teresa employs the symbol of a castle with seven mansions or dwelling places (*las moradas*), to describe the different stages of prayer. The first three mansions, according to her, represent the ascetical stage of the spiritual journey, while the last four mansions (from the fourth to the seventh), represent the different grades of mystical prayer.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 73.

<sup>295</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 40:5.

<sup>296</sup> For some detailed explanations on Teresa’s teaching on prayer, see Daniel de Pablo Maroto, *Teresa en oración: Historia, experiencia, doctrina* (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2004), 343-404. Also Jesús Castellano, “Teresa de Jesús nos enseña a orar,” in Tomás Álvarez-Jesús Castellano, *Teresa de Jesús enseñanos a orar* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1981), 87-148.

Teresa's doctrine on prayer has had a great impact on the life and the teachings of the Church, especially in the areas of Christian living, spirituality and mystical theology. It has influenced many saints, mystics and spiritual writers both in the Church and beyond. Notable among them are St. Alphonsus Liguori (1691-1787) and St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622). Pope Francis in his letter to Fr. Saverio Cannistra, Superior General of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, on the occasion of the fifth centenary of the birth of St. Teresa of Jesus, described Teresa's role in the Church as a teacher of prayer. He writes:

St. Teresa is above all a *teacher of prayer*. The discovery of the humanity of Christ was central to her experience. Moved by the desire to share this personal experience with others, she describes it in a lively and simple manner, within the reach of all, for it consists simply in "being on terms of friendship...with Him who, we know, loves us" (*Vida*, 8, 5). Often the narrative itself transforms into a prayer, as if she wished to introduce the reader to her inner dialogue with Christ.<sup>297</sup>

Unlike many of the works written on prayer before and during her time, Teresa's works on prayer are, according to Jordan Aumann, "practical rather than theoretical, descriptive rather than expository, with invaluable psychological insights drawn from personal experience and a penetrating observation of the conduct of others."<sup>298</sup> Thus, her teachings on prayer flow from her personal experience in the practice of prayer. She describes it in this way:

As much as I desire to speak clearly about these matters of prayer, they will be really obscure for anyone who has not had experience. I'll speak of some things that as I understand them are obstacles to progress along this path and other things in which there is danger. These things I'll say from what the Lord has taught me through experience and through discussions with very learned men and persons who lived the spiritual life for many years. It will be seen that within only twenty-seven years in which I have practiced prayer His Majesty has given me the experience...that for others took forty-seven or thirty-seven years; they journeyed in penance and always in virtue.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Pope Francis., Letter to the Superior General of the Order of Discalced Carmelites on the 500th anniversary of the birth of Saint Teresa of Jesus, 28 March 2015.

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150328\\_lettera-500-teresa.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150328_lettera-500-teresa.html) (accessed June 2, 2018).

<sup>298</sup> Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in The Catholic Tradition* (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1985), 166.

<sup>299</sup> *Life*, 10:9.



Teresa qualifies as a teacher of prayer because of her ability not only to understand her experiences, but also to communicate them properly; to put them into words for the benefit of others. For, according to her, “it is one grace to receive the Lord's favor; (experiences at prayer) another, to understand which favor and grace it is; and one more, to know how to describe and explain it.”<sup>300</sup> In line with this, Keith Egan affirms that “those who commune with God in the depths of their hearts sometimes possess a special gift for expressing something of that experience. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) called this gift the “grace of speech.”<sup>301</sup> Teresa testified to receiving this grace from the Lord. God, she writes, “did give me this favor of understanding what it is (her prayer experience), and knowing how to speak about it.”<sup>302</sup>

Hence, from the wealth and abundance of her personal prayer experience she begins her teaching on prayer. Teresa not only taught about prayer, but she also lived it out. Prayer was for her a way of life. Her entire life and mission revolved around it. She engages in both personal prayer (vocal and mental prayer), and the prayer of the Church (the divine office and other liturgical prayer). She prays especially with the Church and for the Church. According to Tomás Álvarez, “Teresa prays for the needs of the Church, for the desecrations of the Eucharist, for the world at war, and for those responsible for all these.”<sup>303</sup> In a letter addressed to the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, Padre Felipe Sainz de Baranda, on the occasion of the fourth centenary of the death of Teresa of Jesus, Pope John Paul II, wrote:

Teresa considered that her vocation and her mission was prayer in the Church and with the Church, which is a praying community moved by the Holy Spirit to adore the Father in and with Jesus "in spirit and in truth" (Jn

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 17:5.

<sup>301</sup> See Keith J. Egan, “Carmel: A School of Prayer,” in *Carmelite Prayer: A Tradition for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Keith J. Egan (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 7-23.

<sup>302</sup> *Life*, 23:11; 30:4.

<sup>303</sup> Tomás Álvarez, “Oración” in *Diccionario de Santa Teresa: Doctrina e Historia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, editor. Tomás Álvarez (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2006), 468-474.

4:23)...Saint Teresa considered the life of prayer to be the greatest manifestation of the theological life of the faithful who, believing in the love of God, free themselves from everything to attain the full presence of that love.<sup>304</sup>

She cherishes prayer and would not have accepted anything in exchange for it, as she writes, “it seemed to me that in this life there could be no greater good than the practice of prayer.”<sup>305</sup> She wants her nuns and her readers to understand the great good that God does for a soul that willingly disposes itself for the practice of prayer. She will encourage them to persevere and never abandon prayer irrespective of their shortcomings. “It is that in spite of any wrong they who practice prayer do, they must not abandon prayer, since it is the means by which they can remedy the situation.”<sup>306</sup> For the love of the Lord, she urges those who are yet to begin the practice of prayer to avail of “so great a good.” There is nothing in prayer to be feared, she writes, but only something to be desired.

## 2.2 Teresian Understanding of Prayer

Teresa teaches that prayer can be vocal, mental and contemplative. Our emphasis here will be on mental prayer because it belongs to the active or ascetical stage of prayer which, according to her, can be acquired through human efforts. This stage of prayer which Maroto, describes as “the active stage of Teresian method of prayer,”<sup>307</sup> involves the efforts one makes to experience the presence of Christ in prayer through meditation.<sup>308</sup> This is completely different from contemplation (the mystical or supernatural stage of prayer), which is not

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<sup>304</sup> John Paul II, *Virtutis Exemplum et Magistra*, 14 October, 1981. Our English translation is taken from *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, November 9, 1981). The Italian (original) version of it reads: “Teresa era consapevole che la sua vocazione e il suo compito erano di pregare nella Chiesa e con la Chiesa, che è una comunità orante, suscitata dallo Spirito Santo per adorare con Gesù, e in Gesù il Padre, “in spirito e verità” (Gv 4,23s)...Santa Teresa infatti ritiene la vita di preghiera quale massima espressione della vita di fede dei cristiani, i quali, credendo all'amore divino, cercano in ogni cosa di seguire pienamente la sua presenza d'amore.” See [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/letters/1981/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_19811014\\_sainz.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/letters/1981/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19811014_sainz.html) (accessed June 22, 2018).

<sup>305</sup> *Life*, 7:10.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:5.

<sup>307</sup> Daniel de Pablo Maroto, “La oración de “recogimiento” en la Camino de Perfección: Franciscanismo y teresianismo,” in *Revista de espiritualidad*, 70 (2011), 519-546.

<sup>308</sup> The term mental prayer is often used interchangeably with meditation. They both involve an exercise of the conscious mind, and are classified as prayer of effort (ascetical prayer), because they both entail the use of our mental powers and efforts aided by divine grace to ponder on God's presence and to express our love for him.

attained through any human effort; but is given by God. Here, one does practically nothing; God does everything.<sup>309</sup> Teresa distinguished between these two stages of prayer as follows: In mental prayer, “we can do something ourselves, with the help of God,” she writes, while “in contemplation...we can do nothing; His Majesty is the one who does everything, for it is his work and above our nature.”<sup>310</sup>

For Teresa therefore, there are two fundamental stages of prayer. The first is the ascetical stage (beginner’s stage), which involves the efforts one exerts in the practice of prayer, especially in meditation and in other acts that accompany and facilitate the practice of prayer, such as, discipline and the exercise of virtues. The second is the mystical stage (advanced stage), which belongs solely to the supernatural. It is, according to Carlos Eire, “a state in which God reaches out to the soul and makes his presence felt directly.”<sup>311</sup> God acts at this stage to purify, reform and strengthen the soul, opening it to new horizons of holiness and apostolate.<sup>312</sup> In the case of Teresa, this mystical stage opened her up to a:

Vivid sense of the reality and objective truth of the Divine mystery within us, together with a sense of the transcendence of God and the Divine life communicated to us, and of the other supernatural realities (grace, the humanity of Christ, the sacraments, the Church), which receive a new illumination under the light of contemplation.<sup>313</sup>

It also increased and intensified her love for Christ and his Church and set her on fire with ardent desire to reform the Carmelite Order; setting up new monasteries of nuns that will dedicate their lives and time to praying for the needs of the troubled and the suffering Church of her time.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> We shall deal with more on mystical prayer and mystical experience in the next chapter.

<sup>310</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 25:3.

<sup>311</sup> Carlos Eire, “Ecstasy as Polemic: Mysticism and the Catholic Reformation,” 3-23.

<sup>312</sup> See Jesús Catellano, *St. Teresa of Jesus: Outline of Talks on her Personality, Message and its Relevance*, trans. Anastasio Gomes (Nagasandra, BG: St. Paul’s Press, 2001).

<sup>313</sup> The Discalced Carmelites, *The Making of a Doctor: A Tribute to St. Teresa of Avila by the Discalced Carmelites* (Exeter: Catholic Records Press, 1970),65.

<sup>314</sup> See. *Way of Perfection*, 1:1-6.

### 2.3 Teresa on Mental prayer

Teresa believes that one needs to experience prayer to fully understand what it really means. The true meaning of prayer is revealed only to those who practice it. Only those who are open to the love of God operating in the soul can truly understand the essence of prayer. This is true of Teresa, for she understood the meaning of prayer by her experience of practicing it. Edvard Punda states that Teresa “speaks of prayer by living the life of prayer and praying to discover its essence and its value.”<sup>315</sup> She writes in *The Book of her Life* that whatever she explains about prayer “comes from what the Lord has taught me through experience and through discussions with very learned men and persons who have lived the spiritual life for many years.”<sup>316</sup> Also in the beginning of *The Way to Perfection*, she writes, “I shall say nothing about what I have not experienced myself or seen in others (or received understanding of from our Lord in prayer)”<sup>317</sup> Thus, her concept of prayer stems from her experience of praying.<sup>318</sup> It is neither speculative or theoretical, but experiential.

What then is prayer for Teresa? How did she define it.? In chapter eight of *The Book of her Life*, she writes, “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>319</sup> This definition draws on her personal experience of friendship with God in prayer which she developed and sustained over a period of time. Her definition of mental prayer revolves around friendship. It is “an intimate sharing between friends” who love each other; “an exchange between two loves: that which God has for us, and that which we have for him.”<sup>320</sup> God in his love for us initiated this friendship, for he “constantly takes the initiative

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<sup>315</sup> Edvard Punda, *La Fede in Teresa D’Avila* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2011), 91.

<sup>316</sup> *Life*, 10:9.

<sup>317</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, Prol. 3.

<sup>318</sup> See Tomás Alvarez, *Prayer: Journeying to God with St. Teresa*, trans. Anne Harriss (Boars Hill, OX: Teresian Press, 2019), 41.

<sup>319</sup> *Life*, 8:5.

<sup>320</sup> P. Marie-Eugène, *I Want to See God: A Practical Synthesis of Carmelite Spirituality*, vol 1, trans M. Verda Clare (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1953), 54.

with the free gift of his love.”<sup>321</sup> The Second Vatican Council in its *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, states that God, “out of the abundance of His love speaks to people as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into friendship with Himself.”<sup>322</sup>

This free gift of love and friendship was made manifest through Jesus Christ and centred on him. St. John attested to this in his First Letter. He writes: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the expiation for our sins.”<sup>323</sup> St. Paul also made an allusion to that in his Letter to the Romans as follow: “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”<sup>324</sup> God in Jesus<sup>325</sup> is offering us an invitation of friendship and intimacy with himself, and we respond to this call through our personal prayer and on every occasion we set aside time to attend to him (God) who first loved us. Aware of God’s love which invites us to share in the divine life, and the need to reciprocate this love, Teresa writes: “As often as we think of Christ we should recall the love with which He bestowed on us so many favours and what great love God showed us in giving us a pledge like this of His love, for love begets love.”<sup>326</sup>

From the foregoing, it is evident that love is at the core of Teresa’s understanding and practice of prayer. Trueman Dicken states that for Teresa “mental prayer itself is predominantly ‘affective’—that is, its primary motivation is one of love, to which all else is

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<sup>321</sup> James McCaffrey, *Captive Flames: A Biblical Reading of the Carmelite Saints* (Dublin: Veritas Publication, 2005), 26.

<sup>322</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation-Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

<sup>323</sup> See 1 John 4:9-10. All biblical citations for this work will be from *The Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*.

<sup>324</sup> See Romans, 5:8.

<sup>325</sup> Throughout history, God has reached out to human beings in many different ways inviting them to a relationship with him. This move came to a climax in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate word of God who became “the mediator in our relation with the Father,” and through whom everyone of God’s invitations to friendship and communion with him has come to us. See Hebrew 1:1-4 & Ephesians 1:3-14. See also, Kieran Kavanaugh, “How to Pray: From the Life and Teachings of Saint Teresa,” in *Carmelite Studies* vol. 8, eds, Kevin Culligan and Regis Jordan (Washington D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 2000), 115-135.

<sup>326</sup> *Life*, 22:14.

secondary.”<sup>327</sup> The emphasis on love is also evident in another of Teresa’s well known and often quoted description of prayer. In prayer she says, “the important thing is not to think much but to love much.”<sup>328</sup> Commenting on this, Fr. Gabriel states that in prayer “the principal element is not thought, as many believe, but affection... Thought serves to direct the heart, or rather the will, towards God, but then with the will we unite ourselves more intimately to our Lord, directing to Him all our actions.”<sup>329</sup> He gathers it is much easier to sustain a conversation with God by means of the will than by the intellect. But then, it is relevant to point out here that as important as affection may be in Teresian prayer, it does not by any means overrule the place of thinking. For according to Dicken, it is through some “preparatory processes such as imagination and intellection,”<sup>330</sup> that love is awakened, and one is then predisposed to an intimate sharing (friendship) with Christ in prayer. Furthermore, it is through the intellect, according to Peter Rohrbach, “that one comes to the knowledge of some object, and through the will that he begins to love it. In other words, the intellect supplies the object for the will to love; and, correspondingly, nothing is loved by the will unless it has first been presented by the intellect.”<sup>331</sup> This means that it is only when the intellect accomplishes its “function of arousing our love that true mental prayer begins.”<sup>332</sup>

#### **2.4 Mental Prayer Developed Further in *The Way of Perfection***

Teresa takes up the discussion on mental prayer again in chapters 22 and 24 of *The Way of Perfection*. This time she demonstrates what mental prayer is and how it can be joined with vocal prayer. She also encouraged her nuns and her readers not be discouraged or intimidated

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<sup>327</sup> E.W. Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love: A Study of the Mysticism of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963), 103.

<sup>328</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (study edition), trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2010), 4:1:7.

<sup>329</sup> Fr. Gabriel, *Little Catechism of the Life of Prayer* (Eugene, OR: The Carmel of Maria Regina, 1982), 6:2. Fr. Gabriel’s *Little Catechism of the Life of Prayer*, is an exposition of Teresa’s idea and method of mental prayer.

<sup>330</sup> Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 103.

<sup>331</sup> Peter Thomas Rohrbach, *Conversation with Christ* (Rockford, IL: Tan Book and Publishers, 1982), 16.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

into believing that mental prayer is dangerous or that vocal prayer is insufficient and insignificant as most people think. Unlike those (some theologians and Church authorities) who discouraged the practice of mental prayer believing it to be dangerous, and those (especially the *alumbrados*), who belittled the practice of vocal prayer, considering it as insignificant and inferior to mental prayer, Teresa regarded the two kinds of prayer as important and related. She did not share in any of these extreme views, rather she considers both prayers as relevant.<sup>333</sup> She imagines that both mental and vocal prayer are efficacious and can bring one to the love of Jesus Christ and a to profound experience of encounter with him, if done with the awareness of who is speaking, and with whom one is speaking. She writes:

Realise, daughters, that the nature of mental prayer isn't determined by whether or not the mouth is closed. If while speaking 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'm saying, mental and vocal prayer are joined.<sup>334</sup>

Teresa maintains there is no great difference between vocal prayer (the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the divine office, the rosary and other formulated prayers),<sup>335</sup> and mental prayer, for vocal prayer if said with attention becomes mental prayer.

I shall always have to join mental prayer to vocal prayer—when I remember—so that others don't frighten you, daughters. I know how this criticism of mental prayer will end up, for I have suffered some trials in this matter, and thus I wouldn't want anyone to disturb you. It is very important for you to know that you are on the right road...who can say that it is wrong, when you begin to recite the Hours or the rosary, to consider whom we are going to speak with, and who we are, so as to know how to speak with him? Now I tell you, Sisters, if before you begin your vocal prayer you do the great deal that must be done in order to understand these two points well, you will be spending a good amount of time in mental prayer.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> See Tomás Álvarez, *Comentarios a "vida," "camino" y "moradas" de Santa Teresa* (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2005), 409-411. Also D'Souza, *Meeting in God-Experience*, 33-35.

<sup>334</sup> *The Way Perfection*, 22:1.

<sup>335</sup> See *Ibid.*, 22:3; 24:2 and 25:3.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:3.

What Teresa considered as mental prayer in *The Way of Perfection* is an awareness of the one with whom we are speaking (that is, God), and an awareness also of who we are.<sup>337</sup> She confirms this in the last paragraph of chapter 22 as follows: “This is mental prayer...to understand these truths...”<sup>338</sup> “These truths,” going by what she wrote in this chapter, are nothing but the truths about the “who” of the human person, and the “who” of God.<sup>339</sup> It has to do with being aware that we (as creatures) are in the presence of a great God (our creator) who loves us. A God who “commands all,” “can do all,” and for whom, “to will is to do.”<sup>340</sup> A very important aspect of Teresa’s teaching on the practice of mental prayer in *The Way of Perfection* therefore, is her emphasis on the need for an awareness in prayer of who God is and who we are. She thinks that if we understand who God is; how great and majestic he is, and the extent of his love for us (which is made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ his son), and if we know that (as his creatures) we are totally dependent on him and owe him love in return, then we will approach him and speak with him with great respect and reverence. She writes:

Yes, indeed, for we must not approach a conversation with a prince as negligently as we do one with a farm worker, or with some poor thing like ourselves for whom any kind of address is all right...Yes, bring yourselves to consider and understand whom you are speaking with, or, as you approach, with whom you are about to speak. In a thousand lives we will never completely understand the way in which this Lord deserves that we speak with Him, for the angels tremble before Him.<sup>341</sup>

Teresa believes that if at prayer, one is aware of whom one is speaking with (God), aware of oneself (the one speaking), and knows how to approach God, then, one is engaging in mental prayer. The practice of mental prayer requires a great deal of attention. “You should not be thinking of other things while speaking with God, for doing so amounts to not knowing what

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<sup>337</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 22:1-2

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:8.

<sup>339</sup> Punda, *La Fede in Teresa D’Avila*, 102.

<sup>340</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 22:7.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 22: 3 and 7.



mental prayer is,” she writes. The essence of mental prayer in both Teresa’s *Book of Life* and *The Way of Perfection* therefore, boils down to a loving attention to, and an awareness of the presence of God, and in being present (and attending) to his presence.

## **2.5 Practical Aspects of Teresian Mental Prayer**

We already saw Teresa’s definition of mental prayer as “an intimate sharing between friends; as taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.” How do we enter into this intimate sharing with him whom we know loves us? What means do we employ to facilitate a friendly heart-to-heart conversation with Jesus Christ.? How do we attend to the presence of Christ who is inviting us to an intimacy with him? The Teresian ways of achieving these are through meditation and active recollection.

### **2.5.1 Meditation**

Meditation according to Sam Anthony Morello, “is basically a category of non-contemplative prayer, the stage of prayer that presumes the ordinary use of our mental powers in searching for God, though always under the guidance of divine grace.”<sup>342</sup> P. Marie-Eugène, one of Teresa’s modern commentators, describes meditation as the “most traditional form of mental prayer.”<sup>343</sup> Teresa used the term “meditation” to refer to “several prayerful activities” that pertain to ascetical prayer. Thus, for her, meditation “is a *category* of prayer” that requires one’s effort to think about the Lord and to love him.<sup>344</sup> She describes meditation in *The Interior Castle* as “much discursive reflection with the intellect.”<sup>345</sup> What Teresa had in mind here is discursive meditation which involves the use of the intellect in visualizing scenes from Christ’s life to oneself. Both the intellect and the will are necessary in the practice of discursive mediation. It starts with the reasoning of the intellect and concludes with the

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<sup>342</sup> Sam Anthony Morello, *Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer* (Washington, D.C: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1995), 10.

<sup>343</sup> Marie-Eugène, *I Want to See God*, 197.

<sup>344</sup> Morello, *Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer*, 9.

<sup>345</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:10.

affection of the will. In Chapter 13 of *The Book of her Life*, Teresa describes the method of discursive meditation from her own perspective. She writes:

Let us begin to think about an episode of the Passion, let's say of when our Lord was bound to the pillar. The intellect goes in search of reasons for better understanding the great sorrow and pain His Majesty suffered in that solitude...It is good to reflect awhile and think about the pains He suffered there, and why, and who He is, and the love with which he suffered them...This is the method of prayer with which all must begin, continue, and finish; and it is a very excellent and safe path until the Lord leads one to other supernatural things.<sup>346</sup>

The key element in Teresa's method of discursive meditation (especially on the theme of the Passion of Christ), therefore, is to consider "Who is suffering? Why he suffers? And the love with which he suffers?" These considerations should spur one to an intimate conversation with Christ. Hence, while the intellect is employed to consider the passion of Christ, the will is brought "into play to talk with Christ about it, express its sorrow, or promise to avoid sin in the future."<sup>347</sup> In other words, while the intellect is responsible for meditation (providing material for the conversation with Christ), the will takes care of the conversation.<sup>348</sup>

Though Teresa refers (as we saw above) to using the theme of the Passion of Christ for discursive meditation as "the method of prayer with which all must begin, continue, and finish," she did not wish to limit us to using it only for discursive mediation, rather, she leaves it open for one to use other themes for ones' meditation. "I say 'all,' but there are many souls that benefit more by other meditations than those on the sacred Passion,"<sup>349</sup> she writes. There are some according to her, who benefit from thinking about hell or death, while there are others who, because they are tender-hearted and get tired "if they always think about the Passion," find strength and comfort "by considering the power and grandeur of God in creatures—and the love He bore us, and its manifestation in all things."<sup>350</sup> Though she

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<sup>346</sup> *Life*, 13:12 and 22.

<sup>347</sup> Rohrbach, *Conversation with Christ*, 16.

<sup>348</sup> See *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>349</sup> *Life*, 13:13.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

recommends flexibility in one's choice of theme for meditation, she still suggests we don't lose sight of the importance of meditation on the Passion; that we "often reflect on the Passion and life of Christ from which has come and continues to come every good."<sup>351</sup>

Having recommended the use of the intellect for discursive meditation, she was quick to point out that one should not spend the whole time of prayer in reasoning, but that at the proper time, when one might have done a good deal of reflection on whatever theme one has chosen, one should move to the next stage, namely, conversing with the Lord about the theme, expressing one's profound gratitude and love for him, and sorrow for one's sins, and making resolutions to be more faithful and committed to him. She writes:

To those who practice discursive reflection, I say they should not pass the whole time thinking. For, although discursive reflection is very meritorious, they don't seem to realize that since their prayer is delightful there should ever be a Sunday or a time in which one is not working; but they think such time is lost. I consider this loss a great gain. But, as I have said, they should put themselves in the presence of Christ and, without tiring the intellect, speak with and delight in Him and not wear themselves out in composing syllogisms; rather, they should show him their needs and the reason why He doesn't have to allow us to be in His presence.<sup>352</sup>

She directs this counsel mainly to those "who reason a great deal with the intellect, deducing many ideas from one idea and working with concepts,"<sup>353</sup> especially during meditation. She imagines that if not properly contained, this tendency would lead one to losing sight of the fact that prayer (especially meditation) is more about intimate friendly conversation with Christ; about loving than thinking and speculating.

I have run into some for whom it seems the whole business (of prayer), lies in thinking. If they can keep their minds much occupied in God, even though great effort is exerted, they at once think they are spiritual. If, on the contrary, without being able to avoid it, they become distracted, even if for the sake of good things, they then become disconsolate and think they are lost...I do not deny that it is a favour from the Lord if someone is able to be always meditating on His works, and it is good that one strives to do so.

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 13:11.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

But I should like to explain that the soul<sup>354</sup> is not the mind, nor is the will directed by thinking, for this would be very unfortunate. Hence, the soul's progress does not lie in thinking much but in loving much.<sup>355</sup>

Though discursive meditation by nature involves reasoning and picturing with the intellect, Teresa warns that we should not dwell much on the use of reason (on thinking and speculating on revealed truth as would a speculative theologian), but to move from thinking to loving. Thus, she suggests that in discursive meditation, we picture Our Lord and think of him in one of the mysteries of his life, and when the will is moved,<sup>356</sup> speak to him and delight in his presence. Other times, we may be required during meditation to remain in the presence of Christ “with the intellect quiet,” look at him “who is looking at us,” and converse with him.<sup>357</sup> “Looking at Christ in the awareness that he is looking at us, speaking and listening to him,” are what “Teresa found most attractive and helpful in meditative prayer.”<sup>358</sup>

We shall consider now some other alternative means of engaging in an intimate conversation with Christ recommended by Teresa for the benefit of those who are unable to converse with Christ through discursive meditation. They include: meditative recitation of vocal prayer, meditative reading and the use of sacred images. These alternative means of conversing with Christ serve meditation. Following them devoutly is also meditation.

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<sup>354</sup> Teresa uses the word ‘soul’ in many different ways in her writings. It can mean person, the self, the whole person, the subject of religious experience, or sometimes in reference to herself. “Technically, she refers to the soul as our inner depths which is God’s dwelling place.” See Kerrie Hide, “Quiet Loving: The Prayer of Quiet in Teresa of Jesus,” in *Compass*, vol.44, no. 4 (2010), 32-44.

<sup>355</sup> *Foundations*, 5:2.

<sup>356</sup> As to the amount of time that one is required to spend in reflecting with the intellect before engaging in a quiet conversation with God, Fr. Gabriel (one of Teresa’s modern commentators) suggests that it should last only long enough to lead to a loving conversation with Christ, that is, until it produces in the mind an actual conviction of being loved by God and being invited to love him in return. But then he warns that the discursive use of the intellect should not be interrupted or laid aside as soon as we feel some pious affection. Since “this could quickly vanish and leave us empty.” Rather he proposes that we “continue to reflect a good deal until the will is so enkindled with love as to be able to remain at least for some time in its loving attention.” See Fr. Gabriel, *Little Catechism of the Life of Prayer*, 4:7.

<sup>357</sup> See *Life*, 13:12.

<sup>358</sup> Kavanaugh, “How to Pray: From the Life and Teachings of Saint Teresa,” 115-135.

### 2.5.1.1 Meditative Recitation of Vocal Prayer

Teresa knew from her own experience that not everyone has the ability for discursive meditation; not everybody is capable of a sustained and orderly reflection on a particular theme. But she is convinced that all can recite vocal prayer. Hence, she suggests that those who cannot meditate discursively with the intellect (like herself),<sup>359</sup> can as well engage in a friendly conversation with Christ by reciting vocal prayer. For if recited properly with attention and an awareness of the presence of God, vocal prayer is already mental prayer.

Well, what I now want to counsel you about is how you must pray vocally, for it's only right that you should understand what you're saying. I will speak of those prayers we are obliged as Christians to recite (such as the Our Father and the Hail Mary) so that people won't be able to say of us that we speak and don't understand what we're speaking about...I want you to understand that it is good for you, if you are to recite the Our Father, to remain at the side of the Master who taught this prayer to you. You will say that doing so involves reflection and that you neither can nor want to pray any other way but vocally...But I tell you that surely I don't know how mental prayer can be separated from vocal prayer if the vocal prayer is to be recited well with an understanding of whom we are speaking to."<sup>360</sup>

Teresa recommends that those who can't practice mental prayer (discursive meditation) because their minds run wild with distraction, should recite vocal prayer (like the Our Father or the Hail Mary) slowly and meditatively, taking time to reflect on the meaning of the words and to express their affections for God.<sup>361</sup> Doing so will help engage the mind and keep it from distractions and from wandering and dispose it for an encounter with the Lord, because "the interior faculties which previously were unable to retain a series of thoughts will now be drawn along through the succession of words and phrases of the vocal prayer."<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> See *Life*, 9:4; 13:11. She admits here that her imagination is so dull that she never succeeds no matter how hard she tries to meditate discursively with the intellect.

<sup>360</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 24:2,5 and 6.

<sup>361</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 26:1-2. Fr. Gabriel believes there are many ways of expressing our affections towards God. One of these ways he says, could be "with words pronounced vocally, or in a purely 'interior' way, that is, with expressions of the heart and will. These expressions may be brief and follow one another with a certain frequency, or else they may be rather prolonged, repeating them only at fairly long intervals; it might even be enough—and this is the best thing—to remain lovingly in our Lord's company." See Fr. Gabriel, *Little Catechism of the Life of Prayer*, 4:12.

<sup>362</sup> Rohrbach, *Conversation with Christ*, 75.

Furthermore, she also links vocal prayer with contemplation (which she considers as the highest form of prayer). She believes that God can raise a person to perfect contemplation while reciting vocal prayer, as a proof that he listens to prayers said with attention and devotion. “I tell you that it is very possible that while you are reciting the Our Father or some other vocal prayer, the Lord may raise you to perfect contemplation. By this means His Majesty shows that he listens to the one who speaks.”<sup>363</sup> She backs up her position by citing the example of a person she knew who was raised to contemplation while reciting the Our Father.

I know there are many persons who while praying vocally...are raised by God to sublime contemplation...I know a person who was never able to pray any way but vocally, and though she was tied to this form of prayer she experienced everything else. And if she didn't recite vocal prayer her mind wandered so much that she couldn't bear it...She spent several hours reciting a certain number of Our Fathers...Once she came to me very afflicted because she didn't know how to practice mental prayer nor could she contemplate; she could only pray vocally. I asked her how she was praying, and I saw that though she was tied to the Our Father she experienced pure contemplation and that the Lord was raising her up and joining her with himself in union.<sup>364</sup>

For Teresa therefore, vocal prayer (in any form), if recited with attention and reflection becomes not only meditation, but also a means of an intimate conversation with Christ.

### **2.5.1.2 Meditative Reading**

Teresa recommends meditative reading as an alternative for those (especially beginners in prayer) who because they are not yet conversant with the truth of the faith are unable to converse with Christ through discursive meditation. She suggests that such persons “will derive more profit from spending a good deal of time in reading; and this is necessary since by oneself one cannot get any idea.”<sup>365</sup> Reading, according to her, “is very helpful for recollection and serves as a necessary substitute—even though little may be read—for anyone

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<sup>363</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 25:1.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 30:7.

<sup>365</sup> *Life*, 4:8.

who is unable to practice mental prayer.”<sup>366</sup> But then, one has to be selective of the books to use, for not all books will be helpful here. Marie-Eugène warns that the book to be used for meditative reading, “is not the book that is simply instructive or devotional, nor even the interesting book that holds one’s attention, but the book that suggests and provokes reflections, or better still, that awakens the soul and keeps it in the presence of God.”<sup>367</sup> This also means that meditative reading is not an end to prayer, but a means to its end. It is only to be used as a support and a guide, to help focus and direct one’s attention for an intimate friendly conversation with Christ, which is what Teresian prayer is all about. For though it is called meditative reading, “the reading is not the important element; the conversation with Christ is paramount.”<sup>368</sup>

Because its main purpose is to facilitate friendly conversation with God, by providing for us the “truth that we will penetrate with reflection, in order to draw from it a deeper conviction of God’s love for us,”<sup>369</sup> Marie-Eugène suggests that meditative reading (be it short or prolonged), “must be interrupted for deeper reflections in the presence of God, to express to him our love, to enter into conversation with him.”<sup>370</sup> This means that in meditative reading, one is supposed to pause from time to time after reading for a short time, and engage (verbally or non-verbally), in a friendly conversation with Christ. Reading is therefore, not to take the whole of prayer time, for it is only meant to be at “the service of that exchange of friendship with God which is the essential act of mental prayer.”<sup>371</sup> Meditative

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Marie-Eugène, *I Want to See God*, 193-194. Fr. Gabriel suggests that “besides the books that offer suitable ‘collections’ of meditations, all spiritual books that reveal the many manifestations of God’s love,” could be used for meditative reading. But then he asks for caution in the use of “books that are too advanced, either intellectually or spiritually,” for they “will be little understood and will necessarily cause aridity.” See Fr. Gabriel, *Little Catechism of the Life of Prayer*, 3:10.

<sup>368</sup> Rohrbach, *Conversion with Christ*, 84.

<sup>369</sup> Fr. Gabriel, *Little Catechism of the Life of Prayer*, 3:9.

<sup>370</sup> Marie-Eugène, *I Want to See God*, 193.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

reading should therefore not be turned into spiritual reading, but prayer should be injected into it at intervals.

Teresa herself found meditative reading very useful in the early stage of her prayer life. She used a book always as a support in her meditation, for according to her, “God didn’t give me talent for discursive thought or for a profitable use of the imagination.”<sup>372</sup> She narrates how she practiced meditation using a book during her years of aridity, as follows:

In all those years...I never dared to begin prayer without a book...with this recourse, which was like a partner or a shield by which to sustain the blows of my many thoughts, I went about consoled...For the dryness was always felt when I was without a book. Then my soul was thrown into confusion and my thoughts ran wild. With a book I began to collect them, and my soul was drawn to recollection. And many times just opening the book was enough; at other times I read a little, and at others a great deal, according to the favor the Lord granted me.<sup>373</sup>

Of all the books Teresa used as aid to prayer, she found the gospels most valuable and beneficial. She writes: “I have always been fond of the words of the Gospels (that have come from that most sacred mouth in the way they were said) and found more recollection in them than in very cleverly written books.”<sup>374</sup> She believes and attests to the truth of the words contained in the Scriptures with love and conviction. “I would die a thousand deaths for the faith or for any truth of Sacred Scripture.”<sup>375</sup>

### **2.5.1.3 Use of Sacred Images**

Because of her little ability to picture things with her mind, Teresa also resorted to the use of sacred (exterior) images to facilitate her intimate sharing with Christ in prayer. A good way

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<sup>372</sup> *Life*, 4:7.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:9.

<sup>374</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 21:3. It is important to note that Teresa never had access to a complete Bible, at least not in Spanish. She had no Latin, and hence, could not have read the complete Bible which were mostly in Latin at the time. The available Spanish translations were restricted. So, the much she knew about the Word of God, as James McCaffrey puts it, “were mostly through means accessible to the ordinary, simple faithful of her day: the liturgy, partial translations and some spiritual books teeming with scriptural quotations like Francisco de Osuna’s *Third Spiritual Alphabet* and Ludolph of Saxony’s *Life of Christ*.” See McCaffrey, *Captive Flames: A Biblical Reading of the Carmelite Saints*, 16.

<sup>375</sup> *Life*, 33:5.



of doing this according to her, is to look at “an image or painting” of the Lord that appeals to us, and to “speak often with him.”<sup>376</sup> She also proposes that the most appropriate time to use an image or a picture of Christ and perhaps when to find much delight in it, is “when he himself is absent, or when by means of a great dryness he wants to make us feel he is absent. It is then a wonderful comfort to see an image of One whom we have so much reason to love.”<sup>377</sup> Looking at a sacred image is for Teresa a means of connecting with the present but unseen God and of keeping alive her love for him especially in times of aridity.

Furthermore, Teresa’s devotion and affinity with Christ was also awakened and deepened through the instrumentality of a sacred image. For instance, her encounter with an image of the wounded Christ (which was poignant, and very well represented what he suffered for us) in their oratory, brought her face-to-face with the reality and the enormity of the sufferings of Christ,<sup>378</sup> and prompted both sympathy and devotion in her. Firstly, she was utterly distressed in seeing him that way. This was followed by a keen feeling and an awareness “of how poorly I thanked him for those wounds.” Next, she asks him to strengthen her once and for all that she might not offend him. And lastly, she “threw herself down before him with the greatest outpouring of tears.”<sup>379</sup> Trillia states that “Teresa appreciated the image because its realness led to the shedding of many tears and prayers to show that images helped her achieve her spiritual goals.”<sup>380</sup>

Teresa loves sacred images so much (especially for meditation), because they make the person and the presence of Christ very real to her. “Wherever I turn my eyes, I would want to see his image,”<sup>381</sup> she writes. She compares her effort to think of the Lord without the instrumentality of an image, with “those who are blind or in darkness;” for they speak with a

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<sup>376</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 26:9.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:11.

<sup>378</sup> See *Life*, 9:1.

<sup>379</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>380</sup> Trillia, *The Woman or the Text*, 22-45.

<sup>381</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:11

person and know with certainty that the person is there, but they don't see the person.<sup>382</sup> Teresa used sacred images to substitute for her inability to picture to herself what she had never seen—namely, the events of the life of Christ and his suffering. Through the medium of the sacred images, she was able (without having to picture Christ with her intellect) to interiorize the mysteries of his life “in her prayer in order to achieve a true, human encounter with Christ the man.”<sup>383</sup> She writes: “I could only think about Christ as He was as man, but never in such a way that I could picture Him within myself no matter how much I read about His beauty...”<sup>384</sup> For Teresa, looking at an image of Christ is a way of “engraving” him upon her soul, since “by nature she is not very good at conjuring up an imaginative picture of him.”<sup>385</sup> “I wanted to keep ever before my eyes a painting or image of him since I was unable to keep him as engraved in my soul as I desired.”<sup>386</sup> It is a case of using an image or a painting of Jesus Christ as a substitute for his physical presence; of making him who is invisible to be both present and visible through the medium of an image.

She was very passionate about the use of sacred images because of their beneficial effect on her. “This was the reason I liked images so much,”<sup>387</sup> she writes. She decries the negative attitude of some people towards the sacred images and wished they could turn over a new leaf and partake in “this great good.”<sup>388</sup> She holds that those who are against the use of sacred images in any form of prayer, worship or liturgical celebration, “do not love the Lord,

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<sup>382</sup> See *Life*, 9:6.

<sup>383</sup> Tomás de la Cruz. “The Carmelite School: St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross” in *Jesus in Christian Devotion and Contemplation*, The Religious Experience Series vol. 1, editor. Edward Malatesta, trans. Paul J. Oligny (St. Meinrad: Indiana, 1974), 86-101.

<sup>384</sup> *Life*, 9:6

<sup>385</sup> See Mary Frohlich, “‘Set Me as a Seal Upon Your Heart:’ Image and Imagelessness in Teresian Prayer,” in *The Way*, vol. 49, no.1 (2010), 29-44.

<sup>386</sup> *Life*, 22:4

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.* 9:6.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.* See also, *The Way of Perfection*, 34:11.

for if they loved Him they would rejoice to see a portrait of Him, just as here on earth it really gives joy to see one whom you deeply love.”<sup>389</sup>

### 2.5.2 Active Recollection

Another of Teresa’s practical ways of engaging in an intimate sharing with Christ (besides discursive meditation), is through active recollection. She discussed this at length in her Commentary on the Lord’s Prayer in chapters 26, 28, and 29 of *The Way of Perfection*. In chapter 26 she explained her method of recollection which consists mainly in being present to the Lord; in representing him close to herself. She returned to the theme of recollection again in chapter 28 while commenting on the phrase in the Lord’s Prayer: “Who art in heaven.” She believes it is important to know where God is and where we must find him. “Do you think it is of little importance to know what heaven is and where you must seek your most sacred Father,?”<sup>390</sup> She asked. Finding an answer to this important question gives one a clue about where to search for God (who dwells in heaven).

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid. She was referring to the Reformers in the North (mostly the Calvinist Iconoclasts), who rejected the practice of representing Jesus and the saints in images and in venerating them, and went about destroying them. They acted in line with John Calvin’s teaching that designated the use and the veneration of “images and pictures” as “brute stupidity,” and as a superstitious practice contrary to Scripture. Calvin taught that “God repudiates all likenesses, pictures and other signs by which the superstitious have thought he will be near them.” See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.11.1-4. Teresa refused to be dissuaded by Calvin’s teaching. Rather she stood with the teaching of the church, who in her declaration in the Council of Trent (25<sup>th</sup> Session), maintains “that the images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of other saints, are to be kept with honour in places of worship especially; and to them due honour and veneration is to be paid—not because it is believed that there is any divinity or power intrinsic to them for which they are revered...or that a blind trust is to be attached to images as it once was by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols; but because the honour which is shown to them is referred to the prototypes which the images represent.” See John F. Clarkson et al., trans. *The Church Teaches: Documents of the Church in English Translation* (London: B. Herder Book, 1955), no. 524.

<sup>390</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 28:1.

Teresa shared in the general belief that God is everywhere, but she has something to add to that from her experience, namely, that God dwells within the soul; that “the Maker of heaven and earth” is present within the “little heaven of our soul.”<sup>391</sup> She reckons that heaven is within us. “We have heaven within ourselves since the Lord of heaven is there,”<sup>392</sup> she writes. Elsewhere, she states that “wherever God is, there is heaven.”<sup>393</sup> “Heaven” for Teresa therefore, as Aloysius Rego puts it, “is not simply a place,” rather, it “is *being in the presence of God*. Wherever we are present with God, *there* is heaven.”<sup>394</sup>

Teresa refers to St. Augustine as an example of someone who found God within the “little heaven” of his soul. He tried to find God outside himself, in many different places, but to no avail, until finally he found him within himself. She writes: “Consider what St. Augustine says, that he sought him (God) in many places but found him ultimately within himself.”<sup>395</sup> Thus, Teresa admits with Augustine that God dwells within the soul. Like him, she confessed that she knew very well that she had a soul, but she was ignorant of what the soul merited “and who dwelt within it,” because she had covered her eyes “with the vanities of the world.”<sup>396</sup> She bemoaned what her ignorance of the divine indwelling caused her: “If I had understood as I do now that in this little place of my soul dwelt so great a King, I would

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 28:5. This belief is rooted in the Church’s teaching on the divine indwelling. This doctrine which is at the heart of Christian spirituality, “designates the special permanent presence of God in the just.” This presence which is a gift of grace, is different from God’s omnipresence in all things by virtue of creation. For while in the divine omnipresence, God is present everywhere, in the divine presence by grace, God is present only in the just soul (that is, one who maintains a personal relationship with God in prayer, lives a disciplined life and is steady in the practice of virtues). God indwells in the just “as the known is in the knower and the loved in the lover.” For more on this, see P. De Letter, “Indwelling, Divine” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 492-494.

<sup>392</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 29:5.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 28:2.

<sup>394</sup> Aloysius Rego, *St. Teresa and the Our Father: A Catechism of Prayer*, (Boars Hill, OX: Teresian Press, 2015), 40-41.

<sup>395</sup> Here she was alluding to Augustine’s description in *The Confessions* of his search for God and of how he found him within himself. Here are his exact words: “Too late have I loved you. O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you! Behold, you were within me, while I was outside; it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you. They kept me far from you, those fair things which, if they were not in you, would not exist at all. You have called to me, and have cried out, and have shattered my deafness. You have blazed forth with light, and have shone upon me, and you have put my blindness to flight.” St. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), Bk 10. Ch. 27.

<sup>396</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 28:11.

not have left him alone so often.”<sup>397</sup> Having said that, she expressed her delight in learning that God dwells within her and this knowledge filled her with awe. She writes: “What a marvellous thing, that he who would fill a thousand worlds and more with his grandeur would enclose himself in something so small!”<sup>398</sup> This according to Teresa boils down to his (God’s) love for us. Because “he loves us, she writes, “he adapts himself to our size.”<sup>399</sup> Upon discovering the truth of the divine indwelling, Teresa championed the spread of this knowledge. Her aim was to bring to our awareness that God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves, and to correct the wrong impression we have about God as being far from us. This erroneous idea of God according to her, is the reason why we don’t really relate with him as we should; why we tend to keep him at arm’s length. “All the harm comes from not truly understanding that He is near, but in imagining Him as far away,”<sup>400</sup> she writes. She maintains that the Lord is not only near, “but he never takes his eyes off you.”<sup>401</sup>

If God is near us, if he dwells within us (in the “little heaven of our soul”), as Teresa claims, how do we get in touch with him? She explained that one can encounter the indwelling God, through a method of prayer called recollection. She states that “this prayer is called ‘recollection,’ because the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God.”<sup>402</sup> With this method of prayer, God comes more quickly to the soul, to teach it and to raise it to the state of contemplation than he would if one was using any other method of prayer. She believes that if God lives with us, then, “there is no need to go heaven in order to speak with” him...or “any need for wings to go to find him.”<sup>403</sup> All we need do is recollect our faculties together in solitude and enter within ourselves to be with God; to “look at him within” ourselves and not turn away from so good a God who is present within us,

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid, 28:11

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 29:5.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 26:3.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 28:4.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 28:2.

“but with great humility speak to him as to a father...be aware that we are with Him, of what we are asking Him, of His willingness to give it to us, and how eagerly He remains with us.”<sup>404</sup> Commenting on Teresa’s description of prayer of recollection, Father Gabriel, states that “we can comprehend the prayer of recollection easier by saying that it is, quite simply, the realization of the presence of God within us.”<sup>405</sup> This realization is in fact an essence of Teresian prayer. Awareness of the presence of God within oneself is a necessary criterion for Teresa’s method of recollection. Awareness of the divine indwelling propels one to journey within to be with God; it spurs one to seek for companionship with the Lord dwelling within oneself.

It is important to note that the method of (active) recollection mentioned above, is different from the passive recollection (a supernatural gift from God-not acquired by human effort), which Teresa treated in her discussion on mystical prayer. The prayer of recollection described above is that which can be acquired through human efforts. “This recollection” Teresa writes, “is not something supernatural, but...something we can desire and achieve ourselves with the help of God...it is not a silence of the faculties; it is an enclosure of the faculties within the soul”<sup>406</sup> Ernest Larkin observes that through recollection, ‘gathering of one’s faculties together within oneself to be with God,’ “one moves within beyond the confining world of creatures into the sacred space of God.”<sup>407</sup> Deirdre Green notes that “in recollection, we detach ourselves from sense-perception and outward stimuli, turning away from exterior things...and fixing all our ‘faculties,’ every ounce of our attention and dedication, on one point—the centre of the soul where the Divine dwells.”<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid. And 29:6.

<sup>405</sup> Father Gabriel, *The Way of Prayer: A Commentary on Saint Teresa’s Way of Perfection*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 135.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 29:4.

<sup>407</sup> Ernest E. Larkin, “The Carmelite Tradition and Centering Prayer Christian Meditation,” in *Carmelite Prayer: A Tradition for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Keith J. Egan (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 202-222.

<sup>408</sup> Deirdre Green, “Mysticism and its Forms of Expression” (PhD diss, University of Stirling, 1983), 227.

Teresa expressed her delight about this method of prayer and the benefit she got from it, “I confess that I never knew what it was to pray with satisfaction until the Lord taught me this method. And it is because I have always found so many benefits from this habit of recollection that I have enlarged so much upon it.”<sup>409</sup> She held this method of prayer in high esteem, and encouraged her nuns to practice it and get accustomed to it. “Once this recollection is given by the Lord, you will not exchange it for any treasure,”<sup>410</sup> she writes. She puts forward the following steps to her nuns as a way to go about this method of prayer. First, they are to begin with the sign of the cross, followed by the examination of conscience and the act of contrition.<sup>411</sup> Next, (given that they are by themselves), they are to take Christ as their companion and make him present within them in faith.

Then, daughters, since you are alone, strive to find a companion. Well what better companion than the Master himself...Represent the Lord himself as close to you and behold how lovingly and humbly he is teaching you. Believe me; you should remain with so good a friend as long as you can. If you grow accustomed to having him present at your side, and he sees that you do so with love and that you go about striving to please him, you will not be able—as they say—to get away from him; he will never fail you; he will help you in all your trials.<sup>412</sup>

Praying in this way entails entering within the “little heaven” of one’s soul, where Christ is present to encounter and converse with him. She describes it as “an enclosure of the faculties in the soul,”<sup>413</sup> whereby one is enabled to gaze at the Lord. Teresa stresses that this is not the time to think about the Lord, or to “draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle reflections with your intellect,”<sup>414</sup> it is rather according to her, a time to simply look at him present within us. “I am not asking you to do anything more than look at him.” For the Lord, she says, “is not waiting for anything else, as he says to the bride,<sup>415</sup> than that we look at

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<sup>409</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 29:7.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, 26:1.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, 29:4.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 26:3.

<sup>415</sup> She is referring to *Song of Songs*, 2:14.

him.”<sup>416</sup> She maintains that looking at him should also be accompanied by speaking with him. This she insists must be done “not with ready-made prayers but with those that come from the sorrow of your own heart, for he esteems them highly.”<sup>417</sup> This means speaking with him “as with a father, or a brother, or a lord, or as with a spouse,” bearing in mind that he “is within us, and that there we must be with him.”<sup>418</sup> She most of all suggests we look at him according to our sentiments, for he esteems that, and will look at us in return in the measure we looked at him. She writes:

If you are joyful look at him as risen. Just imagining how he rose from the tomb will bring you joy...If you are experiencing trials or are sad, behold him on the way to the garden: what great affliction he bore in his soul; for having become suffering itself, he tells us about it and complains of it...Or behold him burdened with the cross, for they didn't even let him take a breath. He will look at you with those eyes so beautiful and compassionate...he will forget his sorrows so as to console you in yours, merely because you yourselves go to him to be consoled, and you turn your head to look at him.<sup>419</sup>

Though she taught the prayer of recollection and recommended that it be practiced by all and sundry, she points out that it won't come on a silver platter. One would need the help and the support of grace to venture and to sustain this prayer, because it will involve some struggle, effort, and a great deal of disciplining, especially of the senses. It will require as Teresa puts it, “a gradual increase in self-control and an end to vain wandering from the right path,” it will mean “conquering, which is a making use of one's senses for the sake of the inner life.”<sup>420</sup> One will also need to be grounded in the exercise of the theological virtue of faith in order to navigate effectively on this path. For it is through faith that the indwelling presence of the invisible but present God is perceived. “In faith, we direct our awareness to the presence of Christ.”<sup>421</sup> Faith alone makes the seeking and the finding of the indwelling God

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<sup>416</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 26:3.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 26:6.

<sup>418</sup> See *Ibid.*, 28:3.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 26:4-5.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 29:7.

<sup>421</sup> Kavanaugh, *How to Pray*, 115-135.



possible. With the eyes of faith, one can look at God and converse with him as our loving father. Faith is also necessary to sustain the prayer of (active) recollection especially in the absence of spiritual consolations and in times of aridity. As taxing as the practice of the prayer of recollection may be, it gets better and easier with determination and perseverance. One not only gets used to it, but excels in it with dedication and constant practice. “If we make the effort, practice this recollection” for some time and become accustomed to it, “the gain will be clearly seen,”<sup>422</sup> she writes.

Persevering in this method of prayer, brings about a lot of beneficial results. “It is a prayer that brings with it many blessings,”<sup>423</sup> Teresa writes. Firstly, it helps to quieten and recollect the faculties, “which should naturally be agitated in their seeming void but which on the contrary are wonderfully recollected.”<sup>424</sup> Teresa states that “the intellect is recollected much more quickly with this kind of prayer even though it may be vocal.”<sup>425</sup> And once recollected, it becomes easy for one to remain in the presence of Christ and to maintain this presence with a constant dialogue with him.

Secondly, by practicing the prayer of recollection and remaining in the presence of God, one is laying “a good foundation,” which will make one both ready and disposed to being raised “to higher things” by God whenever he deems it necessary. “If then the Lord should desire to raise you to higher things,” she writes, “he will discover in you the readiness, finding that you are close to him.”<sup>426</sup> Prayer of recollection paves the way for receiving the gift of infused or passive recollection. Antonio Moreno describes it as “the key that opens the door of contemplation and many other spiritual gifts which habitually follow as a sequel of its

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<sup>422</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 28:7.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, 28:4.

<sup>424</sup> Marie-Eugène, *I Want to See God*, 211.

<sup>425</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 28:4.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 29:8.

practice.”<sup>427</sup> It is “an excellent path,” which according to Teresa disposes one for attaining the prayer of contemplation (prayer of quiet). Through it, the “divine Master comes more quickly to teach (the soul) and give it the prayer of quiet than he would through any other method it might use.”<sup>428</sup> Those who practice recollection according to Teresa, “will not fail to drink water from the fount; for they will journey in a short time.”<sup>429</sup> She compares their situation to that of a person who travels by ship (with a little wind) and arrives at his or her destination in a couple of days, as against those who travel by land and took a longer time to get to their destination.<sup>430</sup>

## **2.6 Teresa’s Means of Experiencing the Presence of Christ in Prayer**

Teresa revealed (as we saw in chapter one) that she did not know how to “proceed in prayer or how to be recollected,” until 1538, when she was introduced to Francisco de Osuna’s *Third Spiritual Alphabet*, which taught her a method of prayer (recollection) through which one can experience the indwelling presence of God.<sup>431</sup> This discovery gave a new dimension and a boost to her understanding and her practice of prayer. She learnt from Osuna’s book that the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, is present within her soul, that she can encounter his presence by journeying inward to be with him. Thus, reading Osuna brought a shift in her pattern of prayer. From seeking to encounter Christ in the gospel scenes of his life (in meditation), which was her way of praying before she read Osuna, she moved to seeking him interiorly, by journeying inward to experience his presence. She called this prayer (as we saw above), recollection, for in it according to her, “the soul collects its faculties together and

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<sup>427</sup>Antonio Moreno, “The Indwelling of the Trinity and St. Teresa’s ‘Prayer of Recollection’” in *Review for Religious*, vol. 44, no.3 (1985), 439-449.

<sup>428</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 28:4.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 28:5.

<sup>430</sup> See *Ibid.* Teresa’s comparison of a person travelling by sea as distinct from those travelling by land would make more sense if one understands it in the context of her own time. “In her day, unlike our own, it was quicker to travel by sea,” than by land. See Rego, *St. Teresa and the Our Father: A Catechism of Prayer*, 170, note, 19.

<sup>431</sup> See *Life*, 4:7.

enters within itself to be with its God.” She recommends in this prayer, that one closes one’s eyes and becomes present to Christ in some scene from the gospels. Keith J. Egan states that Teresa described the action of this prayer in Spanish “as *re-presentar Cristo* which has been translated as to picture Christ within me.”<sup>432</sup> He suggests that “the emphasis is on *presentar*—to be present with the Spanish prefix *re* adding emphasis for intensification, that is, to be really present to Christ.”<sup>433</sup> Teresa’s emphasis here, according to him, “is less like Ignatius of Loyola’s emphasis on the details in a gospel scene, and more on being with Christ, being lovingly present to Christ for instance at Gethsemane.”<sup>434</sup>

In her prayer therefore, Teresa sought “to keep Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, present within’ herself, using her imagination, not in the style of discursive meditation, but by simple representations of Christ ‘interiorly,’ in some mystery of his life, especially the Passion.”<sup>435</sup> Thus, representing Christ within herself became her means of recollecting herself; her own method of recollection that she formulated herself.<sup>436</sup> She developed this manner of prayer because of her inability to picture things with either her mind or her imagination (to meditate discursively). Based on this method of prayer, she was able to not only recollect herself, but to arrive at the stage “in which only a short step remained between the effort to represent Christ as present and the gift of experiencing his presence without effort.”<sup>437</sup> If, as we mentioned, that the method of “representing Christ within herself”

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<sup>432</sup> Keith J. Egan. Teresa of Ávila: Hope is the Same Thing as Remembering. [https://holyhilloddscommunity.weebly.com/uploads/1/4/2/1/14214286/keith\\_egan\\_teresa\\_of\\_avila\\_hope\\_\\_2.pdf](https://holyhilloddscommunity.weebly.com/uploads/1/4/2/1/14214286/keith_egan_teresa_of_avila_hope__2.pdf) (accessed, November 30, 2019).

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> See Ernest E. Larkin, “St. Teresa of Avila and Centering Prayer,” in *Carmelite Studies*, vol. 3, ed. John Sullivan (Washington D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1984), 203-209. Also *Life*, 4:7.

<sup>436</sup> Though Teresa was greatly influenced by Osuna’s work *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* (which contained his teaching on recollection) in her formulation of the prayer of recollection, her prayer of recollection differs from what Osuna taught in his book. For more on this see E. Allison Peers, *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, vol.1 (London: S.P.C.K., 1951), 76-81.

<sup>437</sup> Kavanaugh, *How to Pray*, 115-135.

(interiorly) was a Teresian formulation, what then, does she mean by that? And how is it a means of experiencing Christ?

## **2.7 Representing Christ Within Herself**

For Teresa, “representing Christ within herself” does not entail picturing him with the imagination or creating a mental picture of him in the mysteries of his life, for according to her, “God didn’t give me talent for discursive thought or for a profitable use of the imagination.”<sup>438</sup> Or as she states in another place, “I could only think about Christ as He was as man, but never in such a way that I could picture Him within myself no matter how much I read about His beauty or how many images I saw of Him”<sup>439</sup> Rather, “representing Christ interiorly” for Teresa, involves making him present within herself in faith; bringing into her awareness the presence of Christ. I tried...to keep Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord, present within me,<sup>440</sup> she writes. Thus, Teresa did not necessarily need to form a mental picture of Jesus, in order to experience his presence in prayer. She goes directly to him in his humanity and “invites him into the space of her own spirit where he can be ‘in her’ or ‘with her,’ so that she only has to talk to him,”<sup>441</sup> and delight in his presence.<sup>442</sup> She does this in the belief that the living Christ is present within her in a concrete way; so much so that in representing him within herself, she is “tuning into that...presence,”<sup>443</sup> whereby she will encounter him.

## **2.8 Teresa’s Other Means of Experiencing Christ in Prayer**

In addition to representing Christ within her (in order to experience his presence), Teresa had other means of experiencing the presence of Christ in prayer, some of which predated her

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<sup>438</sup> *Life*, 4:7. Her imagination was so dull, according to her, that it was almost impossible for her with all her efforts to think about the “humanity of the Lord.” See *Ibid.*

<sup>439</sup> *Life*, 9:6.

<sup>440</sup> See *Ibid.*, 4:7; 10:1.

<sup>441</sup> Álvarez, *Living with God: St. Teresa’s Concept of Prayer*, 17.

<sup>442</sup> See *Life*, 13:22.

<sup>443</sup> See Larkin, *The Carmelite Tradition and Centering Prayer*, 214.

discovery of Osuna's prayer of recollection. These approaches were rooted in meditating on the gospel scenes (especially on the Passion of Christ) and in striving to relate with Christ in her prayer in the manner some characters in the Scriptures did. She adopted these means in her prayer "in order to achieve a true, human encounter with Christ the man."<sup>444</sup> Álvarez has it that Teresa's preference for gospel scenes and characters was in the belief that they "could bring her nearer to the historical Christ and help her to transfer him from a biblical framework to that of her own inner life, or at least as near as possible to it."<sup>445</sup> We shall look at some of the means through which she encountered the presence of the Lord in his humanity.

### **2.8.1 Pondering on the Episode of Christ's Agony in the Garden**

One of the gospel scenes that Teresa loved to meditate on and to relive was the episode of the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he was all by himself undergoing suffering. Meditating on the Lord's agony was Teresa's method of prayer; a practice she observed on a daily basis for many years. It was one of those places where she felt drawn to the Lord in his moments of solitude, pain and suffering, and she wholeheartedly approached him there with confidence to offer him solace. She was able to enter (through her prayer) into the reality of this gospel scene and to participate actively in it. She writes:

This is the method of prayer I used...I strove to represent Christ within me...to represent him in those scenes where I saw him more alone. It seemed to me that being alone and afflicted, as a person in need, He had to accept me. I had many simple thoughts like these. The scene of His prayer in the garden, especially, was a comfort to me; I strove to be His companion there. If I could, I thought of the sweat and agony He had undergone in that place. I desired to wipe away the sweat He so painfully experienced, but I recalled that I never dared to actually do it, since my sins appeared to me so serious. I remained with him as long as my thoughts allowed me to, for there were many distractions that tormented me.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Tomás de la Cruz, *The Carmelite School*, 89

<sup>445</sup> Álvarez, *Living With God: Teresa's Concept of Prayer*, 13.

<sup>446</sup> *Life*, 9:4.

Teresa was very faithful to this method of praying, a practice that goes back to the years of her youth, before she entered the convent. She narrates as follows: “Most nights, for many years before going to bed when I commended myself to God in preparation for sleep, I always pondered for a little while this episode of the prayer in the garden. I did this even before I was a nun since I was told that one gains many indulgences by doing so.”<sup>447</sup> This practice became according to her, “so habitual that I did not abandon it...”<sup>448</sup> Alvarez identified this gospel episode as the “scene which recurs throughout Teresa’s life. She cultivated it with the faithfulness of a lover; laboriously and somewhat artificially during her crisis years, but at an entirely new depth with the arrival of mystical prayer.”<sup>449</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned Passion scene, Teresa also strove to encounter the person of Jesus in his humanity by meditating on other aspects of his passion, namely, on the scene of his flagellation. She beholds him there “bound to the column, filled with pains, with all his flesh torn in pieces,”<sup>450</sup> and reflects on the “pains he suffered there, why he suffered them, and the love with which he suffered.”<sup>451</sup> She tried to relive these gospel episodes by interiorizing them in her prayer with the aim of arriving at a personal and intimate encounter with Jesus Christ in his humanity.

### **2.8.2 Christ’s Encounter with the Samaritan Woman**

Another of the gospel scene Teresa relived with immense affection was the episode of the encounter and the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.<sup>452</sup> Her affection for this scene dates back to her childhood, and she had carried always with her a little painting of this episode later on. She writes:

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> *Álvarez, Living With God: Teresa’s Concept of Prayer*, 14.

<sup>450</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 26:5.

<sup>451</sup> *Life*, 13:12 and 22.

<sup>452</sup> See John 4:1-42.

Oh, how many times do I recall the living water that the Lord told the Samaritan woman about! And so I am very fond of that gospel passage. Thus it is, indeed, that from the time I was a little child, without understanding this good as I do now, I often begged the Lord to give me the water. I always carried with me a painting of this episode of the Lord at the well, with the words, inscribed: *Domine, da mihi aquam*.<sup>453</sup>

Teresa familiarised herself always with the figure of the Samaritan woman and her dialogue with Christ, for she is an example of someone whose thirst was quenched, and who became an apostle proclaiming Christ from her experience of encounter with him. By meditating on this scene, and identifying herself with the Samaritan woman (whose thirst for the Lord was satisfied), Teresa encountered the presence of Christ who gave her the living water that quenched her thirst.

### **2.8.3 Mary Magdalene in the House of Simon the Pharisee**

Teresa also loved to identify with Mary Magdalene, especially in the scene where she was at the feet of Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee weeping and soaking his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair.<sup>454</sup> Teresa feels that her experience of struggle with sin and her lack of gratitude and appreciation for God's graciousness towards her, resonate with that of Mary Magdalene (who irrespective of her sinful life, had received forgiveness through

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<sup>453</sup> *Life*, 30:19.

<sup>454</sup> See Luke 7:36-50. The Latin Church in the past had identified Mary Magdalene with the repentant woman of Luke 7:36:50. This tradition has its origin from a homily given on September 21 591 by Pope Gregory the Great in which he associated Mary Magdalene with the woman who anointed Jesus in Bethany (See Matt 26:6-13; John 12:1-8) and the unknown repentant sinner who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair (See Lk. 7:36-50). He writes: "She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark. What did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? It is clear, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts. What she therefore displayed more scandalously, she was now offering to God in a more praiseworthy manner... She had coveted with earthly eyes, but now through penitence these are consumed with tears." See Gregory the Great, *Homily XXXIII (PL 76:1239-40)*, quoted in Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha and the Christian Testament* (London: Continuum, 2004), 82. Teresa subscribed to this interpretation and that influenced her allusions to Mary Magdalene as the unnamed penitent woman in Luke's gospel. The Church's perception of Mary Magdalene had changed over the years beginning from 1969 when it declares that Mary Magdalene was distinct from the sinful woman mentioned in Luke's gospel. Her image was further rehabilitated in 2016 following Pope Francis' elevation of the July 22 liturgical celebration in her honour from a memorial to a feast, putting her on a par with the apostles. He did this to acknowledge her role (not as a repentant sinner), but as "the first witness of the Risen Christ and the first messenger who announced to the apostles the resurrection of the Lord." Pope Francis. Mary Magdalene, Apostle of the Apostles. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/06/10/160610c.html> (accessed August 20, 2018).

her encounter with Christ). Hence, Teresa finds in her a model of conversion and love for Christ. For this reason, she strives to relive the conversion experience of Mary Magdalene, by placing herself with her at the feet of Jesus, weeping for her sins. She does this mostly after receiving Holy Communion.<sup>455</sup> “I was very devoted to the glorious Magdalene,” she writes, “and frequently thought about her conversion, especially when I received Communion. For since I knew the Lord was certainly present there within me, I, thinking that He would not despise my tears, placed myself at his feet...”<sup>456</sup> She tries to strengthen her faith so that in receiving the Lord in the Eucharist it was as though she saw him with her bodily eyes entering her house. She will then think of herself as being at the feet of Jesus, weeping with Mary Magdalen, “no more nor less than if she were seeing him with her bodily eyes in the house of the Pharisee.”<sup>457</sup>

Teresa considers Mary Magdalene as a model of strength and courage for those who struggle to express themselves. For she was willing and determined to go to any length to express her love for the Lord, not minding the shame and the criticism associated with doing it. She writes:

Do you think it would be a small mortification for a woman of nobility like her to wander through these streets (and perhaps alone because her fervent love made her unaware of what she was doing) and enter a house she had never entered before and afterwards suffer the criticism of the Pharisee and the very many other things she must have suffered? The people saw a woman like her change so much—and, as we know, she was among such malicious people—and they saw her friendship with the Lord whom they vehemently abhorred, and that she wanted to become a saint...<sup>458</sup>

In the footsteps of Mary Magdalene, Teresa demonstrates her love and trust in Jesus by coming to him in faith to receive strength and forgiveness. Her efforts at coming to Jesus paid off in the end, because from that time she went on improving.

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<sup>455</sup> This points to the importance she attaches to moments after receiving the Eucharist. We shall discuss more on that in chapter four.

<sup>456</sup> *Life*, 9:2

<sup>457</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:7.

<sup>458</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:4:13.



#### 2.8.4 The Triumphant Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem

Teresa was very devoted to the Lord's entry into Jerusalem which the liturgy celebrates on Palm Sunday. She had received Communion for more than thirty years on this day, to commemorate it, and also as a way of providing Jesus with the hospitality denied him by the Jews. "For more than thirty years I have received Communion on this day when possible," she writes, "and I have striven to prepare my soul to give hospitality to the Lord. For it seemed to me cruel of the Jews, after having given Him such an enthusiastic reception, to have let Him go so far away to eat."<sup>459</sup> She felt bad that no one had invited the Lord for a meal after his entry into Jerusalem, and consequently he had to return to Bethany hungry.<sup>460</sup> To make up for this hostility, she will invite the Lord on every Passion Sunday to remain with her, as she provides a lodge for him in her heart. She takes time to prepare her soul "to give hospitality to the Lord" who comes to her in the Eucharist and to remain with him on this day. Her kind gesture towards the Lord, and her over thirty years of faithfully observing the feast of his Passion was acknowledged and rewarded by the Lord following a mystical experience she had after receiving the Eucharist on Palm Sunday of 1572 in Ávila, in which she experienced the efficacy of the blood of Jesus, and an assurance from the Lord that his mercy will not fail her. In this experience the Lord spoke to her as follows: "I repay you well for the banquet you prepared me this day."<sup>461</sup>

Álvarez observes that in all of Teresa's quest for an encounter with Jesus, "she keeps going back to biblical motifs, with the humanity of Christ as the focal point and dominant theme of them all."<sup>462</sup> Her reason for reproducing these gospel scenes within her at prayer

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<sup>459</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 22.

<sup>460</sup> See Mark's account of Jesus' Triumphant entry into Jerusalem in Mark 11:1-11.

<sup>461</sup> See *Spiritual Testimonies*, 22.

<sup>462</sup> Álvarez, *Living With God: Teresa's Concept of Prayer*, 15.

was, “to transpose their central figure, Christ, into her own life, in order to establish a real relationship with him.”<sup>463</sup>

## 2.9 The Place and the Role of the Humanity of Christ in Teresian Prayer<sup>464</sup>

Teresian prayer is by nature Christo-centric. She writes in *The Book of Her Life* that she had been “so devoted all my life to Christ.”<sup>465</sup> Jesus Christ is therefore, the immediate object of her prayer, and as such, “she prays with, to, and through”<sup>466</sup> him. She prays so as to experience him personally, especially in the events of his life. This is how she prays: “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.”<sup>467</sup> She spoke further again elsewhere about her way of praying. “This is the method of prayer I used: since I could not reflect discursively with the intellect, I strove to represent Christ within me, and it did me greater good.”<sup>468</sup> Her emphasis on the person of Jesus Christ in her prayer reveals her love for him, and the place he occupies in her life. For Teresa, to pray is to be in contact with the person of Jesus who dwells within her, to make him present within herself in faith and to engage in an intimate conversation with him.

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>464</sup> Devotion to the person of Jesus Christ in his sacred humanity is at the centre of Teresa’s life. This is in line with the dominant place which the humanity of Jesus Christ occupied both in the religious piety and in the theological thought of the sixteenth century Spain in which Teresa lived. Though the humanity of Christ was central in the devotional practices and the teaching at the time, there were variations on how people approached him. Some perceived him as important and indispensable in Christian life, and in every stage of prayer, especially as one advances towards mystical prayer. Others saw him as an object of prayer and meditation (only in the ascetical stage of prayer), which one as a matter of necessity, has to leave behind as one progresses to mystical prayer. This is based on the belief that Christ’s humanity belongs to the corporeal reality and as such, would hinder one from arriving at contemplation; at an experience of the divinity. Teresa stood with the former and went to great length in defending this position. She recorded her thoughts in chapter 22 of *The Book of Her Life*, and in chapter 7 of the 6<sup>th</sup> dwelling places in *The Interior Castle*. According to Castro, “she entered into a polemic in both places” with those (some spiritual writers of her time), who advised leaving behind all “corporeal representation in prayer, even those about the humanity of Jesus and the mysteries of his life, so as to remain in pure emptiness and immersed in the divinity.” He states that Teresa expressed her doctrine here with authority. This according to him was *su tema favorita; su tesis fundamental* (her favourite theme; her fundamental thesis). See Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 303. Also Secundino Castro, “L’humanité du Christ selon Sainte Thérèse d’Avila,” in *Carmel*, 33 (1984), 32-33. Quoted in Chowning, *Jesus Christ, Friend and Liberator*, 29. And Alvarez, *The Carmelite School*, 90.

<sup>465</sup> *Life*, 22:4

<sup>466</sup> Morello, *Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer*, 10.

<sup>467</sup> *Life*, 4:7.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 9:4.

Since Teresa believes that Christ dwells within her, the aim of her prayer then, was to get in touch with him, and be transformed by his presence. Her teaching on degrees of prayer, points to the different stages through which the soul passes in order to arrive at this transformation. Jesus Christ is responsible for the movement that brings about this process; for it is at his invitation that the soul turns towards him. Using the metaphor of the whistle of the good shepherd to describe this call, she states that when Christ (the great King) desires to bring the soul back to himself, he whistles to it as a good shepherd does to his sheep. She explains that though this whistle is very gentle, it “has such power” to cause the soul to return to Christ and to remain absorbed in him in prayer.<sup>469</sup> Each stage of her prayer is a step towards that immersion in Christ that happens in one’s life when prayer takes hold of it; when the person of Christ becomes more and more present in one’s life. Her pattern of prayer therefore, aims at leading one not only to an encounter with Christ, but also to a transforming union with him. As Castro states that for Teresa, “to pray is to be transformed into Jesus Christ.”<sup>470</sup>

Teresa’s definition of prayer as “an intimate sharing between friends; as taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us,” points to a relationship of love between God and the human person made possible through the mediation of the person of Jesus Christ in his humanity, who humbled himself and became man to be with us. “His Majesty,” she writes, “humbles Himself so much so that He allows us to be near Him in spite of what we are.”<sup>471</sup> So, intimate communion with God is at the core of Teresa’s prayer. She reckons that God’s love for us and his desire for communion with us is realised in the person of Jesus Christ who became man in the incarnation, which she describes as so great a union

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<sup>469</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 4:3:2-3.

<sup>470</sup> See Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 75.

<sup>471</sup> *Life*, 15:8.

through which “God became man.”<sup>472</sup> God assumed human nature in its entirety in the person of Jesus of Christ in the incarnation. This makes Jesus truly human, with a real human body as against the teaching of the Docetists<sup>473</sup> who taught that “Christ was not truly man but merely appeared to be man.”<sup>474</sup> They held that the physical body of Jesus is both an illusion and a phantom. Hence, they denied the truth of the incarnation of the Word by denying the reality of the body of Jesus. This belief is “rooted in the perennial suspicion that the human body, and material reality in general, are impure, unworthy of direct contact with divinity. The transcendent Divine Spirit would soil himself by becoming enfleshed in a human body.”<sup>475</sup>

Unlike the Docetists, Teresa makes the truth of the incarnation the centre of both her teaching on prayer and in her own prayer life, suggesting that we walk “continually in an admirable way with Christ, our Lord, in whom the divine and the human are joined,”<sup>476</sup> and experience “the power that this most sacred humanity joined with the Divinity has.”<sup>477</sup> So, she believes in, and is aware of the presence of Christ who is both God and man in her own prayer life and in each and every one of the stages of prayer she teaches about.<sup>478</sup> Although Jesus is Divine, Teresa maintains that he has never ceased to be a man, and he remained a friend and a companion with whom we can always converse. She writes: “I saw that He was man, even though he was God...I can speak with Him as with a friend, even though he is

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<sup>472</sup> St. Teresa of Ávila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Ávila* vol. 2 (*Meditations on the Song of Songs*), trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1980), 1:10

<sup>473</sup> Their doctrine is known as Docetism, “a term derived from the Greek *dokein*, to seem, or to appear.” Their teaching later developed into an essential doctrinal position of the different forms of Gnosticism; a name derived from the Greek word γνῶσις (*gnosis*), “knowledge.” Gnosticism, a religious dualist system of belief which dates back to the 2nd century, taught that all matter is evil, while non-material (the spirit) is good. And that to attain salvation, one needs to acquire an esoteric knowledge. See Justo L. González, *Essential Theological Terms*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 46-47. Also F.L. Cross, and E.A. Livingstone, eds, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 683-684.

<sup>474</sup> Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, revised edition (New York: Alba House, 2002), 223.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:9.

<sup>477</sup> *Life*, 28: 9.

<sup>478</sup> See Secundino Castro Sánchez, *La mística de Teresa de Jesús* (Burgos: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2017), 31.

Lord.”<sup>479</sup> Again she writes: “Christ is a very good friend because we behold Him as man and see Him with weaknesses and trials—and He is company for us.”<sup>480</sup>

Teresa’s prayer life is therefore, centred on the humanity of Christ. It takes its point of departure from him, and eventually returns to him. According to Luti, “the humanity of Christ was absolutely central to Teresa’s developing relationship with God in prayer.”<sup>481</sup> She finds in him a place of encounter and communion. She writes:

The soul can place itself in the presence of Christ and grow accustomed to being inflamed with love for His sacred humanity. It can keep him ever present and speak with Him, asking for its needs and complaining of its labors, being glad with Him in its enjoyments and not forgetting Him because of them, trying to speak to Him, not through written prayers but with words that conform to its desires and needs.<sup>482</sup>

Teresa considers the spiritual exchange which takes place “in this precious company” with the sacred humanity of Christ, as an excellent way of developing and maintaining an intimate relationship with him, especially when accompanied with a reflection on his life and Passion from which, according to her, “has come and continues to come every good.”<sup>483</sup>

As Teresa continued with her method of keeping Christ in his sacred humanity present within her and of meditating on the events of his life and of his passion, she began to notice something different from what she was used to earlier on. She started experiencing the presence of Christ in a manner that was impossible to achieve before now with all her efforts to represent him within her. She describes it as follows:

It used to happen when I represented Christ within me in order to place myself in His presence, or even while reading, that a feeling of the presence of God would come upon me unexpectedly so that I could in no way doubt He was within me or I totally immersed in Him. This did not occur after the manner of a vision.”<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> *Life.*, 37:5.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:10.

<sup>481</sup> Luti, *Teresa of Avila’s Way*, 97.

<sup>482</sup> *Life.*, 12:2.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:13.

<sup>484</sup> *Life.*, 10:1.

A close look at Teresa's description of her experience above, reveals that she has advanced from making efforts to turn her attention inward to the presence of Christ within her soul (or think about an episode of his passion), to being directly conscious of his presence within her or of her being absorbed in him, without having to put in much effort. She has been awakened to a very different way of experiencing the presence of Christ as never before. This involves a shift from prayer that demands the use of the active faculties of thinking and picturing images, or of using her human efforts to represent Christ within her, to a prayer that is passive—when the soul is on the receiving end. The soul at this stage, she writes, “is suspended in such a way that it seems to be completely outside itself.”<sup>485</sup> It is a stage when one begins to experience the prayer of quiet and of union.

She explains that with this prayer one enters into a supernatural state; the beginning stage of contemplation. “This prayer is something supernatural, something we cannot procure through our own efforts. In it the soul enters into peace or better, the Lord puts it at peace by his presence, as he did to the just Simeon,<sup>486</sup> so that all the faculties are calmed.”<sup>487</sup> In this prayer, the Lord begins “to give us his kingdom here below so that we may truly praise and hallow his name.”<sup>488</sup> She states that though the intellect is suspended during this experience, it understands all that the Lord represents to it; all that the Lord desires it to understand. Great delight accompanies this (prayer) experience, and as an indication of the divine origin of this delight, it leaves one feeling better and stronger. “I experienced wonderful delight and sweetness,” she writes, “and often without being able to avoid it, and in addition I was aware of the greatest assurance that this delight was from God, especially when I was in the prayer—and I observed that I came out of it much improved and strengthened.”<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> She was referring to Simeon's *nunc dimittis* in Luke, 2:29-32.

<sup>487</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 31:2 and 6.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 31:1.

<sup>489</sup> *Life*, 23:2.

## 2.10 Teresa Introduced to Neoplatonism and pseudo-Dionysian Mystical Tradition

Kieran Kavanaugh states that the above-mentioned contemplative experience was such a joy for Teresa that she was led at some point into a serious error that she later regretted.<sup>490</sup> She got into this error by following “the advice of certain books about prayer—that the humanity of Christ was a hindrance to higher forms of prayer.”<sup>491</sup> In other words, for those advancing in prayer (like herself), meditating on the humanity of Christ will impede their progress towards perfect contemplation (that is, of contemplating the divinity). This means that meditation on the humanity of Jesus Christ is only to be practiced by beginners in the ascetical stage of prayer, but that as one advances in prayer towards the mystical stage of prayer, one should leave behind the human aspect of Jesus in order to contemplate his divinity. She writes that these books gave “strong advice to rid oneself of all corporeal images and to approach contemplation of the Divinity.”<sup>492</sup> They assume according to her, that these corporeal images, “even when referring to the humanity of Christ, are an obstacle or impediment to the most perfect contemplation.”<sup>493</sup> This means that those who wish to attain pure contemplation, will do well by going beyond creatures, including the humanity of Christ, in order to ascend higher and to contemplate things that are purely spiritual. They supported this idea according to Teresa, by quoting what the Lord said to the Apostles about his ascension into heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit, thinking “that since this work is entirely spiritual, any corporeal thing can hinder or impede it, that one should try to think of God in a general way, that He is everywhere, and that we are immersed in him.”<sup>494</sup>

Their reference to what the Lord said to the Apostles before his ascension, namely, “it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to

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<sup>490</sup> Kieran Kavanaugh. Christ in The Mysticism of St. Teresa.

[http://www.angelfire.com/ca5/stjoseph/formdocs/christ\\_by\\_kieran.htm](http://www.angelfire.com/ca5/stjoseph/formdocs/christ_by_kieran.htm) (accessed July 10, 2018).

<sup>491</sup> Eamon R. Carroll, “The Saving Role of the Human Christ for St. Teresa,” in *Carmelite Studies: Centenary of Saint Teresa*, vol. 3, ed. John Sullivan (Washington D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1984), 133-151.

<sup>492</sup> *Life*, 22:1.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*

you; but if I go, I will send him to you,”<sup>495</sup> was based on the belief shared by Osuna and others (especially the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*), “that the apostles were hindered in spiritual love because of their attachment to the Sacred Humanity and that it was necessary to deprive them of the Sacred Humanity so that they could soar to the heights by desiring the coming of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>496</sup> Their attachment to the Lord’s “corporeal nature” has prevented them from responding to his spiritual presence. The Lord’s departure therefore, was according to them, beneficial for the Apostles because it made them stop contemplating his humanity “for a while so as to be more freely occupied solely in the contemplation of the Divinity.”<sup>497</sup> Or as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* stated, that Christ ascended into heaven that the Apostles may forget his humanity (which was an obstacle to their beholding his spiritual presence), so as to relish “the love of his Godhead.”<sup>498</sup> Teresa refuted this argument later on in *The Interior Castles* as follows:

I believe I’ve explained that it is fitting for souls, however spiritual, to take care not to flee from corporeal things to the extent of thinking that even the most sacred humanity causes harm. Some quote what the Lord said to his disciples, that it was fitting that he go. I can’t bear this. I would wager that he didn’t say it to his most Blessed Mother, because she was firm in the faith; she knew he was God and man, and even though she loved him more than they did, she did so with much perfection that his presence was a help rather than a hindrance. The apostles must not have been as firm then in the faith as they were afterwards and as we have reason to be now.<sup>499</sup>

Teresa’s argument here is that the Lord’s humanity was not responsible for the apostles’ inability to behold his divinity (as these authors thought). They were rather unable to see the Lord’s divinity because they weren’t firm in faith at the time, like the Virgin Mary who because she was rooted in the faith knew of the Lord’s dual nature, and hence, his humanity became a help instead of an obstacle for her. Commenting on this, Marie-Eugene writes, “the

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<sup>495</sup> See John 16:7.

<sup>496</sup> De Osuna, *The Third Spiritual Alphabet*, 42.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> See William Johnston, *The Mysticism of The Cloud of Unknowing: A Modern Interpretation* (New York: Desclee, 1967), 71-72.

<sup>499</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:14.



humanity veils the divinity only for those who, like the apostles before the ascension, are timid in faith. For those, on the contrary, who believe firmly in the divinity, following the example of the Blessed Virgin, the sacred humanity brings a help to that faith.”<sup>500</sup>

Little did Teresa know that by reading these authors (who advised those advancing in prayer to rid themselves of all corporeal things, including the humanity of Christ in order to contemplate the Divinity), she had “entered into contact with an old spiritual tradition that went back to Neoplatonism and to pseudo-Dionysius.”<sup>501</sup> This tradition which promoted the apophatic mysticism and theology also known as the *via negativa* (negative way), based its teaching on the idea of a God who because he is transcendent, is far beyond human comprehension and description. It “stresses that because God is the ever-greater God, so radically different from any creature, God is best known by negation, elimination, forgetting, unknowing, without images and symbols, and in darkness.”<sup>502</sup> This tradition postulates that God is “not this, not that,” because he is “an unknowable being beyond all ways of knowing being.”<sup>503</sup> Thus, it “refuses to assign attributes to God,” based on the assumption that “all names applied to God are necessarily inadequate,” for God’s reality so transcends the world that it “cannot in principle be described.”<sup>504</sup> The aim of this tradition therefore, is “to obliterate all anthropomorphic notions of God (that is, the idea that God ‘sees or ‘thinks’ in human terms), not in order to understand God rationally, which is impossible, but in order to confront the unknowable.”<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Marie-Eugene, *I Want to See God*, 69.

<sup>501</sup> Tomás de la Cruz, *The Carmelite School*, 91

<sup>502</sup> Harvey D. Egan, “Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticism,” in *Theological Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3 (1978), 399-426.

<sup>503</sup> Noel O’Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer: Reflections on St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross and St. Therese of Lisieux* (London: Burns & Oates, 2006), 30-31.

<sup>504</sup> John F. Teahan, “The Dark and Empty Way: Thomas Merton and the Apophatic Tradition,” in *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 58, no. 3 (1978), 263-287.

<sup>505</sup> Bárbara Mujica, “Beyond Image: The Apophatic-Kataphatic Dialectic in Teresa de Avila” in *Hispania*, vol. 84, no. 4 (2001), 741-784.

Among the authors Teresa read, Álvarez argues, it was Bernabé de Palma (1469-1535) who discouraged her (in his *The Way of the Spirit*), from her recourse to the Humanity of Jesus, as she ascends to the peak of contemplation. He states that it is quite easy to find in de Palma's book "the sentences corresponding to the presentation that Teresa makes of them."<sup>506</sup> Álvarez describes de Palma as the true coiner and promoter of the theory of adapting the mind to attain perfect contemplation, and also as one who provides a clear distinction between what is purely corporeal and purely spiritual. He had proposed that in order to walk in the spiritual and to immerse oneself in the depths of the Divinity, one has to adapt the mind, by emptying it of all corporeal things—lifting it above all creatures.<sup>507</sup> Thus, it was from de Palma, according to Álvarez, that Teresa "cites the theory of adapting the mind (*cuadrar la mente*) so as to arrive at the purely spiritual."<sup>508</sup> He elaborated more on this in his *Dictionary of St. Teresa*. He mentioned first of all that it is not easy to identify the books Teresa alludes to in *Life*, 22:1. But then he adds that one, at least is certain it was Bernabé de Palma's theory of adapting the mind—*teoría de cuadrar el entendimiento*—(which he treated in his *la Via spiritus*—Way of the Spirit—), that Teresa outlined briefly in *Life*, 22:1.<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Tomás de la Cruz, *The Carmelite School*, 91.

<sup>507</sup> See Álvarez, *Jesuscristo en la experiencia de Santa Teresa*, 346-347.

<sup>508</sup> Álvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila: 100 Themes on her Life and Work*, 188.

<sup>509</sup> See Tomás Álvarez, "Lecturas teresianas" in *Diccionario de Santa Teresa: Doctrina e Historia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, editor. Tomás Álvarez (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2006), 387-392. In support of this, Kavanaugh, states that contrary to the general notion that the authors who "advised that in order to contemplate the divinity one must rid the mind, the imagination and the intellect from all use of corporeal images and particular thought," were Francisco de Osuna in his *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* and Bernardino de Laredo in *Ascent of Mount Sion*, that there is nothing of such in their teachings. Reading through their books he states, "you will have a hard time trying to find this teaching." Furthermore, he mentions that in recent times, P. Tomás Álvarez, OCD, has demonstrated that we find this teaching in another book read by Teresa, a book by the Franciscan Bernabé de Palma entitled *The Way of the Spirit*. In this work Palma explains at length how we should let the intellect expand until one finds oneself in the midst of an infinite sea of grandeur and goodness. He contrasts this manner of using the mind with the contemplation of God through creatures. That is like trying to look at something through the eye of a needle. "Note that when you contemplate something of God," he writes, "you do not confine your intellect to a limited place but let it adapt and extend to all parts..." See Kieran Kavanaugh. Christ in The Mysticism of St. Teresa.

## 2.11 Teresa Abandons Her Devotion to the Humanity of Jesus Christ

Following the advice from these books, Teresa gave up her usual practice of actively meditating on the mysteries of the life and passion of Jesus Christ in his humanity and in “representing him” within herself, in favour of contemplating his Divinity. In other words, “she tried to put aside everything corporeal and, consequently, go beyond Christ’s Humanity.”<sup>510</sup> The delight and consolation she got from this way of prayer (prayer of quiet), made her reluctant to return to her former way of praying:

When I began to experience something of supernatural prayer, I mean of prayer of quiet, I strove to turn aside from everything corporeal, although I did not dare lift up the soul—since I was always so wretched, I saw that doing so would be boldness. But it seemed to me that I felt the presence of God, as was so, and I strove to recollect myself in His presence. This is a pleasing prayer, if God helps in it, and the delight is great. Since I felt that benefit and consolation, there was no one who could have made me return to the humanity of Christ; as a matter of fact, I thought the humanity was an impediment.”<sup>511</sup>

Mommaers, states that the delight from this experience made “all images and intermediaries, the Humanity included, appear to Teresa, looking down on them from the bliss height of ‘perfect contemplation,’ as a kind of necessary evil.”<sup>512</sup> Consequently, she gave up her practice of meditating on the humanity of Christ in her prayer, and tried to pray in a purely spiritual manner with no recourse to any corporeal thing. But as time went by, she realizes she was in error; that distancing herself from the humanity of Christ was a very costly mistake. The result was completely different from what she had expected. The consolation she got from turning away from the humanity of Christ to contemplate his Divinity was short lived, for after a while, it began to dwindle leaving her sad and vulnerable to trials and temptations. “My soul was in a very bad state...all its consolations were coming in small portions, and, once they were passed, it didn't then have the companionship of Christ to help

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<sup>510</sup> Tomás de la Cruz, *The Carmelite School*, 91.

<sup>511</sup> *Life*, 22:3.

<sup>512</sup> Mommaers, *The Riddle of Christian Mystical Experience*, 73.

in trials and temptations.”<sup>513</sup> Without the help and the company of Jesus Christ, she began to experience “dryness in her prayer and difficulty in living out her daily Christian life with all its demands, obligations, and trials.”<sup>514</sup>

She regretted ever following this path, and the memory of it fills her with pain and remorse. “At no time do I recall this opinion I had without feeling pain; it seems to me I became a dreadful traitor—although in ignorance.”<sup>515</sup> Her reminiscence of this mistake fifteen years later in *The Interior Castle* also portrayed her regret and sorrow for following the wrong path.

The mistake it seemed to me I was making...consisted of not delighting so much in the thought of our Lord Jesus Christ but in going along in that absorption, waiting for that enjoyment. And I realized clearly that I was proceeding badly. Since it wasn't possible for me to experience the absorption always, the mind wandered here and there. My soul, it seems to me, was like a bird flying about that doesn't know where to light; and it was losing a lot of time and not making progress in virtue or improving in prayer. I didn't understand the reason, nor would I have understood it, in my opinion, because it seemed to me that what I was doing was correct...Afterwards, I saw clearly how wrong I had been, and I never stop regretting that there had been a time in which I failed to understand that I could not gain much through such a great loss.<sup>516</sup>

This mistake was an eye-opener for Teresa, for through it she came to realize the importance and the place of Jesus Christ in her prayer. She discovered that the humanity of Christ is never an obstacle to attaining perfect contemplation in prayer as she was made to believe, but that he is rather the only way to achieving that. It is only in and through the person Jesus Christ in his sacred humanity that can we sustain our prayer at any stage and attain maturity in the interior life. “I see clearly, and I saw afterwards,” she writes, “that God desires that if we are going to please Him and receive his great favors, we must do so through the most

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 22:5.

<sup>514</sup> Chowning, *Jesus Christ, Friend and Liberator*, 26-27.

<sup>515</sup> *Life*, 22:3.

<sup>516</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:15.

sacred humanity of Christ, in whom He takes his delight.”<sup>517</sup> She affirms this further by referring to what Christ said about himself in the gospel of John. “The Lord himself says that he is the way...that he is the light and that no one can go to the Father but through him, and anyone who sees me sees my Father.”<sup>518</sup>

## **2.12 Teresa Retraced Her Way Back to the Humanity of Christ**

Having realised her mistake, she traced her way back to her former way of praying, ignoring all previous advice to flee from corporeal things and from her devotion to the humanity of Christ. Narrating about her return to her former way, she writes:

I always returned my custom of rejoicing in this Lord, especially when I received Communion. I want to keep ever before my eyes a painting or an image of Him since I was unable to keep Him as engraved in my soul as I desired. Is it possible, my Lord, that it entered my mind for even an hour that you would be an impediment to my greater good? Where have all my blessings come from but from you?<sup>519</sup>

With her return to her former way of anchoring her prayer on the humanity of Christ, she parted company with the proponents of apophatic mysticism, for she would not accept any mystical path that proposed the idea of leaving behind the corporeal (including the humanity of Christ) in order to ascend to the spiritual. She considers any path that attempts to do away with the humanity of Christ in prayer, or regards meditation on the mysteries of his life and passion as an obstacle to attaining perfect contemplation, as a “dangerous path.”<sup>520</sup> Noel O’Donoghue states that by choosing to differ from the pseudo-Dionysian apophatic mystical path, Teresa prefers to stay:

At the level of the human Christ as he comes to us in the gospel and through our own meditations on the Gospels. She stays at the kataphatic level, that is to say, at the level of things that can be said and thus bring God down (*kata*) close to us, rather than seeing God, and the Logos-Christ

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<sup>517</sup> *Life*, 22:6.

<sup>518</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:6. See John 14:6; 8:12.

<sup>519</sup> *Life*, 22:4.

<sup>520</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:14.

as beyond or above (*apo*) all knowing and attainable only to the *will*, as seeking and loving.<sup>521</sup>

By pushing forward a contrary and challenging opinion on the place and the role of the humanity of Jesus Christ in the mystical life, Teresa, according to Green, went “directly *against* the dominant Scholastic mystical tradition of her time...which emphasised an ascent to contemplation of the formless Divinity by means of renouncing the objects of the senses, intellectual ideas, all symbols and images—including the image of Jesus’ humanity.”<sup>522</sup>

Though she went her separate way, she still respects the opinion of those who teach the apophatic mysticism, (mainly because they were learned and spiritual men, whom she holds in high esteem), for she believes that God leads people along many paths according to his will. This notwithstanding, she did not in any way change her opinion regarding their position which she considers an error. Her conclusion was based on her personal experience from the path the Lord led her, and on the spiritual favours and gifts he granted her soul. She writes:

I am not contradicting this theory; those who hold it are learned and spiritual men and they know what they are saying, and God leads souls by many paths and ways. I want to speak now of the way He led my soul—I’m not considering other ways—and of the danger I found myself in for wanting to put into practice what I was reading. I really believe that anyone who reaches the experience of union without passing beyond—I mean to raptures and visions and other favors God grants to souls—will think what is said in these books is the best practice, as I did. But if I should have kept to that practice, I believe I would never have arrived at where I am now because in my opinion the practice is a mistaken one.<sup>523</sup>

Her position later came under fire on the ground that she has no proper understanding of apophatic mysticism. Irrespective of that, she still maintained her ground, refusing to budge.

They have contradicted me about it and said I don’t understand, because these are paths along which the Lord leads, and that when souls have already passed beyond the beginning stages it is better for them to deal with

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<sup>521</sup> O’ Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer*, 31.

<sup>522</sup> Green, *Gold in the Crucible*, 65.

<sup>523</sup> *Life*, 22:2.

things concerning the divinity and flee from corporeal things. Nevertheless, they will not make me admit that such a road is a good one.<sup>524</sup>

She didn't stop there; she also went as far as warning her nuns to disregard anyone with such opinions. "And take notice that I dare say you should not believe anyone who tells you something else."<sup>525</sup>

### **2.13 Why The Humanity of Christ should not be abandoned in Contemplative Prayer**

Teresa gives two reasons why many souls seek to bypass the Humanity of Christ in their quest to arrive at contemplation. The first reason boils down to lack of humility (*un poco de poca humildad*).<sup>526</sup> She contends that attempting to raise oneself (by suspending the intellect) before God raises one, and going beyond "something so valuable" as the humanity of Christ in order to contemplate his divinity, points to a lack in the virtue of humility. She reckons that the desire to raise oneself before the Lord raises one, is also what prevents one availing of the opportunity given to it by the Lord "to remain at the foot of the cross with St. John,"<sup>527</sup> She thinks that pride contributes a lot to that, for it makes one dissatisfied with remaining with Jesus in his humanity, and thus, prompting one to desire to go beyond him by raising oneself before God raises one. "It seems a kind of pride to desire of ourselves to ascend higher since, in view of what we are, God does too much just in drawing us near to Himself."<sup>528</sup>

Teresa therefore, warns those who in their quest to ascend higher will suspend their thoughts or cease to work with their intellect, to desist from doing that. For they will try in vain unless the God grants it to them. "Whoever would desire to pass beyond this point (of finding recourse in Christ's humanity) and raise the spirit to an experience of spiritual consolations that are not given, would lose both one and the other, in my opinion; for these

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<sup>524</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:5.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>526</sup> See *Life*, 22:5.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, 12:4.

consolations belong to the supernatural.”<sup>529</sup> To make matters worse, if one’s intellect is not active, and one is not able to picture things with the mind (like herself), then one, according to her, is left very dry, like a desert. This is because one lacked the presence (of Christ), to fascinate it, or something to keep it occupied. Thus, she describes one’s effort to suspend the intellect (before God does it), as a demonstration of foolishness and a lack in humility.<sup>530</sup> It is in her opinion, a futile effort that is bound to fail, since it is not grounded in humility which is the foundation of prayer and of Christian perfection. She accordingly suggests that one waits humbly and patiently until the Lord suspends one’s intellect. For it is better and much more profitable when the Lord does it at the appropriate time. “When the Lord suspends the intellect and causes it to stop,” she writes, “he Himself gives it that which holds its attention and makes it marvel; and without reflection it understands more in the space of a Creed than we can understand with all our earthly diligence in many years.”<sup>531</sup>

Teresa regards humility as the basis to making progress in prayer. “What I have come to understand is that this whole groundwork of prayer is based on humility and that the more a soul lowers itself in prayer the more God raises it up.”<sup>532</sup> Using herself as an example, namely, of how her humility paved the way for her to receive favours from God in prayer, she writes: “I don’t recall His (God) ever having granted me one of the very notable favors of which I shall speak later if not at a time when I was brought to nothing at the sight of my wretchedness.”<sup>533</sup> She believes God delights in a humble soul; in a soul who “humbly takes His son as mediator and that loves this Son so much that even when His Majesty desires to

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<sup>529</sup> Ibid. She cautions that attempting to suspend the intellect can be very harmful. “If His Majesty has not begun to absorb us, I cannot understand how the mind can be stopped. There is no way of doing so without bringing about more harm than good...” See *The Interior Castle*, 4:3:4.

<sup>530</sup> See *Life*, 12:5.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 22:11.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.



raise it to very lofty contemplation,” it will out of its sense of unworthiness declare with St. Peter: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”<sup>534</sup>

The second reason why people would want to withdraw from corporeal things, including the humanity of Christ is based on what Teresa describes as the “desire to become angels while we are on earth,”<sup>535</sup> which for her, is humanly unattainable. She was quite realistic and down to earth here in her opinion about human nature and what a person can possibly accomplish while on earth. She writes:

We are not angels but we have a body. To desire to be angels while we are on earth—and as much on earth as I was—is foolishness. Ordinarily, thought needs to have some support. If at times the soul goes out of itself or goes about so full of God that it has no need of any created thing to become recollected, this isn’t so usual. When one is in the midst of business matters, and in times of persecutions and trials, when one can’t maintain so much quietude, and in times of dryness, Christ is a very good friend because we behold Him as man and see Him with weaknesses and trials—and He is company for us.<sup>536</sup>

She reiterated this once again, some years later in *The Interior Castle* as follows: “To be always withdrawn from corporeal things and enkindled in love is the trait of angelic spirits, not of those who live in mortal bodies.”<sup>537</sup> Teresa considers that if as human beings we deemed it necessary to always “speak to, think about” and seek the company of those (especially the saints) who, having had a mortal body, accomplished a lot for God, “how much more it is necessary not to withdraw through one’s own efforts from all our good and help, which is the most sacred humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>538</sup> She gathers that as long as we are humans and not angels, we will always need something to lean on; something to support us especially in moments of trials and dryness. And that is precisely when the person of Jesus Christ will be of great help. He is a friend who never abandons us. She writes: “What

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid., 22:10.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6.7.6.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

more do we desire than to have such a good friend at our side, who will not abandon us in our labors and tribulations, as friends in the world do?”<sup>539</sup>

It is important to note that Teresa is not rejecting completely the need to turn aside from corporeal things once we attain a certain stage along the mystical path (in fact, she states that this practice “must be good, certainly,” because some “spiritual persons advise it”<sup>540</sup>), nor is she “denying the possibility of contemplating the divinity without the humanity, which she knows does happen in mystical prayer.”<sup>541</sup> But she is to a large extent endorsing a general attitude that contemplative persons should take concerning prayer and the Person of Christ, which is, “that the most sacred humanity of Christ must not be counted in a balance with other corporeal things.”<sup>542</sup> She avows that Christ’s humanity is never an impediment to attaining perfect contemplation. He is rather in her opinion, the door through which all of God’s graces are made available to us, and through which we can please the Father. “I see clearly, and I saw afterwards, that God desires that if we are going to please Him and receive His great favors, we must do so through the most sacred humanity of Christ, in whom he takes delight.”<sup>543</sup> He is the door through which we must enter, “if we desire His sovereign Majesty to show us great secrets,”<sup>544</sup> the one “through whom all blessings come to us.”<sup>545</sup>

To further strengthen her argument on the role and place of the humanity of Christ in prayer, she refers to some great saints who followed and never abandoned the path of devotion to Christ’s humanity, and whose examples are worth imitating. She writes:

This Lord of ours is the one through whom all blessings come to us. He will teach us these things. In beholding His life, we find that He is the best example. What more do we desire than to have such a good friend at our

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<sup>539</sup> *Life*, 22:7.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:8.

<sup>541</sup> Antonio Moreno, “St. Teresa, Contemplation and the Humanity of Christ,” in *Review for Religious*, vol. 38, no.6 (1979), 912-923. A good example of when one can possibly transcend all forms and images is during a momentary suspension of the faculties which one experiences at a certain stage of mystical prayer.

<sup>542</sup> *Life*, 22:8.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:6.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:7.

side, who will not abandon us in our labors and tribulations, as friends in the world do? Blessed are they who truly love Him and always keep Him at their side! Let us consider the glorious St. Paul: it doesn't seem that any other name fell from his lips than that of Jesus, as coming from one who kept the Lord close to his heart. Once I had come to understand this truth, I carefully considered the lives of some of the saints, the great contemplatives, and found that they hadn't taken any other path: St. Francis demonstrates this through the stigmata; St. Anthony of Padua, with the Infant; St. Bernard found his delight in the humanity; St. Catherine of Siena—and many others...<sup>546</sup>

For Teresa then, the key to arriving at the fullness of Christian perfection is to journey on the path of the humanity of Jesus Christ, and never to let go of him at any stage. She points out that the reason many people do not make it to the last two dwelling places (that is, the sixth and seventh dwelling places),<sup>547</sup> was because they abandon Christ in his humanity who is their guide. “For if they lose the guide, who is the good Jesus, they will not hit on the right road...The Lord himself says that He is the way; the Lord also says that He is the light and that no one can go to the Father but through Him, and ‘anyone who sees me sees my Father,’”<sup>548</sup> Jesus Christ is therefore, the mediator between us and the Father. In him God comes to meet us, and through him we have access to God. It follows that no matter what

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<sup>546</sup> *Life*, 22:7.

<sup>547</sup> In *The Interior Castle*, Teresa describes the mystical journey of the soul towards union with God. She uses the symbol of a castle with seven dwelling places to explain this inward journey. She states that as one progresses in prayer, one passes through these mansions until one encounters and becomes united with the Lord who dwells at the centre of the mansion. The first three dwelling places represent the ascetical stage, when one through active efforts tries to respond to God's invitation to journey within through perseverance in prayer, self-denial and practice of virtues. The fourth dwelling place represents the beginning of the “supernatural experiences.” It is the “stage where God's gratuitous activity of infusing grace takes over and where the soul becomes increasingly passive to divine action.” The last three dwelling places (fifth, sixth and seventh), deal with the deeper levels of mystical prayer leading to mystical union with God. In the fifth dwelling places (which is also the stage of prayer of union when “God places himself in the interior of the soul”), there is the initial encounter between God and the soul. This is characterized by what Teresa describes as “sleep of the faculties,” and which Bernard McGinn calls “short periods of abstraction from ordinary consciousness.” The sixth dwelling places deal with spiritual betrothal or mystical espousal and the unusual mystical graces that accompany it, such as visions, ecstasy, divine locutions, etc. Lastly, in the seventh dwelling places, which is the summit of the mystical journey attainable in this earthly life, the soul arrives at the mystical marriage also called transforming union. See *The Interior Castle*, 4:1:1; 5:1:9 and 7:1:6. Also Bernard McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church: Thirty-Three Men and Women Who Shaped Christianity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 139-141. And Jordan Aumann, “St. Teresa of Avila: Teacher of Prayer,” in *Word and Spirit* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1993), 54-62. And Ahlgren, *Entering Teresa's Interior Castle*, 1-135.

<sup>548</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:6.

level one seeks to attain in the mystical life, one can never outgrow “an absolute need for the mediation of Christ.”<sup>549</sup>

## 2.14 A Theological Remark on Teresa and the Humanity of Christ

It is important to note that though Teresa placed a great deal of emphasis on the humanity of Jesus Christ in her writings as well as in her spiritual life, she did not by any means intend to place his humanity over his Divinity or to separate them. The document, *El Cristo Vivo de Santa Teresa*, a theological and spiritual reflection project for the Discalced Carmelite Nuns states that:

Teresa had no thought of God apart from the God who in the Gospels reveals himself in Christ...She moved from the Jesus of Nazareth to the One and Triune God without leaving aside the Sacred Humanity—she never abstracted from Christ in all the mysterious reality of his person: her references to his Humanity are not references to his human aspect only.<sup>550</sup>

She believes that Jesus Christ has two natures (human and Divine) which according to the Chalcedonian definition, are united in the incarnation, “into a single person and in a single subsistent being.”<sup>551</sup> Though Jesus is divine, Teresa maintains that he chose to make himself one with us and available to us in the mysteries of his human life. Thus, she centres her life and her spirituality on his human aspect, approaching him in his humanity. Castro observes that “the spirituality of Teresa affirms, without ambiguity, the human dimension of Christ, not so much as opposed to its divine aspect, but rather as the place where the entire reality of Jesus Christ becomes accessible to us.”<sup>552</sup>

Teresa was against the proponents of the idea of going beyond the humanity of Christ in prayer, so as to contemplate his Divinity. This for her, is tantamount to separating the two natures of Christ, which is contrary to the teaching of the Church, in the Chalcedonian

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<sup>549</sup> George H. Tavard, “The Christology of the Mystics,” in *Theological Studies*, vol.42, no.4 (1981), 561-579.

<sup>550</sup> Secretariat Generalis Pro Monialibus O.C.D. *El Cristo Vivo de Santa Teresa*.  
[http://www.ocd.pcn.net/nuns/n5\\_es.htm](http://www.ocd.pcn.net/nuns/n5_es.htm) (accessed September 15, 2018).

<sup>551</sup> Norman P. Tanner, ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. From Nicaea I to Vatican II (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 86.

<sup>552</sup> Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 304.

Definition. Given that the two natures of Christ are what constitute his being, Castro argues that any attempt to separate them or “to leave them in the shadows is to cut off the reality of Jesus Christ.”<sup>553</sup> It is therefore an error to separate the two natures of Jesus Christ, for it is in his entire reality (as God and man) that he accompanies one throughout one’s journey towards perfection and union with God. Instead of attempting to rid oneself of the humanity of Christ in prayer or to transcend beyond him to arrive at his Divinity, Teresa suggests holding on to the humanity of Christ as a guide (since he is the way) to arriving at his Divinity. By this, she is also affirming the place and the role of Jesus Christ (especially in the interior life) as the mediator between God and humankind,<sup>554</sup> and as the way to the Father. William Thomson, holds that since Teresa “never seems to separate the humanity from the divinity of Jesus, it would be better to say that she accents the mediatorial role of Jesus in our spiritual lives.”<sup>555</sup> For Teresa according to him, “every aspect of our Christian lives in some sense is Jesus-mediated.”<sup>556</sup> In other words, for Teresa, to arrive at the peak of the interior life and to attain Christian maturity, one needs the meditation of Jesus Christ; to be accompanied by him, “in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead in the earthly vessel of his humanity.”<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

<sup>554</sup> See, 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, 2:5.

<sup>555</sup> William M. Thompson, *Fire and Light: The Saints and Theology. On Consulting the Saints, Mystics, and Martyrs in Theology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 143.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Karl Rahner, “The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus for Our Relationship with God,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1967), 43. Quoted in Chawning, *Jesus Christ, Friend and Liberator*, 31.

## **2.15 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to explore Teresa's experience of Christ in prayer, and to show how her prayer at this stage was primarily directed to the person of Christ in his sacred humanity. We began by looking at her understanding of prayer which according to her is "nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends." Prayer for her, is comprised of both the ascetical and the mystical stages. While the former can be acquired through human efforts aided by grace, the latter (the mystical or supernatural stage of prayer), is not attained by any human effort. It is divinely infused. God does everything in this stage of prayer.

Teresa prayed in order to encounter Christ in his humanity. She sought to experience his presence through the concrete events of his earthly life. These include, meditating on the gospel scenes (especially on the Passion of Christ), striving to relate with him in her prayer in the manner some characters in the Scripture did. She also sought to represent Christ within herself; to make him present within herself in faith. She tried to relive these gospel episodes by interiorizing them in her prayer and, through them, she arrived at a personal encounter with Jesus Christ in his humanity.

In the next chapter we shall see how her experience of Christ moved from the ascetical to the mystical. How after a prolonged and an intense effort in meditating on the mysteries of Christ, and in keeping him present within herself, Christ reached out to her and made his presence felt directly. He made himself known to her at this stage through the mystical phenomena of visions and locutions.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TERESA'S MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

In chapter two we discussed Teresa's experience of Christ in (ascetical) prayer, and how (after a sustained dedication to meditation and active recollection), she began to experience the preliminary stages of mystical prayer (in the prayer of quiet). In this chapter we shall demonstrate how this experience intensified to the stage where she was brought to an experience of encounter with the person of Jesus Christ in his humanity through the extraordinary mystical phenomena of visions and locutions. The aspect of Teresa's experience of Christ which we intend to establish in this chapter is characterized by her experience of what she refers to as the "supernatural" or the "mystical" because they are not acquired through human efforts, but are divinely infused. They represent a divine activity in a person; when God "invades" the soul and takes complete possession of it. Thus, we shall explore the nature and characteristics of these phenomena according to Teresa's own description of them and their effects in her life.

In dealing with these subjective phenomena we are cognizant of the fact that questions are usually raised especially on how to ascertain their authenticity, and as to whether they are from God or not. But it is not the scope of this chapter to determine this, (though we will be mentioning some of Teresa's criteria for determining the genuineness of her mystical experiences of locutions and visions), rather, we will attempt to examine Teresa's locutions and visions from the point of view of the positive effects they produced in her life, –on how they helped her above all in the practice of the theological virtues. We shall also consider how she came through them (her locutions and visions), to a deeper understanding of the person of Jesus Christ as he spoke and revealed himself to her in his risen and glorified humanity.

### 3.1 Mysticism: An Overview

Given that we are dealing with mysticism (and mystical phenomena) in this chapter, it may be worthwhile to clarify the meaning of this term which has been so vaguely used in our times, that it seems almost to have lost its meaning. This term which was originally and usually restricted to religion and to the experiential dimension of religion, has in recent times been applied also in relation to non-religious phenomena. It has in fact become a commonplace usage not only in books dealing with religion and religious experiences, but also in many books that have nothing at all to do with religion. According to Evelyn Underhill, it is “perhaps the most ambiguous term in the whole vocabulary of religion.”<sup>558</sup> Consequently, it has come to mean a different thing for different people.

For instance, many nowadays, as Harvey Egan observes, “identify mysticism with irrationalism, vague speculation, otherworldliness, dreaminess, or a lack of practicality in dealing with daily living.”<sup>559</sup> Others incorrectly associate it with “parapsychological phenomena, theosophy, the occult, magic, witchcraft, and demonology.”<sup>560</sup> There are also those who reduced it to “moments of ecstatic rapture, or ‘peak experience,’ triggered by music, poetic inspiration, nature, lovemaking, psychedelic drugs, prayer, giving birth, and so on.”<sup>561</sup> Others associate it with “repressed eroticism, deviant behaviour, madness, psychological regression, biological and psychological pathology, or a variety of ‘altered state of consciousness’ usually engendered by sensory deprivation.”<sup>562</sup> There was also the tendency in many to erroneously reduce mysticism to supernatural phenomena, so that a mystic is regarded as someone who “receives Christ’s wounds on his body (the stigmata), levitates during prayer, sees visions, hears heavenly voices, receives divine communications

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<sup>558</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 9.

<sup>559</sup> Harvey D. Egan, *Christian Mysticism: The Future of a Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 14.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.



and revelations, and works various miracles.”<sup>563</sup> The misinterpretation and the discrepancies in the understanding and application of mysticism make it difficult for scholars (especially at the present time), to come up with a single and a comprehensive definition of it. The vague usage of mysticism is also responsible for the negative connotation that is often times attached to it by some authors. According to William James, “the words ‘mysticism’ and ‘mystical’ are often used as terms of mere reproach, to throw at any opinion which we regard as vague and vast and sentimental, and without a base in either facts or logic.”<sup>564</sup>

There is therefore the need to correct these misrepresentations, especially in reaffirming the fact as Underhill puts it “that mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else...”<sup>565</sup> According to her:

Mysticism is not an opinion: it is not a philosophy. It has nothing in common with the pursuit of occult knowledge. On the one hand it is not merely the power of contemplating Eternity: on the other, it is not to be identified with any kind of religious queerness. It is the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the love of God: the achievement here and now of the immortal heritage of man...It is an ordered movement towards ever higher levels of reality, ever closer identification with the Infinite.<sup>566</sup>

For her therefore, the core of mysticism is union with “a living absolute, that Divine Dark, that Abyss of the Godhead...the Uncreated Light in which the Universe is bathed...”<sup>567</sup> The mystic is the person who attains this union, and not the person who speaks about it. He or she “is ‘in love with the Absolute’ not in any idle or sentimental manner, but in that vital sense which presses at all costs and through all dangers towards union with the object beloved.”<sup>568</sup> This union is “conscious, personal, and complete” in the mystic. In this union the mystic enjoys a certain contact with the Divinity. In it, God is felt and tasted. This, according to

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<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>564</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 378.

<sup>565</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1993), 72.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 81-82.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 72.

Underhill, is what distinguishes the mystic from “the best and most brilliant of other men,” and makes his or her science, “the science of self-evident Reality.”<sup>569</sup>

In line with Underhill’s concern about restoring the correct and precise meaning of mysticism, we will attempt to clarify this term (by exploring its origin and meaning) in relation to the place it occupies in the Christian tradition. We shall show how it came to be adopted into the Christian vocabulary, and its subsequent application to the Christian mysteries.

### 3.2 Mysticism: An Etymological Survey

The term “Mysticism” is historically “associated with the Hellenistic mystery religions and cults of the pre-Christian and early Christian era.”<sup>570</sup> It derives from the Greek word *mystikos* (mystical) which is based on the “verb *muo*, which means “to close,” and more particularly, to close the eyes.”<sup>571</sup> To close the eyes, according to Thelagathoti J. Raja Rao suggests “introspection and the keeping of secrets.”<sup>572</sup> The word ‘mystical’ was used among the Greeks to refer to rites and rituals of the mystery religions and cults that were hidden to the eyes of all except the initiates. These initiates are bound to keep secret the rites and rituals of their religions into which they had been initiated. Louis Bouyer comments on this as follows:

What the initiated must forbear from revealing to their interrogators is not a doctrine, nor is it esoteric knowledge, but simply and solely the details of a ritual...In Hellenistic religions the secret which is truly mystical is not the secret of any ineffable religious knowledge, but the secret of a rite in its purely material aspect.<sup>573</sup>

Hence, mysticism and mystical from their original Greek roots convey a sense of what is hidden or secret; of hidden mysteries known only to the initiated ones.

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<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>570</sup> Egan, *Christian Mysticism*, 1.

<sup>571</sup> Louis Bouyer, “Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word,” in *Mystery and Mysticism: A Symposium* (London: Black Friars Publications, 1956) 119-137.

<sup>572</sup> Thelagathoti J. Raja Rao, *The Mystical Experience and Doctrine of St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort*. Tesi Gregoriana: Serie Spiritualità 10 (Roma: Gregorian University Press, 2005), 20.

<sup>573</sup> Bouyer, “Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word,” 119-137.

### 3.3 “Mystical” Transposed into Christianity

Before it was adapted into Christianity, “the word ‘mystical’ had already undergone a transposition of meaning,”<sup>574</sup> acquiring a more generic sense of whatever was hidden or mysterious. It was this common usage that the early Christian writers adopted. According to Bouyer, the word mystical was rendered commonplace for the first time in Christian terminology in Alexandria.<sup>575</sup> When the term “mystical” was adopted into Christianity (thanks to the Christian authors), it was not in any way used or mentioned in connection with rituals as was the case among the mystery religions and cults, but in relation to the Christian mystery; to the mystery of Christ. Louis Bouyer in his seminal article entitled “Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word,” (which contains a historical investigation of the word *mystikos*), showed that the term *mystikos* was used by the Greek Fathers in three different ways. First in the Scriptural exegesis, secondly with regard to the sacraments (especially the Eucharist), and lastly in connection with the spiritual experience.<sup>576</sup> We shall consider in detail how the term “mystical” was applied to the Christian mystery in the three aforementioned ways.

#### 3.3.1 The of Use of “Mystical” in Scriptural Exegesis

The primary concern of the Christian authors who adopted the term mystical into Christianity was to explore the hidden depth of the Bible; to bring out the “mystical meaning” of the Scriptures. It was probably the renowned Jewish thinker Philo of Alexandria (20BC-50AD), who paved the way for this. According to Egan, Philo “wielded Jewish beliefs and spirituality with Greek thought.”<sup>577</sup> He placed a great deal of emphasis on the “mystical,” or allegorical interpretation of the Bible. He held that the word “mystical” did not denote the secret details of a ritual, but rather the “mystical” or the hidden meaning of God’s word. Hence, Egan,

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<sup>574</sup> Raja Rao, *The Mystical Experience and Doctrine of St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort*, 21.

<sup>575</sup> Bouyer, “Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word,” 119-137.

<sup>576</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>577</sup> Egan, *Christian Mysticism*, 2.

describes him as “probably the bridge between the Jewish and Greek worlds for the transposed use of the word ‘mystical’ as the later Fathers of the Church used it with respect to Scripture.”<sup>578</sup>

Following in the footsteps of Philo, the early Greek Church Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and Origen (185-254), maintained the use of the word “mystical.” They did so not in relation to ritual secrets but, with respect to the hidden depths of the Scriptures.<sup>579</sup> Origen employed the word “mystical” in his Scriptural exegesis, especially in speaking about the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures. The essence of his allegory according to Bouyer, “is not the literary form itself...it is the notion, fundamentally evangelical and Pauline, that the whole Bible, and the whole history of God’s people, find their final significance and, as it were, their key in Christ alone.”<sup>580</sup> He believes that the incarnate Word (in the person of Jesus Christ), is contained in the Old Testament, revealed in the New Testament, and is fully assimilated in the Church’s experience.<sup>581</sup> Hence, he maintains that the literary sense of Scripture must flow into its mystical one.

In line with Clement of Alexandria who (from a purely Christian perspective), had described the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures as a “mystical interpretation,” Origen according to Bouyer, defines the allegorical interpretation as an “explanation of the mystical meaning extracted from the treasury of the (divine) words.”<sup>582</sup> Both Clement and Origen hold that there is a hidden or mystical meaning of the Scriptures, and they explored this using their allegorical method of exegesis, in which Christ is the hermeneutical key in unlocking this mystical meaning. Their method of biblical interpretation was in reference to Christ and his mystery, and they referred to this as “mystical interpretation” or as discovering the “mystical

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> See Mark A. McIntosh. Thinking about an unfathomable God. <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/s102McIntosh.pdf> (accessed 23, October, 2018).

<sup>580</sup> Bouyer, “Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word,” 119-137.

<sup>581</sup> Harvey D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 19.

<sup>582</sup> Bouyer, “Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word,” 119-137.

meaning” of the biblical texts. Their thought reflects what is obviously St. Paul’s understanding and use of *mysterion* (mystery). William Johnston, states that they “took the noun “mystery” and the adjective “mystical” and applied them to the mystery of Christ, particularly as it appears in St. Paul.”<sup>583</sup> They regard Paul’s notion of mystery as the key to understanding both the New Testament and the Christian mysticism; for this mystery is precisely the object of Christian mysticism. Paul uses this term to express “the idea that in Christ alone that which is most profound in religion, the final designs of God and his very nature, are communicated to us.”<sup>584</sup> He writes of this mystery in his *First Letter to the Corinthians* in relation to the cross of Christ, which according to him, is “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and—the wisdom of God.”<sup>585</sup> He refers to this knowledge he wishes to communicate to them as, “a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.”<sup>586</sup> It is precisely the wisdom of God, made manifest in Jesus Christ, through his cross and taught by the Spirit.

Paul writes again of this mystery in his *Letter to the Colossians*, referring to it as “the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.”<sup>587</sup> This mystery according to him, is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”<sup>588</sup> This is Jesus Christ himself in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”<sup>589</sup> Pauline mystery therefore is, according to Bouyer, “that of Christ himself, not only as supremely revealed on his Cross but also as including within him from all eternity the whole plan for our race and for the whole universe, for they are destined not just for creation but for their

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<sup>583</sup> William Johnston, *Christian Mysticism Today* (London: William Collins Sons, 1984), 14.

<sup>584</sup> Bouyer, “Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word,” 119-137.

<sup>585</sup> See 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, 1:23-24.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:7.

<sup>587</sup> See Colossians, 1:26.

<sup>588</sup> See *Ibid.*, 1:17.

<sup>589</sup> See *Ibid.*, 19:20.

reconciliation.”<sup>590</sup> It is the mystery of Christ who reveals the Father’s infinite love, “unfathomably expressed in finite historical circumstance.”<sup>591</sup> The incomprehensible self-giving love of God made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ, is thus, at the core of all mystical depths and meanings in the Bible. For Clement and Origen and indeed the Greek Fathers, the word mystical was used to describe the divine reality ushered in by Christ, which is the Gospel.

### 3.3.2 The of Use of “Mystical” in a Sacramental Sense

From the use of the word “mystical” in relation to biblical interpretation, it also came to be used with respect to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It was applied to the Eucharist in reference to its reality, which is Christ himself,<sup>592</sup> veiled in the consecrated bread and wine. For as Christ is believed to be mystically present in the Scriptures, so is he mystically present in the Eucharist. Because of the present but veiled reality of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, the Fathers used the word mystical to refer to both the Eucharist and Eucharistic Liturgy. For instance, a fifth-century epistle of St. Nilus (+430), states that the Eucharist must be approached “not as simple bread but as “mystical bread.”<sup>593</sup> St. John Chrysostom refers to the Eucharist as a “mystical food,” in his *Commentary on St. Matthew*, and as a “mystical banquet,” in his *Commentary on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians*.<sup>594</sup> The Christian presbyter and exegete, Hesychius of Jerusalem (+433), called the Eucharistic celebration a “mystical Pasch,” in his *Evangelical Questions*.<sup>595</sup> While Theodore (393-466) calls the moment after communion “the mystical moment in which we receive the body of the

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<sup>590</sup> Louis Bouyer, *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism*, trans. Iltyd Trethowan (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 15.

<sup>591</sup> McIntosh. Thinking about an unfathomable God.

<sup>592</sup> Bouyer, “Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word,” 119-137.

<sup>593</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

Bridegroom.” The whole of the Eucharistic liturgy also came to be referred to as a “mystical cult,” or a “mystical rite.”<sup>596</sup>

### 3.3.3 The of Use of “Mystical” in relation to Spiritual Experience

According to Bouyer, it is in the writings of the sixth-century Syrian monk, Pseudo-Dionysius that we “find earliest (and numerous) habitual use” of the word mystical in relation to an experiential way of knowing God.<sup>597</sup> McGinn writes that it was Pseudo-Dionysius more than anyone else who gave the term mystical the importance “it has continued to enjoy in Christian thought, using it often and in key contexts in his writings.”<sup>598</sup> In Dionysius, “we find the word mystical applied (for the first time) to a very clear-cut phenomenon.”<sup>599</sup> He never ascribes this knowledge and experience to himself, but he speaks of it always in relation to the experiences of Moses, Paul Carpos and Hierotheus, whom he regards as exemplary mystics and his direct and indirect teachers. We will limit ourselves in this study to the experiences of Moses, Paul and Hierotheus.

In his *Mystical Theology*, (a treatise on negative theology and apophatic mysticism), Pseudo-Dionysius describes Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai where, “renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, he plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing” and is “united to the completely unknown (God) by an inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.”<sup>600</sup> In his commentary on this text, Paul Rorem states that “renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible,” and plunging “into the truly mysterious

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<sup>596</sup> According to Bouyer, the use of “mystical cult,” and “mystical rite” in connection with the Eucharistic liturgy, was the first time words borrowed from the pagan religions (such as cult and rite) were directly applied to the celebration of the Christian mystery.

<sup>597</sup> See Bouyer, “Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word,” 119-137.

<sup>598</sup> See Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* vol.1, (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992), 171.

<sup>599</sup> Johnston, *Christian Mysticism Today*, 18.

<sup>600</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works (Mystical Theology)*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 1.3, 1001A. Dionysian use of Moses’ entry into the darkness of Mount Sinai as the symbol of the mystic way, was drawn on *Life of Moses* by Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) and by Origen’s *Homilies on the Exodus*. See Hilda Graef, *The Story of Mysticism* (London: Peter Davies, 1965), 120-121.

darkness of unknowing” means “losing one’s self, belonging completely to the Unknown One who is beyond everything.”<sup>601</sup> For “just as God’s brilliant light transcends our powers of sight, so too the infinity of the transcendent surpasses our finite powers of thought.”<sup>602</sup> Moses is thus, presented as the ideal mystic, who encountered God by journeying through the three mystical steps of purification, illumination and union; “as one who undergoes first purification, then gains contemplation of the place of God, and finally attains union.”<sup>603</sup> The Dionysian account of Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai in his *Mystical Theology* has come to be regarded in the Middle Ages and in our own time as the paradigm of “mystical ascent,” whereby the soul transcends images and arrives at a knowledge of God as he really is. It was interpreted as referring to “a contemplative union with God, where the soul abandons forms of prayer that rely on imagery and reasoning (‘meditation’ as it was, and is still called) and learns an openness to God himself in the darkness of abandonment of techniques within its control.”<sup>604</sup>

For Bouyer, the Dionysian “mysterious darkness of unknowing,” points to the mystery of Christ. He argues that Dionysius states “substantially, that one enters ‘a truly mystical cloud of unknowing,’ when one attains to the sole Object of the Gospels, who is revealed to us through the multiplicity of its words, beyond all the details of liturgical consecrations, and the particular illuminations of biblical revelation.”<sup>605</sup> This sole Object of the Gospels present (though veiled) in both the Christian liturgy and beneath the words of the sacred Scriptures, is according to Bouyer, what the Church Fathers after St. Paul refer to as τὸ μυστήριον (the mystery). This mystery is no other person than our Lord Jesus Christ

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<sup>601</sup> Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 192.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>603</sup> McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, 172.

<sup>604</sup> Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 101.

<sup>605</sup> Bouyer, “Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word,” 119-137.



through whom we have access to “the God who dwells in an inaccessible light.”<sup>606</sup> The “mysterious darkness of unknowing,” is thus, for Dionysius, the mystery of Jesus Christ for he “transposes into the language of his own era the universal reconciliation and restoration in Christ which St. Paul preached as ‘the mystery’”<sup>607</sup> The Scriptures and the Sacraments therefore, becomes the pillars of Christian mysticism. For it is by hearing the word and sharing in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, that one is drawn into both the mystery of Christ and the mystical life.

Another of Dionysius’ use of the word mystical in referring to spiritual experience is in relation to the doctrine and experience of his supposed teacher, Hierotheus.<sup>608</sup> In the *Divine Names* Dionysius speaks of the doctrine Hierotheus “learned directly from the sacred writers;” or that which “his own perspicacious and laborious research of the scriptures uncovered for him.”<sup>609</sup> He also refers to another type of knowledge (a higher type of knowledge) which “was made known” to Hierotheus by some divine inspiration through which he was enabled to not only learn the divine things (things of God), but also to experience them. “For he had a ‘sympathy’ with such matters...and he was perfected in mysterious (mystical) union with them in a faith in them which was independent of any education.”<sup>610</sup> Dionysius’ emphasis here is more or less on the difference between the things of God which Hierotheus learnt directly from the “theologians” (sacred writers) or from his own personal study of the Scriptures, and that which he learnt through experience (by divine

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<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

<sup>608</sup> Dionysius refers to Hierotheus a good number of times as his teacher or guide. He also acknowledges his dependence on him. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works (The Divine Names)*, 2:9, 648A-B; 3:2, 681A-D. I. P. Sheldon-Williams describes Hierotheus as either a bishop or a priest. See I. P. Sheldon-Williams, “The Pseudo-Dionysius and the Holy Hierotheus,” in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1966), 108-117.

<sup>609</sup> See *The Divine Names*, 2:9, 648A-B.

<sup>610</sup> See Ibid., 2:9, 648A-B.

inspiration). While the former is acquired through “mental effort” (*mathein*), the latter is attained by “special experience” (*pathein*).<sup>611</sup>

Dionysius also describes as “mystical” the supernatural experience Hierotheus had on the occasion of the “dormition” (or falling asleep) of Mary the Mother of God, and how within that solemn moment, he surpassed the other apostles, “all the divinely rapt hierarchs, all the other sacred initiators” in praising “the omnipotent goodness of that divine frailty.” He was indeed “so caught up, so taken out of himself, experiencing communion with the things praised, that everyone who heard him, everyone who saw him, everyone who knew him (or, rather, did not know him)” thought of him to be divinely inspired, “to be speaking with divine praises.”<sup>612</sup>

Louth indicates that the language of the Dionysian account of the experiences of Hierotheus “suggests that the context was liturgical.”<sup>613</sup> He argues that Hierotheus’ experience of “the divine things,” and his experience of “communion with the things praised,” are “to be understood of his celebrating the Christian sacraments.”<sup>614</sup> McGinn also shared in this view. He observes that comparing these passages on Hierotheus with those in which Dionysius treats his other exemplary mystics, Moses, Paul, and Carpos, “a definite pattern emerges.” “The special experience, knowledge, vision that these mystics received,” he writes, “is described in language often reminiscent” of that which Dionysius employed in

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<sup>611</sup> See McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, 172.

<sup>612</sup> *The Divine Names*, 2:9, 681D-684A. Traditionally this text was taken as an account of the death (“dormition”) of the Blessed Virgin Mary, though she was never named. Dionysius refers to the apostles as gathering together for “a vision of that mortal body, that source of life, which bore God;” who happens to be Mary the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). It was partly on this Dionysian authority that the idea of a gathering of the disciples and others around Mary’s body was accepted into the Christian tradition as historical fact. See Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 147; 167-174. For more on Dionysius and the death of the Blessed Virgin Mary, see Gabriele M. Roschini, *Lo Pseudo-Dionigi l’Areopagita e la morte di Maria SS* (Roma: Marianum, 1958). For a recent study on the “dormition” of the Blessed Virgin Mary, see Joseph J. Shoemaker, “Death and the Maiden: The Early History of the Dormition and Assumption Apocrypha,” in *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 50:1-2 (2006), 59-97.

<sup>613</sup> See Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 29.

<sup>614</sup> Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 29. The phrase “experiencing communion with the things praised” which Dionysius used in relation to Hierotheus’ extraordinary experience, also echoes the Eucharistic language he employed in his *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works (The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy)*, 3, 425D, 440B and 444A.

his *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* “for the celebration of the liturgy.”<sup>615</sup> This means that both the experiences of Moses and Hierotheus have a liturgical undertone. For while the former’s experience envisages a liturgical context, the latter’s experience is “liturgical and ecclesial in setting and context.”<sup>616</sup>

According to Rorem, Dionysius’ account of Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai is full of liturgical undertones. It envisages most especially the reality disclosed by the liturgical actions of the celebrant (the hierarch) of the liturgy which he describes in his *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.<sup>617</sup> Rorem states that Moses purifies himself and then, separating himself from the crowd, he approaches the summit accompanied by his chosen priests, just as the hierarch purifies himself and with the priests and chosen deacons leaves the nave and enters the inner sanctuary.<sup>618</sup> There he speaks in praise of the sacred works of God, and “sets about the performance of the most divine acts, and lift into view the things praised through the sacredly displayed symbols.”<sup>619</sup> Moses did not meet God himself at this stage of his ascent, but rather contemplates where he dwells. This, according to Rorem, signifies “not just physical sight but also spiritual comprehension, just as the hierarch sees and teaches the advanced contemplation of every liturgical rite.”<sup>620</sup> He describes a (Dionysian) hierarch as one who, like Moses, also knows how to transcend all symbols, their contemplation, and even beyond every resulting concept.<sup>621</sup> This is evident in the experience of the hierarch during the Eucharistic liturgy, whereby after receiving and distributing “the divine Communion” and concluding “with the sacred thanksgiving” (and while the general crowd is satisfied to look at

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<sup>615</sup> McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, 172.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>617</sup> See Paul Rorem, “Moses as the Paradigm for the Liturgical Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius” in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 18, no. 2, (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1989), 275-279.

<sup>618</sup> See Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 190. Also *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 3:2, 425C-D.

<sup>619</sup> *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 3:2, 425C-D. The most divine acts represent the uncovering and pluralization (fraction) of the bread and the distribution of the one cup, as symbolic of the Incarnation. see Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, 222, note 102.

<sup>620</sup> Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 190.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-191.

the divine symbols), he “is continuously uplifted by the divine Spirit toward the most holy source of the sacramental rite.” He does so in “blessed and conceptual contemplation, in that purity which marks his life as it conforms to God.”<sup>622</sup> Rorem points out that the “terminological parallels” between Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai and the hierarchy during the Eucharist liturgy (as described above), are supported by the example of Hierotheus’ extraordinary spiritual experience which is also liturgical in context (as we saw already).

Having shown that Hierotheus’ significance is imbedded in the liturgy, it will be necessary at this point to explore further what Dionysius says about him, for it appears that it is his experience that will guide us to the meaning of *Mystical Theology* from the Dionysian point of view.

We mentioned above about Dionysian reference to Hierotheus’ knowledge of the divine as coming partly from his study of the Scriptures, and partly through an experience not acquired by learning, where he ‘suffered’ or experienced divine things. We also pointed out his mentioning of Hierotheus’ ‘sympathy’ with divine things which, was both an expression of and a means to his “mysterious union with them and in a faith in them...”<sup>623</sup> This sympathy or suffering of divine things according to Louth, “is presented as divine possession, which issues in ecstasy.”<sup>624</sup> Dionysius sees this ecstasy, as “an ecstasy of love, as union and divinization (*henosis* and *theosis*).”<sup>625</sup> For through ecstasy one transcends “the human

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<sup>622</sup> *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 3:2, 428A.

<sup>623</sup> See *The Divine Names*, 2:9, 648A-B.

<sup>624</sup> Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 29. Ecstasy is from the Greek word *ékstasis* (ἐκστασις) meaning “to stand outside of or transcend oneself.” In mysticism, it represents the experience of an inner vision of God or of one’s relation to or union with the divine. As the main aim in most religious mysticism, ecstasy is achieved through many and different methods. The most typical of these means comprises four stages: purgation (of bodily desire), purification (of the will), illumination (of the mind) and unification (of one’s being or will with the divine). It is the marker signifying “the transition to the place where all values are transmuted—both reversed (ignorance becomes knowledge, darkness becomes dazzling) and transcendentalized by passing beyond *both* affirmation and negation.” See McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 179. Also Encyclopaedia Britannica. Ecstasy-Religion. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ecstasy-religion> (accessed November 22, 2028).

<sup>625</sup> Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 175.

condition and become divinized.”<sup>626</sup> He defines love as “a capacity to effect a unity, an alliance, and a particular commingling in the Beautiful and the Good.”<sup>627</sup> This love is ecstatic because it draws the lover out of himself or herself and centres his or her life on the beloved (on the object of one’s love).<sup>628</sup> As Dionysius puts it, those who are possessed by this love, “belong not to the self but to the beloved.”<sup>629</sup> He gave St. Paul as an example of such ecstatic love of God. He describes him as a true lover who was caught up out of himself in rapture by divine love, thus, “possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned, as exceptionally beloved.”<sup>630</sup>

For Dionysius therefore, ecstasy does not particularly denote an extraordinary experience, it rather means having one’s life centred on the beloved so that the life of the beloved is one’s own.<sup>631</sup> This is evident in what he wrote about the soul’s (one’s) ecstasy in chapter thirteen of his *The Divine Names*. There he speaks of the soul not so much standing out of itself (in ecstasy), as being taken out of itself and “being brought into union with God.”<sup>632</sup> The soul achieves this by way of negation, and it is this way (of negation) also known as apophatic theology that “surrenders the soul to the unknowable God.”<sup>633</sup>

Dionysian *Mystical Theology* therefore, teaches a way of ascent to, and union with God by negation, as is evident in Moses’ mountain experience, for as he climbs the mountain of Sinai, “he passes beyond what can be affirmed, and can only express what he experiences by means of negation.”<sup>634</sup> His *Mystical Theology* proposes a way of self-emptying and negation, which prepares one for an encounter “wherein God’s loving self-communication and presence are experienced in an ecstasy of pure love through which one goes beyond all

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<sup>626</sup> McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 179.

<sup>627</sup> *The Divine Names*, 4:12, 709C.

<sup>628</sup> Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 175.

<sup>629</sup> *The Divine Names*, 4:13, 712A.

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>631</sup> Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 103.

<sup>632</sup> See *The Divine Names*, 13: 3,981B.

<sup>633</sup> Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 103.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*

things and out of oneself—in a way beyond analogies, beyond supereminent negations, beyond knowing, and unknowing.”<sup>635</sup> In this apophatic way, God who is unknowable, is experienced through a union of ecstatic love. The goal of the Dionysian *Mystical theology* is union with God whereby one becomes completely like God in a differentiated unity with him, that is, “of two becoming one, while remaining two—of one genuinely becoming the other, while remaining oneself, of becoming God by participation.”<sup>636</sup>

### 3.4 The Dionysian Influence in the Christian Mystical Tradition

Dionysian thought had a huge impact on the Christian mystical tradition. His writings were of a great influence not only to “the Greek mystics, notably Maximus the Confessor (590-662) in the eighth century, but also after the translation of John Scotus Erigena (815-877) in 877 they made an incalculable impact on the whole Latin Church.”<sup>637</sup> Describing the extent of the Dionysian influence in the Middle Ages, Underhill writes:

Mediaeval mysticism is soaked in Dionysian conceptions. Particularly in the fourteenth century, the golden age of mystical literature, the phrase ‘Dionysius saith’ is of continual recurrence: and has for those who use it much the same weight as quotations from the Bible or the great Fathers of the Church.<sup>638</sup>

Dionysius stood out from other Christian writers of his time because he was according to Underhill, “the first and in a long while the only, Christian writer who attempted to describe frankly and accurately the workings of the mystical consciousness, and the nature of its ecstatic attainment of God.”<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>635</sup> Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 95.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> William Johnston, *The Mysticism of The Cloud of Unknowing: A Modern Interpretation* (New York: Desclee Company, 1967), 32-33.

<sup>638</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, 457.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

### 3.5 Affective Reading of Dionysius: Love over Knowledge

As generations moved on and new cultures were born, the Dionysian heritage was “purified, corrected and developed.”<sup>640</sup> Part of this was the interpolation of love over knowledge in the Dionysian *Mystical Theology* by his Medieval Latin interpreters. These interpreters (affective Dionysians as they are called),<sup>641</sup> attempted a complete re-appropriation of the contents of *Mystical Theology* especially by adding love at the peak of the Dionysian mystical ascent to union with God. That is, love above the intellect. They proposed that one journeys (through purification and illumination) to union with God through love. For while there was no mention of love, delight or of affection in general in the Dionysian *Mystical Theology*, especially in relation to Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai where, leaving behind all sense-perception and intellectual cognition, he plunged into the “cloud of unknowing,” to be united with God, these interpreters posit that “when Moses finally abandons all intellectual and cognitive activity, he is united to the unknown God through love.”<sup>642</sup> A good example worth mentioning here is that of the 14<sup>th</sup> century anonymous English author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, who (like the Victorine interpreters) made some significant changes and adaptations in his Middle English translation of the work of Pseudo-Dionysius. For instance, his *Denis’ Hidden Theology*, (a paraphrase of Pseudo-Dionysian *The Mystical Theology*) has

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<sup>640</sup> Johnston, *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love*, 40.

<sup>641</sup> Bernard McGinn identifies “affective Dionysianism” and “speculative Dionysianism” as the two broad streams of the interpretation of the Dionysian *Mystical Theology* that emerged in the later Middle Ages. The former which emphasised the role of love (*amor, affectio*) over knowledge in the pursuit of union with God, was first started by the Victorine interpreters of Pseudo-Dionysius such as Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141), Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), and was systematized in the writings of Thomas Gallus (c.1200-1246), also a Victorine. While the latter which proposed an intellectual approach to union with God, with no reference to love, was initiated by the Dominican Albert the Great (1200-1280). Albert’s interpretation of Dionysian *Mystical Theology* contrasts with his Victorine predecessors Hugh and Richard. Unlike them, he held on to the Dionysian “relentless intellectual approach to union with God and his omission of any reference to love in *Mystical Theology*.” For more on the debate on the conception of, and the role of love and knowledge in the mystical union with God, see Bernard McGinn, “Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries” in *Church History*, vol. 56, no.1 (1987),7-24. Also Boyd Taylor Coolman, “The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition,” in *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, eds. Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 85-102. And Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism 1200-1350* (New York: Crossroads, 1998), 79-82.

<sup>642</sup> Coolman, “The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition,” 85-102.

Dionysius saying to Timothy that he will be “drawn up above mind in love,” urging him to enter into the darkness “with love,” in the same way Moses climbed the Mount of Sinai in the darkness of unknowing because of love; because of his “singularity of affection.”<sup>643</sup> This shift makes a whole lot of difference, for in place of “a cold, philosophical, Neo-Platonic Moses” who separates himself from matter to enter the world of pure spirit, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, portrays a Moses so totally on fire with love for God that he abandons everything and climbs the mountain “in the utmost spirit of poverty.”<sup>644</sup> By highlighting this aspect of love, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* follows the medieval mystical tradition. But does he really translate Dionysian thought?<sup>645</sup> William Johnston has already raised this question,<sup>646</sup> and found the answer in one of the Dionysian works *The Divine Names*, where he speaks robustly concerning the ecstasy of St. Paul which is an ecstasy of rapturous love. He writes:

This is why great Paul, swept along by his yearning for God and seized of its ecstatic power, had this inspired word to say: “I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me.” Paul was truly a lover and, as he says, he was beside himself for God, possessing not his own life, but the life of the One for whom he yearned, as exceptionally beloved.<sup>647</sup>

It is obvious from this passage that Dionysius is very much aware of the specific role of love in the mystical ascent.

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<sup>643</sup> See Johnston, *The Mysticism of The Cloud of Unknowing*, 34-35. Coolman describes this treatise by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* as the most explicit and extensive “affectivizing” of the Dionysian *Mystical Theology* in the Middle Ages. See Coolman, “The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition,” 85-102.

<sup>644</sup> See Johnston, *Mystical Theology*, 38. Also Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 221-222.

<sup>645</sup> In the prologue to his translation of Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology* called *Denis’ Hidden Theology*, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, stated that he had made a close rendering of the *Mystical theology*, and that he had followed the interpretation of Thomas Gallus, one of the Victorine interpreters of Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology*, whom he described as “a noble and worthi espositour of this same book.” See Phyllis Hodgson, ed. “*The Cloud of Unknowing*” and *Related Treatises* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), prologue. Denys Turner believe that the main influence of Gallus on the author *The Cloud of Unknowing* was his emphasis on the supremacy of *affectus* over *intellectus* (love over knowledge), in the journey towards union with God. For more on the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and his translation of Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology*, and on the influence of Thomas Gallus on his Translation, see Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 186-210.

<sup>646</sup> See Johnston, *Mystical Theology*, 38.

<sup>647</sup> *The Divine Names*, 4:13, 712A.



As the Dionysian concept of ecstasy entered into the Christian mystical tradition, it was further refined. It came to represent, especially in the works of Christian mystics “a going forth from the self in abandonment of all things understood in the context of the gospel exhortation to abandon everything for the love of Jesus.”<sup>648</sup> This gospel exhortation was to become normative in the Christian mystical tradition, and those who embraced it did so according to Johnston, “for loving wisdom.”<sup>649</sup> With the development of the mystical tradition, his ecstasy also came to be understood in the context of *The Song of Songs* whereby the bride goes forth to meet the bridegroom,<sup>650</sup> who in this case is the Word Incarnate. This going forth culminates in the mystical union which, according to Johnston, “is the gateway to eternal life where is enacted the eternal marriage, the marriage in glory between God and the soul.”<sup>651</sup>

### 3.6 Dionysian Mystical Theology Modified

With the transmission and transformation of the Pseudo-Dionysian thought (that started in the Middle Ages and reached its climax in 16<sup>th</sup> century), the term “mystical theology” that he coined “to describe the indescribable contact with the unknown God,”<sup>652</sup> and on how to know God as the “Divine Darkness” by way of unknowing, gradually came to denote “the knowledge of God attained by direct, immediate, and ineffable contemplation.”<sup>653</sup> Mystical theology in this sense, refers to mystical experience; of an infused way of knowing and experiencing God, a heightened awareness of his presence “apprehended not by thought but

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<sup>648</sup> See Johnston, *Mystical Theology*, 38-39.

<sup>649</sup> See *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>650</sup> See *Song of Songs*, 3:2.

<sup>651</sup> Johnston, *Mystical Theology*, 39.

<sup>652</sup> Bernard McGinn, “Christian Mysticism: An Introduction,” in *Comparative Mysticism: An Anthology of Original Sources*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 157-162.

<sup>653</sup> Egan, *Christian Mysticism*, 3. Contemplation in this sense, refers to knowledge and consciousness of God’s presence that one attains through love. It is “a knowledge born out of love” and an experience that transcends rational explanation. This concept of Contemplation was used interchangeably with mystical theology in the Middle Ages and in the early modern period. According to Johnston “the medievals identify mystical theology with mystical experience and call contemplation mystical theology.” William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 34.

by love.”<sup>654</sup> The result of this shift was an intensified emphasis on individual experiences and affectivity.

The person who championed this transition was Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), called “the last of the Fathers,” “because in the twelfth century he renewed and updated the great theology of the Fathers.”<sup>655</sup> Like his predecessors (such as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa), he found in the *Song of Songs* “a privileged locus for his reflections on union with Christ, though from time to time he treated the experience of such union in a more personal way than Origen did.”<sup>656</sup> For instance, Bernard believes that the coming of the Bridegroom (Christ) into the soul was mystical (hidden), because according to him, “he never made known his coming by any signs, not by sight, not by sound, not by touch. It was not by any movement of his that I recognized his coming; it was not by any of my senses that I perceived he had penetrated to the depth of my being.”<sup>657</sup> It means that the presence of the Bridegroom (the Word) cannot be perceived by the senses, but by “*interior* signs of an intensely affective nature,”<sup>658</sup> through which his presence is felt. Bernard refers to these interior manifestations, as follows:

Only by the movement of my heart...did I perceive his presence; and I knew the power of his might because my faults were put to flight...At the very slightest amendment of my way of life, I have experienced his goodness and mercy; in the renewal and remaking of the spirit of my mind, that is of my inmost being, I have perceived the excellence of his glorious beauty, and when I contemplate all these things I am filled with awe and wonder at his manifold greatness.<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>654</sup> William H. Shannon, “Contemplation, Contemplative Prayer,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 209-214.

<sup>655</sup> Pope Benedict XVI (General Audience). Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20091021.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20091021.html) (accessed April 10, 2019).

<sup>656</sup> James A. Wiseman, “Mysticism,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 681-692.

<sup>657</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Songs of Songs IV*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 89-92.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.* McGinn describes Bernard’s experience here, as what would be considered today as “mystical experience or, perhaps better, mystical consciousness of the direct presence of the Word.” It is according to him, “a brief foretaste of the freedom from the misery of fallen existence which is the heavenly goal of the restoration process.” See McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 110.

Bernard's description above, of his experience of the coming of Christ to the soul (which is both personal and affective), was according to James Wiseman, his move towards "that modern understanding of Christian mysticism as a state of consciousness surpassing ordinary experience through union with the transcendental reality of God."<sup>660</sup> This received a scholarly definition in 15<sup>th</sup> century—when Jean Gerson (1363-1429) gave what has come to be known as the classical definition of mystical theology—, and a definitive expression in 16<sup>th</sup> century in the writings of Teresa<sup>661</sup> and John of the Cross. For the purposes of our study, we shall consider the definitions of mystical theology by Jean Gerson, Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross. Our aim will be to explore how their definitions brought out the experiential and the affective aspect of mystical theology.

### 3.6.1 Jean Gerson's Definition of Mystical Theology

Jean Gerson, the erstwhile Chancellor of the University of Paris, in addition to being a scholastic theologian (the most popular and leading theologian of his time), had a long-standing interest in mystics and mystical theology, and had written a great deal on this theme. He wrote a two-volume treatise called *De mystica theologia* (*The Mystical Theology*).<sup>662</sup> Gerson advanced a classic definition of mystical theology as "experiential knowledge of God that comes through the embrace of unitive love." (*theologia mystica est cognitio experimentalis habita de Deo per amoris unitivi complexum*).<sup>663</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> Wiseman, "Mysticism," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*,

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

<sup>662</sup> William Harmless, *Mystics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>663</sup> Jean Gerson, *De mystica theologia*, I. 28. 4-7. Quoted in Ibid. Though Gerson's definition is considered a standard definition of mystical theology, McGinn states that it only "expresses a particular understanding created in the midst of late medieval debates, especially about the "experimental" (*experimentalis*) nature of mystical theology." See McGinn, "Christian Mysticism: An Introduction," 157-162.

He distinguished such knowledge from that which is acquired through speculative theology (*theologia speculativa*) which uses “reasoning in conformity with philosophical disciplines.”<sup>664</sup> Unlike speculative theology which issues forth from the intellect, mystical theology springs primarily from the heart, the *affectus*.<sup>665</sup> It is acquired not through the “school of the intellect” (*scola intellectus*), but through the “school of the affect” (*scola affectus*) or “school of love” (*scola amoris*).<sup>666</sup> Gerson believes that the acquisition of mystical theology (*theologia mystica*) does not “require great knowledge or extensive study of books,” for it can “be acquired by ‘any of the faithful, even if she be an insignificant woman or someone who is illiterate’” (*a quolibet fidei, etiam si sit muliercula vel ydiota*).<sup>667</sup> For him therefore, knowledge of God in mystical theology is acquired not from academic study, but “from experience, from the experience of being loved intimately, intensely, by God...a love-wrought knowledge of God.”<sup>668</sup>

Commenting on Gerson’s definition of mystical theology, as “experiential knowledge of God” gained “through the embrace of unitive love,” William Harmless likened this knowledge (of God that comes from love) to the kind of knowledge married couples have for each other. He states that though they have neither read books about one another, nor “studied each other academically, they know one another through the union of their lives, an intimacy that touches heart and mind and body.”<sup>669</sup> He argues further that though there is “certainly a cognitive element in their knowledge of each other,” it would not stand for an intellectual knowledge. It is not theoretical, but rather “it is a love-wrought knowledge;”<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>664</sup> See Jean Gerson, *De mystica theologia*, 1.30.2. Quoted in Peter Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila and the Christian Mystical Tradition* (London: Continuum, 2011), 103. This is similar to a large extent to the kind of theology done in most faculties nowadays, which employs all the elements and methods of an academic discipline.

<sup>665</sup> Harmless, *Mystics*, 6.

<sup>666</sup> Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical*, 103.

<sup>667</sup> Jean Gerson, *De mystica theologia*, 1.30.5. Quoted in Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical*, 103.

<sup>668</sup> Harmless, *Mystics*, 7.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*

similar to a knowledge which one acquires from the experience of being loved intimately and deeply by God. This according to Harmless, is the kind of knowledge that Gerson refers to as coming about “through the embrace of unitive love.” He posits further that Gerson’s idea was drawn on Gregory the Great’s dictum that “love itself is a knowledge of sorts” (*amor ipse notitia est*),<sup>671</sup> it is a form of knowing.

### 3.6.2 Teresa of Jesus’ Definition of Mystical Theology

Teresa defined “mystical theology” in the context of her own (prayer) experience. She used the term “mystical theology” four times in *The Book of Her Life*,<sup>672</sup> mainly in reference to her experience of contemplation. For her, “mystical theology” is synonymous with “contemplation,” which she describes as the stage of prayer that is divinely infused. By “contemplation,” Teresa means a form of prayer superior to mental prayer (meditation) and structurally different from it. For while mental prayer is discursive, contemplation is intuitive.<sup>673</sup> She classified prayer into two stages. The first stage is mental prayer (or meditation), which is acquired by human effort aided by grace, while the second stage is the prayer of contemplation, which only God can bring about. She specified the difference between these stages of prayer in the twenty-fifth chapter of *The Way of Perfection* as follows: In mental prayer, “we can do something ourselves, with the help of God,” she writes, while “in contemplation...we can do nothing; His Majesty is the one who does everything, for it is his work and above our nature.”<sup>674</sup> This means that while mental prayer “begins in an

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<sup>671</sup> See Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Ev.* 27.4 (PL 76:1207A), quoted in Harmless, *Mystics*, 6-7.

<sup>672</sup> See *Life*, 10:1, 11:5, 12:5 and 18:2.

<sup>673</sup> Tomás Álvarez, “Contemplación” in *Diccionario de Santa Teresa: Doctrina e Historia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, editor. Tomás Álvarez (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2006), 168-173.

<sup>674</sup> *The Way Perfection*, 25:3.

activity that is natural (namely thinking),” contemplation “begins in an action that is divine and infused.”<sup>675</sup>

In chapter 10 of *The Book of Her Life*, Teresa narrates her experience of the beginning of some form of contemplative prayer (suspension in prayer), which according to her is known as mystical theology. She writes:

It used to happen, when I represented Christ within me in order to place myself in His presence...that a feeling of the presence of God would come upon me unexpectedly so that I could in no way doubt He was within me or I totally immersed in Him...I believe they call the experience “mystical theology.” The soul is suspended in such a way that it seems to be completely outside itself. The will loves; the memory, it seems to me, is almost lost...the intellect does not work.<sup>676</sup>

The key “marker” of Teresa’s reference to mystical theology in the above citation is, according to Howells, “her state of suspension.”<sup>677</sup> This suspension is characterized by an intense feeling of God’s presence within the soul. It is “a feeling of ecstasy, in which the soul departs from its normal operation, especially in the higher faculties of memory, intellect and will.”<sup>678</sup> In this state of suspension, according to Teresa, the will is actively engaged (in loving), while the cognitive faculties (the memory and the intellect) fail; the will is active, while the memory and the intellect are passive.

This means that when the Lord desires to raise the soul from mental prayer (or meditation) to contemplation, he suspends its faculties, allowing only the will to function (to love). Teresa believes that it is necessary for this to happen at this stage of prayer, for if the faculties “were to be at work” she writes, “they would do harm rather than bring benefit.”<sup>679</sup> When the soul’s faculties are suspended it becomes passive and, therefore, is more receptive

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<sup>675</sup> Terence O’Reilly, “The Mystical Theology of Saint Francis de Sales in the *Traité de l’amour de Dieu*,” in *Mysticism in the French Tradition: Eruptions from France*, eds. Louise Nelstrop and Bradley Onishi (London: Routledge, 2015), 207-220

<sup>676</sup> *Life*, 10:1.

<sup>677</sup> Edward Howells, “Teresa of Avila: Negative Theologian?” in *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition*, eds. Peter Tyler and Edward Howells (London: Routledge, 2017), 51-63.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>679</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 25:2

to what the Lord is communicating to it. As she rightly observed, “the soul understands that without the noise of words,” the Lord “is teaching it by suspending its faculties.”<sup>680</sup> Though the cognitive faculties are suspended, Teresa holds that one still understands “the things His Majesty represents to it,” because he desires that one understands it.<sup>681</sup> She sums up what the soul experiences in this encounter with the Lord during contemplation as follows:

The soul is being enkindled in love, and it doesn't understand how it loves. It knows that it enjoys what it loves, but it doesn't know how. It clearly understands that this joy is not a joy the intellect obtains merely through desire. The will is enkindled without understanding how. But as soon as it can understand something, it sees that this good cannot be merited or gained through all the trials one can suffer on earth. This good is a gift from the Lord of earth and heaven, who, in sum, gives according to who he is. What I have described...is perfect contemplation.<sup>682</sup>

For Teresa therefore, contemplation is purely of God's action, unlike mental prayer or other active forms of prayer that one can acquire through one's natural efforts. It is rather a free gift from God, which he “gives when he desires, as he desires, and to whom he desires.”<sup>683</sup> One can't arrive at contemplation by one's merits or efforts, but one can by the grace of God dispose oneself to receiving it, when God wishes to grant it.

Teresa in the early stage of her mystical life believed she could actually prepare for contemplation or acquire it by her own efforts. She got this idea from the books she read (whose authors were the contemporary exponents of the Neoplatonism and pseudo-Dionysian apophatic mode of Christian mysticism), which proposed that one could prepare for the gift of contemplation by emptying the mind of all corporeal images including that of Christ in his humanity. These authors recommended that one suspends the mind during prayer, leaving it blank (not thinking of anything—*no pensar nada*), with the hope of arriving at contemplation. Teresa followed this teaching for almost twenty years before she eventually realised she was on

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<sup>680</sup> Ibid.

<sup>681</sup> *Life*, 10:1.

<sup>682</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 25:2. She wrote extensively in chapters 14-21 and 22-31 of *The Book of Her Life* on the nature of contemplation. See especially chapter 14:2:6-8 and chapter 18:14.

<sup>683</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 4:1:2

the wrong track, that these authors were mistaken. The issue, as she saw it, was that one cannot prepare for contemplation or induce it by suspending the mind and lifting it above all corporeal things in order to contemplate pure spiritual things (the Divinity). She believes that the intellect cannot be suspended by one's efforts, but only by the infusion of a divine force. God suspends intellect when he desires to raise one to contemplation, and no human effort can genuinely achieve this. For Teresa therefore, contemplation is a free gift of grace that comes not as a result of any preparation or the use of "a technique or training induced from outside oneself."<sup>684</sup> It is thus, an experience that breaks forth into one's "psychological space as an unexpected fact, unforeseen, not desired, neither procured nor known."<sup>685</sup>

Mystical theology (or contemplation), from Teresa's point of view therefore, could be seen as one's experience of a direct encounter with God, that is beyond human efforts to acquire, for one does nothing at all to obtain it. This encounter, which one attains in an entirely passive manner, is purely of God's initiative. For when he deems it fit, God raises one from mental prayer (meditation) to contemplation. And in this state (of contemplation), one gradually "comes to understand and to love God more and more profoundly, without knowing in any way *how* it understands and loves."<sup>686</sup> In the experience of contemplation as Teresa puts it:

The will is fully occupied in loving, but it doesn't understand how it loves. The intellect, if it understands, doesn't understand how it understands; at least it can't comprehend anything of what it understands. It doesn't seem to me that it understands, because, as I say, it doesn't understand—I really can't understand this!<sup>687</sup>

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<sup>684</sup> Álvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on her Life and Work*, 287.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>686</sup> Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 121.

<sup>687</sup> *Life*, 18:14.



The influence of the Dionysian apophasis (of divine unknowing and ineffability) which Teresa “inherited from the medieval tradition,”<sup>688</sup> is very much at play here in her attempt at describing what transpires during contemplation. Teresa did not read the Dionysian *corpus*, but it has been firmly argued that she is working in the Dionysian tradition.<sup>689</sup> The reason being that most of the Spanish mystical literature she read (which influenced her thought), was written by authors belonging to the Affective Dionysian school such as Francisco de Osuna and Bernadino de Laredo. Teresa was tutored in the Dionysian tradition from de Osuna’s *Third Spiritual Alphabet* and de Laredo’s *Ascent of Mount of Sinai*. These two spiritual masters were influenced by the work of Jean Gerson who himself, was influenced by the Victorine affective interpretation of the Dionysian corpus.<sup>690</sup> Howells describes Gerson as a mediating figure, “who helped to produce the major groundswell of Affective Dionysian writings that characterized Teresa’s spiritual milieu.”<sup>691</sup>

One of the roles of Dionysius in the development of Teresa’s theology was her use of his negative language and his paradox (as contained in the Spanish sources she read) in describing her experience of contemplation (mystical theology). For instance, in the block quotation we have above, she used the Dionysian negativity to describe what takes place during contemplation. She employed there, the negative phrase of unknowing “piling up repeated denials in a way more reminiscent of Dionysius’ apophaticism.”<sup>692</sup> In addition to the aforementioned quotation, Teresa also employed the Dionysian negative/apophatic language

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<sup>688</sup> Peter Tyler, “Teresa of Ávila’s Picture of the Soul: Platonic or Augustinian?” in *St Teresa of Ávila: Her Writings and her Life*, eds. Terence O’Reilly, Colin Thompson and Lesley Twomey (Oxford: Legenda, 2018), 91-107.

<sup>689</sup> See Peter Tyler, “Mystical affinities: St. Teresa and Jean Gerson,” in *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition*, eds. Peter Tyler and Edward Howells (London: Routledge, 2017), 36-50.

<sup>690</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Edward Howells, “Teresa of Avila: Negative Theologian?” in *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition*, eds. Peter Tyler and Edward Howells (London: Routledge, 2017), 51-63.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

in her teaching on contemplation and spiritual experiences in different places in her work.<sup>693</sup> She equally makes use of positive language sometimes, and a number of “combined affirmations and negations” at other times, in relation to contemplation.<sup>694</sup>

### 3.6.3 John of the Cross’ Definition of Mystical Theology

Like Teresa, John of the Cross also used mystical theology and contemplation interchangeably.<sup>695</sup> According to him, “contemplation is mystical theology, which theologians call secret wisdom and which St. Thomas says is communicated and infused into the soul through love.”<sup>696</sup> Elaborating on this divine communication, he writes:

In contemplation God teaches the soul very quietly and secretly, without its knowing how, without the sound of words, and without the help of any bodily or spiritual faculty, in silence and quietude, in darkness to all sensory and natural things. Some spiritual persons call this contemplation knowing by unknowing. For this knowledge is not produced by the intellect that the philosophers call the agent intellect, which works on the forms, phantasies, and apprehensions of the corporeal faculties; rather it is produced in the possible or passive intellect. The possible intellect, without the reception of these forms, and so on, receives passively only substantial knowledge, which is divested of images and given without any work or active function of the intellect.<sup>697</sup>

He also describes this (hidden), mystical knowledge in *The Living Flame*, in reference to what Dionysius taught about it. He writes: “This knowledge is general and dark to the intellect because it is contemplative knowledge, which is a ray of darkness for the intellect, as

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<sup>693</sup> See *Life*, 14:2; 21:11; 40:7. *Spiritual Testimonies*, 12:1, 59:6; 59:21. *The Way of Perfection*, 25:2. *The Interior Castle*, 6:4:5; 6:10:2.

<sup>694</sup> See Howells, “Teresa of Avila: Negative Theologian?” 51-63. See also. *Life*, 10:1; *The Interior Castle*, 6:8:6.

<sup>695</sup> John used the term “mystical theology” nine times in his writings. Once in Book 2, chapter 8.6 of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, four times in Book 2, chapters 5.1, 12.5, 17.26, 20.6 of *The Dark Night*, thrice in Prologue, 3 and in chapters 27.5 and 39.2 of Redaction B of *The Spiritual Canticle*, and once in chapter 3.49 of Redaction B of *The Living Flame of Love*. See Ciro García, “Teología mística” in *Diccionario de San Juan de la Cruz*, ed. Eulogio Pacho (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2000), 1379-1395.

<sup>696</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, revised edition (*The Dark Night*), trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), 2.17.2. Henceforth, *The Dark Night* only.

<sup>697</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle* 39:12. Kavanaugh states that John employed in this text the classical epistemological theories of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas in explaining the kind of knowing that takes place in infused contemplation, “of which, admittedly, there is comparatively speaking little first-hand knowledge.” See Kieran Kavanaugh, *John of the Cross: Doctor of Love and Light* (New York: Crossroad Publication, 1991), 132-133.

Dionysius teaches.”<sup>698</sup> John considers this obscure, dark or general knowledge that pertains to contemplation as pure faith which enlightens one’s inner darkness and instructs one “in the perfection of love without its doing anything or understanding how it happens.”<sup>699</sup> He reckons that this mystical knowledge which comes through love is given in a manner that corresponds to the mode of faith through which one loves God “without understanding him.”<sup>700</sup>

For John of the Cross therefore, mystical theology is a way of “knowing by unknowing.” This way of knowing (which is a Dionysian concept) means, as Johnston puts it, that “one layer of the psyche knows and another does not know; or that one layer of the psyche (the sensory and the intellectual) does not know what is happening to the other (the mystical layer). The left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.”<sup>701</sup> In this way of knowing, the knower is the soul, and the known is God, who “reveals himself to the knower communicating a knowledge free of reliance on the senses, on words or images.”<sup>702</sup> God communicates this knowledge to the soul (the knower) through love, for love according to John of the Cross “is the master of this knowledge and what makes it wholly agreeable.”<sup>703</sup>

The above classical definitions and applications of mystical theology, highlight a direct, immediate experience (knowledge) of God (in contemplation), which transcends the ordinary working of the intellect and senses. It is an experience through which one is united with God. This loving union results in a flow of “a special knowledge, a ‘secret wisdom,’

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<sup>698</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, revised edition (*The Living Flame of Love*), trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), 3:49. Henceforth, *The Living Flame of Love*, only.

<sup>699</sup> *The Dark Night*, 2.5.1.

<sup>700</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, revised edition (*The Spiritual Canticle*), trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), prologue, 2. Henceforth, *The Spiritual Canticle* only.

<sup>701</sup> William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 34.

<sup>702</sup> Kavanaugh, *John of the Cross: Doctor of Love and Light*, 133.

<sup>703</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle*, 27:5. In the introduction to this stanza, John indicates that God’s self-communication to the soul is done “with such genuine love that neither the affection of a mother, with which she so tenderly caresses her child, nor a brother’s love, nor any friendship is comparable to it. See *Ibid.*, 27:1.

which stupefies the intellect and short-circuits the memory.”<sup>704</sup> It is a loving experiential knowledge or consciousness of God in which, according to Walter H. Principe:

The human person remains passive and receptive within the active giving and penetrating presence, and in which the more profound the experience, the less the person is focused on himself, or herself, the more he or she is totally absorbed in the awesome lover experienced at present; an experience in which conceptual knowledge fades away, even if imagination is not always stilled, and in which direct intuitive awareness is dominant.<sup>705</sup>

Because this (mystical) knowledge transcends conceptual knowledge, it is impossible to describe or to sufficiently talk about it. Referring to the ineffableness of this knowledge, John of the Cross writes, “not only does a person feel unwilling to give expression of this wisdom, but one finds no adequate means or simile to signify so sublime an understanding and delicate a spiritual feeling.”<sup>706</sup>

### **3.6.4 Other Forms of Mystical Experience**

In addition to the direct, immediate knowledge and consciousness of God (or “the dark and general knowledge” called contemplation, in the words of John of the Cross), experienced in mystical theology (contemplation), there are also other extraordinary phenomena such as locutions, visions, ecstasy, raptures, etc, that often times accompany it. McGinn observes that though these phenomena “have admittedly played a great part in mysticism, they are considered by many mystics as not constituting “the essence of the encounter with God.” He pointed out that many of the greatest Christian mystics like Origen, Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) and John of the Cross, were opposed to such experiences, and would rather emphasize “the new level of awareness, the special and heightened consciousness involved in both loving and knowing that is given in the mystical meeting.”<sup>707</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> Egan, *Christian Mysticism*, 4.

<sup>705</sup> Walter H. Principe, “Mysticism: Its Meaning and Varieties,” in *Mystics and Scholars: The Calgary Conference on Mysticism 1976*, eds. Harold Coward and Terence Penelhum (Ontario: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1977), 1-18.

<sup>706</sup> *The Dark Night*, 2:17, 3.

<sup>707</sup> McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xviii.

Despite the negative attitudes towards these mystical phenomena, and the warning from the great mystics on the danger of attributing too much importance to them, Underhill thinks these phenomena “are such frequent accompaniments of the mystic life, that they cannot be ignored.”<sup>708</sup> She argues that though some of these phenomena originate from the devil or from psychological dysfunction, there are nevertheless genuine ones which occur as a result of “the contact between man’s finite being and the Infinite Being in which it is immersed.”<sup>709</sup> She views these phenomena mainly from the point of view of their life-enhancing quality; of the fruits they bear in one’s life. According to Egan, Underhill places these mystical phenomena “in a wider context of a mystical life that gradually purifies, illuminates and transforms the mystic from the very root of his being.”<sup>710</sup> She regards them as “the psychosomatic reverberations of God’s self-communication,” which takes hold of the entire being of the mystic, to enhance his or her life and encourage even deeper surrender to and communion with God.<sup>711</sup>

Underhill’s position echoes Teresa’s view about these phenomena which were frequent in her own life. Teresa categorizes these mystical experiences as unmerited gifts of God’s grace gratuitously given to her for her own sanctification, for the benefit of humanity and the enrichment of the Church. Her life, according to Andrea Dickens, was one in which these phenomena “often provided the impetus for her to change her own ways or for her to encourage others to change their ways.”<sup>712</sup> They enriched and transformed her life, setting her on fire with the love of God and for the Church, which she served faithfully especially through her works of reform. Like her predecessors and contemporaries, Teresa was aware that these phenomena are not the essence of mysticism. The core of mysticism according to

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<sup>708</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, 268.

<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>710</sup> Egan, *Christian Mysticism*, 8.

<sup>711</sup> See Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, xvii-xviii.

<sup>712</sup> Andrea Janelle Dickens, *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009, 189-190).

her is attaining union with God; a “complete transformation of the soul in God.”<sup>713</sup> As fascinating as these phenomena may be, Teresa did not seem to regard them as essential to the religious life or to a good Christian life or even for one’s spiritual growth. Instead, she was of the opinion that detachment, love of God, humility and practice of virtues is what matters most.<sup>714</sup> Hence, she warned her nuns (being aware also of the danger associated with them) not to desire these phenomena or go in search of them or regard them as a criterion for assessing holiness or determining one’s progress in the interior life.<sup>715</sup> And if anyone does receive them, Teresa admonishes that she shares the experience “with a discreet and learned confessor,” and that she is not to “believe anything other than what he tells her.”<sup>716</sup>

We will dedicate the remaining part of this chapter to exploring these phenomena as they occur in the life of Teresa. She had numerous extraordinary mystical experiences, but we will limit ourselves only to her mystical experiences of Jesus Christ; on how she heard from him through locutions and saw him in her visions, and on the fruits that these experiences bore in her life.

Before discussing Teresa’s experience of encounter with Jesus Christ through these mystical phenomena (locutions and visions), and their transforming effects in her life, we shall first of all describe them. Our description of them will consist mainly of a detailed study of their categories and characteristics, first with locutions then with visions. Though we will be considering them as different phenomena occurring at different times in Teresa’s life, it is necessary to indicate that they are also connected. They often times occur together—visions accompanied by locutions.

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<sup>713</sup> *Life*, 20:18. Also *The Interior Castle*, 7:2:1-5.

<sup>714</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 6:8:10.

<sup>715</sup> See *Foundations*, 4:8. Also *The Interior Castle*, 6:9:14.

<sup>716</sup> *Foundations*, 8:5.

### 3.7 Locutions

The term “locution comes from the Latin *locutio*, a speaking, an utterance.”<sup>717</sup> Mauricio Martín del Blanco describes locutions as “the specific function or activity of the sense of hearing.”<sup>718</sup> In them, one hears or listen to what another speaks or says. Hence, there is one who speaks and another who listens or hears. In the case of God and Teresa, God speaks, and she listens or hears.<sup>719</sup> Together with visions, locutions are the most frequent extraordinary mystical phenomena in Teresa's life. She considers them as another of God’s “ways of awakening the soul.”<sup>720</sup> There are different kinds of locutions according to Teresa, “some seem to come from outside oneself; others, from deep within the interior part of the soul; others, from the superior part; and some are so exterior that they come through the sense of hearing; for it seems there is a spoken word.”<sup>721</sup> Teresa’s categorization of locutions can be summed up into three different kinds, namely, external or bodily locutions, imaginative locutions and intellectual locutions.

#### 3.7.1 External or Bodily Locutions

External or bodily locutions take place from outside the person and are heard with one’s bodily ears. The divine words spoken in these locutions are heard with one’s physical organ of hearing. External or bodily locutions are the least recurrent and the most imperfect<sup>722</sup> of all

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<sup>717</sup> Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel-on Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 249.

<sup>718</sup> See Mauricio Martín del Blanco, “Locuciones,” in *Diccionario de Santa Teresa: Doctrina e Historia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, editor. Tomás Álvarez (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2006), 413-420.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid. Teresa never used the word locutions (*locuciones*) in referring to her mystical experiences of hearing from God. Rather, she refers to them as *este hablar*, which literally means “this speaking” or “talking.” Carlos Eire observed that “though Teresa has no noun such as locuciones for this phenomenon, it is traditionally rendered into English as “locutions.” See Eire, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila*, 87-88.

<sup>720</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:3:1.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid.

<sup>722</sup> External or bodily locutions are considered imperfect because they are perceived with the external sense of hearing and thus, can cause more illusion and deception than the imaginary and intellectual locutions which takes place within ones’ inward sense faculties and deep within the interior part of the soul. This means therefore, that the deeper the level of locutions, the more genuine they are likely to be.

of Teresa's locutions, and she only experienced them twice according to her account in *The Book of Her Life*.<sup>723</sup>

### 3.7.2 Imaginative or Imaginary Locutions<sup>724</sup>

These locutions originate “within the person, that is, within” his or her “inward sense faculties.”<sup>725</sup> According to Thomas Dubay, the term “imaginary” attached to this kind of locutions does not refer to what it commonly signifies nowadays such as “unreal, fabricated, illusory.” It is rather “an adjective referring to our inner sense capacity, the imagination, which enables us to recapture various sights, sounds, fragrances and the like through inner awareness of them.”<sup>726</sup> Divine words are communicated to one through this faculty. Though they are not perceived with bodily ears, these words according to Teresa, are understood much more clearly than if they were heard with the ears.<sup>727</sup> And no matter how hard one tries to resist hearing them, they will always be heard. It is in fact impossible not to hear them. This is unlike in the natural order, where if one does not want to listen to something one stops one's ears or turn one's attention to something else, so that even if one hears, he or she does not understand what is heard. In these locutions, according to Teresa, one is completely unable to resist listening to the words being spoken to one. Even though one may want to resist, the power behind these words compels one to listen, and makes the intellect so keenly capable of understanding what God wishes one to understand “that it is not enough either to desire or not to desire to understand.”<sup>728</sup> If genuine, these locutions remain so impressed on the intellect that they cannot be quickly forgotten. Teresa did not go into much details in her

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<sup>723</sup> See *Life*, 31:1 and 39:3.

<sup>724</sup> The original Spanish for this term is *Locuciones imaginarias*, but it has been rendered into English by different translators and authors as either imaginative or imaginary locutions. In this work, we shall be using “imaginative” instead of “imaginary” (especially in relation to locutions and visions), as it appears in Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez's translations of Teresa's works which are our primary sources.

<sup>725</sup> Dubay, *Fire Within*, 249.

<sup>726</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>727</sup> See *Life*, 25:1.

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*



discussions on the bodily and the imaginary visions. Much of what she said about locutions were on the intellectual locutions because they were the type she experienced most.<sup>729</sup>

### 3.7.3 Intellectual Locutions

These locutions occur in the innermost depth of the soul. In them, God communicates to the soul without words formed neither in the sense, nor in the imagination, nor in the intellect.<sup>730</sup>

The words received in this locution are much clearer than those heard with the bodily ears and the ears of the soul. They are considered to be more reliable than other forms of locutions, because they are supernatural and do not involve the use of and the activity of the senses. They “carry with them an assurance of authenticity,”<sup>731</sup> hence, there is the least possibility of any deception in them. The words heard in these locutions are so powerful and so compelling that one cannot help but listen to them. “One cannot resist listening to and understanding these words in the same way that one cannot choose to ‘turn off’ mere human speech. When the Lord speaks in this manner, the recipient of the message listens, wishing or not.”<sup>732</sup> Unlike in the normal way of listening whereby one can choose whether or not to listen to something, in the intellectual locutions, “one listens whether wishing to or not.”<sup>733</sup> In these locutions one only receives words (from God) and never formulates words; one listens to the (divine) words and does not compose them. “There is not the usual composition involved, as there is when, in normal thinking, our intellect goes through a process of formulating integrated ideas.”<sup>734</sup>

There is therefore, the difference between words coming from God and those composed by the intellect. Teresa shows the difference between them as follows:

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<sup>729</sup> See *Ibid.*, 25:1-8.

<sup>730</sup> See Martín de Blanco, “Locuciones,” 413-420.

<sup>731</sup> Marc Foley, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel: Reflections* (Washington D.C: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2013), 122.

<sup>732</sup> Dubay, *Fire Within*, 249.

<sup>733</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>734</sup> *Ibid.*

If they are something the intellect fabricates, no matter how subtly it works, a person will know that it is the intellect that is composing something and speaking. The difference is that in the one case the words are composed and in the other they are listened to. The intellect will see that it is not then listening because it is working. And the words it fabricates are as though muffled, fancied, and without the clarity of those that come from God. It is in our power to divert our attention from these words of the intellect, as we do when while speaking we decide to keep quiet; in the case of those words that are from God there is no way of diverting one's attention.<sup>735</sup>

These locutions also bring about a heightened understanding and knowledge of the things of God. Martín de Blanco describes them as “an intuition of God realized in faith; hence, their contents must be about God, his divine attributes and his mysteries.”<sup>736</sup> In these locutions, one receives an enlightenment on the divine mysteries and on “other sublime things” which ordinarily are beyond human comprehension. One does not understand how this happens. Teresa likens what takes place in these locutions to an experience of “someone who without having learned or...studied anything, would find that all knowledge was possessed inwardly, without knowing how or where it was gotten since no studying had been done...”<sup>737</sup> Through the divine enlightenment accompanying these locutions, the soul, according to Teresa sees for example, “that in an instant it is wise: the mystery of the Blessed Trinity and other sublime things are so explained that there is no theologian with whom it would not dispute in favor of the truth of these grandeurs.”<sup>738</sup> We have an example from Teresa's own words in her *Spiritual Testimonies* of how such an understanding was given to her. She writes:

Once while with this presence of the three persons that I carry about in my soul, I experienced so much light you couldn't doubt the living and true God was there. In this state he gave me understanding of things I don't know how to speak of afterward. Among them was how the Person of the Son, and not the others, took flesh.<sup>739</sup>

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<sup>735</sup> *Life*, 25:3.

<sup>736</sup> Martín de Blanco, “Locuciones,” 413-420.

<sup>737</sup> *Life*, 27: 8.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, 27:9.

<sup>739</sup> *The Spiritual Testimonies*, 51.

Teresa states that it is hard to explain or to talk about this experience, the reason being that it takes place “so secretly in the soul that it seems the intellect understands as in the case of a person who while sleeping or half asleep thinks that what is spoken is understood within.”<sup>740</sup>

On another occasion she narrates how she received an infused understanding of a verse in the *Magnificat* of Our Lady.<sup>741</sup> She writes: “while in prayer on day, I felt my soul to be so deep in God that it didn’t seem there was a world; but while immersed in Him, understanding of that *Magnificat* verse, *et exultavit spiritus*, was given to me in such a way I cannot forget it.”<sup>742</sup> What one is taught or made to understand in this divine enlightenment is fast and instantaneous. In it, one is “taught without losing anytime; things are understood that it seems would require a month to compose, and the intellect itself and the soul are amazed at some of the things that are understood.”<sup>743</sup>

### **3.8 Sources of Locutions and their Effects**

Teresa identifies three sources of locutions, namely, God, the devil and one’s own imagination.<sup>744</sup> Having mentioned these sources, the question that needs to be addressed here is as to how one can ascertain with certitude from which of the above-mentioned sources a locution is coming. Teresa provided an answer to this question at some length in chapter three of the sixth dwelling places of *The Interior Castle* and in chapter twenty-five of *The Book of Her Life*. There, she explained the nature of locutions and demonstrates how locutions from God can be differentiated from those coming either from the devil or from one’s own imagination. She proposed that locutions coming from any of the three sources (God, the devil and one’s own imagination), are to be identified by their features and the fruits they produce in one’s life.

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<sup>740</sup> Ibid.

<sup>741</sup> See Luke, 1:47.

<sup>742</sup> *The Spiritual Testimonies*, 56.

<sup>743</sup> *Life*, 25:8.

<sup>744</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 6:3:1 and 4.

Locutions from God according to Teresa, have the following characteristics. Firstly, they carry great authority and power, for they “effect what they say.”<sup>745</sup> For instance, if God says to one who is in the midst of tribulation and disturbance “don’t be distressed,” he or she is immediately “left calm and free from all distress.”<sup>746</sup> Or if God says to one in great fear, “it is I, fear not,” the fear disappears completely, and one is “most comforted, thinking that nothing would be sufficient to make” him or her “believe anything else.”<sup>747</sup> Here, the divine word from God incarnates itself within one’s heart, mind and body, causing some kind of transformation or growth in one’s life.<sup>748</sup> Secondly, locutions from God must also be in conformity with Sacred Scripture. If they deviate even just a little from it, Teresa states that she would have “incomparably greater assurance” that they are from the devil.<sup>749</sup> She is very much aware that God cannot contradict himself, that his words spoken to a person in private revelation will not contradict what he spoke already in a public revelation through the Scriptures. Thirdly, locutions from God also produce in the soul great quiet, devout and peaceful recollection, and the “readiness to engage in the praises of God.”<sup>750</sup> The words received in locutions that are from God are “imprinted” in the memory. Teresa states “that these words remain in the memory for a long time, and some are never forgotten, as are those we listen to here on earth—I mean those we hear from men.”<sup>751</sup> Fourthly, locutions from God bring with them a firm certitude that in some way the words spoken to one (especially in relation to a coming event) will be accomplished even when all available external evidence proves otherwise. One may have some doubts, but deep within one’s heart one is unshakably certain that the divine words which he or she has heard will be fulfilled. Teresa herself would experience this certitude in her life, writings and in her foundations. For even though the

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<sup>745</sup> Ibid., 6:3:5.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid.

<sup>748</sup> Ahlgren, *Entering Teresa of Avila’s Interior Castle*, 93.

<sup>749</sup> See *Life*, 25:13.

<sup>750</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:3:6.

<sup>751</sup> Ibid., 6:3:6.

bishop refused to give permission, or her confessor was opposed to her proposal, or she had no money to execute a project, “she remained secure in her conviction, and the event would prove her to be right.”<sup>752</sup> The fulfilment of the words received from locutions is a proof that God is faithful to his word.

Locutions from the devil on the contrary, lack the depth and the good effects of the locutions from God. In locutions that come from the devil, “it seems that all blessings go into hiding and flee from the soul, in that it is left displeased and agitated and without any good effect. For even though it may seem that good desires are given, they are not strong ones.”<sup>753</sup> She considers whatever humility that such locutions (from the devil) brings as “false, disturbed, and without gentleness.”<sup>754</sup> She warns that the devil can sometimes counterfeit the Spirit of light, especially by communicating “the words very clearly so that there will be certitude about their meaning, as is with those coming from the Spirit of truth.”<sup>755</sup> But then, he will not be able to fake the good effects that locutions from God produce. For in place of certainty, locutions from the devil bring confusion. Aware of the wiles of the devil, she encourages those experiencing these phenomena to seek counsel from “a learned and prudent confessor and servant of God,”<sup>756</sup> and to be as open and truthful with him as possible. For “in this way,” she writes, “no harm can come.”<sup>757</sup>

Locutions from one’s own imaginations on the other hand, are those that one conjured or composed with the intellect. The words that one fabricates in these locutions are “as though muffled, fancied, and without the clarity of those that come from God.”<sup>758</sup> Locutions of this kind are like “something half-dreamed.”<sup>759</sup> Hence, they have “neither certitude, nor

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<sup>752</sup> Dubay, *Fire Within*, 253.

<sup>753</sup> *Life*, 25:13.

<sup>754</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>755</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:3:16.

<sup>756</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:3:11.

<sup>757</sup> See *Life*, 25:14.

<sup>758</sup> *Ibid.*, 25:3.

<sup>759</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:3:12.

peace, nor interior delight,<sup>760</sup> which are among the effects produced by locutions from God. In locutions from one's own imagination, one can compose (or hear) what one desires to hear (or to be told), and one could even imagine hearing them during prayer. But this is not the case with locutions from God. For one may desire to hear them and would not hear them, but could hear them when he or she did not want to.<sup>761</sup>

### **3.9 Teresa's Experience of Christ in Locutions**

Following Teresa's experience before the image of the wounded Christ that brought about her second conversion (see chapter one), her prayer life intensified, and she became closer to Jesus Christ, placing all her trust in him. Consequently, she began to feel the presence of God (especially when she represents Christ with her in order to place herself in his presence) within her in a passive way. She describes it as "a feeling of the presence of God," which comes upon her "unexpectedly" so that she could by no means doubt he was within her or that she is "totally immersed in him."<sup>762</sup> This unexpected and sudden experience of a deep consciousness of God's presence as she describes it was the beginning of the mystical prayer or contemplation, when Christ began to "invade" her life. She refers to this stage as "another new life."<sup>763</sup>

With this new life, the Lord began to grant her favours in prayer. Beginning with the prayer of quiet and of union, to her experiencing Christ in locutions where she perceived him speaking to her in words that are "very explicit."<sup>764</sup> These words she states, "are not heard with the bodily ears, although they are understood much more clearly than they would be if heard."<sup>765</sup> These divine words which are full of strength, clarity, affection and consolation come usually when Teresa needed them most. Initially, she did not recognize who was

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<sup>760</sup> Ibid., 6:3:10.

<sup>761</sup> See *Life*, 25:1, 6 and 9.

<sup>762</sup> *Life*, 10:1.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid., 23:1.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid., 25:1.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid.

speaking to her. For though she understood the words spoken to her, and could feel their “great effects” in her life, she couldn’t pinpoint their origin.<sup>766</sup> Hence, she was afraid, and sought guidance from her confessors. But soon, she came to realize that it was Jesus Christ who was speaking to her; Jesus came in search of her. Thus, we have a role reversal here, for before now, it was Teresa who sought Christ in her prayers, but now it is Christ, who comes to meet her, and to speak with her.

### 3.10 The Evolution of Teresa’s Christological Locutions

Jesus spoke to Teresa at different times in her life, and her experience of encounter with him and his words had a progressive development. Castro states that it is difficult to present a chronological account of the evolution of Teresa’s locutions from Christ. But he believes her first locution took place most probably between 1554 and 1556,<sup>767</sup> while Teresa was reciting the Divine Office. She narrates what happened as follows:

Once...while reciting the Hours, I came to the verse that says: *Justus es, Domine, and Your judgement.*<sup>768</sup> I began to think of what a great truth this was...while I was thinking that You justly permit that there be many...who are very good servants of Yours and yet do not receive these gifts and favors You grant me because of what I am, You answered me, Lord: “Serve me, and don’t bother about such things.” This was the first locution I heard You speak to me, and so I was very frightened.<sup>769</sup>

Álvarez considers this experience as the first time whereby Teresian prayer “understood and lived as ‘an intimate sharing between friends’ (a dialogue or conversation with God), becomes an actual reality because she realises the willingness to share on the part of God.”<sup>770</sup>

Having shown the above experience to be Teresa’s first locution, Castro points out that the Teresian series of locutions does not begin with the aforementioned experience, but with the experience of rapture accompanied by locution (inner word) which she heard while

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<sup>766</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 6:8:2.

<sup>767</sup> See Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 65.

<sup>768</sup> See Psalm 119:137.

<sup>769</sup> *Life*, 19:9.

<sup>770</sup> See Tomás Álvarez, “Santa Teresa de Jesús contemplativa,” in *Estudio Teresiano III: Doctrina espiritual* (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 1996), 103-163.

reciting the hymn *Veni Creator*, following the instruction of her Jesuit confessor Father Prádanos. She writes that while reciting this hymn (after spending a long time in prayer), “a rapture came upon me so suddenly that it almost carried me out of myself.” Then she heard the following words spoken to her “deep within the spirit,” “no longer do I want you to converse with men but with angels.”<sup>771</sup> This locution which took place in 1556 or later 1558, is according to Castro, what marked the beginning of an uninterrupted series of locutions that lasted practically for the rest of Teresa’s life.<sup>772</sup> Teresa testified to this in her last testimony written while in Palencia. She writes: “The interior locutions haven’t gone away, because when it’s necessary our Lord gives me some advice; and even now in Palencia I would have made a big blunder...if it were not for this.”<sup>773</sup>

Though it may be difficult to specify the different times in which these locutions were more frequent in Teresa’s life, we will attempt to group them into four periods.<sup>774</sup> The first period corresponds with the locutions she received from the Lord shortly after her second conversion, when the Lord “invaded” her life, and the mystical graces that followed subsequently, as we mentioned above. These favours were so frequent that they became a great concern for both Teresa herself and her confessors, who were very sceptical about them, believing them to be from the devil. In fact, one of her confessors mortified her very much as a result of this. He was according to her, “sometimes an affliction and a great trial to me because he disturbed me exceedingly.”<sup>775</sup> It was a very difficult period of time for Teresa. But then, she received a great deal of locutions within this time, which helped to calm the anxieties that afflicted her soul, and served as light that guided and strengthened her in the face of the scepticism of her confessors and her spiritual directors.

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<sup>771</sup> See *Life*, 24:5. See also pages 35-37 above.

<sup>772</sup> Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 65.

<sup>773</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 65:4. See also *Foundations*, 29: 18.

<sup>774</sup> This classification is drawn on Castro’s specifications of the different stages of the Teresian locutions. See Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 66-67.

<sup>775</sup> *Life*, 26:3.



It was also within this period that she received a locution from Christ which consoled her following the publication of the Valdés index of 1559, which banned the use and the circulation of many spiritual books and theological treatises written in the vernacular. Teresa was saddened by this turn of events, which she considers a great loss, for she had profited a great deal from reading such books. But Christ responded to her plight (with a locution) in a way that was beyond her expectations. “The Lord said to me:” She writes, “don’t be sad, for I shall give you a living book.”<sup>776</sup> These divine words came to pass. Not long after receiving this locution, she “experienced the presence of Christ as teacher” in ways that gave her “so much to think about and such recollection...” that according to her, “I had very little or almost no need for books. His majesty had become the true book in which I saw the truths. Blessed be such a book that leaves what must be read and done so impressed that you cannot forget.”<sup>777</sup> Howells describes this experience as the basis of Teresa’s writing career.<sup>778</sup>

The second period concerns the locutions she received in relation to the foundation of St. Joseph’s in Ávila (her first Discalced Carmelite monastery of nuns).<sup>779</sup> By means of these locutions Teresa received comforting words from Jesus Christ that helped her to confront the difficulties and the tribulation her undertaking as a reformer entailed. Through these locutions, the Lord encouraged her and assured her that her whole enterprise will be a success, despite the suffering, the tribulation and the criticism she will encounter.<sup>780</sup> These locutions according to Castro, came to shape an aspect of Teresa’s life that would henceforth be something substantial for her, namely, her status as the founder of a new religious family.<sup>781</sup>

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<sup>776</sup> Ibid., 26:5.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid.

<sup>778</sup> See Edward Howells, “Teresa of Ávila’s Theological Reading of History: From Her Second Conversion to the Foundation of St. Joseph’s, Ávila,” in *St. Teresa of Ávila: Her Writings and Life*, eds. Terence O’Reilly, Colin Thompson and Lesley Twomey (Cambridge: Legenda, 2018), 32-41.

<sup>779</sup> See *Life*, 32-36.

<sup>780</sup> See Ibid., 26:2.

<sup>781</sup> Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 66.

The third period covers from 1562 to 1567,<sup>782</sup> and includes the time in which Teresa lived in the silence and stillness of San Joseph's monastery in Ávila. "From what I can understand now," she writes, "the five years I spent in St. Joseph's in Ávila after its foundation<sup>783</sup> seem to me to have been the most restful of my life, and my soul often misses that calm and quiet."<sup>784</sup> The Locutions she received within this period range from the revelations of the mysteries of grace and sin to the problems posed by the foundations of new convents without money and in the midst of many contradictions.<sup>785</sup> These locutions helped Teresa not only to face these challenges but also to understand and appreciate her vocation as a Carmelite, which entails silence and contemplation of divine things.<sup>786</sup>

The fourth and the last period covers two sections.<sup>787</sup> The first one refers to the locutions that precede and prepare the soul for the spiritual marriage,<sup>788</sup> which takes place according to Teresa in the seventh dwelling places of *The Interior Castle*.<sup>789</sup> In the second section are the locutions that follow this divine grace (the spiritual marriage) and are related primarily to the mysteries of the faith, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation. She writes for

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<sup>782</sup> Ibid.

<sup>783</sup> The monastery of St. Joseph's in Ávila was founded on August 24, 1562.

<sup>784</sup> *Foundations*, 1:1

<sup>785</sup> See *Life*, 38-40.

<sup>786</sup> Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 66.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid.

<sup>788</sup> Spiritual or mystical marriage is a symbol used to signify the state of a human soul that is intimately united to God through grace and love. It refers to what is known in mystical theology as a "transforming" union between a soul and God, requiring extraordinary graces, and to which God calls only a few privileged individuals. This marriage "constitutes a consummate union of love; a total possession, a fusion of lives—through it the soul is made one with God, made divine, by participation, without losing its identity." It is used to designate that mystical union with God which is the most exalted condition the soul could attain in this life. Teresa was not the first Christian mystic to write on this experience of (spiritual) marriage between God and the soul. This phenomenon "had numerous precedents in the history of Western mysticism." The idea that a saintly soul was the bride of Christ came from a long tradition of allegorical interpretation that had been applied to the *Song of Songs*. This notion was first used by Origen in his commentary on the Song of Songs. Origen was to be followed by St. Augustine (354-430), who also referred to the soul as the bride of Christ a few times in his numerous works. But then, it was St. Bernard of Clairvaux who first advanced the idea that the spiritual marriage of the soul to Christ takes "place during the most elevated experiences of contemplation." His idea was to be championed by prominent Western mystics such as Richard of St. Victor, St. Bonaventure (1221-1274), John Ruysbroeck (1293-1381), Walter Hilton (1340?-1396) and St. John of the Cross. See A.A Bialas, "Mystical Marriage," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. x (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1967), 170-171. Also Jess Byron Hollenback, *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empowerment* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 550-551.

<sup>789</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 7:3-5 and 7.

instance, that when the soul is brought into the seventh dwelling place, “the Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons...is revealed to it through a certain representation of the truth.”<sup>790</sup> Her locutions at this period were more intense and penetrating and under a more sublime form. Castro describes this period as the richest from a theological point of view, for it contains Teresa’s most important contributions to Christian theology.<sup>791</sup>

It is evident from our discussion so far that Teresa’s Christological locutions evolved with time. For instance, the locutions she received in the first period going by our classifications above, are those that refers to her interior life; they are words that are meant for her spiritual well-being, her personal relationship with God. Those she received in the second, third and fourth period according to our classifications, are those that extend to other aspects of her life, which include her life as a foundress, her apostolate and her teaching.<sup>792</sup> Her Christ-centred locutions therefore played two vital roles in her life, one in relation to her spiritual life, and the other concerning her external activities. Both functions take place concurrently.<sup>793</sup>

Another pointer to the progressive development of Teresa’s Christological locutions, is on how the two kinds of locutions (imaginary and intellectual) advanced in her life. Her first locutions for instance, were predominantly imaginative, but that changed later on, and she began to receive more intellectual locutions, whereby great mysteries and truths were communicated to her in the very depth of her soul. This was prior to her receiving the grace of the mystical marriage. Subsequent to her attaining the mystical marriage, the imaginative locutions gradually disappeared, to the point that only the intellectual locutions remained.<sup>794</sup> At this point her life was filled with a continuous experience of the presence of God and of

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<sup>790</sup> Ibid., 7:1:6.

<sup>791</sup> See Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 66-67.

<sup>792</sup> Martín de Blanco, “Locuciones,” 413-420.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid.

<sup>794</sup> Ibid.

dialogue with him through intellectual locutions (and visions), which she refers to as “something much more sublime.”<sup>795</sup>

### **3.11 Teresian Locutions: Inner Words from Christ**

We mentioned that locutions served different purposes for Teresa. They were given to her at specific times and for specific reasons. In whatever way they came, they were basically meant to benefit her. Their benefit ranges (as we mentioned above) from pacifying her anxieties and bringing her relief in her suffering and trials and consoling her in sad moments, to giving her assurance and hope for the future, in admonishing her and in illuminating her (mind) on the mysteries of faith. They are a sign of God’s love and care for his creatures, especially for those who like Teresa have surrendered their lives totally to God, and have allowed him to permeate their lives. These divine words (words of Jesus), which are very similar in many cases to the words spoken by either God or Jesus in the Bible,<sup>796</sup> are very efficacious, because they accomplish what they signify. Their power and efficacy lie in the fact that they came from the Lord’s mouth. They are Christ’s words addressed to Teresa; genuine words, which according to her proceed from Jesus Christ in his humanity. She writes: “I don’t recall that it seemed to me our Lord spoke unless in His humanity, and...I can affirm that this experience is not the work of imagination.”<sup>797</sup> That these words come from the lips of Jesus in his humanity, indicates that he plays a central role in God’s act of revelation. It is through him, (the image of the living God) that we hear the voice of God.

For Teresa, locutions “are both words and works,” for through them, the Lord touches the soul, “give it light, favor it, and bring it quiet. And if the soul suffers dryness, agitation and worry, these are taken away as though by a stroke of the hand,” because the Lord wants

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<sup>795</sup> See *Spiritual Testimonies*, 65:3-4.

<sup>796</sup> See Luis de San José, “Concordancias de las obras y escritos de Santa Teresa de Jesús,” in *Monte Carmelo*, vol. 9 (Burgos, 1965), 1419-1430.

<sup>797</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 59:23. This text places the Humanity of Christ at the centre of Teresa’s mystical experience of locutions.

to demonstrate to it that he is powerful and that “his words are works.”<sup>798</sup> She describes the moment when in the midst of her afflictions, the Lord spoke to her as follows: “Do not fear, daughter; for I am, and I will not abandon you...” She states that by these words (which she was willing to dispute with the entire world that they came from the Lord), she “was given calm together with fortitude, courage, security, quietude, and light so that in one moment I saw my soul become another.”<sup>799</sup> Teresa strongly believes in the effectiveness of the words from Jesus Christ, for they bring to pass what they say. She recalls the passage in the Scriptures where Jesus commanded the wind and the sea to be still and they obeyed him.<sup>800</sup> It is this same Lord according to her, “who softens a heart that seemed like stone, and who gives the water of gentle tears where it seemed there would be dryness for a long time.”<sup>801</sup>

Like the disciples, Teresa has heard from the Lord. She believes her locutions are words from Christ because they not only accomplish what they signify, but they also produce great interior effects which leave her in a far much better condition than she was prior to receiving them. These words bear the seal of Christ, they leave an imprint of his image in her soul.<sup>802</sup> They are according to Rómulo Cuartas Londoño, the “grace of Christ,” because of their origin, content and purpose.<sup>803</sup> Though the content of her locutions varies, they are all meant to direct her in her charism as both a contemplative and a foundress, and all these functions according to Castro, bear an irrefutable seal of Christ.<sup>804</sup> As a contemplative for instance, the object of her contemplation was mostly the person of Jesus Christ in his humanity and Divinity. And as a foundress, her works of foundations also bear the seal of Christ, for he was involved in every one of her foundations. Hence, the purpose of her

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<sup>798</sup> *Life*, 25:3.

<sup>799</sup> *Ibid.*, 25:18.

<sup>800</sup> See Mark 4:35-41.

<sup>801</sup> *Life*, 25:19.

<sup>802</sup> Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 69.

<sup>803</sup> See Rómulo Cuartas Londoño, *Experiencia trinitaria de Santa Teresa de Jesús* (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2004), 261.

<sup>804</sup> Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 69.

foundations, is “to renew the mystery of Christ,” for her new foundations would as Castro puts it, re-echo the mystery of the nativity in Bethlehem, the events of the Last Supper and the life within the apostolic community.<sup>805</sup>

Having looked at locutions, we shall now turn our attention to visions. Unlike locutions which Teresa refers to as another of God’s “ways of awakening the soul,” she treats visions as God’s way of communicating his love to the soul. Her tripartite classification of locutions corresponds to her categorization of visions. For just as she classed locutions into three types (namely: corporeal, imaginative and intellectual) she also did the same with visions. As in locutions, visions for Teresa also have hierarchy. While corporeal visions (the least of the three types of vision) are considered to be more susceptible to deception, she assumed that being the most interior and spiritual of three types of visions, the intellectual visions cannot be faked by the devil, “because he can only see the image in our minds.”<sup>806</sup>

### **3.12 Visions**

Visions according to Martín del Blanco, are supernatural perceptions, by an immediate “quasi-contact,” of objects that are naturally invisible, or not so visible to human beings.<sup>807</sup> He describes them as “a certain form of pure contemplation, a sublime mode of mystical experience, which places the soul in immediate communication with spiritual and divine realities.”<sup>808</sup> They are in other words, the supernatural means through which God communicates with human beings and makes his love known to them. Referring to them, Teresa writes: “when His Majesty desires, we cannot do otherwise than walk always with him. This is evident in the ways and modes by which His Majesty communicates himself to us and shows us the love he bears us. He does this through some very wonderful apparitions

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<sup>805</sup> See *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>806</sup> See Matthew C. Bagger, *Religious Experience, Justification, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 188-189.

<sup>807</sup> See Martín del Blanco, “Visiones,” in *Diccionario de Santa Teresa: Doctrina e Historia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, editor. Tomás Álvarez (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2006), 641-650.

<sup>808</sup> *Ibid.*

and visions.”<sup>809</sup> Hence, visions for Teresa, are “God’s communication to the soul, expressed in words and images and sometimes as intuitive understandings of God (i.e., some mediated, others unmediated).”<sup>810</sup> She considers them as gratuitous gifts and favours from God, who though he is full of majesty and power chooses to communicate with his creatures through these supernatural means. And this happens according to her, while one is heedless of any thought about such favours being granted to one, and never thought that he or she deserved these visions.<sup>811</sup>

### 3.13 Types of Visions

Following the tradition that is “rooted in the threefold visionary typology” advanced by St. Augustine in his *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Teresa classified visions into three types, namely, corporeal, imaginative and intellectual visions.<sup>812</sup> These divisions are according to the different levels of the human faculties: external senses, internal senses and spiritual faculties. These three kinds of visions can be pure or mixed, depending on whether the activity belongs to only those of the senses and faculties, or they are mixed.<sup>813</sup> Mixed visions are those containing elements of both the imaginative and the intellectual visions

#### 3.13.1 Corporeal Visions

Corporeal visions are those seen with the bodily eyes. In these visions, one sees objects which would naturally be invisible to him or her. These objects are perceived with the external senses. O’Donoghue holds that the visions or appearances of Christ after his

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<sup>809</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:8:1.

<sup>810</sup> Gillian Ahlgren, “Teresa of Avila (1515-1582),” in *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 311-324.

<sup>811</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:8:1.

<sup>812</sup> Teresa based her discussion of visions on St. Augustine’s threefold distinction between corporeal, imaginative and intellectual visions which he developed in book 12, chap. 14, sec. 29 of his *De Genesi ad Litteram (The Literal Meaning of Genesis)*. She most probably found this threefold distinction (which was a common way of distinguishing between visions before and during her time) in the different books and manuals on visions, revelations and discernment of spirits which were quite accessible in her time. See Gillian Ahlgren, ed. and trans. *The Inquisition of Francisca: A Sixteenth-Century Visionary on Trial* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 20, note 52. Also Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila*, 110, note 90.

<sup>813</sup> Martín de Blanco, “Visiones,” 641-650.

resurrection belong to this category.<sup>814</sup> Teresa never experienced this kind of visions, hence, she had nothing much to say about them. She writes: “I wouldn’t know how to say anything about a vision that comes through the exterior sense of sight, because this person mentioned, of whom I can speak so particularly, had not undergone such a vision, and one cannot be sure about what one has not experienced.”<sup>815</sup> Her knowledge of these visions was however, based on what was said or written about them by men of learning (her way of referring to theologians). According to her, “corporeal visions, they say, are the lowest and the kind in which the devil can cause more illusions.”<sup>816</sup> Though she never experienced corporeal visions, she nevertheless, had desired greatly to see visions of a corporeal nature; to see with her bodily eyes the things she contemplated and saw with the eyes of her soul (in her imaginative visions), so that she could tell her confessors that what she saw was with her bodily eyes, since they did not always believe her.<sup>817</sup>

### 3.13.2 Imaginative Visions

Imaginative visions are seen with the eyes of the soul; with the internal senses. They occur “within the confines of the imagination, where God constructs visual representations from images and intelligible forms that dwell in the memory.”<sup>818</sup> Dubay states that though these visions are called “imaginative,” they “do not refer to autosuggestion,” for one does not fabricate them. They originate according to him, “from another source and are perceived by the inner senses.”<sup>819</sup> Because they take place by means of the internal sense, they are

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<sup>814</sup> See Noel O’Donoghue, *Mystics For Our Time: Carmelite Meditations For a New Age* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1989), 42.

<sup>815</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:9:4. Teresa is referring to herself in the third person. She also mentions elsewhere that “she never saw anything with her bodily eyes.” See *Life*, 28:4; 30:4 and *Spiritual Testimonies*, 58:15.

<sup>816</sup> *Life*, 28:4.

<sup>817</sup> See *Life*, 28:4 and 29:2. Because all of Teresa’s visions were either imaginative (where she sees with the eyes of her soul), or intellectual visions (where she sees neither with the eyes of the body or those of the soul), her confessors thought she had imagined them. Hence, she desired corporeal visions so she could tell them that she saw the visions with her bodily eyes. And perhaps that could have convinced them the more.

<sup>818</sup> Foley, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel: Reflections*, 119.

<sup>819</sup> Dubay, *Fire Within*, 264.



considered to be far more superior and spiritual compared with those (corporeal visions) perceived with the bodily eyes (by means of the external senses). These visions contain very concrete images, and happen quickly. Though they occur very rapidly, Teresa reckons that the image (of the Lord) that is represented to the soul “remains so engraved on the imagination that...it would be impossible to erase it until it is seen by the soul in that place where it will be enjoyed without end.”<sup>820</sup> She points out that this image is not something imaginary, but alive. “Although I say ‘image,’ she writes, “let it be understood that...it is not a painting but truly alive.”<sup>821</sup> Teresa states that she had seen many good works of art, hence, she reckons that “it is foolish to think that an earthly drawing can look anything like a vision; it does so no more nor less than living persons resemble their portraits.” Regardless of how good the portrait may have turned out, she believes, “it can’t look so natural that in the end it isn’t recognized as a dead thing.”<sup>822</sup> She maintains that Christ appears more alive in these visions than the people we encounter in everyday life, and he speaks with authority that is beyond doubt. One is often terrified by these visions because they not only occur rapidly (with the speed of lighting) but they are also accompanied by a dazzling light.<sup>823</sup> A light which she describes to be “so different from earthly light that the sun’s brightness that we see appears very tarnished in comparison”<sup>824</sup> to it. Such visions are extremely beautiful and so far beyond everything imaginable here on earth that one’s mere imagination could never fabricate them.<sup>825</sup>

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<sup>820</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:9:3.

<sup>821</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:9:4.

<sup>822</sup> *Life*, 28:7.

<sup>823</sup> Fr. Laurian points out that the fright which accompanies this experience, “is not sensible fear, but an awe-inspiring sensation before the greatness and sublime majesty of Our Lord.” See Fr. Laurian, “The Doctrine of St. Teresa on Spiritual Betrothal,” in *St. Teresa of Avila: Studies in her Life, Doctrine and Times*, eds. Frs. Thomas and Gabriel (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds, 1963), 144-190.

<sup>824</sup> *Life*, 28:5.

<sup>825</sup> See *Ibid.*, 28:11.

The advantage of imaginative visions according to Teresa, is that “they are in greater conformity with our nature,”<sup>826</sup> for in them we perceive and hear something that accords with our nature. For instance, in them, the Lord discloses his most sacred humanity to one “either as he was when he went about in the world or as he is after his resurrection.”<sup>827</sup> These visions bring with them great favours and inner transformation. They lead above all, to an increase in one’s love of God, growth in humility, and “fortitude in virtue.”<sup>828</sup> Teresa’s criteria for determining the genuineness of these visions (as is the case with locutions) are the fruits they bore in her life. Writing about one of her visions and its effect on her life, she states: “I noted from that day the greatest improvement in myself brought about by a more sublime love of God and much stronger virtues.”<sup>829</sup>

### 3.13.3 Intellectual Visions

Intellectual visions are the most interior of all the three types of visions. They are perceived not with the eyes of the body or those of the soul, but in the depth of the soul. Foley refers to them as “knowledge that is communicated directly to the soul without the instrumentality of either the external or the internal senses.”<sup>830</sup> These visions contain neither form nor image, hence, Teresa describes them as “the most sublime and the kind in which the devil can interfere the least of all.”<sup>831</sup> They are according to Dubay, “immaterial, spiritual and without the traits of sense; as the name indicates, they are seen by the intellect alone.”<sup>832</sup> Though they are referred to as visions, John Welch holds that “they are actually intuitive understandings,

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<sup>826</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:9:1.

<sup>827</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:9:3.

<sup>828</sup> See *Ibid.*, 6:9:11.

<sup>829</sup> *Life*, 38:11

<sup>830</sup> Foley, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel: Reflections*, 120.

<sup>831</sup> See *Life*, 27:3. Teresa states that she learnt this from Friar Peter of Alcántara (whom she describes as a very holy and spiritual man), and from other men of great learning. See *Ibid.*

<sup>832</sup> Dubay, *Fire Within*, 264.

generally beyond any specific reporting.”<sup>833</sup> These visions are indeed ineffable, and the evidence of their ineffability is seen in Teresa’s constant struggle when it comes to putting into words the things of admirable reality she saw and contemplated. For instance, following her first intellectual vision of Christ, her confessor (whom she told about the vision) asked her how she knew it was Christ she saw, to which she responded:

I answered that I didn’t know how, but that I couldn’t help knowing that He was beside me, that I saw and felt Him clearly, that my recollection of soul was greater, and that I was very continuously in the prayer of quiet, that the effects were much different from those I usually experienced, and that it was very clear.<sup>834</sup>

The reason why these visions are difficult to describe is because in them, one is conscious of the presence of the Lord or some truth that has been communicated or represented to him or her, but the means by which one arrives at this knowledge is entirely mysterious. For without seeing with either the eyes of the body or those of the soul one is aware of the presence of the Lord at one’s side but not “with those senses by which we can know that a person is beside us.”<sup>835</sup> This is an instance of knowing without knowing how one knows, which is all the more reason why it cannot be explained or described.

Though these visions are difficult to explain, Teresa states that they carry with them a certitude that they are from God and not from the devil or the imagination. They leave in one more certainty than what other visions do, for according to her, “in the visions that come through the senses (like the corporeal and imaginative visions) one can be deceived, but not in the intellectual visions.”<sup>836</sup> The intellectual vision brings about a constant habitual awareness of the presence of the Lord (who impresses himself upon one’s intellect), a consciousness that does not come from one’s imagination or from any sense-perception or from the devil or from melancholy, but as a gift from God. From Teresa’s point of view, the

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<sup>833</sup> John Welch, *The Carmelite Way: An Ancient Path for Today’s Pilgrim* (Leominster HR: Gracewing Publications, 1996), 126.

<sup>834</sup> *Life*, 27:3.

<sup>835</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:8:3.

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*

proof that these experiences come from God, is evident from the great interior benefits and lasting effects they produce. Namely, they give rise to a most tender love for God, and a greater desire to surrender oneself entirely to the Lord's service, "and to a great purity of conscience because the presence at its side makes the soul pay attention to everything."<sup>837</sup>

### 3.14 Mixed Visions

Teresa did not mention mixed visions in her classification of visions. But in *The Book of Her Foundations*, she refers to a kind of vision (known as imaginative-intellectual), which contains elements of both the imaginative and the intellectual visions. Teresa herself did not experience visions of this kind, rather it was Teresa Layz, (the founding benefactress of the monastery of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Alba de Tormes) who according to her, had this experience.<sup>838</sup> But then, Teresa gave a hint in chapter 28 of *The Book of Her Life* (using the vision of the humanity of Christ as an example), on how both the imaginative and the intellectual visions come together (as mixed visions). She writes:

This is the way they occur: with the eyes of the soul (as in the imaginative visions) we see the excellence, beauty, and glory of the most holy humanity; and through the intellectual vision, we are given an understanding of how God is powerful, that He can do all things, that He commands all and governs all, and that His love permeates all things.<sup>839</sup>

In mixed visions, the imaginative visions clothe the intellectual visions with living and resplendent forms. This according to Dubay "fits the human mode of understanding: insight together with image."<sup>840</sup> In mixed visions, all the interior powers of the soul, (the intellect and the senses), are enraptured by the same presence manifesting itself in a way appropriate to

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<sup>837</sup> Ibid., 6:8:4.

<sup>838</sup> See *Foundations*, 20:1-7. The Monastery of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Alba de Tormes was Teresa's ninth foundation, founded on January, 25 1571. It was Teresa Layz, a daughter of noble parents and the wife of Francisco Velázquez, *contador* of the Duke of Alba, who provided the money for this foundation, following a vision she had. For more on Teresa's account of the foundation of the Monastery in Alba de Tormes, see *Foundations*, 20:1-15.

<sup>839</sup> *Life*, 28:9.

<sup>840</sup> Dubay, *Fire Within*, 268.

each one.<sup>841</sup> This for Teresa is how the imaginative visions and the intellectual visions come together.

### 3.15 Teresa's Experience of Christ in Visions

We mentioned in our discussion of Teresa's experience of Christ in locutions, of how after prolonged and persistent efforts to remain in the presence of Christ in prayer and in meditation, and in representing him within her, she began to hear Christ speaking to her in words that she perceived with her interior senses and in the depths of her being. About two years after this experience, she moved from the level of hearing to that of seeing; from hearing the voice of Christ in her locutions, to seeing him in her visions. These visions were oftentimes accompanied by locutions, which sometimes clarifies visions.

As in her locutions, Teresa's visions of Christ were either imaginative or intellectual. She saw him not with her bodily eyes, but with her interior eyes (eyes of her soul) and in the very depth of her being. She always experienced Christ (in her visions) in his risen body. "The Lord almost always showed Himself to me as risen,"<sup>842</sup> she writes. He occasionally also showed himself to her in some of the moments of his earthly life, but always in his glorified body. She writes: "sometimes He appeared on the cross or in the garden, and a few times with the crown of thorns; sometimes He appeared also carrying the cross...But His body was always glorified."<sup>843</sup> These experiences according to Castro, place the Teresian visions within the realm of the disciple's paschal experience.<sup>844</sup> Teresa's visions always had a positive impact on her. "In every favor the Lord granted me, whether vision or revelation," my soul

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<sup>841</sup> P. Marie-Eugene, *I am a Daughter of the Church: A Practical Synthesis of Carmelite Spirituality*, vol 2 (Chicago: The Fides Publishers, 1955), 256.

<sup>842</sup> *Life*, 29:4.

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>844</sup> See Secundino Castro, "Mística y cristología en Santa Teresa," in *Revista de espiritualidad*, 56 (1997), 75-117.

gained something, she writes. “The vision of Christ,” according to her, “left upon me an impression of His most extraordinary beauty, and the impression remains today.”<sup>845</sup>

### 3.16 The Sequence of Teresa’s Visions of Christ

Unlike her experience of locutions, which started with the imaginative ones and then gradually progressed to the intellectual ones, Teresa’s visions of Christ began with an intellectual vision (a purely spiritual apprehension of Christ), then to the imaginative ones (of Christ’s physical humanity), and finishing with only the intellectual visions (of Christ and of the Trinitarian Persons), towards the end of her life.<sup>846</sup> She describes her first experience of an intellectual vision of Christ as follows:

Being in prayer on the feast day of the glorious St. Peter, I saw or, to put it better, I felt Christ beside me; I saw nothing with my bodily eyes or with my soul, but it seemed to me that Christ was at my side—I saw that it was He, in my opinion, who was speaking to me...it seemed to me that Jesus Christ was always present at my side; but since this wasn’t an imaginative vision, I didn’t see any form. Yet I felt clearly that He was always present at my right side and that He was the witness of everything I did.<sup>847</sup>

Though Teresa did not perceive any form or image of Christ in this vision (since it wasn’t an imaginative vision), yet she apprehends his presence; she felt his presence at her side. She explains that this vision is “represented through knowledge given to the soul that is clearer than sunlight.”<sup>848</sup> It comes with a certain degree of knowledge and certitude that leaves one without any doubt it is from God. This vision according to her, impresses itself with such clear knowledge “that I don’t think it can be doubted.” For “the Lord desires to be so engraved upon the intellect that this vision can no more be doubted than can what is seen...”<sup>849</sup> She holds that in this vision, one perceives “clearly that Jesus Christ, son of the

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<sup>845</sup> Ibid., 37:4.

<sup>846</sup> The intellectual visions will last until the end of her life, while the imaginary ones would cease shortly before her death. See *Spiritual Testimonies*, 66:3.

<sup>847</sup> *Life*, 27:2.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid., 27:3.

<sup>849</sup> Ibid., 27:5.

Virgin, is present,” and that “the most sacred humanity accompanies us and desires to grant us favors.”<sup>850</sup>

Teresa’s first intellectual visions of Christ were to be followed by the imaginative visions of Christ, which she narrates towards the beginning of chapter 28 of *The Book of Her Life*. These visions which she describes as coming with the speed of lightning and lasting only a short while, engrave the image of Christ upon her imagination. But she remarks that this image is not in any way like that of a portrait, but of a living person. “For if what is seen is an image,” she writes, “it is a living image—not a dead man, but the living Christ.”<sup>851</sup> He reveals himself to her in these visions with such beauty and splendour that is far beyond what the human imagination could ordinarily fabricate. According to her, “He makes it known that He is both man and God, not as he was in the tomb but as He was when He came out of the tomb after his resurrection. Sometimes He comes with such great majesty that no one could doubt but that it is the Lord Himself.”<sup>852</sup> Teresa believes the imaginative visions to be very advantageous because in them, the Lord reveals his most sacred humanity in its entirety to one either as he was during his earthly life, or as he really is now in heaven. This conforms more to our human nature. It is on this basis that the imaginative visions are in a way considered to be more profitable than intellectual visions. Frohlich for instance, writes, that “while many spiritual writers place intellectual visions at the peak of mystical transformation, Teresa in some ways gives precedence to imaginative visions—because in them we are sealed with the mysteries of the life of the risen Christ, the Image of the transcendent God.”<sup>853</sup>

Her account of her experience of Christ in the imaginative visions indicates that he revealed himself to her in a progressive manner. First, he showed her his hands. She writes, “one day, while I was in prayer, the Lord desired to show me only His hands which were so

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<sup>850</sup> Ibid., 27:4.

<sup>851</sup> Ibid., 28:8.

<sup>852</sup> Ibid.

<sup>853</sup> Frohlich, “Set Me as a Seal Upon Your Heart,” 29-44.

beautiful that I would be unable to exaggerate the beauty.”<sup>854</sup> Later on she saw his divine face. “After a few days,” she writes, “I saw also that divine face which it seems left me completely absorbed.”<sup>855</sup> Finally, Christ showed himself completely to her. “One feast day of St. Paul, while I was at Mass,” she writes, “this most sacred humanity in its risen form was represented to me completely, as it is in paintings, with such wonderful beauty and majesty.”<sup>856</sup> By revealing himself bit by bit to Teresa, the Lord was leading her in accordance with her natural weakness, for according to her, “so much glory would have been unbearable next to so lowly and wretched a subject as I; and as one who knew this, the merciful Lord was preparing me.”<sup>857</sup> In other words, by showing himself little by little to Teresa, Christ was both preparing and disposing her for the total vision of himself. She felt short of words to describe what she experienced in this vision. According to her, “writing about it was very difficult for me to do because one cannot describe this vision without ruining it.”<sup>858</sup> She stated clearly that the physical senses were not involved in seeing this vision as in the case of corporeal visions. “I never saw this vision—nor any other—with my bodily eyes, even though it is an imaginative one.”<sup>859</sup>

Teresa’s first imaginative vision was to be followed by other imaginative visions which she narrated in *The Book of Her Life* and elsewhere in her other writings.<sup>860</sup> For instance, she recounts how on one occasion while holding the wooden cross attached to her rosary, the Lord took it from her, and when, “he gave it back to me, it was made of four large

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<sup>854</sup> *Life*, 28:1.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.*, 28:3.

<sup>857</sup> See *Ibid.*, 28:1.

<sup>858</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>859</sup> *Ibid.*, 28:4.

<sup>860</sup> There are many other accounts of Teresa’s visions of Christ in her *Spiritual Testimonies*, most of which took place after her receiving the Eucharist. See *Spiritual Testimonies*, 6; 12:6; 13:1-5; 22:1-2; 31; 39:1-3; 42; 44; 50; 52. There are also a few of such visions in *The Book of Her Foundation* and in *The Interior Castle*. See *Foundations*, 1:8; 16:6 and *The Interior Castle*, 7:2:1; 7:2:3. For the purposes of our present discourse, we shall limit ourselves to Teresa’s visions of Christ and their positive effects in her, as narrated in *The Book of Her Life*. Nevertheless, references will be made when necessary to her visions of Christ as recounted in her *Spiritual Testimonies* and elsewhere.



stones incomparably more precious than diamonds...He told me that from then on I would see the cross in that way.”<sup>861</sup> This came to pass, for henceforth according to her, “I didn’t see the wood from which it was made but these stones. This phenomenon was exclusively for her. “No one...saw this except me,”<sup>862</sup> she writes. On another occasion while speaking about prayer and the things of God with Fr. Gaspar de Salazar, rector of the Jesuit College of St. Gil in Ávila, Teresa saw a vision of Christ “with awesome majesty and glory showing great happiness over what was taking place.”<sup>863</sup> She relates that Christ told her and wanted her to see clearly that He was always present in conversations like these and how much He is pleased when people take delight in speaking of him. She also saw in another vision after receiving the Eucharist, how Christ brought her half sister Maria de Cepeda to glory after her death.<sup>864</sup>

One day “before entering the new monastery (of St. Joseph in Ávila), while in prayer outside in the church,” she saw a vision of Christ receiving her with great love and placing a crown on her head,”<sup>865</sup> perhaps in acknowledgement for all her relentless efforts in establishing the new monastery where he (the Lord) “would be highly served.” Once while she was at Mass, “at the elevation of the host,” she saw the vision of Christ on the cross, who gave her consoling words for the rector of the Society of Jesus who at the time was going through “a severe trial...in which he was very persecuted and found himself in deep affliction.” She also received “some other words from the Lord foretelling what was to come and reminding the rector of what Christ suffered for him and announcing that he should

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<sup>861</sup> *Life*, 29:7.

<sup>862</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>863</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:17.

<sup>864</sup> See *Ibid.*, 34:19. Teresa’s brother-in-law Martín de Guzmán y Barrientos died suddenly, and while she was grieving especially because he died without the sacrament of penance, she received a locution from the Lord in prayer, that her half sister Maria de Cepeda (Martín’s wife), “would die this way,” that she “should go to her and try and get her to prepare herself for such an event.” Teresa did as she was instructed by the Lord. She got her sister to make regular confessions and in all events to take care of her soul. “Within four or five years after that,” her sister died in the state of grace. Teresa narrates that Christ appeared to her in a vision after her sister’s death and showed how her sister was brought to glory.

<sup>865</sup> *Life*, 36:24.

prepare himself to suffer.” These words according to Teresa, “gave the rector great consolation and courage,” and everything else was fulfilled in accordance with what the Lord told her.<sup>866</sup> Thus, the fulfilment of whatever words she received from the Lord either for herself or for someone else, was for Teresa an indication that such words were from the Lord.

Once, while in the state of rapture, she saw “the most sacred humanity with more extraordinary glory than she had ever seen.” It was revealed to her in this vision “through a knowledge admirable and clear that the humanity was taken into the bosom of the Father.” For according to her, “without my seeing anything, it seemed to me I was in the presence of the Divinity.”<sup>867</sup> This vision is so efficacious that it remains as Teresa puts it “so strongly engraved on the imagination that no matter how short a while it lasts the impression left cannot be removed for some time; and the impression is very consoling and beneficial.”<sup>868</sup> Teresa saw this same vision three other times, and considers it as the most sublime of all the visions the Lord had granted her, and as that which “bears along with it marvellous benefits.”<sup>869</sup> Castro states that through this experience, Teresa was brought in a mysterious way to an understanding of the relationship that exists between Christ and the Trinity.<sup>870</sup> While Alvarez describes it as a situation whereby Teresa was brought to the “contemplation of the divinity of Christ in the Trinitarian mystery.”<sup>871</sup>

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<sup>866</sup> See *Ibid.*, 38:14.

<sup>867</sup> *Ibid.*, 38:17.

<sup>868</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>869</sup> *Ibid.*, 38:18.

<sup>870</sup> Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 52.

<sup>871</sup> Alvarez, “Santa Teresa de Jesus contemplativa,” 103-163.

In another of her imaginative visions, Teresa saw the Lord in his majesty present in the consecrated host that was about to be given to her by a priest she perceived to be in a state of mortal sin.<sup>872</sup> She relates that the Lord permitted her to see this vision so that she “might understand the power of the words of consecration and how God does not fail to be present, however evil the priest who recites them...”<sup>873</sup> Once, while imploring the Lord to give sight to someone she knew who “had almost completely lost his vision,” and being in a state of fear and doubt that her prayers would not be heard because of her sins, the Lord appeared to her (in an imaginative vision) in his sacred humanity and showed her the wound in His left hand, “and with the other hand He drew out a large nail that had been embedded there.”<sup>874</sup> He then told her not to doubt him who had suffered all that for her sake, and assured her he would grant her request. The Lord fulfilled his promise, for according to her, “I don’t think eight days passed before the Lord gave sight back to that person.” And her response to this was that of thanksgiving, “I thanked His Majesty as though the favor had been granted to me,”<sup>875</sup> she writes.

In another vision she saw herself standing alone in prayer in a large field surrounded by “many different types of people” (she presumed to be her enemies) with weapons in their hands intending to harm her. But then, she saw Christ coming to her rescue, reaching out his hand towards her, and protecting her in such a way that she had no fear of all the people, nor could they harm her even though they had intended to. This vision initially seems fruitless for her, but it later benefited her greatly for she was given an understanding of its meaning. “A

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<sup>872</sup> According to her, she saw a vision (while approaching to receive the Eucharist), of two devils of abominable appearance with “their horns wrapped around the priest’s throat,” and in the host he was about to give her, she saw the Lord in his “majesty placed in the priest’s hands, which were clearly seen to be of His offender’s. Teresa understood from this vision that the priest was in mortal sin. She was terrified by this vision and had wondered that if it had been from God, he would not have allowed her to see the evil in the priest’s soul. But then she was asked by the Lord to pray for him. In addition to her understanding through this vision that the priest was in mortal sin, she points out the Lord also wanted her to “see his great goodness since He places Himself in those hands of His enemy,” and to everyone out of his love for them. See *Life*, 38:23.

<sup>873</sup> *Life*, 38:23.

<sup>874</sup> *Ibid.*, 39:1.

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid.*

little afterwards,” she writes, “I found myself almost in the midst of that battery, and I knew that the vision was a picture of the world; everything in the world, it seems, bears arms so as to injure the afflicted soul.”<sup>876</sup>

Once, while she was having some doubts (in a period of darkness), about the authenticity of her visions, and fearing her experiences had been illusions from the devil, the Lord appeared to her in a vision and scolded her for her unbelief, as follows: “O children of the earth! How long will you be hard of heart?” He then enjoined her to examine one thing in herself: “Whether I was totally surrendered to Him, or not; that if I was, I should believe He would not let me go astray...that I should behold the love for Him that was growing in me each day; that from this I could see that my experiences weren’t from the devil,” and that it is impossible for the devil to give the quietude or clarity of understanding that she experienced.<sup>877</sup> Through this vision therefore, she received the certitude from Christ that her experiences were of divine origin.

On another occasion while reciting the hours of the Divine office with her nuns, she became suddenly recollected and was granted (by the Lord) the grace of being able to contemplate her soul, which according to her “seemed to be like a brightly polished mirror, without any part on the back or sides or top or bottom that wasn’t totally clear.” And in the centre of her soul, Christ was revealed to her in his sacred humanity. She states that she saw him clearly in every part of her soul, “as though in a mirror,” and that this mirror also “was completely engraved upon the Lord Himself by means of a very loving communication” that is difficult to explain. She knows that this vision is very beneficial to her each time she remembers it, “especially after receiving communion.”<sup>878</sup> Thus, she was made to understand from this vision what it is for one to be in mortal sin. In her own reckoning, “it amounts to

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<sup>876</sup> Ibid., 39:17-18.

<sup>877</sup> See Ibid., 39:24.

<sup>878</sup> See Ibid., 40:5.

clouding this mirror with mist and leaving it black,” so that the Lord cannot be seen, “even though He is always present giving us being.”<sup>879</sup> This vision also proved to Teresa that Christ is present within her, in every part of her soul. She affirms through this vision “not only that Christ has been engraved upon her being, so that in herself she sees only Him, but also that this utter transparency of her being has been engraved upon Christ, so that in him she sees her true self.”<sup>880</sup>

In another instance, while suffering from great bodily pains and being very distressed because of her inability to spend the amount of time she had wanted in prayer, the Lord appeared to her in a vision, and in her own words, he “greatly comforted me and told me I should suffer and do all these things for love of Him because they were now necessary for my life.”<sup>881</sup> This vision was very effective in Teresa’s life, for according to her, “I think I was never afflicted afterward, because I’m determined to serve this Lord and my comforter with all my strength; even though he allowed me to suffer a little, He consoled me in such a way that I don’t do anything in desiring trials.”<sup>882</sup>

The imaginative and the intellectual visions of Christ were frequent in Teresa’s life while she was in the stage of the spiritual betrothal (in the sixth dwelling place). These experiences would alternate throughout this stage, leading to the stage of the spiritual marriage after which the imaginative visions will cease, and she would be brought to purely intellectual visions of Christ and the Trinitarian Persons in the seventh dwelling place. In this regard, Alvarez writes that “both the imaginative and the intellectual visions would alternate in the entire history of the contemplative experiences of Saint Teresa, with only the purely

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<sup>879</sup> Ibid. Kavanaugh describes this grace as one of the most doctrinally fruitful of all the mystical graces Teresa mentions in *The Book of Her Life*. This according to him, “provided a basis for her book *Interior Castle* (I, ch.1) and for one of the most beautiful chapters on *The Way of Perfection*, ch. 28, nos. 9-12.” Also in *Spiritual Testimonies*, 13; 14 and 20. See Kavanaugh, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 1. 490, note 6 of chapter 40.

<sup>880</sup> Frohlich, “Set Me as a Seal Upon Your Heart,” 29-44.

<sup>881</sup> *Life*, 40:20.

<sup>882</sup> Ibid.

intellectual contemplation of the Lord, prevailing in the end, becoming stable and permanent, with slight variations.”<sup>883</sup>

### **3.17 Visions of the Seventh Dwelling Place: Christological and Trinitarian**

The intellectual and the imaginative visions we have discussed so far, took place in Teresa’s life while she was (according to her description of the dwelling places) within the sixth dwelling place, which is the stage of spiritual betrothal (with the person of Jesus, the risen Christ) and the union of rapture. She treats here of the different and unusual mystical graces (such as ecstasy, divine locutions, transverberation and visions) that accompany this stage of the mystical life. These extraordinary graces, according to McGinn, “marked the acme of the mystical journey” in Teresa’s *Book of Her Life*.<sup>884</sup> But then she teaches in her mature work *The Interior Castle*, “that the goal is higher: the seventh dwelling place, the state of mystical marriage,”<sup>885</sup> where one, by means of an intellectual vision attains a deep union with the Trinitarian persons through Christ in his most sacred humanity. This experience leaves one in a constant awareness of the presence of these divine persons deep within oneself. One becomes more amazed each day, she writes, “for these persons never seem to leave it anymore, but it clearly beholds...that they are within it. In the extreme interior, in some place very deep within itself, the nature of which it doesn’t know how to explain...”<sup>886</sup>

In the seventh dwelling place (as in the sixth dwelling place) Teresa writes again of receiving the imaginative and the intellectual visions of Christ. But these she states are unlike the visions of the sixth dwelling place, “you must understand,” she writes, “that there is a great difference between all the previous visions and those of this dwelling place. Between the spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage, the difference is as great as that which exists

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<sup>883</sup> Alvarez, “Santa Teresa de Jesus contemplativa,” 103-163.

<sup>884</sup> See McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 141.

<sup>885</sup> Ibid.

<sup>886</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:1:7.

between two who are betrothed and two who can no longer be separated.”<sup>887</sup> This means that the spiritual marriage, (unlike spiritual betrothal) consists of a permanent union with Christ (the beloved), which takes place in the deepest centre of the soul. In discussing the spiritual marriage at the beginning of the second chapter of the seventh dwelling places, Teresa writes that “the first time the favor is granted, His Majesty desires to show himself to the soul through an imaginative vision of his most sacred humanity so that the soul will understand and not be ignorant of receiving this sovereign gift.”<sup>888</sup> Teresa experienced this vision one day after receiving the Eucharist. In the vision she saw Christ “in the form of shining splendour, beauty, and majesty, as he was after his resurrection, and he told her that now it was time that she considers as her own what belonged to him and that he would take care of what was hers...”<sup>889</sup> Mommaers holds that this imaginative vision “has a pedagogical ring.” According to him, it was meant firstly, “to enable Teresa, who has now been admitted to the most profound mystical union, ‘to clearly understand what is taking place and not be ignorant.’”<sup>890</sup> Secondly, to prevent her from losing sight of the fact that it is through the sacred humanity of Christ (in his risen and glorified body), “that ‘so sovereign a gift’ as this divine marriage has been granted.”<sup>891</sup>

Hence, Teresa’s imaginative vision of the humanity of Christ which took place at the beginning of her experience of the mystical union, is according to Philip Boyce, “proximate preparation for the union of spiritual marriage,” when “the Lord reveals to the soul in its inmost centre, through direct knowledge or a so called intellectual vision, the splendours of

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<sup>887</sup> Ibid., 7:2:2.

<sup>888</sup> Ibid., 7:2:1.

<sup>889</sup> Ibid. Teresa gave a detailed account of her experience of the spiritual marriage in the testimony she wrote while serving as prioress of the convent of the Incarnation in Ávila. This phenomenon happened in the context of the Eucharistic celebration, with Father John of the Cross as the celebrant. See *Spiritual Testimonies*, 31.

<sup>890</sup> Mommaers, *The Riddle of Christian Mystical Experience*, 85.

<sup>891</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

the indwelling Trinitarian life.”<sup>892</sup> Teresa describes the soul’s experience of entry into the seventh dwelling place where it abides in the Trinitarian Persons, as follows:

In this seventh dwelling places the union comes about in a different way: our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul’s eyes and let it see and understand, although in a strange way, something of the favor he grants it. When the soul 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 the truth. First there comes an enkindling in the spirit in the manner of a cloud of magnificent splendor; and these Persons are distinct, and through an admirable knowledge the soul understands as a most profound truth that all three Persons are one substance and one power and one knowledge and one God alone. It knows in such a way that what we hold by faith, it understands, we can say, through sight—although the sight is not with the bodily eyes nor with the eyes of the soul, because we are not dealing with an imaginative vision. Here all three Person communicate themselves to it, speak to it, and explain those words of the Lord in the Gospel: that he and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul that loves him and keeps his commandments.<sup>893</sup>

This passage indicates that at the summit of the mystical Journey, (when one arrives at the spiritual marriage also known as the transforming union, and when one is completely introduced to the reality of God), the Trinitarian persons appear to the soul through an intellectual vision and communicate themselves to it, giving it an understanding of the complete truth of the promise made by Christ in the Scripture, “if anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”<sup>894</sup> At this stage, according to Ahlgren, “the truth now flows wordlessly into the soul...union too is no longer fleeting; the soul now lives in the ongoing presence of God, experienced both as a form of resting with the divine and moving with the divine.”<sup>895</sup> And instead of having a partial experience of God, here, “the soul is brought fully and completely into the Trinitarian nature of God.”<sup>896</sup>

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<sup>892</sup> Philip Boyce, “The Marvels of Divine Union in The Last Mansions,” in *Within You he Dwells: Rediscovering Teresa’s Interior Castle*, ed. Philip Boyce (Oxford: Teresian Press, 1981), 47-71.

<sup>893</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:1:6.

<sup>894</sup> John 14:23.

<sup>895</sup> Ahlgren, *Entering Teresa of Avila’s Interior Castle*, 113.

<sup>896</sup> *Ibid.*



Teresa also describes another of vision of Christ that one experiences in the union of the spiritual marriage in the seventh dwelling place that is entirely different from the previous (imaginative) visions which one receives prior to this mystical union. In this vision one experiences the presence of Christ in a different way, through an intellectual vision. She writes: “the Lord appears in this centre of the soul, not in an imaginative vision but in an intellectual one (although more delicate than those mentioned) as he appeared to the apostles without entering through the door when he said to them *pax vobis*.”<sup>897</sup> In this experience according to Teresa, God communicates “to the soul in an instant a secret so great and a favor so sublime,” that nothing can be compared to it.<sup>898</sup> She holds that what the Lord wishes to reveal in this experience (in a more sublime manner), is “the glory of heaven.”<sup>899</sup>

Teresa mentions that the experience of the indwelling Trinity and of the nearness and intimacy with Christ that the soul experiences in the spiritual marriage does not distract the soul from carrying out its daily responsibilities. In other words, the soul is not completely absorbed or lost in God, but on the contrary is even more alert. “You may think that as a result (of this experience) the soul will be...so absorbed that it will be unable to be occupied with anything else,” Teresa writes. But that is not the case, for according to her, the soul is rather “much more occupied than before with everything pertaining to the service of God.”<sup>900</sup> This means that the constant companionship of the Trinitarian persons which the soul experiences, fortifies it to work passionately in Lord’s service than before.

Teresa’s intellectual vision of the Trinity in the seventh dwelling brings her visionary experiences to an end. For henceforth, she would not require further visions (especially the imaginative ones) because as Howells suggests, the “Trinitarian structure” of her soul is completely formed and her “final view of mystical knowing emerges in terms of this inner

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<sup>897</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:2:3.

<sup>898</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>899</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>900</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:1:8.

Trinitarian relationship with God.”<sup>901</sup> She was only to receive intellectual visions of the Trinity and of Christ in his humanity. She affirmed this in her last testimony written in 1581 (four years after she wrote the final part *The Interior Castle*), while she was in Palencia. In it she mentions that with the spiritual marriage she received from Christ in an imaginative vision, and following her intellectual visions of the Blessed Trinity in the seventh dwelling, the imaginative visions ceased, while the intellectual visions of the “three (divine) persons and of the humanity of Christ” continued.<sup>902</sup>

### **3.18 The Role of Christ in Teresa’s Ascent to the Spiritual Marriage**

It is necessary to point out at this stage the important role of the person of Christ in Teresa’s journey towards the mystical union in the seventh dwelling place. Christ in his sacred humanity played a very vital role in Teresa’s ascent to the spiritual marriage. Firstly, it was her imaginative vision of Christ in his humanity that translates Teresa from the level of spiritual betrothal to that of spiritual marriage. Christ himself brought her to his own dwelling place (the seventh dwelling place) “and removed the ‘blindfold’ that had covered the eyes of her soul during the prayer of union and rapture.”<sup>903</sup> She writes about Christ moving the soul from the state of betrothal (in the sixth dwelling place) to the level of spiritual marriage (in the seventh dwelling place), as follows:

When our Lord is pleased to have pity on this soul that he has already taken spiritually as his betrothed because of what it suffers and has suffered through its desires, he brings it, before the spiritual marriage is consummated, into his dwelling place, which is this seventh. For just as in heaven, so in the soul His majesty must have a room where he dwells alone. Let us call it another heaven.<sup>904</sup>

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<sup>901</sup> Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila*, 110.

<sup>902</sup> See *The Spiritual Testimonies*, 65:3.

<sup>903</sup> Egan, *Christian Mysticism*, 144.

<sup>904</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:1:3.

And when the Lord finally grants the soul the spiritual marriage, “he brings it into his own dwelling place...and joins the soul to himself,”<sup>905</sup> in a union that takes place in the very depth of the soul.

Secondly, it was her intellectual vision of the Trinitarian persons that sealed her spiritual marriage. This deep union in the Trinity, “where direct vision of divine truth is always present,” is “achieved through Christ.”<sup>906</sup> Christ in his humanity is therefore, according to Mommaers, “the key figure in Teresa’s final contemplative process, and as the divine person, he is central to her ultimate experience of the ‘one substance...one God alone.’”<sup>907</sup> It is through Christ that her soul is raised to the summit of the mystical union, and is made to partake with him in his relation to the Father within the Trinity. Here Christ reveals himself to her in the depth of her being as he did to the disciples behind closed doors. He unites himself with her in an inseparable way. Her soul is made one with Christ in such a way that “just as those who are married cannot be separated,” he doesn’t want to be separate from her.<sup>908</sup> She used other comparisons to express further, the indissoluble nature of the union between herself and Christ in the spiritual marriage. This union according to her, “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 divided or separated from the water of the river. Or...like what we have when a little stream enters the sea; there is no means of separating them.”<sup>909</sup> It is thus, a transforming union in which Teresa experiences her soul permanently united with Christ, and whereby she enjoys his (divine) presence on a regular basis.

The effect of this transforming union (in the spiritual marriage) is among other things, an identification with Christ. The transformation that takes place at this stage is the

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<sup>905</sup> Ibid., 7:1:5.

<sup>906</sup> McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 141.

<sup>907</sup> Mommaers, *The Riddle of Christian Mystical Experience*, 87.

<sup>908</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:2:3.

<sup>909</sup> Ibid., 7:2:4.

experience of a new life. For here, according to Teresa, the soul dies “because its life is now Christ.”<sup>910</sup> She no longer has other desires. Her will is fully identified with that of Christ. To express the new life, Teresa made allusions to some biblical passages as follow: “Here,” she writes, “an abundance of water is given to this deer that was wounded. Here one delights in God’s tabernacle. Here the dove Noah sent out to see if the storm was over finds the olive branch as a sign of firm ground discovered amid the floods and tempest of this world.”<sup>911</sup> This new life in Christ, calls for an ongoing imitation of his life and of his sufferings, which according to Teresa is the reason why the Lord grants the spiritual marriage and other mystical favours. She writes that “his majesty couldn’t grant us a greater favor than to give us a life that would be an imitation of the life his beloved Son lived.” He gives these favours also so as to fortify our weakness and to enable us “to imitate him in his great sufferings.”<sup>912</sup> She notes that those who were closer to Christ, like his Mother and the apostles underwent the greatest sufferings and trials. For Teresa therefore, Christ is our companion in our journey, our true life and the model to imitate, especially in his suffering.<sup>913</sup>

With her experience of the spiritual marriage with Christ and of sharing intimately in the life of the divine persons in the seventh dwelling place, Teresa could say with St. Paul, “for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”<sup>914</sup> She was to live in a constant awareness of the presence of Christ within her. In this regard, she declares that “any one whom the Lord places in the seventh dwelling place...such a person walks continually in an admirable way with Christ, our Lord, in whom the divine and the human are joined and who is always that person’s companion.”<sup>915</sup> Furthermore, Christ was to live “within her and through her by

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<sup>910</sup> Ibid., 7:2:5.

<sup>911</sup> Ibid., 7:3:13. See Also Psalm 42:2; Revelations 21:3 and Genesis 8:8-12.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid.,7:4:4.

<sup>913</sup> See John Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 196.

<sup>914</sup> See Philippians 1:21.

<sup>915</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:9.

means of her virtuous deeds and intentions.”<sup>916</sup> Thus, she was to live out this transforming union through a life of love for neighbour (in the practice of virtues) and of service to the Church, which for her is the core of the spiritual marriage. Writing to her nuns, she states: “this is the reason for prayer my daughters, the purpose of this spiritual marriage is: the birth always of good works, good works.”<sup>917</sup> She also draws our attention to the fact that what counts most in these good works is the love with which one does them, for such is what pleases the Lord. “The Lord doesn’t look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done,” she writes.<sup>918</sup>

### **3.19 The Effects of Teresa’s Christological Visions**

Going through Teresa’s innumerable visions of Christ, one may be tempted to dismiss them (especially from a psychiatric and scientific point of view) as products of hysteria or hallucinations. But our aim so far had been to look at them from a theological perspective; from the point of view of the good effects they produce in Teresa’s life, on how they helped her above all in the practice of virtues. Hence, we hold that her visions are both charismatic and supernatural graces gratuitously given to Teresa by God for the sanctification of her soul, for the benefit of humanity and for the good of the Church.

Her experience of the Risen Lord in her visions did bring a great transformation in her life. They were according to her, “a powerful help towards possessing the virtues with higher perfection.”<sup>919</sup> Her visions left in her the virtues of fortitude and humility especially. For through them she got the fortitude to cope with the great difficulties and challenges she encountered as a woman mystic and a reformer. She also perceived from them the sense of how weak and limited she is (self-knowledge) before the great majesty (of Christ) whom she

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<sup>916</sup> Hollenback, *Mysticism*, 555.

<sup>917</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:4:6.

<sup>918</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.4.15.

<sup>919</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:9:17.

saw in her visions, and the extent to which she needs him in her life and how she had offended him. This realization increased her humility and her dependence on Christ. Teresa always stands in awe of the mysterious nature of her visions. Her inability to understand how these visions come about and her awareness that they are far beyond what she could ordinarily bring about by herself, leaves her more humbled before “this Lord,” who according to her is “so powerful that He can do what we cannot even understand.”<sup>920</sup> Her visions of Christ also bestow on her soul peace, consolations, spiritual delight, “little esteem of earthly things save for those that can be used for the service of so great a God,”<sup>921</sup> and a lot more. Castro states that, “all these effects evidently have a Christological nuance, since they are provoked by visions, which are mostly Christological.”<sup>922</sup>

The good effects (jewels, as she calls them) which her visions left in her soul were so obvious that she would present them to those who were sceptical about them, as proofs of their divine origin. “I was able to show them these jewels,” she writes, “because all who knew me saw clearly that my soul was changed, and my confessor told me so. The difference in all things was very great; it was not feigned, but all could see it very clearly.”<sup>923</sup> Through her visions also she experienced within herself a powerful and a transforming grace that increased her faith and her love of Christ, and her desire to serve his bride the Church and humanity at large. Pope Gregory XV, confirms this in his Bull of Canonization of Teresa of Avila. He writes:

The chief among Teresa’s virtues was the love of God, which our Lord Jesus Christ increased by means of many visions and revelations. He made her His spouse on one occasion. At other times she saw an angel with a flaming dart piercing her heart. Through these heavenly gifts the flame of divine love in her heart became so strong that, inspired by God, she made

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<sup>920</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 58:20.

<sup>921</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:5:10.

<sup>922</sup> Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 62.

<sup>923</sup> *Life*, 28:13.

the extremely difficult vow of always doing what seemed to her most perfect and most conducive to God's glory."<sup>924</sup>

Thus, the "christophanies" that Teresa experienced through intellectual and imaginative visions, were the foundations of her mission (in the Carmelite Order and in the Church), as a teacher, mystical writer and a founder—all to God's glory.<sup>925</sup>

Another point worth mentioning here also, is that Teresa's visions of Christ (as well as the locutions from him), were never destined for the Church as was the case with those of other mystics and saints, such as Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373), Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), and Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690), etc. They rather consist as Kavanaugh points out, "of an inner experience of the content of Revelation."<sup>926</sup> For while they issued from within the faith, they "also brought what was contained in that faith into sharper focus resulting for her in a convinced and powerful awareness of faith's mysteries."<sup>927</sup> Through her visions and other revelations for instance, she came to know from experience what she already knew in the dark light of faith (like the mysteries of the incarnation, the Trinity, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, etc).

### **3.20 Conclusion**

Our aim in this chapter has been to explore Teresa's mystical experience of Christ. Given that our study lies within the scope of mysticism and bearing in mind that this term has over the years received some different vague and wrong connotations that are far from what it really signifies, we undertook at the beginning of this chapter to clarify these misconceptions by showing what mysticism is and what it is not. Namely, that mysticism is not "an opinion," or a philosophy, that it has nothing to do with the "pursuit of occult knowledge," neither is it

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<sup>924</sup> Gregory XV in *The Bull of Canonization of Teresa of Avila*. [http://www.carmelitaniscalzi.com/en/mc-events/st-teresa-of-jesus/?mc\\_id=9620](http://www.carmelitaniscalzi.com/en/mc-events/st-teresa-of-jesus/?mc_id=9620) (accessed March 4, 2019).

<sup>925</sup> For more on Teresa's mystical experiences and their usefulness for the Church, especially on how, they served to reassert central beliefs of the Church that were being challenged by Protestants at the time, see Eire, "Ecstasy as Polemic: Mysticism and the Catholic Reformation," 3-23.

<sup>926</sup> See, *The Way of Perfection* (Introduction), 11.

<sup>927</sup> Ibid.

only about "mystical experiences," nor any kind of "religious queerness," but what constitute its essence is union with God; union of the human soul with the divine (known as divinization or deification).

For a proper understanding of the term mysticism, we also explored its etymology and how it came to be adopted into the Christian vocabulary. We also showed the early Church Fathers' take on it, and how they applied it to the Christian mysteries. They used it essentially to describe all the divine reality ushered in by Christ, through the Scriptures and in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. They all used it in relation to an experiential way of knowing God, that leads one to union with him.

Having considered what mysticism is and what it is not, and its place in the Christian mystical tradition, we then focused on Teresa's contribution to this field; on her mystical teachings especially in relation to her mystical experiences of Christ in her locutions and visions, and the fruit they bore in her life. Teresa's experience of Christ involves a journey from the ascetical to the mystical; from going in search of Christ through prayer, to Christ coming in search of her by revealing himself to her through the mystical phenomena of locutions and visions. Birgitta Mark describes the mystical process as "a path that leads the travelling soul from the natural to the supernatural," enabling it to attain a "mystical union with God."<sup>928</sup> This description is true of Teresa's mystical itinerary towards an encounter with Christ. For after prolonged and persistent efforts in the practice of prayer (especially in meditation on the life and passion of Christ, and in representing him within her), Teresa began to hear Christ speaking to her through locutions which she perceived only with her interior senses and in the depths of her soul. This was to be followed by a series of visions (intellectual and imaginative visions) in which she saw Christ appearing to her in his risen and glorified humanity. We showed in this chapter, how these phenomena transformed

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<sup>928</sup> Birgitta Mark, *Mysticism and Cognition: The Cognitive Development of John of the Cross as Revealed in his Works* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2000), 150.



Teresa's life, leading her most especially to an intense life of communion with Christ, culminating in her union with him in the mystical marriage. And how as a sequel to this encounter she was to commit herself to serving Christ in the Church.

We also indicated in this chapter that though the mystical phenomena of locutions and visions abound in Teresa's life, they are not "arbitrary graces," but are rather given to her for a specific purpose, and that they fulfilled the particular "needs that exist at the time they are given."<sup>929</sup>

In the next chapter we shall explore Teresa's Eucharistic experience, and show how the Eucharist is at the centre of her experience of Christ in prayer and in her mystical experience of him in locutions and visions. Given that the centrality of the Eucharist in the above-mentioned aspects of Teresa's Christological experiences has often been neglected, we shall be giving it the attention it deserves in the next chapter.

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<sup>929</sup> Foley, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel: Reflections*, 124.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CENTRALITY OF THE EUCHARIST IN TERESA'S EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

In chapters two and three we looked at Teresa's experience of Christ in prayer and her mystical experience of him in locutions and visions respectively. We showed that her experience in the former consists of her sustained efforts (supported by grace) to be in the presence of Christ in prayer by meditating on his life and passion and in representing him within her. While the latter (a gratuitous gift of grace, not acquired through human efforts) consists of her mystical experiences of Christ; of him coming in search of her and revealing himself to her. They represent divine activity in a person; when God takes complete possession of one's life. In this chapter we shall explore Teresa's Eucharistic experience, and show how the Eucharist is at the centre of her experience of Christ in prayer and in her mystical experiences of him in locutions and visions. As a religious nun Teresa's life was centred on regular celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist which she received on a daily basis. Furthermore, as a contemplative nun, her prayer flows from the Eucharist. Her prayer finds its highest expression in the Eucharist where she encountered the sacramental presence of Christ.

Eucharistic Communion<sup>930</sup> was at the centre of Teresa's life and experiences. She attached a great importance to the moments after receiving the Eucharist for she believes that it is the risen and the glorified Christ who comes to her in those moments. She writes: "Sometimes he comes with such great majesty that no one could doubt but that it is the Lord

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<sup>930</sup> Teresa never used the term Eucharist. She always speaks of the Blessed Sacrament (*Santísimo Sacramento*). This term appeared sixty times in all of her writings. By it she means the real presence of Jesus in the tabernacle; his risen and glorified Humanity present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. She used the verb (*comulgar*) "to commune" or "to receive communion" in relation to receiving the Eucharist, about a hundred and three times, and the noun (*Comunión*) Communion eight times, and in the plural (*Comuniones*) Communions five times. See Mauricio Martín del Blanco, "Los tres Doctores del Carmelo teresiano y la Eucaristía," in *Monte Carmelo: revista de estudios e información carmelitanos*, vol. 114, no. 2 (2006), 231-255.

himself. Especially after receiving communion—for we know that he is present, since our faith tells us this.”<sup>931</sup> According to Cardinal Schonborn, “Teresa knows that the whole sacramental dimension of the Church stands or falls with the abiding, glorified humanity of Christ. She knows that the Risen One is near us now in the Sacrament.”<sup>932</sup> Hence, the time after receiving Communion becomes for her an intense moment of encounter and communion with Christ who has entered into her soul; an ideal time to pray and to grow in intimacy with him. It is also an occasion of her many mystical graces (her visions and locutions, especially).

Before embarking on a study of Teresa’s sense of the Eucharist and its centrality in her experience of Christ in prayer and in her mystical experiences in locutions and visions, we shall begin by considering the background of her Eucharistic piety: this will involve a close look at the Eucharistic formation she received both at home (before becoming a nun), and as a nun in the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation in Avila, where she lived for about twenty-seven years (1535-1562). We shall consider each of these stages of her Eucharistic formation and how they influenced her.

#### **4.1 Teresa’s Eucharistic Formation at Home**

Not much is known about the Eucharistic formation that Teresa could have received at home in her childhood and adolescent age before she entered Carmel. There is no account of her catechetical initiation or an existing reference to when she made her First Holy Communion.<sup>933</sup> These events did not appear in the early part of *The Book of her Life* where she recounted the memories of her childhood. As a matter of fact, she did not include them among the things or practices (such as reading good books, praying—which includes devotions to “our Lady and to some of the saints”), which awakened her to the practice of

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<sup>931</sup> *Life*, 28:8.

<sup>932</sup> Christoph Cardinal Schonborn, *God Sent his Son: A Contemporary Christology*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 342.

<sup>933</sup> Salvador Ros García, “Eucaristía y experiencia mística en santa Teresa”, in *Revista de espiritualidad*, vol. 74 (2015), 465-483.

virtue, and had helped her “to understand the truth.”<sup>934</sup> One has to go through a good number of pages in *The Book of Her Life* to find where Teresa first made reference to her partaking in the sacrament of the Eucharist and Penance, and some mention about Mass.<sup>935</sup>

Though Teresa did not mention anything about her Eucharistic formation and practice in her childhood and adolescent age before she became a nun, there is no doubt however, that she would have participated in what would be considered normal Eucharistic piety and practices in every Christian home in the pre-Tridentine Church. This includes: Participation at Sunday Mass, receiving Communion at Eastertide and on particular family occasions, participation in the popular Eucharistic processions and pageants around the solemnity of *Corpus Christi*.<sup>936</sup> These family and communal practices would definitely have impacted a lot on Teresa, instilling in her great a sense of reverence and devotion to the Eucharist.

Having considered Teresa’s Eucharistic formation at home, we shall now look at her Eucharistic formation in Carmel. But before doing that, it would be appropriate to first of all examine the place of the Eucharist and its practice in the Carmelite tradition; what the Eucharist signifies for the Carmelites and how their way of life revolves around this mystery. This will give us a background to what informed Teresa’s sense of the Eucharist and her Eucharistic piety.

## **4.2 Carmel and the Eucharist**

The Eucharist has always been at the centre of the Carmelite life. It is indeed “a vital and central Carmelite value.”<sup>937</sup> Life in Carmel (especially among the first Carmelite hermits on Mount Carmel), revolved around the Eucharistic celebration.

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<sup>934</sup> See *Life*, 1:1 and 5; 3:5.

<sup>935</sup> See *Ibid.*, 4:9; 5:4; 5:10; 6:6; 7:11; 7:21.

<sup>936</sup> See Tomás Álvarez, “Eucaristía” in *Diccionario de Santa Teresa: Doctrina e Historia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, editor. Tomás Álvarez (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2006), 247-279.

<sup>937</sup> Christopher O’Donnell, “The Eucharist and Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906),” in *Hidden Riches: The Eucharist in the Carmelite Tradition*, ed. Eltin Griffin (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2005), 44-68.

The Carmelite Rule (or *Rule of St. Albert*<sup>938</sup> as it is called) spelt this out clearly as follows: “An oratory should be built as conveniently as possible among the cells, where, if it can be done without difficulty, you are to gather each morning to hear Mass.”<sup>939</sup> The Rule places Mass (or Eucharistic celebration), at the heart of the Carmelite life. Thus, it is to become the place of encounter; where the hermit–brothers meet one another and the Lord. Mass was, according to Patrick McMahoan, “their one, daily community exercise.”<sup>940</sup> These first Carmelites (hermit–brothers), did everything else (such as reciting the Psalms, meals, etc) alone in their various cells, but Mass was the only event that brings them together every day. Patrick Mullins states that “apart from their regular encounters with whoever distributed their food and other basic necessities to them in their cells, and the weekly meeting for fraternal correction,” it was only during their daily morning gathering for Mass that the hermits met with one another.<sup>941</sup> Wilfrid McGreal for his part, linked the daily celebration of Mass with fraternal communion. He observes that “if anything is at the heart of the Rule it is the daily celebration of the Eucharist and the brotherly communion that it achieves.”<sup>942</sup> Eucharistic

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<sup>938</sup> The Carmelite rule, also called the *Rule of St. Albert* (by which all Carmelites, both religious and laity live) “was first given to a group of Christian hermits gathered on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land,” by St. Albert the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem (+1214), somewhere between 1206 and 1214. The rule, considered as the shortest of all rules of consecrated life in the history of the Church, was directed to “Brother B.,” to whom Carmelites refer by tradition as Brother Brocard. (Though there was no historical evidence of his identity). *The Rule of Albert*, which became a way of life (*Formula Vitae*) for the Carmelites, received a temporary approval by Pope Gregory IX (1145-1241) in 1229. And in 1247 Pope Innocent IV (1195-1254), in consultation with some Dominican theologians, “corrected, emended and confirmed” the *Rule of Albert* as a “Rule (*Regula*) for the hermits, who were in the process of becoming mendicant friars” at the time. Part of the amendment was the inclusion of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience and specifying of the Divine Office. See Disalced Carmelites, *Constitutions and Norms* (Dublin, 1988), 21-28, especially paragraphs 1, 7 and 8. Innocent IV’s modifications of the Rule therefore, allowed the Carmelite hermits to live as mendicants (friars) following their migration from the Holy Land to Europe. For more on St. Albert and the Rule of Carmel, see Johan Bergstrom-Allen, ed. *Climbing the Mountain: The Carmelite Journey* (Roma: Edizioni Carmelitane, 2010), 133-152. Also Patrick Mullins, *The Carmelites and St Albert of Jerusalem: Origins and Identity* (Roma: Edizioni Carmelitane, 2015). And Kees Waaijman, *Mystical Space of Carmel: A Commentary on the Carmelite Rule* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1999).

<sup>939</sup> Disalced Carmelites, *Constitutions and Norms*, 21-28 (See paragraph 10).

<sup>940</sup> Patrick Thomas McMahoan. Nine Themes in Carmelite Spirituality 2: Carmel is Eucharistic.

<https://ocarm.org/en/content/ocarm/nine-themes-carmelite-spirituality-2-carmel-eucharistic> (accessed May 17, 2019).

<sup>941</sup> Patrick Mullins, “The Eucharist in the Carmelite Rule,” in *Hidden Riches: The Eucharist in the Carmelite Tradition*, ed. Eltin Griffin (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2005), 102-122.

<sup>942</sup> Wilfrid McGreal, “From Carmel to Avila,” in *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition*, eds. Peter Tyler and Edward Howells (London: Routledge, 2017), 30-35.

celebration is therefore, at the heart (“the source and summit”) of Carmel’s fraternal life, in the same way as it is for Christian life.

Contrary to what people think or imagine that religious such as monks, nuns and friars always had Mass as part of their daily lives, McMahon observes that this has not always been the case. For according to him, there were many religious orders (such as the Benedictines) who never had daily Masses early on. They “only celebrated mass on Sundays and major feasts and introduced the practice of a daily mass later in their history.”<sup>943</sup> But the Carmelites from their early days on Mount Carmel have always gathered on a daily basis for Mass as was stipulated in their Rule. In fact, they were among the few religious groups at that time whose Rule mandated daily Eucharistic celebration. Rudolf Hendriks states that “no other rule for hermits included such an explicit emphasis on daily Mass.”<sup>944</sup> James Boyce observes that the fact that Albert’s Rule recommended daily communal Mass for the hermit brothers indicates that “great importance was attached to the Eucharistic celebration.”<sup>945</sup>

Though these hermits (first Carmelites) attended Mass every day, they most likely did not receive communion each day, since it would not have been usual to receive communion daily at the time. They probably received communion only a few times in a year which was the prevailing practice in the Middle Ages (mostly from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>946</sup> But this practice changed significantly with the Council of Trent. In 1562, the Council in her twenty- second session, (concerning the most holy sacrifice of the Mass) urged the faithful to receive Communion at every Mass they attended.<sup>947</sup> Furthermore, the Council in her Catechism describes as minimal the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) which

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<sup>943</sup> McMahon. *Nine Themes in Carmelite Spirituality 2: Carmel is Eucharistic*.

<sup>944</sup> Rudolf Hendriks, “The Original Inspiration of the Carmelite Order as Expressed in the Rule of Saint Albert,” 65-72. Quoted in Mullins, “The Eucharist in the Carmelite Rule,” 102-122.

<sup>945</sup> James Boyce, *Carmelite Liturgical Spirituality*, (Melbourne: Carmelite Communications, 2000), 14. Quoted in Mullins, “The Eucharist in the Carmelite Rule,” 102-122.

<sup>946</sup> See F. Costa, “Communion, Frequency of,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. IV Com to Dys (New York: McGraw-Hall Book, 1967), 37-39.

<sup>947</sup> See H.J. Schroeder, trans. *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1978), 174 (chapter IV).

restricted the reception of communion to only once in a year. The Catechism reads: “Let not the faithful imagine that it is enough to receive the body of the Lord once a year only, in obedience to the decree of the Church. They should approach oftener; but whether monthly, weekly, or daily, cannot be decided by any fixed universal rule.”<sup>948</sup> Though the Council’s decrees and teaching on the Eucharist gave impetus to the practice of frequent communion in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Council was not definite on her declaration on frequent communion. But this was clarified centuries later when (in 1905) St. Pius X (in conformity with Trent’s pronouncements and catechism on the Eucharist) promulgated the definitive teaching on frequent and daily reception of Holy Communion in the decree *Sacra Tridentina Synodus*.<sup>949</sup> To this effect, Joseph Dougherty states that Trent’s “interpretative catechism remained largely in abeyance until the definitive ‘interpretation’ of Trent by *STS*, the decree of Pius X that more than three centuries later ratified the very idea of frequent reception of Holy Communion.”<sup>950</sup> He notes that “the very title of the decree alludes to the Council of Trent.”<sup>951</sup>

### **4.3 Teresa’s Eucharistic Formation and Practice in Carmel**

The Eucharistic piety Teresa lived and practiced while in the Carmelite monastery of the Incarnation in Ávila, was that which was common in a religious community of the pre-Tridentine Church. What the Eucharist signifies for the first Carmelites (namely, as the *par*

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<sup>948</sup> John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan, trans. *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (London: B. Herder, 1949), 249.

<sup>949</sup> Prior to Trent’s decree on frequent communion, and Pius X’s *Sacra Tridentina Synodus* which authorized daily communion, several attempts were made towards restoring frequent communion as it was originally practiced in the early Church and in the Patristic times, before it declined in the Middle Ages. Spiritual writers, theologians, reformers and preachers of different religious Orders (especially, the Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans), in the Middle Ages promoted the idea and the practice of frequent communion. They “strongly recommended the practice of frequent Communion, even, on occasion, its daily reception.” Their efforts brought about the revival of this practice, and was subsequently endorsed by the Council of Trent in her decrees and teachings on the Eucharist, which permitted frequent and daily communion as the official practice of the Church. See John A. Hardon, “Historical Antecedents of St. Pius X’s Decree on Frequent Communion,” in *Theological Studies*, vol.16 (1955), 493-532. Also Costa, “Communion, Frequency of,” 37-39.

<sup>950</sup> Joseph Dougherty, *From Altar-Throne to Table: The Campaign for Frequent Holy Communion in the Catholic Church* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>951</sup> *Ibid.*

*excellence* community act which brought them—the hermits—together every morning<sup>952</sup>), it also stands for the Carmelite nuns of the Monastery of the Incarnation in Ávila. For it also brought them together as a community every day when they gathered to assist at daily Mass. But like the first Carmelites on Mount Carmel, these nuns also did not receive Communion daily. There were very few feast days within the year when they were allowed to receive Holy Communion. In the Constitutions of the Carmelite nuns at the time, the “third rubric” which dealt with the “nun’s confessions and communion” prescribed that:

They will receive Holy Communion normally on the first Sunday of Advent, on the Nativity of the Lord, on the first Sunday of Lent, on Holy Thursday, on the following Easter Sunday, on the feast of the Ascension, on Pentecost Sunday, on Corpus Christi, the feast of All Saints, on the feast days of Our Lady, on the day they receive the habit and on the day they make their Profession... However, should Our Lord grant such devotion to the community, or to a majority of it, to desire more frequent Communion, this can be allowed with the advice of the confessor and the permission of the Prioress.<sup>953</sup>

In other words, the Constitutions of the Monastery of the Incarnation only permitted Communion on relatively few occasions. It also made provisions however, for those who (out of special devotion to the Eucharist), would wish to make frequent Communion, but only with “the advice of the confessor and the permission of the Prioress.” That was the Eucharistic practice observed in the Monastery of the Incarnation where Teresa lived.

While in the monastery of the Incarnation Teresa observed the Eucharistic devotion practiced by the community. As frequent Communion was not customary at the time, she received Communion a few times in a year as outlined by their Constitution. This must have

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<sup>952</sup> Álvarez, “Eucaristía,” 247-279.

<sup>953</sup> Above is my translation of the original Spanish version which reads: “Comulgarán regularmente en la primera dominica del adviento, y en la natividad de nuestro señor, y en la primera dominica de la cuaresma, y en el jueves de la cena, y en el día de pascua siguiente, y en el día del ascensión, y en la pascua del espíritu santo, y en el día del corpus christi, en la fiesta de todos santos, y en las fiestas de nuestra senora, y en el día que reciben el hábito, y en el día que hacen profesión...Pero si nuestro señor diere devoción al convento, o a la mayor parte, de querer comulgar más a menudo, poderlo han facer de consejo del confesor y de licencia de la priora.” See Silverio de Santa Teresa, ed. *Biblioteca mística carmelitana* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1935), 9:485. Henceforth we shall use only *BMC* for subsequent citation of this text.



been her usual practice until the "paroxysm" of August 15, 1539,<sup>954</sup> those four days in a coma which left her with "everything seeming to be disjointed, the greatest confusion in my head; all shrivelled and joined together in a ball,"<sup>955</sup> resulting in her being "unable to stir" her arms or feet, or move her hands or head. This condition lasted for more than eight months, until Easter (April 6, 1540),<sup>956</sup> and "the paralysis, although it gradually got better, lasted almost three years."<sup>957</sup> From then onwards, she received "Communion and confessed much more often and desired to do so."<sup>958</sup> However, since her terrible "paroxysm" had left her with stomach upsets and frequent bouts of morning vomiting, she had to force herself to vomit the night before to be able to receive Communion during community Mass in the morning. "From the time I began to receive Communion more frequently," she writes, "I have had to vomit at night before going to bed. And it is more painful because I have to induce it with a feather or some other thing."<sup>959</sup>

Thus, confession and "frequent" Communion will be Teresa's resources to combat the pitfalls of spiritual mediocracy, in the tremendous battle and struggle to deal with God and with the world.<sup>960</sup> At the death of her father in 1543 and her decision to undertake a drastic revision of her life, her new confessor, the Dominican Fr. Vincent Barron, encouraged her "to receive Communion every fifteen days."<sup>961</sup> This tentative re-flourishing of her Eucharistic devotion will, according to Álvarez, "sustain Teresa's spiritual life in those difficult years between her 29 and 39 years of age."<sup>962</sup> The Eucharist then, became the focal point of the improvement in her spiritual life. Thus, she would turn moments after receiving Holy Communion into a time of prayer and intimacy with Christ, for according to her, "I knew the

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<sup>954</sup> Ros García, "Eucaristía y experiencia mística en santa Teresa," 465-483.

<sup>955</sup> *Life*, 6:1.

<sup>956</sup> *Ibid.* Also Ros García, "Eucaristía y experiencia mística en santa Teresa," 465-483.

<sup>957</sup> *Life*, 6:1-2.

<sup>958</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:4.

<sup>959</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:11; 40:20.

<sup>960</sup> See *Ibid.*, 6:4 and 7.

<sup>961</sup> See *Ibid.*, 7:17; 19:12.

<sup>962</sup> Álvarez, "Eucaristía," 247-279.

Lord was certainly present there within me,” at that moment, and believing that he would not despise her tears, she placed herself at his feet.<sup>963</sup> During this time too, a group of devotees of the Blessed Sacrament also existed in the Monastery of the Incarnation. The group called itself *Compañía del Corpus* (the Company of the Body), with its own special rules and practices. Teresa was a member of this group, and her membership will prove very positive for her, producing remarkable fruits in her later Eucharistic devotion.<sup>964</sup>

In addition to what we noted above as to what constitutes Teresa’s Eucharistic formation and practice in the monastery of the Incarnation, there is also another significant factor which contributed to her Eucharistic formation. This factor has to do with the books she read. One of such books is *The Imitation of Christ* or *Contemptus Mundi* as she called it.<sup>965</sup> Álvarez notes that while Teresa never actually refers to the famous book four of *The Imitation of Christ* which deals with the Sacrament of the Altar,<sup>966</sup> it is very clear that she did read it. He affirms that she might have used some of its content later in her chapters of *The Way of Perfection* when treating of the subject of the Eucharist.<sup>967</sup> Furthermore, he mentions that Teresa had also recommended *The Imitation of Christ* as one of the essential books (to be

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<sup>963</sup> See Life, 9:2. Also *The Way of Perfection*, 34:7.

<sup>964</sup> See Álvarez, “Eucaristía,” 247-279.

<sup>965</sup> See Santa Teresa de Jesús, *Obras completas, (Constituciones)*, 8. *The Imitation of Christ* popularly known as *Contemptus Mundi*, “originated from various spiritual pamphlets by a member of the Brethren of the Common Life, the lay community formed in the Low Countries in the late fourteenth century, from which came the *devotio moderna* movement.” This book which was attributed to Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), was the major text of the *devotio moderna* movement, and the “most influential of its kind in Western Christian History.” The Spanish translation of *Contemptus Mundi* was already in existence from 1491. See, Hilary Pearson, “The ‘Library’ of Saint Teresa: Teresa of Ávila’s Sources and their Effect on her Writings,” in *St Teresa of Ávila: Her Writings and her Life*, eds. Terence O’Reilly, Colin Thompson and Lesley Twomey (Oxford: Legenda, 2018), 167-192. Also Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*, 139. And for more on the *devotio moderna*, see John van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Late Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

<sup>966</sup> *The Imitation of Christ* is divided into four books each providing detailed spiritual instructions. Book one provide useful admonitions for the spiritual life, book two contains admonitions concerning the inner life, book three deals with interior consolation, while book four treats of the Blessed Sacrament.

<sup>967</sup> See Álvarez, “Eucaristía,” 247-279. Teresa’s treatment of the subject of the Eucharist is found in chapters 33-35 of *The Way of Perfection*.

made available in every Monastery), for the formation of her nuns, with the conviction that “it is an important sustenance for the soul,” as food is for the body.<sup>968</sup>

Another book which was indispensable to Teresa’s Eucharistic formation was *Vita Christi* (*The Life of Christ*) by the Carthusian, Ludolph of Saxony, commonly referred to as *Vita Christi cartujano*.<sup>969</sup> According to Martín del Blanco, “Teresa would have discovered an invaluable manual on Eucharistic formation in the four volumes of *The Life of Christ* written by the Carthusian, Ludolph of Saxony.”<sup>970</sup> This book used by many people all through 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain “as a substitute for the New Testament”<sup>971</sup> (because of the numerous gospel passages it contained), helped Teresa to penetrate the mysteries of the life of Christ. She also used it in preparation of solemn liturgies. She describes how she used it to prepare for liturgy on one occasion, as follows: “One day on the vigil of Pentecost I went to a secluded spot after Mass where I often prayed, and I began to read about this feast in a volume by the Carthusian.”<sup>972</sup> Álvarez holds that it is quite probable that the contents of *The Life of Christ* would be basic in what Teresa will later describe in her *Spiritual Testimonies* where she affirms that “for more than thirty years” she had performed an intimate liturgical celebration on Palm Sunday,” which includes receiving “Communion on this day...” in those number of years.<sup>973</sup> *The Life of Christ* was also among the books Teresa proposed to be made available in all libraries in her reformed Carmelite foundations.<sup>974</sup>

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<sup>968</sup> See Álvarez, “Eucaristía,” 247-279. Also *The Constitutions*, 8.

<sup>969</sup> *Vita Christi* is a four volume work (containing an extended meditation on the life of Christ, especially on his passion, based on the passages from the four Gospels), written originally in Latin and translated into Spanish by the Franciscan, Ambrosio Montesino (1444?-1514), between 1499 to 1501, and was first printed in 1502 at Alcalá. Carrera describes it as “the first in the series of devotional books published under the auspices of...Cardinal Francisco Ximénez de Cisneros, who had established a printing press in Alcalá with the aim of launching the first serious campaign to translate devotional books into Spanish.” See Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*, 28-29.

<sup>970</sup> Martín del Blanco, “Los tres Doctores del Carmelo teresiano y la Eucaristía,” 231-255.

<sup>971</sup> Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*, 139.

<sup>972</sup> See *Life*, 38:9. Also Giovanna della Croce, “La ‘Vita Christi’ di Landolfo di Sassonia e S. Teresa d’Avila,” in *Carmelus*, vol. 29 (1982), 87-110.

<sup>973</sup> See Álvarez, “Eucaristía,” 247-279. Also *Spiritual Testimonies*, 22:1.

<sup>974</sup> See *The Constitutions*, 8.

#### 4.4 Teresa's Practice of Daily Communion

The re-flourishing of Teresa's Eucharist devotion which started following Vincente Barrón's advice that she receives "Communion every fifteen days," took a different turn with her introduction to the mystical life, beginning with her (second) conversion in 1554.<sup>975</sup> As it was with other important elements in Teresa's spiritual life, the change in her understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist would be inexplicable without bearing in mind her progress to mystical experience. Once, Teresa's mystical experience was focused on the mystery of Christ, with particular emphasis on His Humanity,<sup>976</sup> as she was convinced that in the Eucharist she encounters the Humanity of Christ in a real and personal way. "I always returned to my custom of rejoicing in this Lord, especially when I received Communion."<sup>977</sup> Thus, it was normal that the Eucharist becomes integrated into the framework of her Christological devotion.

Álvarez holds that probably Teresa was receiving the Eucharist every day at this stage, (since for her, the mystical life is incomplete without the Eucharist), even though according to him, "this would have been a noticeable exception in a community ambience."<sup>978</sup> This exception, he adds, "would have been all the more surprising given her state of health,"<sup>979</sup> because, for twenty years she had vomiting spells every morning so that she could not eat anything until afternoon; sometimes she had to wait longer. And given that she had to receive Communion in the morning, she had to vomit at night (by inducing it with a feather or something else) before going to bed.<sup>980</sup> Teresa's first biographer, de Ribera, refers to it as follows:

Even prior to her departure from the Incarnation to found these

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<sup>975</sup> See Ros García, "Eucaristía y experiencia mística en santa Teresa," 465-483.

<sup>976</sup> See *Life*, 27; 22 and *The Interior Castle*, 6:7.

<sup>977</sup> *Life*, 22:4

<sup>978</sup> Álvarez, "Eucaristía," 247-279

<sup>979</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>980</sup> See *Life*, 7:11; 40:20.

monasteries, she normally received Holy Communion every day, with the advice and permission of many learned persons whom she consulted. She thus began something that was certainly not usual in the community where they only received Communion from time to time. From her example, however, the community's devotion to this Holy Sacrament increased. During this period, Our Lord made Teresa to understand that He was pleased she should receive daily Communion. Among her other infirmities, she was still vomiting every day, in the morning and at night, but the morning vomiting soon ceased totally while that of night-time continued all her life.<sup>981</sup>

It means that as daily communion was not customary in Teresa's time, and given that her desire to receive Communion had intensified as mystical graces increased in her, she obtained permission to receive Communion daily. She describes an instance of the longing for Holy Communion that comes over her sometimes, as follows:

On occasion there come over me such ardent desires to receive Communion that I don't think they could be exaggerated. They came upon me one morning when it was raining so hard it seemed impossible to leave the house. When I was outside the house, I was already so outside myself with the desire for Communion that even should lances have been held to my heart I think I'd have gone into their midst; how much more into the midst of rain.<sup>982</sup>

Hence, daily Communion would become part of Teresa's life, and she practiced it with great passion and reverence, taking a great deal of time to prepare before receiving it, and remaining recollected in prayer afterwards. Some of her nuns testified to this during the process of her beatification. For instance, Ana de los Angeles (1535-1605)<sup>983</sup> affirms the following about Teresa's devotion to the Eucharist:

It is well known that the said Mother Teresa of Jesus was very devoted to

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<sup>981</sup> Above is my translation. The original Spanish version reads: "Desde antes que saliese de la Encarnación a fundar estos monasterios, comulgaba ordinariamente cada día, y esto con consejo y autoridad de muchos y muy grandes letrados con quien lo trató, siendo cuando ella lo comenzó una cosa que en aquella casa no se usaba, antes le recibían de tarde en tarde, y con su ejemplo se comenzó en ella a continuar harto este Sacramento. Dio en este tiempo nuestro señor muestras de que gustaba de que ella comulgase cada día, porque teniendo entre otras enfermedades dos vómitos cada día, uno a la mañana y otro a la noche, el de la mañana se le quitó del todo presto y nunca más le tuvo, y el de la noche la duró toda la vida." See de Ribera, *La Vida de Santa Teresa de Jesus*, 447-448.

<sup>982</sup> *Life*, 39:22.

<sup>983</sup> Ana de los Angeles lived with Teresa in the Monastery of the Incarnation for about twenty years. In 1562, she moved with Teresa to her new (reformed) Monastery of St. Joseph's in Ávila, becoming the sub-prioress. "She accompanied Teresa on the foundations made in Medina (1567), Malagón (1568), and Toledo (1569)." See Kavanaugh, trans. *The Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2007), (Biographical sketches), 594-595.

the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar, and desired that all others should be so too; this witness observed and experienced how the said Saint practised this and received Holy Communion every day; also how she prepared to do so with particular recollection and how, after Holy Communion, she would remain for a long time in prayer, very often suspended and elevated in God.<sup>984</sup>

María de San José (1548-1603),<sup>985</sup> also testified that Teresa “used to have different sisters accompany her to receive Holy Communion, sometimes one, at other times another, reasoning that because of the company of another sister, Our Lord would forgive her for daring to receive Communion every day”<sup>986</sup>

Though Teresa received Holy Communion daily, her nuns of the reformed Carmel did not have the privilege of doing the same, since as we mentioned, daily Communion was not customary at the time. But then, knowing the importance of allowing her nuns to receive Communion frequently, (unlike in the monastery of the Incarnation where the Constitutions restricted Communion to a few days in the year), Teresa extended the days for receiving Communion in her *Constitutions*, allowing her nuns to receive Communion on a weekly basis, on feast days and on other designated days. In number five of her *Constitutions* she writes:

Communion will be received every Sunday, on feast days, and on days honouring our Lord, our Father St. Albert, and St. Joseph, and on other days that the confessor designates in accordance with the devotion and spirit of the Sisters and with the permission of the Mother Prioress. Communion will also be received on the titular feast of the house.<sup>987</sup>

And on the days the nuns did not receive Communion at Mass, she recommends they make a

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<sup>984</sup> Above is my translation of the original Spanish version which reads: "Sabe que la dicha Madre Teresa de Jesús fue devotísima del Santísimo Sacramento del altar, y deseaba que todas lo fuesen; lo cual vio y experimentó esta declarante, en que así lo practicaba la dicha Santa y en que cada día comulgaba, para lo cual la veía prepararse con singular cuidado, y después de haber comulgado estar largos ratos muy recogida en oración, y muchas veces suspendida y elevada en Dios." See *BMC* 19:563.

<sup>985</sup> María de San José was a very close friend of Teresa. Kavanaugh remarked that “because of her intelligence, education, and other talents, she was referred to by Teresa as the ‘provincialess’ (*provinciala*).” She became the prioress of the Monastery of Seville, and a great figure among the nuns of the Teresian Reform. See Kavanaugh, trans. *The Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2 (Biographical sketches), 645-647.

<sup>986</sup> The above translation is mine. The original Spanish version reads: "Acostumbraba a llevar consigo a la santa comunión, ora una religiosa, ora otra, pareciéndola que por la compañía de la hermana que llevaba, nuestro señor la perdonaría el atrevimiento de comulgar cada día. See *BMC* 18:493.

<sup>987</sup> *The Constitutions*, 5.

spiritual Communion. “When you do not receive Communion, daughters, but hear Mass, you can make a spiritual Communion.”<sup>988</sup> Before and during Teresa’s times, spiritual Communion was recommended for those who could not attend Mass, or those who were at Mass but did not receive the Eucharist sacramentally.

Spiritual Communion tends to be reduced (by a lot of people), to a mere pious practice with no root or place in the teachings of the Church. This may be due to the over emphasis on the devotional aspect of it as against its theological aspect. The practice of spiritual Communion is deeply rooted in the doctrine of the Church. The teaching on spiritual Communion, according to Francis Costa, “goes back to the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, and he and the other theological giants of that age were in turn inspired by St. Augustine writing almost a thousand years before them.”<sup>989</sup> The Medievals used the phrase “spiritual eating” to refer to spiritual Communion. Thomas Aquinas describes spiritual Communion as union with Jesus Christ effected by an ardent desire to receive him in the sacrament of the Eucharist, when one is unable receive him sacramentally.<sup>990</sup>

Thomas taught that the sacrament of the Eucharist can be received in two ways: namely, sacramentally (that is, receiving the Eucharist physically) and spiritually (that is, when one ardently desires to receive Jesus in the Eucharist). The Council of Trent in its “decree on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist” confirmed Thomas’ teaching on the two ways to receive the Eucharist, but made a further distinction. It writes:

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<sup>988</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 35:1.

<sup>989</sup> Francis D. Costa, “Nature and Effects of Spiritual Communion” in *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, vol. 13 (2012), 139-148. In his sermons on the Gospels *De Verbis Domini*, Augustine states that: “Christ is to be eaten spiritually, as He Himself declares: ‘He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me, and I in him.’” Also in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, he writes: “Eat the bread” of the altar “spiritually; take innocence to the altar.” See Augustine’s *De Verbis Domini* and *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, quoted in, Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros Edition, 1947), III, q. 80, art. 2. obj 3 and sed contra. Thomas quoted Augustine’s teaching on eating Christ spiritually, to support his position on spiritual Communion.

<sup>990</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, III, q. 80, art. 1. resp to obj 3 and art. 2. Also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Volume 59. Holy Communion: 3a. 79-83*, ed. Thomas Gilby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30, note 1.

With respect to the use (of the Eucharist), however, our fathers have rightly and wisely distinguished three ways of receiving it. For they taught that some, being sinners, receive it only sacramentally; others receive only spiritually, namely those who have the desire to eat the heavenly food that is set before them, and so experience its effect and benefit by a lively *faith working through love*; the third group, who receive both sacramentally and spiritually, are those who so test and train themselves beforehand, that they approach this divine table clothed in a wedding garment.<sup>991</sup>

Spiritual Communion according to Costa, is based on the theological principle of faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the benefits of this sacrament. According to him, “Catholic faith in the Real Presence assures us that Holy Communion is a powerful source of spiritual life, of loving union with Christ and our fellow-communicants.”<sup>992</sup> Hence, it follows that one can therefore “desire to receive such benefits,” and strive to “bolster one’s strength by means of this food from heaven.”<sup>993</sup> Spiritual Communion satisfies one’s desire to be united with Christ. It enables one above all, to remain united with Christ, especially when one is not able to receive him sacramentally.

As a practice that is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Church, and encouraged by saints and “great authorities in the spiritual life,”<sup>994</sup> the Church has continued to recommend it to everybody even in our present time. In his encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II encouraged the practice of spiritual communion, describing it as part and parcel of the Church’s life. He writes:

In the Eucharist “unlike any other sacrament, the mystery (of communion) is so perfect that it brings us to the heights of every good thing: here is the ultimate goal of every human desire, because here we attain God and God joins himself to us in the most perfect union.” Precisely for this reason it is good to *cultivate in our hearts a constant desire for the sacrament of the Eucharist*. This was the origin of the practice of “spiritual communion,” which has happily been established in the Church for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life. Saint Teresa of Jesus wrote: “When you do not receive communion and you do not

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<sup>991</sup> Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2. Trent to Vatican II (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 696.

<sup>992</sup> Costa, “Nature and Effects of Spiritual Communion,” 139-148.

<sup>993</sup> Ibid.

<sup>994</sup> Michael O’Carroll, *Corpus Christi: An Encyclopedia of the Eucharist* (Wilm: Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), 52.



attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you”<sup>995</sup>

John Paul II’s successor Pope Benedict XVI, also recommended the practice of spiritual Communion. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, he writes:

Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such circumstances it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion, praised by Pope John Paul II and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life”<sup>996</sup>

Though some theologians, like Thomas Aquinas and St. Alphonsus Liguori, taught that spiritual Communion “produces effects similar to sacramental Communion according to the dispositions with which it is made,”<sup>997</sup> while the likes of the Dominican mystic and theologian John Tauler (1300-1361), elevated spiritual Communion above sacramental Communion (believing it to produce greater effects than sacramental Communion),<sup>998</sup> we wish to indicate that spiritual Communion is only a substitute for actual sacramental reception of the Eucharist. It is an ardent “desire for full union with Christ,” in the Eucharist when one cannot actually receive him sacramentally. As a substitute therefore, spiritual Communion can never take the place of sacramental reception of the Eucharist; it “can never equal the power of the Sacrament itself.”<sup>999</sup>

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<sup>995</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. No. 34.

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/special\\_features/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_20030417\\_ecclesia\\_eucharistia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html) (accessed May 25, 2019).

<sup>996</sup> Pope Benedict XVI. *Sacramentum Caritatis*. No. 55. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20070222\\_sacramentum-caritatis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html) (accessed May 27, 2019).

<sup>997</sup> See Stefano M. Manelli, *Jesus our Eucharistic Love: Eucharistic Life Exemplified by the Saints* (New Bedford, MA: The Academy of the Immaculate, 1996), 61. Also *The Summa Theologica*, III, q. 80, art. 1 and 2.

<sup>998</sup> See John Tauler, *Sermon 33* (Fourth Sermon for Corpus Christi), quoted in Hughes Oliphant Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 456.

<sup>999</sup> Costa, “Nature and Effects of Spiritual Communion,” 139-148.

Too much emphasis on spiritual Communion (especially the belief that it produces greater effects than sacramental Communion), would amount to ignoring the “more abundant source of grace available in the Sacrament itself.”<sup>1000</sup> The Church teaches that sacraments confer grace. According to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament.”<sup>1001</sup> If the sacraments confer grace to those who partake of them, then the Eucharist, being the greatest of all the sacraments, “the source and summit of the Christian life”<sup>1002</sup> is the *par excellence* source of grace. On why the Eucharist is regarded as the central sacrament, *The Catechism* writes:

The mode of Christ’s presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as “the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend.” In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.” “This presence is called ‘real’—by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be ‘real’ too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.”<sup>1003</sup>

The Eucharist is the *par excellence* source of grace, because unlike other sacraments which are means through which God confers his grace on the soul, it contains the giver of grace himself, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, really present in the forms of bread and wine. As an excellent and unsurpassed source of grace the Eucharist produces marvellous effects on those who receive it sacramentally, with a proper disposition, as against those who received it spiritually.<sup>1004</sup>

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<sup>1000</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1001</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1131.

<sup>1002</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 11

<sup>1003</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1374.

<sup>1004</sup> For more on the fruits of a well-received sacramental Communion, see Ibid., 1391-1398.

## **4.5 The Centrality of the Eucharist in Teresa's Experience of Christ in Prayer and in Mystical Experiences**

Having looked at what shaped Teresa's sense of the Eucharist and the development of her Eucharistic devotion, we will now demonstrate how the Eucharist is at the core of her Christological experience in prayer and in her mystical experiences (of locutions and visions). A lot has been written about Teresa's experience of prayer and on her mystical experiences, but the centrality of the Eucharist in this aspect of her life has often been neglected. Our aim here will be to give it the attention it deserves. We will do this by showing how the Eucharist informs her experience of Christ in both her prayer and in her mystical experiences. We will begin with her prayer and then go on to her mystical experiences.

### **4.5.1 The Eucharist and Teresian Prayer**

The Eucharist is at the centre of Teresa's prayer. During and after receiving the Eucharist were for Teresa intense moments of encounter and communion with Christ in prayer, for she believes that in those moments, it is Christ himself who comes to her. He is present in and with her during and after communion. Teresa's encounter with the risen Christ in the Eucharist deeply shaped her view of prayer. She referred to (mental) prayer as "an intimate sharing between friends; as taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us."<sup>1005</sup> For Teresa therefore, prayer is a relationship of friendship; a place of personal encounter and communion with the risen Christ. This intimate communion with Christ (which is at the core of Teresian prayer) "finds its source and highest expression in the Eucharist."<sup>1006</sup>

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<sup>1005</sup> *Life*, 8:4.

<sup>1006</sup> Iain Matthew, "Teresa of Avila" in *Jesus in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia*, vol 2: Entries K-Z, ed. Leslie Houlden (Oxford: ABC-CLIO Inc, 2003), 831-836.

Teresa longed for friendship with Christ in prayer; to spend time alone on a regular basis with him who she knows loves her. To attend to his presence. This desire finds fulfilment in the Eucharist, where she encountered the object of her devotion—the risen and the glorified Christ in his “bodily presence,”<sup>1007</sup> “disguised” in the “accidents of bread” and wine.<sup>1008</sup> Thus, For Teresa, the Eucharist is “the Sacrament of friendship”<sup>1009</sup> with Christ. For through this sacrament, Christ makes himself available and accessible to her, and there, she encounters his living and glorious presence. This encounter helped to deepen her friendship with him. She describes Christ as “our companion in the most Blessed Sacrament...a true friend”<sup>1010</sup> who is so near to us in the Eucharist, “where He is already glorified.”<sup>1011</sup> The Eucharist, according to Dickens, is for Teresa “an opportunity to understand the nearness of Christ...because it is in the Eucharist that the real presence of Christ is made present” to us.<sup>1012</sup> For Teresa, having Christ in the Eucharist as a friend and companion, is as good as having everything. “What more do we desire than to have such a good friend at our side, who will not abandon us...as friends in the world do,”<sup>1013</sup> she asks?

Teresa believes that Christ is present in the Eucharist and that he comes to us each time we receive him at Communion. Thus, she recommends that the moments after communion should be the best time to remain with the Lord. It is an opportune time to converse with him (in prayer); a moment for adoration, petition and thanksgiving. “Be with him willingly; don’t lose so good an occasion for conversing with him as is the hour after

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<sup>1007</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 5:1:11.

<sup>1008</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 34:3. Kavanaugh in his interpretative notes on this chapter observes that the word “accidents” which Teresa used here in relation to the Eucharist “was a scholastic term used to refer to the appearances of bread and wine under which the Lord is present.” It is most likely that she got this term from either her Dominican or Jesuit confessors. See *Ibid.*, 389. (Interpretative notes on Chapter 34). We shall consider the scholastic use of the terms “substance” and “accident” in relation to the Eucharist in the next chapter of this work.

<sup>1009</sup> Thomas Larkin, “Mental Prayer—Friendship with God” in *Mount Carmel*, vol. 20, no.1 (1972), 3-13.

<sup>1010</sup> *Life*, 22:6.

<sup>1011</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1012</sup> See Dickens, *The Female Mystic*, 185.

<sup>1013</sup> *Life*, 22:7.

having received Communion,”<sup>1014</sup> she writes. After Communion is not the time to get carried away or distracted by other things, it is rather as Teresa puts it, the time to pay attention to the fact that the Lord is within us; the time to listen to him (as he teaches us) and ask him to remain with us.<sup>1015</sup> The Lord desires to remain with us after Communion, to let “us know that it is he who is present in the most Blessed Sacrament.”<sup>1016</sup> But then, he will make himself known only to those who longed for him earnestly, and are willing to remain with him and converse with him after Communion. According to Teresa, the Lord “communicates his grandeurs, and gives his treasures...to those whom he knows desire him greatly...”<sup>1017</sup> Not to those who “pay no attention to him,” who after receiving him in the Eucharist, “leave him and go seeking after other base things.”<sup>1018</sup>

#### **4.5.2 The Eucharist and Teresa’s Means of Experiencing Christ in Prayer**

Teresa as we saw already, defines mental prayer as “an intimate sharing between friends; as taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.” We mentioned earlier on that meditation and recollection are her means of accomplishing this intimate sharing and friendly conversation with Christ. They are her means of encountering the presence of Christ in prayer.<sup>1019</sup> We intend to demonstrate here, how these Teresian methods of experiencing Christ in prayer find their “source and highest expression” in the Eucharist; how the Eucharist informs these means of prayer. We will begin with meditation, then go to recollection.

##### **4.5.2.1 The Eucharist and Meditation**

What does meditation mean for Teresa? “By meditation,” she writes, “I mean much discursive reflection with the intellect in the following way: we begin to think about the favor

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<sup>1014</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:10.

<sup>1015</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1016</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:14.

<sup>1017</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:13

<sup>1018</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1019</sup> See pages 80-91 above.

God granted us in giving us his only Son, and we do not stop there, but go on to the mysteries of his whole glorious life.”<sup>1020</sup> For Teresa therefore, the practice of meditation is aimed at bringing us to a friendly, intimate conversation with Christ, during which we can reflect on the mysteries of his life, and express our love for him. But because she is not very good at (discursive) meditation; at using her intellect in considering and in picturing scenes from the life of Christ, (for according to her, “God didn't give me talent for discursive thought or for a profitable use of the imagination”<sup>1021</sup>), she had to use other means to control her wandering thoughts and to facilitate her meditation. These include the reading of some devotional books and use of images and pictures of Christ, as we saw already in chapter two of this work. For instance, she used devotional books to recollect her (wandering) thoughts and to increase her devotion,<sup>1022</sup> while she employed the images or pictures of Christ to “engage her imagination” and to help her “enter into communion with him.”<sup>1023</sup>

As useful as these aids to meditation are in bringing Teresa to an encounter with the presence of Jesus and in helping her to converse with him in prayer, they fall short of what her encounter with the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist will accomplish in her. In the Eucharist, the Jesus she sought in meditation (with the aid of books and images, for instance), becomes real for her, he comes into her soul and dwells within her. His real presence in the Eucharist gives substance to her prayer, enabling her to pray without the above-mentioned aids. For instance, with the presence of Christ after Communion, books were no longer necessary; she no longer needs them to help her to pray. “...except for the time after Communion,” she writes, “I never dared to begin prayer without a book.”<sup>1024</sup> Teresa’s experience of Christ in prayer is at its best after receiving Holy Communion, for at that

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<sup>1020</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:10.

<sup>1021</sup> *Life*, 4:7.

<sup>1022</sup> See *Ibid.*, 4:9.

<sup>1023</sup> Daniel de Pablo Maroto, *Vida eucarística de Santa Teresa en el siglo de las reformas* (Madrid: Editorial Claune, 1990), 36-37.

<sup>1024</sup> *Life*, 4:9.

moment, Christ in the Eucharist accomplishes more than what books will do for her at prayer. After Communion, Christ holds her attention, keeping her away from distractions by controlling and taming her wandering thoughts. He, most importantly, occupies her will with love of him. This love (coming from her will)<sup>1025</sup> replaces the discursive toil of her intellect and the wanderings of her imagination. During Teresa's post-Communion meditation therefore, the loving of her will supersedes the thinking of her intellect, and this for her is what determines one's growth in prayer. For one's progress in prayer according to her, "does not lie in thinking much but in loving much."<sup>1026</sup>

What we mentioned above in relation to Teresa's use of books as an aid to (discursive) meditation, also applies to her use of images or pictures of Christ as an aid to meditation. She sought to support her thoughts with the help of images or pictures of Christ in order to arouse her affection for him. She used them frequently at prayer to help her imagine Christ present within her. She writes: "I had such little ability to represent things with my intellect that if I hadn't seen the things my imagination was not of use to me..."<sup>1027</sup> Thus, she needed the image of Christ as an aid to prayer; to help her connect with his presence since she is not able to picture him with her imagination during discursive meditation. But then, she suggests that all use of images or pictures of Christ as an aid to discursive meditation be suspended entirely after receiving Communion, because at that moment, "the reality (Christ in the Eucharist) is already present and no further meditation is required."<sup>1028</sup> No need to go looking for him by picturing him in one's imagination. According to her:

Receiving Communion is not like picturing with the imagination, as when we reflect upon the Lord on the cross or in other episodes of the Passion, when we picture within ourselves how things happened to Him in the past. In Communion the event is happening now, and it is entirely true. There's

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<sup>1025</sup> See *Ibid.*, 10:1; 18:14.

<sup>1026</sup> *Foundations*, 5:2. Also *The Interior Castle*, 4:1:7.

<sup>1027</sup> *Life*, 9:6.

<sup>1028</sup> Maroto, *Vida eucarística de Santa Teresa*, 38.

no reason to go looking for Him in some other place farther away.<sup>1029</sup>

For Teresa therefore, Christ's presence in the Eucharist is "the enactment *now* of the events narrated in the gospel,"<sup>1030</sup> namely, of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ. She believes it is futile to go about creating mental pictures of him in these gospel episodes after receiving Communion, for he is present within us at that moment. Because she believes he is really present after Communion, her attitude then, would be to remain in silence with him (who has entered within her), to experience his presence and to keep him company in prayer. In this case, the experience of Christ she sought in prayer through (discursive) meditation (using images or pictures of him, as an aid), could be said to be realized in the context of the Eucharist, where she experienced his real bodily presence. After Communion is therefore, her privileged moment for meditation (for prayer). Rowan Williams states that she "found post-Communion meditation the heart of her prayer."<sup>1031</sup>

Still on the dos and don'ts after Communion, Teresa reiterates that after Communion is not the time to picture the events of the gospels to oneself, or the time to use images and pictures of Christ as an aid to prayer. According to her, to pray to Christ after Communion "by looking at his picture...would seem to me foolish."<sup>1032</sup> She compares it to one ignoring the presence of a beloved friend who came visiting, and concentrating on the friend's picture. "Wouldn't it be silly," she writes, "if a person we love very much and of whom we have a portrait came to see us and we stopped speaking with him so as to carry on a conversation with the portrait?"<sup>1033</sup> She suggests that the appropriate time to use images or pictures of Christ as an aid to prayer is "when he himself is absent, or when by means of a great dryness he wants to make us feel he is absent. It is then a wonderful comfort to see an image of One

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<sup>1029</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:8.

<sup>1030</sup> Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila* (London: Continuum, 2003), 124.

<sup>1031</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>1032</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:11.

<sup>1033</sup> *Ibid.*



whom we have so much reason to love.”<sup>1034</sup> Knowing that Christ himself is truly present in the Eucharist, Teresa recommends that after receiving him at Communion time, one “closes the eyes of the body and open those of the soul,” and look into one’s own soul.<sup>1035</sup> If one gets into the habit of doing this, she writes, one will come to the realization that the Lord is there, “although he comes disguised.”<sup>1036</sup> She observed that though Christ’s glory and majesty are concealed under the Eucharistic species, “it does not prevent him from being recognized in many ways, in conformity with the desire we have to see him.” For our desire to see him could be so much that he will reveal himself to us completely.<sup>1037</sup> In other words, the extent to which we desire to “see” him, is the extent to which he will manifest himself to us.

#### **4.5.2.2 The Eucharist and Prayer of Recollection**

Recollection is Teresa’s most favourite method of praying. She called this method of prayer “recollection” because in it according to her, “the soul recollects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God.”<sup>1038</sup> Discovering this method of prayer was a great delight for her. “I confess,” she writes, “that I never knew what it was to pray with satisfaction until the Lord taught me this method.”<sup>1039</sup> With the prayer of recollection, Teresa is able to enter within herself to be alone with Christ, her beloved Lord and Master. Eugene McCaffrey describes this prayer “as the ‘prayer of presence’ or the ‘prayer of companionship,’” which is “based on a faith awareness of God’s presence in the soul.”<sup>1040</sup>

Teresa believes that it is by going within oneself during the prayer of recollection that one encounters the indwelling presence of God. Hence, she writes to her nuns: “Turn your

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<sup>1034</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1035</sup> Ibid., 34:12.

<sup>1036</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1037</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1038</sup> Ibid., 28:4

<sup>1039</sup> Ibid., 29:7.

<sup>1040</sup> See Eugene McCaffery, “Teresa of Avila: Teacher of Prayer” in *Mount Carmel*, vol. 59, no. 4 (2011), 56-64.

eyes inward and look within yourself...you will find your Master.”<sup>1041</sup> Turning inward and looking within oneself requires great attention; attention to the presence of the Lord who dwells within; in the very depth of one’s being. Teresa’s prayer of recollection is at its best in the context of the Eucharist where, in her post-Communion recollection she encounters the Lord who comes “to deepen his life within her.”<sup>1042</sup> His Eucharistic presence “offered her an opportunity to withdraw from the outer world, in order to experience the divine indwelling in the silence of her heart.”<sup>1043</sup>

Writing on her practice of post-Communion recollection, she narrates that whenever she received Communion, “she strove to strengthen her faith so that in receiving her Lord it was as if, with her bodily eyes, she saw him enter her house.”<sup>1044</sup> Since she believed that Christ truly entered her “poor home” (her soul), she “freed herself from all exterior things when it was possible and entered to be with him.”<sup>1045</sup> Furthermore, she strove to recollect the senses so that they would pay attention to “so great a good” and “would not impede the soul from recognizing it.”<sup>1046</sup> She remarked that even though she “didn’t feel devotion,” faith told her that Christ was indeed there. This conviction is rooted in the truth of what the Church teaches, namely: that Jesus Christ is truly present in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Teresa declares that if we do not wish to blind the intellect (by acting as fools), there is no reason for doubting the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.<sup>1047</sup> She reckons that if we believe without doubt that Christ is present within us after Communion; if we accord him the welcome due to him, and accompany him with love, he will repay us abundantly. For

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<sup>1041</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 29:2.

<sup>1042</sup> Philip McParland, “The Riches of our Inner Life: Characteristics of Teresian Prayer,” in *Mount Carmel*, vol. 59, no. 4 (2011), 24-28.

<sup>1043</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1044</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:7.

<sup>1045</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1046</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1047</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:8.

according to her, “his Majesty is not accustomed to paying poorly for his lodging if the hospitality is good.”<sup>1048</sup>

In the context of her discussion on prayer of recollection after Communion, she also refers to spiritual communion. She believes that spiritual communion is very useful for those who do not receive communion at Mass, and that one could also practice recollection during spiritual communion. “When you do not receive Communion, daughters, but hear Mass,” she writes, “you can make a spiritual communion.” She adds: “spiritual communion is highly beneficial; through it you recollect yourselves in the same way after mass.”<sup>1049</sup> She holds that it is in the moment of post-Communion recollection that the love of the Lord is “deeply impressed on the soul.”<sup>1050</sup> It is by remaining with the Lord in recollection after receiving Holy Communion that one can benefit from what he is offering us in the Eucharist. She compares this to what happens when one approaches a fire to receive its warmth. For “even though the fire be a large one,” she writes, “it will not be able to warm you well if you turn away and hide your hands...”<sup>1051</sup> It is only by remaining beside the fire for a while that one “will stay warm for many hours.”<sup>1052</sup>

#### **4.5.3 The Connection Between Teresa’s Personal Prayer and her Eucharistic Piety**

What connects Teresa’s description of her practice of personal prayer and her Eucharistic piety is the “language of interiority” she used in relation to both of them. The language she used in describing the former echoes the language she used in relation to the latter. For instance, her description of her practice of personal prayer (prayer of recollection) involves the gathering together of her faculties and entering within herself to be with the Lord; to spend time with him in prayer, while that of her Eucharistic piety involves entering within

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<sup>1048</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1049</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 35:1.

<sup>1050</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1051</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1052</sup> Ibid.

herself after receiving Communion to be with Christ who has entered within her, and to spend time at his feet like Mary Magdalene at her conversion.<sup>1053</sup> “I was very devoted to the glorious Magdalene and frequently thought about her conversion, especially when I received Communion. For since I knew the Lord was certainly present there within me...I placed myself at His feet,”<sup>1054</sup> she writes. At Holy Communion, Teresa is very convinced that she is in Christ’s company (for he is present within her at that moment) no less than Mary Magdalen was “in the house of the Pharisee.”<sup>1055</sup> Thus, Teresa’s reference to her practice of “entering within” herself to be with the Lord in her prayer (of recollection), and her practice of “entering within” herself at Communion time to encounter the Lord is what connects her personal prayer with her Eucharistic piety.

#### **4.2.4 The Eucharist and Teresa’s Devotion to the Humanity of Christ**

Teresa’s prayer as we mentioned in chapter two of this work is centred on the humanity of Christ. In her prayer, she sought for a personal encounter and intimacy with the person of Jesus Christ in his sacred humanity through the events of his earthly life she sees Christ in his humanity as a friendly person with whom we can lovingly converse, frequently and alone. This frequent intimate conversation with Christ is the core of Teresian prayer.

Teresa as we saw in chapter two of this work, abandoned her devotion to the humanity of Christ for a brief period, following the suggestion of some spiritual writers who recommend that those seeking contemplation should leave behind all corporeal representation in prayer, even those about the humanity of Jesus Christ in other “to approach the contemplation of Divinity.” These authors held that corporeal images, including that of the humanity of Christ are an obstacle to perfect contemplation. Thus, adhering to their teaching, Teresa gave up her devotion to Christ’s humanity, for according to her, “I thought the

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<sup>1053</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 34:7 and 10.

<sup>1054</sup> *Life*, 9:2.

<sup>1055</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 34:7. See also pages 102-104 above.

humanity was an impediment.”<sup>1056</sup> When Teresa was still in this error, she sought refuge in her Eucharistic experience,<sup>1057</sup> “I always returned to my custom of rejoicing in this Lord, especially when I received Communion,” she writes.<sup>1058</sup> Recalling her error and what ignorance had caused her, she reacted thus:

Is it possible, my Lord, that it entered my mind for even an hour that you would be an impediment to my greater good? Where have all my blessings come from but from you? I don’t want to think I was at fault in this, because it deeply saddens me—and certainly it was ignorance.”<sup>1059</sup>

From this reaction, according to Rómulo Cuartas Londoño, Teresa goes on to profess her Eucharistic faith as follows: “If our nature or health doesn’t allow us to think always about the Passion, since to do so would be arduous, who will prevent us from being with Him in His risen state? We have him so near in the Blessed Sacrament, where He is already glorified.”<sup>1060</sup> In other words, Teresa identified the Blessed Sacrament with the Risen and glorified humanity of Christ.

Teresa’s devotion to the person of Christ in his humanity, and her quest for an experience of encounter with him finds its full expression and realization in the Eucharist where she encountered him, present in his risen and glorified body. One of the reasons she abandoned the suggestion of some writers who conceived the Humanity of Christ as an impediment to mystical contemplation was because it could diminish her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. “I consider this a dangerous path and think the devil could make one lose devotion for the most Blessed Sacrament,”<sup>1061</sup> she writes. Teresa believes that since Jesus Christ is present in his humanity in the Eucharist, any path which recommends that one “flee from “corporeal things to the extent of thinking that even the most sacred humanity

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<sup>1056</sup> *Life*, 22:4.

<sup>1057</sup> See Londoño, “Humanidad de Cristo y Eucaristía,” 61-100.

<sup>1058</sup> *Life*, 22:4.

<sup>1059</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1060</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:6. Also Londoño, “Humanidad de Cristo y Eucaristía,” 61-100.

<sup>1061</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 6:7:14.

causes harm”<sup>1062</sup> could cause one to lose devotion to Christ present in the Eucharist. She holds that as human beings, we need the humanity Christ; his humanity with which we can identify and through which we can connect with the divinity.

#### **4.6 The Eucharist and Teresian Mystical Experience of Christ**

The Eucharist is at the centre of Teresa’s mystical life. For her, the mystical life would be incomplete without it. Most of her mystical experiences took place in the context of the Eucharist; that is, during or after receiving Holy Communion. Teresa’s Eucharistic related mystical experiences are therefore “consistent with a long tradition of female mystical experience,” which often occurred in the context of the Eucharist; “in some kind of liturgical act.”<sup>1063</sup>

Like the apostles, Teresa came to fully understand the mystery of Christ only after her encounters and her experiences of the risen Christ, who went out in search of her and revealed himself to her through visions and locutions.<sup>1064</sup> Despite her extraordinary and ineffable experiences of encounter with the risen Christ, Teresa affirms with all the strength of her faith that the privileged place where one would have access to the person of Jesus in his totality—from his “incarnation to his resurrection and glorification—is in the Eucharist.”<sup>1065</sup> She believes that in the Eucharist, we have the real presence of Christ (body and blood, soul and divinity), whose coming into the world and whose his presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist makes us partakers of the divine nature. The event of our transformation and our sharing in the divine life realized in union with Christ is accomplished in the Eucharist. For

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<sup>1062</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1063</sup> Ahlgren, “Teresa of Avila (1515-1582),” 311-324.

<sup>1064</sup> See Rómulo Cuartas Londoño, “Humanidad de Cristo y Eucaristía en la experiencia de Santa Teresa de Jesús,” in *Mística y Eucaristía: Beber en las fuentes de la plenitud*, ed. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín (Ávila: CiteS, 2008), 61-100.

<sup>1065</sup> Ibid.

Teresa, according to Jesús Castellano, “the mystery of Eucharistic communion is a participation in the divine life, open to the Trinitarian experience.”<sup>1066</sup>

Teresa’s mystical experiences increased her knowledge of the mystery of the person of Christ. Her mystical encounter with him in the Eucharist gave her an experiential knowledge of what she knew and believed in already (of what her faith teaches her); namely that he is present (in the sacrament of the Eucharist) in his risen and glorified body. Thus, in the Eucharist “she saw and felt the reality she had confessed with fervour in the full darkness of faith.”<sup>1067</sup> Her relation of faith in the Eucharist increased immeasurably when Christ revealed Himself to her in the context of this sacrament as the risen and glorified Lord. Her first visionary experiences of the risen Lord were given to her (as we mentioned in chapter three), in a progressive manner. At first she saw “only his Hands” (which according to her “were so very beautiful that I would be unable to exaggerate the beauty”), then she saw his “divine face,” and finally, while at Mass, he revealed himself completely to her.<sup>1068</sup> She attested to the fact that the object of her vision is not a mere image or a dead man, but a living person; the Risen One, who is both human and divine, and whom she believes is truly present in the Eucharist. She writes: He is “not a dead man, but the living Christ:”

And he makes it known that He is both man and God, not as He was in the tomb but as He was when He came out of the tomb after His resurrection. Sometimes He comes with such great majesty that no one could doubt but that it is the Lord Himself. Especially after receiving Communion—for we know that He is present, since our faith tells us this—He reveals Himself as so much the lord of this dwelling that it seems the soul is completely dissolved; and it sees itself consumed in Christ.”<sup>1069</sup>

Teresa’s encounter with the risen Lord in the Eucharist brought her closer to him; it increased her love for, and her confidence in him, enabling her to relate to him as a friend. “A much

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<sup>1066</sup> Jesús Castellano, “Espiritualidad teresiana” in *Introducción a la lectura de santa Teresa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Alberto Barrientos, ed (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2002), 105-201.

<sup>1067</sup> Secundino Castro, *Ser Cristiano Segun Santa Teresa*, 2<sup>a</sup> edición (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1985), 270.

<sup>1068</sup> See *Life*, 28:1-3.

<sup>1069</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:8.

greater love and confidence in this Lord began to develop in me when I saw Him as one with whom I could converse continually. I saw that He was man, even though he was God.”<sup>1070</sup>

Her mystical experiences of Christ in the Eucharist left her with conflicting feelings. On the one hand, she felt the closeness to Christ, being able to consider him as a “companion in the most Blessed Sacrament,”<sup>1071</sup> with her corresponding trust in him because he became a friend and brother. However, at the same time, her feelings of personal misery and worthlessness besieged her. Her shortcoming and her feeling of unworthiness made her run away and distance herself from Christ, though not to the extent of abandoning Holy Communion. She was conscious of the glory and the splendour of the risen Christ in the Eucharist, and how undeserving she is to approach him. “When I approached to receive Communion and recalled that extraordinary majesty I had seen and considered that it was present in the Blessed Sacrament...my hair stood on end; the whole experience seemed to annihilate me.”<sup>1072</sup> Consequently, she turned her feeling of unworthiness into acts of humility and admiration, as she approached the majestic presence of Christ in the Eucharist. She writes: “When I behold majesty as extraordinary as this concealed in something as small as the host, it happens afterwards that I marvel at wisdom so wonderful, and I fail to know how the Lord gives me the courage or strength to approach Him.”<sup>1073</sup>

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<sup>1070</sup> Ibid., 37:5.

<sup>1071</sup> Ibid., 22:6.

<sup>1072</sup> Ibid., 38:19.

<sup>1073</sup> Ibid., 38:21.



#### 4.7 Mystical Experiences of Christ During the Celebration of the Eucharist (Holy Mass)

Teresa's life is rooted in Christ. Life in Christ for her, is a participation in his mysteries. And one of her ways of doing this is through her participation in the Eucharistic liturgy (Holy Mass),<sup>1074</sup> which she did diligently using her Spanish missal. Two of her nuns (Juana de Jesús and Isabel de Jesús) from Salamanca testified to seeing her "in choir, during the celebration of Mass, remaining on her feet with the small missal in her hand."<sup>1075</sup> Teresa considers Holy Mass as the means of renewing the living presence of Jesus Christ in the history of humanity; a presence so alive and so real that she thought of it as the same as the bodily presence of Christ when he lived on earth, especially after his resurrection.<sup>1076</sup> Teresa had many mystical experiences of visions and locutions from Christ during Mass, in which she encountered (saw and heard) him in his risen and glorified body. "The Lord almost always showed Himself to me as risen, also when He appeared in the Host...His body was always glorified."<sup>1077</sup> Again she writes: "On another day, while hearing Mass, I saw the Lord glorified in the host."<sup>1078</sup> On another occasion, during a Eucharistic celebration on the second day of Lent while in St. Joseph's Monastery at Malagón, Christ appeared to Teresa "in an imaginary vision, as He usually does" (in his risen and glorified body), and in place of the crown of thorns, according to her, he was wearing "a crown of great brilliance on His Head."<sup>1079</sup>

#### 4.8 Teresa's Mystical Experiences of Christ During or After Receiving the Eucharist

Teresa had many mystical experiences of Christ whereby she saw him in her visions and

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<sup>1074</sup> For an in-depth study on Teresa's liturgical participation and experience, see Jesús Castellano, *Vivere con S. Teresa di Gesù la liturgia della Chiesa* (Firenze: Edizioni O.C.D., 1982). Part of this work has also been published under the title "Liturgia" in the Dictionary of Saint Teresa. See Jesús Castellano, "Liturgia" in *Diccionario de Santa Teresa: Doctrina e Historia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, editor. Tomás Álvarez (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2006), 399-411.

<sup>1075</sup> The original Spanish text as García presents it reads: "La vieron 'en el coro, estando oficiando la misa, quedarse en pie con un misal pequeno en las manos.'" See *BMC*, 18:57; 20:120. Quoted in García, "Eucaristía y experiencia mística en santa Teresa," 465-483

<sup>1076</sup> See Martín del Blanco, "Los tres Doctores del Carmelo teresiano y la Eucaristía," 231-255.

<sup>1077</sup> *Life*, 29:4.

<sup>1078</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 13:5.

<sup>1079</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

heard him speaking to her through locutions. Most of these experiences took place either during or after receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist. Pedro Ibáñez, a Dominican professor of theology at the Dominican College of Santo Tomás in Ávila and Teresa's confessor, confirms this in his *Dictamen* (his statement on the Spirit of Teresa), as follow: "Normally she experienced these mystical graces...after receiving Holy Communion,"<sup>1080</sup> he writes. In other words, Teresa's mystical experiences were often triggered by her reception of the Eucharist as was the case with the medieval female mystics before her.<sup>1081</sup> Because receiving the Eucharist was what often triggers Teresa's mystical experiences, when these experiences began to increase, her confessor and other theologians in Ávila, fearing they were from the devil or that she was making them up, asked her to stop receiving the Eucharist frequently. "I believe there were five or six of them, all great servants of God; and my confessor told me that they all came to the decision that my experience was from the devil, that I shouldn't receive Communion so often."<sup>1082</sup> They assumed that since receiving Holy Communion often prompts Teresa's mystical experience, reducing the rate at which she receives Communion could control the occurrence of this dubious and worrying experience. In obedience to their decision, Teresa gave up frequent Communion. "I had for many days given up receiving Communion," she writes.<sup>1083</sup> But that didn't diminish her love and devotion to the Eucharist, it rather increased them.<sup>1084</sup>

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<sup>1080</sup> See *BMC*, 2: 131. Quoted in Álvarez, "Eucaristía," 247-279. See also pages 39-40 above, for more on Teresa and Pedro Ibáñez.

<sup>1081</sup> For more on the Eucharist and mystical experiences in medieval female mystics, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>1082</sup> *Life*, 25:14.

<sup>1083</sup> *Ibid.*, 25:15.

<sup>1084</sup> See *Ibid.*, 39:22.

## 4.9 Particular Mystical Graces Received During or After Receiving the Eucharist

In the course of her mystical life, Teresa had received several specific and significant mystical graces of a Christological nature. Her most profound experiences of Christ and “most decisive events of her life” took place during or after receiving Holy Communion.<sup>1085</sup> We will limit ourselves here to only a few of these significant experiences and decisive moments in Teresa’s life that occurred in the context of the Eucharist. We will begin with her experience of spiritual (mystical) marriage, then with her mission as a founder and finally on the role of the Eucharist in her mystical knowing.

### 4.9.1 The Eucharist and Teresa’s Experience of Spiritual (Mystical) Marriage

Spiritual (mystical) marriage is the ultimate stage of the mystical journey; a stage where one attains a permanent union with God, which takes place in the deepest centre of the soul where God dwells.<sup>1086</sup> Teresa attained at this stage, according to McGinn, “a deep union in the Trinity achieved through Christ, one in which ‘the soul always remains with its God in that center (that is, of the soul).’”<sup>1087</sup> Her experience of spiritual (mystical) marriage took place at the moment of Holy Communion; while receiving the Eucharist from John of the Cross. We have her account of this experience in her *Spiritual Testimonies* of November 1572, as follows:

While at the Incarnation in the second year that I was prioress, on the octave of the feast of St. Martin, when I was receiving Communion, Father John of the Cross who was giving me the Blessed Sacrament broke the host to provide for another Sister. I thought...that he wanted to mortify me because I had told him it pleased me very much when the hosts were large (not that I didn’t understand that the size made no difference with regard to the Lord’s being wholly present, even when the particle is very small). His majesty said to me: “Don’t fear, daughter, for no one will be a party to separating you from Me,” making me thereby understand that what just happened didn’t matter. Then he appeared to me in an imaginative vision, as at other times, very interiorly, and he gave me his right hand and said:

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<sup>1085</sup> See Ros García, “Eucaristía y experiencia mística en santa Teresa,” 465-483.

<sup>1086</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 7:2:2.

<sup>1087</sup> McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 141. Also *The Interior Castle*, 7:2:4.

‘Behold this nail; it is a sign you will be my bride from today on. Until now you have not merited this; from now on not only will you look after my honor as being the honor of your Creator, King, and God, but you will look after it as my true bride. My honor is yours, and yours Mine.’<sup>1088</sup>

She also alludes to her reception of this mystical grace (under an easily identifiable anonymity), in her final synthesis of graces in the *Interior Castle*.<sup>1089</sup> “With regard to the one of whom we are speaking,” (referring to herself in the third person), she writes, “the Lord represented himself to her, just after she had received Communion, in the form of shining splendor, beauty and majesty, as he was after his resurrection, and told 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.”<sup>1090</sup>

Thus, Teresa’s spousal communion with Christ was accomplished in the context of the Eucharist, whereby she became his bride and “was to be wholly taken up with his concerns, as he would be with hers.”<sup>1091</sup> In this case, the Eucharist could be referred to as “the mystery of communion between spouses.”<sup>1092</sup> That is, a communion between Christ as bridegroom and the Church as his bride “personalized in Teresa,”<sup>1093</sup> or in “every Christian who celebrates and shares the love of Christ in the Eucharist.”<sup>1094</sup> In response to such a great and awesome mystical grace she received from Christ, Teresa writes: “Now I see, my Bridegroom, that *You are mine*. I cannot deny it. You came into the world for me; for me You underwent severe trials; for me You suffered many lashes; for me You remain in the most Blessed Sacrament; and now You grant me so many wonderful favors.”<sup>1095</sup>

In the Eucharist according to Teresa, the union with Christ is accomplished whereby

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<sup>1088</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 31.

<sup>1089</sup> See Maroto, *Vida eucarística de Santa Teresa*, 58.

<sup>1090</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:2:1.

<sup>1091</sup> Matthew, “Witness to Christ’s Resurrection,” 82-95.

<sup>1092</sup> For more on the Eucharist as a mystery of communion between Christ (the bridegroom) and the Church (his bride), see M. Gesteira Garza, *La Eucaristía, misterio de comunión*, (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1983), 105-201.

<sup>1093</sup> Castellano, “Espiritualidad teresiana,” 105-201.

<sup>1094</sup> Manuel Reis. Santa Teresa de Jesus: A Santíssima Trindade, a Encarnação e a Eucaristia.

[http://teresadejesus.carmelitas.pt/ficheiros/noticias/TeresaJesus\\_Euc\\_artig\\_complt.pdf](http://teresadejesus.carmelitas.pt/ficheiros/noticias/TeresaJesus_Euc_artig_complt.pdf) (accessed May 20, 2019).

<sup>1095</sup> *Meditations on the Song of Songs*, 5:10.

receiving his body we become one with him. According to Jesús Castellano, she “perceives Eucharistic Communion as the grace of a consummate union with the body of Christ.”<sup>1096</sup> Her *Testimony* of 1575 confirmed this. “One day after having received Communion, I truly thought my soul was made one with the most sacred Body of the Lord. He appeared to me and by his presence caused me to make much progress.”<sup>1097</sup> This experience is similar to what she described earlier on in chapter 28 of *The Book of Her Life*. There, she states that after receiving Communion, the Lord “reveals Himself as so much the Lord of this dwelling that it seems the soul is completely dissolved; and it sees itself consumed in Christ.”<sup>1098</sup>

#### **4.9.2 The Eucharist and Teresa’s Mission as a Founder**

Much of Teresa’s works of establishing new foundations of the reformed (Discalced) Carmelites were as a result of the mystical experiences of Christ during or after receiving Communion, in which she was either instructed or encouraged to take on this task. We shall look at some of Teresa’s foundations, namely; St. Joseph’s in Ávila (August 24, 1562), the foundation of Villanueva de la Jara (February 21, 1580), and that of Palencia (December 29, 1580), which she undertook in obedience to the command she received from Christ in the context of the Eucharist. In each of these foundations, Christ encouraged the wearied, hesitant and troubled Teresa to persevere in carrying out the task he entrusted to her. Her experiences taught her the importance of trusting in divine providence, and of believing firmly that the Lord will accomplish the promises he made to her.

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<sup>1096</sup> Castellano, “Espiritualidad teresiana,” 105-201.

<sup>1097</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 44.

<sup>1098</sup> *Life*, 28:8.

#### 4.9.2.1 The Foundation of St. Joseph's in Ávila

The foundation of the first monastery of the Reformed (Discalced) Carmelites, St. Joseph's in Ávila, was in obedience to a command Teresa received from Christ after Communion. "One day after communion," she writes, "His Majesty earnestly commanded me to strive for this new monastery with all my powers, and he made great promises that it would be founded and that he would be highly served in it."<sup>1099</sup> This command left Teresa more anxious than excited. According to her, "I felt the severest pain because on the one hand the terrible disturbances and trials the new monastery would cost me were partly represented to me, and on the other hand I was very happy in my own monastery."<sup>1100</sup> Thus, she was reluctant to carry out the instruction from the Lord. But then, the Lord kept reminding her of the necessity of making the new foundation. "But often the Lord returned to speak to me about this new monastery," she writes, "presenting me with so many clear reasons and arguments that I saw it was His will, and I could no longer help but tell my confessor."<sup>1101</sup> Teresa eventually embarked on the project of making her first foundation in Ávila, but she encountered lots of setbacks (one of which was lack of funds for the project) that slowed it down. But once again after Communion, she received locutions from the Lord, who promised to supply all she needed for the work to continue. "The Lord...told me to get started as best I could, that afterward I would see what His Majesty would do."<sup>1102</sup> She states that though she knew the income was small, she believed the Lord would help her "and arrange things through other means."<sup>1103</sup> True to his word, the Lord provided those who, according to Teresa, had "agreed

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<sup>1099</sup> *Life*, 32:11.

<sup>1100</sup> *Ibid.*, 32:12

<sup>1101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1102</sup> *Ibid.*, 32:18; 33:12.

<sup>1103</sup> *Ibid.*

to help me in the project.”<sup>1104</sup> Finally, the Monastery of St. Joseph’s in Ávila was completed and inaugurated on the feast of St. Bartholomew, August 24, 1562.<sup>1105</sup>

#### 4.9.2.2 The Foundation of Villanueva de la Jara

After the foundation of Seville (May 29, 1575), Teresa suspended the task of making further foundations of the reformed (Discalced) Carmelites, “because of the great persecutions that broke out unexpectedly against the discalced friars and nuns.”<sup>1106</sup> She described the persecutions and sufferings as coming “from false testimony and opposition on the part of almost all the calced<sup>1107</sup> Fathers,” who misrepresented her and her enterprise before Giovanni Battista Rossi, the then Father General of the Order.<sup>1108</sup> Thus, in 1576 she was ordered by the General to suspend her work of making new foundations.

With this development, Teresa went to stay in Toledo. While in Toledo, she received letters through a priest from the town council of Villanueva de la Jara, requesting “that I accept as a monastery a shrine in that town dedicated to glorious St. Anne where nine women were living together.”<sup>1109</sup> These women, Teresa remarked, had lived for some years in a little house near the shrine “with so much recollection and holiness that the whole town was moved to seek to help them attain their desires to become nuns.”<sup>1110</sup> She also received a letter from Agustín de Ervías,<sup>1111</sup> the parish priest of Villanueva de la Jara (a “learned man of great virtue,” as Teresa describes him), who promised to provide “three hundred ducats income

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<sup>1104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1105</sup> See Ibid., 36:5.

<sup>1106</sup> See *Foundations*, 28:1.

<sup>1107</sup> Calced Carmelites was the original Carmelite Order from which Teresa broke away to form the Discalced Carmelites.

<sup>1108</sup> See *Foundations*, 28:1-2.

<sup>1109</sup> Ibid., 28:8.

<sup>1110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1111</sup> Agustín de Ervías, was according to Kavanaugh, “a learned canon of Cuenco, who exchanged his office for parish priest of Villanueva de la Jara because of his desire for the care of souls. See Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 3 trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1985), 436, note, 11.

from what he received from his benefice,” to support the monastery.<sup>1112</sup> Since she had been forbidden to make new foundations, she didn’t pay much attention to the requests coming from Villanueva de la Jara. But when finally she was granted permission by Angel de Salazar (1519?-1600), vicar general of the Discalced friars and nuns, to continue her foundations, Teresa was faced with the difficulty of deciding whether or not to accept the request to make a foundation at Villanueva de la Jara.

After reviewing the situation at hand in the town of Villanueva de la Jara, she became very reluctant to accept the foundation for a number of reasons. She writes:

It seemed to me that for the following reasons it would have been completely unsuitable to accept this foundation: First, there were so many women, and it seemed to me it would be very difficult for them to adapt to our way of life when they were used to their own. Second, they had almost nothing to live on, and the population of the place is little more than a thousand which is not much help for living on alms. (Although the town council offered to support them, it didn’t seem to me to be a stable offer). Third, they didn’t have a house. Fourth, the place was far from where these other monasteries were located. Fifth, although I was told that these women were very good, I had not seen them and so could not verify whether they had the qualities we require for these monasteries. Thus I decided to turn down the proposal entirely.<sup>1113</sup>

Before deciding to turn down the proposal completely, she went to speak with her confessor, Alonso Velázquez (d. 1587),<sup>1114</sup> about it, for according to her, “it is always my custom never to do anything on my own but rather seek the opinion of persons like him.”<sup>1115</sup> Having listened to Teresa and seen the letters she had received from Villanueva de la Jara requesting a foundation, Velázquez asked her not to refuse their proposal but to reply to them “in a friendly manner, for when God has joined so many hearts for the sake of something, one may

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<sup>1112</sup> See *Foundations*, 28:8 and 11.

<sup>1113</sup> *Ibid.*, 28:9.

<sup>1114</sup> Teresa described Alonso Velázquez as “a very learned and virtuous man.” He was a professor of philosophy for some years at the University of Alcalá, after which he became a canon at the cathedral of Toledo. It was during his time in Toledo, that he became Teresa’s confessor and advisor. He heard her confessions “once a week,” and was pleased to offer “her whatever guidance she needed.” He was later appointed bishop of Burgo de Osma in 1578, and then, archbishop of Santiago de Compostela in 1583. Teresa’s final account of the state of her soul was written for Velázquez in 1581 when he was bishop of Burgo de Osma. See Kavanaugh, trans. *The Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol.1(Washington, D.C: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2001), (Biographical sketches), 666. Also *Spiritual Testimonies*, 65.

<sup>1115</sup> *Foundations*, 28:10.



suppose that He will be served by it.”<sup>1116</sup> Teresa obeyed him, choosing not to give a completely negative response, but to remain neutral, “for I neither accepted it entirely nor turned it down,”<sup>1117</sup> she writes. Though according to her, “my opinion was always that it would be foolish to agree to this request.”<sup>1118</sup>

After a month and a half had elapsed and no further requests came, Teresa thought she had put a stop to the matter. Then came a messenger from Villanueva de la Jara, this time, “with letters from the town council, which took on the obligation to provide for the needs of the monastery,” and from other influential persons such as Agustín de Ervías (who had written earlier on), Father Fray Gabriel de la Asunción (1544-1584), prior of the Discalced Carmelite friars at La Roda, near Villanueva de la Jara, and Father Fray Antonio de Jesús (a Discalced Carmelite friar),<sup>1119</sup> who came to preach in Villanueva de la Jara. These letters were meant to persuade Teresa to accept their proposals. The entire situation left her very troubled and confused. For “on the one hand,” she writes, “I had great fear of admitting so many Sisters thinking that as usually happens they would band together against those others who would join them; and on the other hand, I did not see a sure means for their support, because that which was offered amounted to nothing very impressive.”<sup>1120</sup> Finally, the matter was settled through a locution which Teresa got from Christ after receiving Communion. She narrates what happened as follows:

One day after I received Communion I was recommending this matter to God as I often do...While I was praying in this way, His Majesty

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<sup>1116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1119</sup> Fray Antonio de Jesús (formally as known Fray Antonio de Heredia), together with John of the Cross began the first foundation of the Discalced Carmelite friars in Duruelo. They were the first Carmelite friars who joined the Teresian reform.

<sup>1120</sup> *Foundations*, 28:14. In addition to Teresa’s concern as to whether her four nuns could co-exist as one community with the nine women already living at the shrine of St. Anne without conflicts, she was also slow at accepting the various offers to support the monastery because she knew from experience that some people are usually not good at redeeming their financial pledges. Their promises “looked very unsure,” she writes, “since it seemed to me that after the foundation was made they would drag their feet saying that the little the Sisters had was quite enough.” See Ibid., 28:12.

reprimanded me sternly, asking me with what treasures that which had been done so far had been accomplished and telling me that I should not hesitate to accept this house, that it would be for His great service and the spiritual progress of souls. Since these locutions from God are so powerful, not only does the intellect understand them but it is enlightened so as to understand the truth, and the will is disposed to the desire to carry them out; and this is what happened to me. For not only was I glad to accept the foundation but it seemed to me that I had been at fault in delaying so long and being tied to human reason when the works I had seen His Majesty do for this sacred religious order were so beyond reason.<sup>1121</sup>

Thus, Christ in the Eucharist resolved Teresa's doubt and confusion. In the Eucharist, she understood that Christ was both interested and in support of her making the foundation at Villanueva de la Jara. She also learnt the need to trust him always. As in her first foundation of Ávila, the mystical grace and the assurance she received from the Lord after receiving Communion sustained her to accomplish the task of making the foundation at Villanueva.

Having received a licence for the foundation from her superior (de Salazar), who asked her "to go personally," and to bring along with her the nuns of her choice,<sup>1122</sup> she set out accompanied by four nuns (two from the monastery of St. Joseph's in Toledo and two from Malagón). They arrived at Villanueva de la Jara "on the first Sunday of Lent, the feast of St. Barbaciani (celebrated on February 21), the vigil of the feast of the Chair of St. Peter, in the year 1580."<sup>1123</sup> On their arrival, Holy Mass was celebrated, and "the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in the church of the glorious St. Anne.

Teresa and her companions were well received in the town, for the people were delighted to see them. According to Teresa, "the joy of the whole town was so great."<sup>1124</sup> After the celebrations (which included a procession with the Blessed Sacrament around the town), Teresa spoke with the nine women (already staying in the shrine of St. Anne), and seeing their readiness and their holiness of life, she admitted them into the Order (to live with her four nuns). She "considered it a far greater treasure to have souls like these in the Order

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<sup>1121</sup> Ibid., 28:15-16.

<sup>1122</sup> Ibid., 28:17.

<sup>1123</sup> Ibid., 28:37.

<sup>1124</sup> Ibid.

than to have a good deal of income...<sup>1125</sup>

Things turned out well for both Teresa's nuns and the nine women. Though it wasn't so smooth in the beginning, for she was told by her nuns, "that on the very first days they experienced some opposition." But then as time went by, they adjusted to each other. Teresa's nuns got to know "the new Sisters better" and "felt very happy to remain with them and loved them very much."<sup>1126</sup> Álvarez states that "it was the first time Teresa had an experience of this kind."<sup>1127</sup> This was made possible because of the command and the assurances she received from Christ after receiving the Eucharist.

#### **4.9.2.3 The Foundation of Palencia**

Upon completing the foundation of Villanueva de la Jara, Teresa returned to Toledo, "leaving the new community in full splendour."<sup>1128</sup> Not long after her return, she received another invitation to make a foundation in Palencia. "Having returned from the foundation of Villanueva de la Jara," she writes, "the major superior<sup>1129</sup> ordered me to go to Valladolid at the request of the bishop of Palencia, Don Alvaro de Mendoza" (d. 1586).<sup>1130</sup> Don Alvaro de Mendoza had requested for Teresa to come and establish a foundation of the reformed Carmelites in Palencia, so, she was ordered by "the major superior" to go to Valladolid (less than thirty miles from Palencia) to make preparations for the foundation in Palencia.

Unlike the foundation of Villanueva de la Jara which took her time to accept, she did

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<sup>1125</sup> Ibid., 28:39.

<sup>1126</sup> See Ibid., 28:43.

<sup>1127</sup> Álvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on her Life and Work*, 170.

<sup>1128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1129</sup> Here, Teresa was referring to Angel de Salazar, the vicar general of the Discalced friars and nuns, under whose permission she made the foundation of Villanueva de la Jara as we saw already.

<sup>1130</sup> *Foundations*, 29:1. Don Alvaro de Mendoza, was the bishop of Ávila when Teresa made her first foundation (St. Joseph's), in Ávila. He stood by Teresa and defended her against detractors who were against her plans of making a foundation in Ávila. He gave Teresa the go ahead to establish her new foundation in his diocese (in Ávila), when the provincial denied her the permission to do so. He was also very generous to Teresa and her nuns. She describes him as "the bishop who had accepted and favored the first monastery, St. Joseph's, in Ávila, and always favored whatever pertains to this order." As the bishop of Palencia, he also wanted Teresa to make a foundation in his diocese. Teresa states, "that since he was transferred from the diocese of Ávila to that of Palencia, our Lord had inspired him with the desire to found there another monastery of this sacred order." See Ibid.

not hesitate in accepting the invitation to make a foundation in Palencia. Upon receiving the order from her superior, she immediately embarked on a journey to Valladolid. There, she was struck down according to her by “so bad an illness that they thought I was going to die.”<sup>1131</sup> The illness left her without strength and motivation to continue with the foundation. “I felt so listless and so unable even to think of doing anything that I could not be persuaded even though the prioress of our monastery in Valladolid who desired this foundation very much was pressing me to go ahead with it.”<sup>1132</sup> Hearing also that the monastery she intended to set up in Palencia “could not be sustained because the city was poor,” discouraged her the more. Hence, she couldn’t find any basis for making the foundation because the monastery has to be “founded in poverty.” She therefore, found herself in almost a similar situation to the one she faced in making the foundation of Villanueva de la Jara; this time, losing “even the confidence God usually gives me when I begin one of these foundations,”<sup>1133</sup> (referring to her previous foundations). Everything seemed impossible to her. Consequently, she became very indecisive about making the foundation in Palencia, and needing someone as she puts it: “to encourage me,” and “to help me overcome my faintheartedness.”<sup>1134</sup>

While in this state of doubt and uncertainty, she received a mystical grace (of locution) from Christ after receiving Communion, that settled the matter for her. She writes:

One day just after having received Communion and in the midst of this vacillation and indecision about making any foundation, I begged the Lord to enlighten me so that I might do His will in everything...Our Lord answered in a kind of reprehensive way: “What do you fear? When have I failed you? I am the same now as I was before. Do not neglect to make these two foundations.”<sup>1135</sup>

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<sup>1131</sup> See *Ibid.* Teresa actually contracted the deadly influenza (the “universal flu” as it was called) that ravaged Spain in 1580. It was so severe, they feared she would die of it. Her brother Lorenzo died of the influenza in June of 1580. See *The Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol.1 (Biographical sketches), 618-619.

<sup>1132</sup> *Foundations*, 29:1.

<sup>1133</sup> *Ibid.*, 29:3.

<sup>1134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1135</sup> *Ibid.*, 29:6. During this time she was also thinking of making a foundation in Burgos. “I was then considering the foundations of Palencia and Burgos together...” See *Ibid.*, 29:4.

Through the grace of this experience, she continued unabated with her tasks till the end. “I was thereby left with such determination and courage that the whole world would not have been enough to oppose me,”<sup>1136</sup> she writes. Without wasting time, she commenced with arrangements for the foundation, and according to her, “our Lord began to give me the means.”<sup>1137</sup> Finally, on December 29, 1580 (Feast of King David), the foundation of Palencia was made.

#### 4.9.3 The Eucharist and Teresa’s Mystical Knowing

Teresa received numerous mystical graces from Christ, and through these experiences, she came to an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the mysteries of faith. Through her mystical experiences, she gained an experiential knowledge of what she believed in already; of what faith teaches. Aided by mystical grace, the soul (one) “knows in such a way that what we hold by faith, it understands, we can say, through sight,”<sup>1138</sup> she writes. Teresa points out that the “sight” mentioned above, is not with the eyes of the body nor with those of the soul, it is rather a much more profound way of apprehension, through an intellectual vision.

Mystical experience, according to Ros García, “is a form of knowledge.”<sup>1139</sup> It is according to him “a mysterious knowledge of God,” (otherwise called “mystical theology”) attained by love.<sup>1140</sup> For John of Cross, mystical experience is a means by which one receives “a higher knowledge of God,” known as “mystical theology,” meaning the secret wisdom of God. For this wisdom is secret to the very intellect that receives it.”<sup>1141</sup> Elsewhere he refers to mystical experience as “a knowledge or experience of...divine things as they are in

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<sup>1136</sup> *Ibid.*, 29:6.

<sup>1137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1138</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:1:6.

<sup>1139</sup> Salvador Ros García, “Mística teología” in *Diccionario de Santa Teresa: Doctrina e Historia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Tomás Álvarez (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2006), 429-446.

<sup>1140</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>1141</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, revised edition (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*), trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), 2.8.6.

themselves.”<sup>1142</sup> Mystical experience could be seen therefore, as a gift of grace through which one comes to a deeper understanding of divine things and of the mysteries of faith. This understanding, according to Teresa, is achieved through divine illumination. “There was nothing I understood until His Majesty gave me understanding through experience,” she writes.<sup>1143</sup> Through mystical experience as Teresa puts it, one “sees that in an instance it is wise;” that the mysteries of faith and “other sublime things are so explained that there is no theologian with whom it would not dispute in favor of the truth of these grandeurs.”<sup>1144</sup>

In most cases Teresa receives an in-depth understanding of the mysteries of faith and of other sublime things during or after receiving Communion. “There are deep interior secrets revealed when one receives Communion,”<sup>1145</sup> she writes. This means that as well as being her fount of mystical experience (as we discussed above), the Eucharist is also Teresa’s source of mystical knowing; a means through which God reveals mystical truths to her. We shall consider two aspects of her life where the Eucharist played a very significant role in bringing her to a deeper knowledge of sublime things and of the mysteries of faith, which ordinarily would have been difficult if not impossible for her to comprehend. We begin first with the understanding she received of the mystery of the Trinity, then to the knowledge she received which enabled her to explain the different aspects of mystical prayer in her writings.

#### **4.9.3.1 The Eucharist and Knowledge of the Trinitarian Mystery**

The mystery of the Trinity is at the heart of Teresa’s mysticism, it is the summit of her mystical experience.<sup>1146</sup> Ciro García describes Teresa’s mysticism as Trinitarian, for it consists according to him, of “the experiential knowledge of God;” of the God of revelation, the One and Triune God, who spoke to us in the person of “Jesus of Nazareth and acts by the

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<sup>1142</sup> *The Dark Night*, 2.17.6

<sup>1143</sup> *Life*, 22:3.

<sup>1144</sup> *Ibid.*, 27:9.

<sup>1145</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 52.

<sup>1146</sup> Ciro García, “Experiencia trinitaria y pneumatológica en Santa Teresa de Jesús: Lectura teológica,” in *Burgense*, vol. 39, no. 2 (1998) 375-396.

Holy Spirit.”<sup>1147</sup> Teresa considers Christ as the centre from which she “captures the Trinitarian mystery.”<sup>1148</sup> It is through him, the way and the guide, that one hits “upon the right road” to the Trinity.<sup>1149</sup> Thus, from the experience of Christ in his sacred Humanity, Teresa was led to an experience of the Most Blessed Trinity.<sup>1150</sup> Her Christological experience made way for her Trinitarian experience.

At the summit of her mystical journey, (when she arrived at the transforming union or the spiritual marriage in the seventh dwelling place), Teresa was introduced to the reality of God, through an intellectual vision of the Most Blessed Trinity. “When the soul is brought into that dwelling place,” (referring to the seventh dwelling place), she writes, “the Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons, through an intellectual vision, is revealed to it through a certain representation of the truth.” As a result of this experience, and through “an admirable knowledge,” she “understands as a most profound truth that all three Persons are one substance and one power and one knowledge and one God alone.”<sup>1151</sup> In addition to understanding the unity of the divine Persons, she was also given the knowledge of their distinctness. This will be followed by other communications and revelations she received from the three divine Persons that brought her to a deeper understanding of the Trinitarian mystery.<sup>1152</sup>

Teresa’s mystical experience (through an intellectual vision) of the Trinitarian Persons was to continue (together with the intellectual vision of the humanity of Christ), to the end of her life, as her final testimony written in 1581 to her former confessor Alonso

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<sup>1147</sup> See Ciro García, *La mística del Carmelo* (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2002), 86.

<sup>1148</sup> See Castro, *Cristología teresiana*, 275.

<sup>1149</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 7:1:6.

<sup>1150</sup> Ciro García divides Teresa’s spiritual journey into three main stages of experiences: First, was her experience of the presence of God within her—in her soul (1544-1554). Second, her experience of the presence of Christ in the mystery of his Humanity (1560). And finally her experience of the presence of the Holy Trinity, as a permanent company (1571). See Ciro García, *Santa Teresa de Jesus: Nuevas claves de lectura* (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 1998), 53-54.

<sup>1151</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 7:1:6.

<sup>1152</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:1:6.

Velázquez makes clear: “The imaginative visions have ceased, but it seemed this intellectual vision of these three Persons and of the humanity of Christ always continues. This intellectual vision, in my opinion, is something much more sublime.”<sup>1153</sup>

Having established that mystical experience is the source of Teresa’s mystical knowing; a means through which she came to the knowledge and understanding of the truth of the Trinitarian mystery, we will demonstrate how the grace of knowing and of understanding the mystery of the Trinity was given to her in the context of the Eucharist. We shall base our discussion here on Teresa’s own account of her Trinitarian experiences which occurred at the moment of Eucharistic Communion.

In the account of one of her intellectual visions of the Blessed Trinity (which took place after Communion), written in May 29, 1571 in St. Joseph, Ávila, she writes:

On the Tuesday following Ascension Thursday, having remained a while in prayer after Communion, I was grieved because I was so distracted I couldn’t concentrate. So I complained to the Lord about our miserable nature. My soul began to enkindle, and it seemed to me I knew clearly in an intellectual vision that the entire Blessed Trinity was present. In this state my soul understood by a certain kind of representation (like an illustration of the truth), in such a way that my dullness could perceive, how God is three and one. And so it seemed that all three Persons were represented distinctly in my soul and that they spoke to me, telling me that from this day I would see an improvement in myself...and that each one of these Persons would grant me a favor...I understood those words the Lord spoke, that the three divine Persons would be with the soul in grace; for I saw them within myself in the way described.<sup>1154</sup>

In another account written in August 28, 1575, she narrated how she received an infused knowledge of the Trinity after receiving Communion.

After having received Communion on the feast of St. Augustine, I understood—I’m unable to say how—and almost saw (although it was something intellectual and passed quickly) how the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, which I bear imprinted in my soul, are one. By means of the strangest painting and a very clear light, I was given an understanding that was an activity very different from merely holding this truth by faith. As a result, I haven’t been able to think of any of the three divine Persons

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<sup>1153</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 65:3.

<sup>1154</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:1. See also *The Interior Castle*, 7:1:6.



without thinking of all three. Thus I was reflecting...upon how, since they were so united, the Son alone could have taken flesh; and the Lord gave me understanding of how although they are united they are distinct...For although it seems our lowliness was not meant for understanding anything about them, the soul, without knowing how, receives incomparably greater benefit from this understanding...than from many years of meditation.<sup>1155</sup>

In another part of her Testimony written the same year in 1575, she narrates how after receiving Communion she was made to understand how the Father receives Christ in the soul of the communicant; of how the Father receives the sacrifice of Christ, “with the heart of the communicant serving as an altar for the holocaust.”<sup>1156</sup> She writes:

Once after receiving Communion I was given understanding of how the Father receives within our soul the most holy Body of Christ, and of how I know and have seen that these divine Persons are present and how pleasing to the Father this offering of his Son is, because he delights and rejoices with Him here-let us say-on earth. For his humanity is not present with us in the soul, but His divinity is. Thus the humanity is so welcome and pleasing to the Father and bestows on us so many favors.<sup>1157</sup>

This experience points to the fact that during Communion, the Father receives and is pleased with the Son’s sacrifice in the soul. In other words, the Eucharist allows a new form of the singular presence of the Son in the soul, which delights the Father.<sup>1158</sup> The Father is already present in the soul, but the Son has to come to him there in his humanity in Holy Communion since “his humanity is not present with us in the soul, but His divinity is.” The Son comes to the Father in the soul during Holy Communion, “just as he comes to the Father’s throne in heaven, bringing his incarnate humanity with him.”<sup>1159</sup> The entire Trinity is always present within the soul (the Father is present, and Christ’s divinity is also present as Teresa indicated), but the favours that God desires to grant us are made available to us by the coming

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<sup>1155</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 42.

<sup>1156</sup> Maroto, *Vida eucarística de Santa Teresa*, 57.

<sup>1157</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 52.

<sup>1158</sup> See Manuel Diego Sánchez and Secundino Castro Sánchez, *Santa Teresa de Jesús-Cuentas de conciencia: La otra autobiografía-Texto crítico y comentario* (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2013), 92.

<sup>1159</sup> Rowan Williams, “Teresa, the Eucharist and the Reformation,” in *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition*, eds. Peter Tyler and Edward Howells (London: Routledge, 2017), 67-76.

of the Son in his humanity into the soul during Holy Communion. “When this happens,” according to Rowan Williams, “the joy of the eternal Trinitarian life is realized on earth.”<sup>1160</sup>

Teresa was also emphasizing that by our receiving of the Lord's body and blood in the Eucharist, we experience the abiding presence of the Trinitarian persons within us. This is made possible by the coming of Christ in his incarnate humanity into the soul in Holy Communion. As Rowan William puts it, “the abiding presence of the Trinity in the soul is awakened by the Son's ‘passing through’ the texture of historical existence, not only in the once and for all event of the incarnation and the passion but in the actual humanity of the communicant.”<sup>1161</sup> Thus, in receiving the Eucharist, we become partakers in the Trinitarian life, “not only as participating in the general presence of God in creatures as their ground and sustainer but as participating in the actual interrelation of the divine persons.”<sup>1162</sup>

#### **4.9.3.2 The Eucharist: Source of Teresa's Understanding of Mystical Prayer**

In the Teresian experience, “Christ is her interior Master.”<sup>1163</sup> He teaches her the way of prayer,<sup>1164</sup> and gives her an understanding (through experience) of what goes on in the mystical stage of prayer which ordinarily is beyond comprehension and difficult to put into words. The time after receiving the Eucharist is often the moment when she receives an understanding of this mystical grace as well as the ability to communicate it. Such was the case when she treats the third degree of prayer in *The Book of Her Life*.<sup>1165</sup>

In chapters 11 to 21 of *The Book of Her Life*, Teresa discusses the four degrees of prayer using the symbol of the four ways of watering a garden. “It seems to me the garden

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<sup>1160</sup> Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 126.

<sup>1161</sup> Williams, “Teresa, the Eucharist and the Reformation,” 67-76.

<sup>1162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1163</sup> Londoño, “Humanidad de Cristo y Eucaristía en la experiencia de Santa Teresa de Jesús,” 61-100.

<sup>1164</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 26:1.

<sup>1165</sup> See chapters 16-17 of *The Book of Her Life* for Teresa's treatment of the third degree of prayer. Also Grace Madeleine, “The Centrality of the Eucharist in the Journeys of Teresa of Avila” in *Emmanuel*, vol. 110, no. 6 (2004), 514-524.

can be watered in four ways,”<sup>1166</sup> she writes. The first way is by drawing water from a well using a bucket fastened to a rope. This is the first degree of prayer, and is associated with beginners. Beginners in prayer according to Teresa, “are those who draw water from the well.”<sup>1167</sup> This is very taxing, because it involves a lot of effort on their part in trying to exercise their faculties through the practice of mental prayer (discursive meditation) and in recollecting their senses. She described the discursive work of the intellect involved in this stage of prayer as “what is meant by fetching water from the well.”<sup>1168</sup>

The second way of watering a garden is by means of a water wheel and aqueducts. Water is obtained here by turning the crank of the water wheel. By this means, “the gardener obtains more water with less labor;” enabling him to rest “without having to work constantly.”<sup>1169</sup> This is the second degree of prayer (also called prayer of quiet), and it pertains to those who have already advanced in prayer. At this stage of prayer according to Teresa, “the soul begins to be recollected and comes upon something supernatural because in no way can it acquire this prayer through any effort it may make.”<sup>1170</sup> Prayer here borders on the supernatural, for at this stage, one is gradually moving from ascetical prayer (one’s efforts to pray), to mystical (supernatural) prayer, when one begins to pray or practice recollection without any effort of one’s own. “In this prayer,” as Teresa puts it, “the faculties are gathered within so as to enjoy that satisfaction with greater delight. But they are not lost, nor do they sleep.”<sup>1171</sup>

The third way of watering a garden is by irrigation; that is, by means of “the water flowing from a river or spring.”<sup>1172</sup> This method ensures that the garden is irrigated with

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<sup>1166</sup> *Life*, 11:9.

<sup>1167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1168</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:10. For more on Teresa’s discussion on the first degree of prayer, see chapters 11-13 of *The Book of Her Life*.

<sup>1169</sup> *Life*, 14:1.

<sup>1170</sup> *Ibid.*, 14:2.

<sup>1171</sup> *Ibid.* For more on the second degree of prayer, see chapters 14-15 of *The Book of Her Life*.

<sup>1172</sup> *Life*, 16:1.

much less labour, for at this stage, the Lord himself “become practically the gardener and the one who does everything.”<sup>1173</sup> He provides an endless supply of water for the garden through irrigation. Teresa describes prayer at this third stage as “a sleep of the faculties,” for one’s faculties at this stage, are “occupied completely with God.”<sup>1174</sup> It is a prayer of “a very apparent union of the whole soul with God.”<sup>1175</sup> This stage of prayer therefore, is the prayer of contemplation (or mystical prayer), for it is attained mainly through God’s special intervention and grace and not by human efforts.

The fourth way of watering a garden is by means of rainfall. By this means, “the Lord waters the garden without any work on our part.”<sup>1176</sup> This fourth degree of prayer is called the prayer of union, for in this stage, one is united with God, and both beings become one.<sup>1177</sup> It is the “prayer of union” (mystical prayer), which one attains “without many mystical phenomena.”<sup>1178</sup>

Teresa’s presentation of the four degrees of prayer therefore, indicates that the journey of prayer consists of “a progressive passage from the lower to the higher stages of prayer; from ascetical to mystical prayer.”<sup>1179</sup> The first and second degrees of prayer belong to the ascetical stage which involves one’s active efforts to experience the presence of Christ in prayer through meditation, recollection and in the practice of virtues. While the third and the fourth degrees of prayer belong to the mystical stage, which is a gift from God and cannot be acquired by human efforts. God does everything at this stage of prayer.<sup>1180</sup> He makes his presence felt.

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<sup>1173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1174</sup> Ibid., 1 and 3.

<sup>1175</sup> Ibid., 17:3. See chapters 16-17 of *The Book of Her Life*, for more on the third degree of prayer.

<sup>1176</sup> *Life*, 11:1.

<sup>1177</sup> Ibid., 18:3. For more on Teresa’s treatment of the fourth degree of prayer, see chapters 18-21 of *The Book of Her Life*.

<sup>1178</sup> D’Souza, *Meeting in God-Experience*, 35.

<sup>1179</sup> Jordan Aumann. St. Teresas’ Teaching on the Grades of Prayer. <https://ocarm.org/en/content/ocarm/st-teresas-teaching-grades-prayer> (accessed June 25, 2019).

<sup>1180</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 25:3.

When Teresa began to experience the third degree of prayer, (“sleep of the faculties,” as she called it), which was a transition from ascetical to mystical prayer, she knew she was into a different and a new stage of prayer, with its own particular experience. While she already knew that this new experience of prayer was of a higher level than those of the experiences of the first and the second degrees of prayer, she could not understand nor explain its nature; especially of how God “was working in this stage” of prayer which she had experienced “in abundance.”<sup>1181</sup> “I didn’t understand it; nor did I know how to speak of it,”<sup>1182</sup> she writes. Teresa was to receive an understanding of the nature of this degree of prayer and how to explain it. This happened in the context of the Eucharist, whereby after receiving Holy Communion, she was granted an experience of the third degree of prayer (the prayer of “the sleep of the faculties”), which she intends to describe, followed by an understanding of it, and how to communicate it.

Writing to Father García de Toledo<sup>1183</sup> who had asked her to shed more light on the nature of the third degree of prayer (especially, on what differentiates it from the second degree of prayer), and on how God works in it, she states:

I believe that on account of the humility your Reverence (referring to García de Toledo), has shown in desiring to be helped by as simple-minded a person as myself, the Lord today after Communion granted me this prayer (that is, prayer of the sleep of the faculties—the third degree of prayer); and interrupting my thanksgiving, He put before me these comparisons, taught me the manner of explaining it, and what the soul must do here. Certainly I was startled and I understood at once.<sup>1184</sup>

Thus, Christ through his Eucharistic presence brought Teresa (through experience and the use of metaphors) to an understanding of the nature of the second degree of prayer (prayer of quiet), and on how it differs from the third degree of prayer (prayer of the sleep of the faculties). She understood through this experience and the metaphors given to her by Christ,

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<sup>1181</sup> See *Life*, 16:2. Also Madeleine, “The Centrality of the Eucharist in the Journeys of Teresa of Avila,” 514-524.

<sup>1182</sup> *Life*, 16:2.

<sup>1183</sup> See pages 40-42 above, for more on Teresa and García de Toledo.

<sup>1184</sup> *Life*, 16:2. Words in bracket are mine.

that in the third degree of prayer (prayer of the sleep of the faculties), “the faculties are almost totally united with God but not so absorbed as not to function.”<sup>1185</sup> The faculties, she states, have only the ability to be completely occupied with God. “It doesn’t seem that any one of them dares to move, nor can we make them stir unless we strain to distract ourselves, but even then,” she adds, “I don’t think we could do so entirely.”<sup>1186</sup> She reveals that in the prayer of the sleep of the faculties, “one utters many words...in praise of God without thinking them up, unless it is the Lord who thinks them up;” for at this stage, “the intellect is worth nothing.”<sup>1187</sup> Thus, in and through the Eucharist, Teresa came to an understanding of how God was working in the prayer of the sleep of faculties. She was above all made to understand that whatever goes on in this stage of prayer is entirely God’s work. Consequently, she exclaimed: “I am extremely pleased that I now understand it. Blessed be the Lord who so favored me!”<sup>1188</sup>

Teresa encountered similar difficulties in explaining the nature and the experience of the fourth degree of prayer—the prayer of union (also a mystical stage of prayer). “How this prayer they call union comes about and what it is, I don’t know how to explain,”<sup>1189</sup> she writes. Her initial attempt at explaining the experience of the prayer of union didn’t go well. She describes her attempt as that of someone trying to give “some explanation of an experience that...one cannot even put into words.”<sup>1190</sup> But then, she received divine help in the context of the Eucharist that settled the matter for her. After receiving Holy Communion, Christ enlightened her mind, giving her the ability to explain the mystical grace of the prayer of union. She writes:

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<sup>1185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1186</sup> Ibid., 16:3.

<sup>1187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1188</sup> Ibid., 16:2.

<sup>1189</sup> Ibid., 18:2.

<sup>1190</sup> Ibid., 18:7.

When I began to write about this last water (referring to the fourth degree of prayer or the prayer of union), it seemed impossible to know how to speak of it without making it sound like Greek; for it is very difficult to explain. So I set the work aside and went to receive Communion. Blessed be the Lord who so favors the ignorant!..God enlightened my intellect; sometimes with words, at other times showing me how to explain this favor, as He did with the previous prayer (referring to the third degree of prayer or the prayer of the sleep of the faculties). His Majesty, it seems, wanted to say what I neither was able nor knew how to say.<sup>1191</sup>

Furthermore, she also received divine inspiration in the context of the Eucharist as she thought of how to explain what happens to the soul in the prayer of union.

After having received Communion and been in this very prayer I'm writing about, I was thinking when I wanted to write something on it of what the soul did during that time. The Lord spoke these words to me: "It detaches itself from everything, daughter, so as to abide more in me. It is no longer the soul that lives but I. Since it cannot comprehend what it understands, there is an understanding by not understanding."<sup>1192</sup>

The Eucharistic Christ "provided Teresa with the explanation she sought—an explanation that was all the more authoritative for its echo of Scripture."<sup>1193</sup> Thus, she understood in the context of the Eucharist that in the prayer of union, one is completely united with God, and that one's faculties are so absorbed in God that they become suspended, leaving only the will to function—to love. In the prayer of union according to her, one "appears to be joined to God," and that one is so certain about this union that one "cannot help believing in the truth of it."<sup>1194</sup> She expounds more on the certainty of this union in the fifth dwelling place of *The Interior Castle*, affirming "that whoever does not receive this certitude does not experience union of the whole soul with God, but union of some faculty," or "one of the many other kinds" of favours which comes from God.<sup>1195</sup>

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<sup>1191</sup> Ibid., 18:8. Words in bracket are mine.

<sup>1192</sup> Ibid., 18:14.

<sup>1193</sup> Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 81.

<sup>1194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1195</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 5:1:11.

In the of prayer union as Teresa puts it, “all the faculties fail, and they are so suspended that in no way does one think they are working.”<sup>1196</sup> According to her, when the faculties are suspended one loses one’s ability to retain and recall things. For instance, “if a person is reflecting upon some scriptural events,” she writes, “it becomes as lost to the memory as it would be if there had never been any thought of it.” The same thing happens when one reads or recites vocal prayers. When the faculties are suspended, one loses the ability to remember what one reads, as well as the capacity to recall “if one prays vocally.”<sup>1197</sup>

She received a similar grace when writing *The Interior Castle* in 1577 (five years before her death). This work is regarded as her masterpiece and the most organized (though with a few digressions) and mature of all her writings. McGinn describes it as “one of the most sustained and profound accounts of mystical transformation in the history of Christian theology.”<sup>1198</sup> Unlike in her first two works (*The Book of Her Life* and *The Way of Perfection*), where she focused much on the ascetical grades of prayer, in *The Interior Castle*, she gave more attention to the mystical stages of prayer, beginning from the fourth to the seventh dwelling places.

In writing about mystical prayer (beginning from the fourth dwelling place of *The Interior Castle*), Teresa first of all entrusted herself to the Holy Spirit beseeching him for the grace to say something about this prayer in a way that her readers will understand it. For according to her, supernatural prayer experiences “are something most difficult to explain, if His Majesty doesn’t do so...”<sup>1199</sup> She admits that writing about these experiences (“these difficult things” as she called them), “will be impossible if His Majesty and the Holy Spirit

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<sup>1196</sup> *Life*, 18:14.

<sup>1197</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>1198</sup> McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 140.

<sup>1199</sup> *The Interior Castle*, 4:1:1.



did not move my pen.”<sup>1200</sup> Hence, she needed divine grace to accomplish this. Teresa was to receive this grace in the context of the Eucharist, when, after receiving Communion, she got the illumination to write and to explain mystical prayer in *The Interior Castle*. This was evident in the testimonies of some of her nuns during her canonization process. Among those who testified to seeing Teresa working on *The Interior Castle* after receiving Communion was María del Nacimiento. Her testimony is as follows:

When the said Mother Teresa of Jesus wrote the book called *The Dwelling Places*, she was in Toledo, and this witness saw that it was after Communion that she wrote this book, and when she wrote she did so very rapidly and with such great beauty in her countenance that this witness was in admiration, and she was so absorbed in what she was writing that even if some noise was made there, it did not hinder her; wherefore this witness understood that in all that which she wrote and during the time she was writing she was in prayer.<sup>1201</sup>

It was also believed that she wrote her *Soliloquies* after receiving Communion. This work formerly known as *Exclamations of the Soul to God*,<sup>1202</sup> which Teresa wrote “for herself and not for readers,”<sup>1203</sup> contains seventeen short spontaneous meditations which Teresa composed after Communion. These Teresian post-Communion meditations offer us, as Michael Griffin puts it, “a rare glimpse into the way she was led to think and experience and offer herself fully to her Eucharistic Lord and Savior.”<sup>1204</sup> Giovanna della croce observed that though the words of these meditations were “not always closely connected with the Eucharistic grace, they were certainly vibrations of love of the one who had come into

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<sup>1200</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:3:11.

<sup>1201</sup> *BMC*, 18:315, quoted in *The Interior Castle*, (General Introduction), 8-9. See also Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 78-79.

<sup>1202</sup> Because Teresa did not give a title to this short work, the Augustinian theologian and Scripture scholar, Fray Luis de León (1527-1591), deemed it necessary to do so when he published the first edition of Teresa’s work in 1588. Thus, he entitled it: *Meditations or exclamations of the soul to God written by Mother Teresa of Jesus in the year 1569 on different days according to the spirit our Lord gave her after Communion*. Subsequent editions and translations continued to refer to the work as *Exclamations of the Soul to God*. But this title was changed to *Soliloquies* by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez in volume one of their translation called *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, which contains Teresa’s *Book of Her Life*, *Spiritual Testimonies* and *Soliloquies*.

<sup>1203</sup> Matthew, “St. Teresa and the Prayer of Offering,” 124-134.

<sup>1204</sup> Michael D. Griffin, *Linger With my Lord: Post Communion Experiences of St. Teresa of Avila* (New York: Alba House, 1985), 3.

Teresa's 'soul during Holy Communion.'"<sup>1205</sup> They expressed Teresa's immense love for Christ and her fervent desire for union with him.<sup>1206</sup> Giovanna maintains that "although not formally mentioned, Christ in the sacrament of the altar is the source of these meditations," which according to her were very striking for "their harmonious sweetness."<sup>1207</sup>

Thus, it could be said that Teresa's task as a writer benefitted a lot from the inspirations she received moments after Holy Communion. In receiving Christ in the Eucharist; in having his real and sacramental presence within her, Teresa received the grace that enabled her to write, especially on the themes of mystical prayer. Aided by this grace and inspiration, she wrote in such a way that would otherwise have been difficult if not impossible for an unlettered woman like her. Although Teresa was uneducated, Ahlgren holds that "her doctrine was worthy of consideration" because she claims, "it was not her own."<sup>1208</sup> "This doctrine is excellent, and it is not mine, but taught by God,"<sup>1209</sup> she writes. In that case, Teresa is only a conveyor; "an instrument of the actual communication of God."<sup>1210</sup> She affirms this as follows: "I am literally, just like the parrots that are taught to speak; they know no more than what they hear or are shown, and they often repeat it. If the Lord wants me to say something new, His Majesty will provide."<sup>1211</sup>

Having shown that Teresa was aided by a direct inspiration from God (especially after receiving the Eucharist), in her writings (especially in her mystical works), we wish to also indicate that not every one of her writings are divinely inspired, neither did she always write

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<sup>1205</sup> See Luigi Borriello and Giovanna Della Croce, *Cristo Gesù Dio Della mia Vita: Pagine scelte di Teresa d'Avila* (Milano: Paoline Editoriale Libri, 1995), 150, note, 20.

<sup>1206</sup> For instance, in *Soliloquies* 6:1, she writes: "O my delight, Lord of all created things and my God! How long must I wait to see You? What remedy do you provide for one who finds so little on earth that might give some rest apart from You?...What shall I do, my God, what shall I do? Should I, perhaps, desire not to desire You? Oh, my God and my Creator, You wound and the sore is not seen; You kill, leaving one with more life! In sum, my Lord, being powerful You do what You will."

<sup>1207</sup> Borriello and Giovanna Della Croce, eds. *Cristo Gesù Dio Della mia Vita*, 150, note, 20.

<sup>1208</sup> Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 80.

<sup>1209</sup> *Life*, 19:13.

<sup>1210</sup> Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 82.

<sup>1211</sup> *The Interior Castle*, Prologue, 2.

while in ecstasy or after receiving Holy Communion. She mentions in *The Book of Her Life* that her work is a combination of direct inspiration from God and of her own insight.

Many of the things I write about here (that is, in *The Book of Her Life*), do not come from my own head, but my heavenly Master tells them to me. The things I designate with the words ‘this I understood’ or ‘the Lord said this to me’ cause me great scrupulosity if I leave out even as much as a syllable. Hence if I don’t recall everything exactly, I put it down as coming from myself; or also, some things are from me. I don’t call mine what is good, for I already know that there is nothing good in me but what the Lord has given me without my meriting it. But when I say ‘coming from me,’ I mean not being made known to me through a revelation.”<sup>1212</sup>

Ahlgren argues that reducing the source of Teresa’s works only to divine inspiration is a way of denying her “credit for creativity”, and attributing “the genius of her work to the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1213</sup> Quoting from Rosa Rossi, Ahlgren contends that attributing divine inspiration to Teresa’s writings is a way of denying “the autonomy” of her “word;” a way of saying “it was always someone else who spoke—God, or the will of her male confessor, or her instinct,” but “never her *persona*.”<sup>1214</sup> Thus, she holds that the best way to account for Teresa’s work, “is that she wanted to write, partly to respond to the Valdés Index’s censorship of manuals on mystical prayer, partly to continue her reform efforts and offer the new Carmelites their own tradition of religious literature, and partly because she was a born writer.”<sup>1215</sup> Whatever was Teresa’s motive for writing, our position in this work is that the source of her writing is a combination of Divine inspiration and her own insight.

#### 4.10 Conclusion

A great deal of work had been written about Teresa’s experience of prayer and on her mystical experiences, but the centrality of the Eucharist in these aspects of her life has often

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<sup>1212</sup> *Life*, 39: 8.

<sup>1213</sup> Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 79.

<sup>1214</sup> See Rosa Rossi, “Teresa de Jesús: La mujer y la palabra” in *Mientras tanto*, 15 (1983), 29-45. Quoted in Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 79.

<sup>1215</sup> Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 79-80

been neglected. Our aim in this chapter therefore, has been to give it the attention it deserves. And we did that by showing how the Eucharist is at the centre of her experience of Christ in prayer and in her mystical experiences of him in locutions and visions.

We demonstrated in this chapter, that the Eucharist is at the centre of Teresa's life and experience, that she attached a great importance to the time after receiving Communion, for she believed it is the Risen Christ himself who came to her at that moment. Her belief is rooted in what the Church teaches that Jesus Christ is truly present ("the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity") in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Believing that Christ is really present in the Eucharist, and knowing that he enters into her soul at Holy Communion time, she turns this occasion into an intense moment of communion and friendship with him in prayer. We also established in this chapter that Teresa's prayer is at its best after receiving Communion, and that most of her mystical experiences of Christ (through locutions and visions) took place also in that context. Furthermore, we showed that in addition to Teresa's mystical experiences of Christ which occurred moments after receiving Holy Communion, that some of the significant and decisive events of her life (such as her experience of spiritual marriage, her undertaking and vocation as a founder) also happened in the context of the Eucharist.

Similarly, we illustrated how the Eucharist, in addition to being the font of Teresa's mystical experience, is also the source of her mystical knowing; a means through which God revealed mystical truths to her. We showed above all, how the Eucharistic Christ played a major role in bringing Teresa to a deeper knowledge and understanding of divine things and of the mysteries of faith (especially on the mystery of the Trinity). Finally, we observed that the mystical knowledge she obtained in the Eucharistic setting, was what constitutes her writings, especially where she discusses mystical prayer and experiences.

In the next chapter we shall explore Teresa's teaching on the mystery of the Eucharist. Her Eucharistic teaching was rooted in 16<sup>th</sup> century Eucharistic theology which holds that Christ is really and substantially present in the Eucharistic bread and wine. That after consecration, the substances of the bread and wine are changed into the substances of Christ's body and blood. This position (among others) came under severe attack by some Protestant Reformers who rejected the Church's doctrine of the real presence and of its explanation of how this presence take place.

We shall consider the Church's response to these Reformers at the Council of Trent (1545-1653), and how the Council's decrees and teaching on the Eucharist informed Teresa's Eucharistic teaching. Teresa's response to the activities of the Protestant Reformers, especially their negative attitude towards the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist will also form part of our discussion in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TERESA'S TEACHING ON THE MYSTERY OF THE EUCHARIST

In chapter four we explored Teresa's Eucharistic experience. In this chapter we will treat her teaching on the mystery of the Eucharist. This teaching is centred on the Church's belief in the Eucharist as the real presence of Christ.<sup>1216</sup> Teresa's emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was her way of responding to the Reformers who she believed denied the Eucharistic presence of Christ.<sup>1217</sup>

We mentioned that Teresa's Eucharist theology was rooted in the Church's faith and teaching on the Eucharist as the real presence of Christ. Given the importance she attached to this belief, and the central place it occupied in the life of the Church, we shall begin by looking at its historical aspects, starting from its foundation (i.e., when Christ first instituted the Eucharist as the sacrament of his body and blood), to the medieval times when it became controversial, and finally to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when it came under severe attack by some Protestant Reformers. We shall also consider how the Church at the Council of Trent responded to the criticisms of these Reformers as well as Teresa's response to their activities.

#### 5.1 The Traditional Foundation of the Church's Belief in the Real Presence

The Church's belief in the real presence is rooted in the words of the institution of the Eucharist. On the night before his Passion and death, Jesus had his last Supper with his disciples, during which he instituted the Eucharist—the sacrament of his body and blood. In the course of their meal, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his

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<sup>1216</sup> The Church teaches that “after the consecration of the bread and the wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really and substantially, contained in the propitious sacrament of the holy Eucharist under the appearance of those things which are perceptible to the senses.” See Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol.2, 693.

<sup>1217</sup> Maroto describes the sixteenth century in which Teresa lived, as a time of religious “revolution,” when “the delineation and the explanation of sacramental theology that, for example, Luther and Calvin professed and promulgated,” destroyed the traditional beliefs of the Church. This, according to him, “applied to the dogmas of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacrificial meaning of the Mass, Transubstantiation and, as a consequence, liturgical celebrations and even the very structures of places of worship.” See Maroto, *Vida Eucarística de Santa Teresa*, 62-63.

disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood...”<sup>1218</sup> While contending with the Jews in the bread of life discourse of John 6, Jesus maintained that these words were not metaphorical. He states: “My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”<sup>1219</sup>

In the words of the institution therefore, Jesus offered his very self (“his own body and his own blood”), to his disciples,<sup>1220</sup> and they in turn, passed on this tradition to the Church. Bruce D. Marshall observes that the Church’s “insistence that the Eucharistic food is the same as the one body and blood of Christ stems, no doubt, from an already established apostolic tradition that this is how the Lord’s words in the upper room are to be taken...”<sup>1221</sup>

## 5.2 Early Christian Writers on the Real Presence

For the early Christian writers, the Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ; the real presence of Christ. They believed “the real presence as a matter of faith...because it was taught by Christ, as attested by Scripture and tradition.”<sup>1222</sup> There was a general consensus among them on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. They believed and taught that the Eucharistic bread and wine are transformed (by the power of the Holy Spirit) into the body and blood of Christ during Mass. But they never tried to explain the “how” of this change, “beyond their insistence that the word of Christ was its necessary condition.”<sup>1223</sup> Neither did they “probe very much into questions about change and presence in the Eucharist

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<sup>1218</sup> See Matthew 26:26-28. For words of the institution in the other synoptic gospels, see Mark 14:22-26 and Luke 22:19-20. And for a different version according to St. Paul, see 1 Corinthians 11:24-25.

<sup>1219</sup> John 6: 55-56.

<sup>1220</sup> See W.F. Dewan, “Eucharist (As Sacrament)” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 599-609.

<sup>1221</sup> Bruce D. Marshall, “The Eucharistic Presence of Christ,” in *What Does it Mean to “Do This?”: Supper, Mass, Eucharist*, eds. Michael Root and James J. Buckley (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 47-73.

<sup>1222</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988-2007* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 455.

<sup>1223</sup> Robert Barron, *Eucharist* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 108.

independently of its liturgical context.”<sup>1224</sup> All seemed well in the early Christian period in relation to belief in the reality of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, since it “was affirmed without significant dissent.”<sup>1225</sup>

### **5.3 Real Presence in Medieval Times**

The generally held belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist changed when the issue of real presence became a topic of philosophical debate among western theologians beginning with the controversy between Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus in the ninth century, with the controversy between Berengarius of Tours and Lanfranc of Bec in the eleventh century, and finally with the third and the severest of the controversies which began at the Reformation in the sixteenth century, championed by Martin Luther with Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin joining him subsequently. We shall consider each of these controversies respectively.

#### **5.3.1 Paschasius Radbertus (785–865) and Ratramnus (800–868)**

Paschasius Radbertus was a ninth century Carolingian theologian and abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Corbie in northern France. Sometime between 831AD-833AD, he wrote a treatise on the Eucharist which he called *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* (On the Body and Blood of the Lord), “for the use of Benedictine missionaries among the Saxon tribes of Germany.”<sup>1226</sup>

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<sup>1224</sup> Owen F. Cummings, *Eucharistic Soundings* (Dublin: Veritas Publication, 1999), 31.

<sup>1225</sup> Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. *The Presence of Christ in the Church with Special Reference to the Eucharist: Fourth Agreed Statement of the Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue*, 2003-2009.

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/discip-christ-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20090630\\_disciples-christ-report-2003-2009\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/discip-christ-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20090630_disciples-christ-report-2003-2009_en.html) (accessed July 26, 2019).

<sup>1226</sup> Aidan Nicholas, *The Holy Eucharist: From the New Testament to Pope John Paul II* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1991), 59.



It was the first extensive discourse on the Eucharist in the Latin (Western) world.<sup>1227</sup> Paschasius' main concern in his treatise was on the question of whether the Eucharistic body of Jesus Christ is identical with his body, "taken from the womb of Mary, done to death in the passion, and raised up by the Father to his right hand."<sup>1228</sup> He practically did not see any difference between these bodies. According to him, the Eucharistic body and blood of Christ were "nothing different...from what was born of Mary, suffered on the cross, and rose again from the tomb."<sup>1229</sup> For him, the relation between Christ's Eucharistic body and his historical/biological body "is one not simply of continuity but of essential sameness."<sup>1230</sup> Paschasius believes in the utter realism of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist; that after consecration, the bread and wine are nothing else than true flesh and true blood of Christ. Thus, he advanced a materialistic view of the change in the bread and wine, as though it were a physical or a material change. He sees the Eucharistic bread and wine "almost as envelopes encasing the natural flesh and blood of Jesus."<sup>1231</sup>

When in 844 Paschasius' treatise on the Eucharist was presented to the Carolingian emperor Charles the Bald (823–877), the "ultra-realist" views expressed in it "gained a mixed reception among the court intelligentsia."<sup>1232</sup> They found his direct identification of Christ's presence in the Eucharist with his incarnate presence in the womb of Mary difficult to accept. Consequently, at the urging of the emperor (who himself had found Paschasius' Eucharistic views to be "excessively realistic"), another monk and theologian Ratramnus, wrote a refutation of Paschasius' views in a work bearing the same title as Paschasius' treatise on the

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<sup>1227</sup> See Patricia McCormick Zirkel, "The Ninth Century Eucharistic Controversy: A Context for the Beginnings of the Eucharistic Doctrine in the West," in *Worship*, vol. 68 (1994), 2-23. Also Celia Chazelle, "The Eucharist in early medieval Europe," in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, eds. Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 205-250.

<sup>1228</sup> David N. Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), 210.

<sup>1229</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, "The Lord's Body and Blood" (Selections), in *Early Medieval Theology*, ed and trans. George E. McCracken (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 90-108.

<sup>1230</sup> Nicholas, *The Holy Eucharist*, 59.

<sup>1231</sup> Cumming, *Eucharistic Soundings*, 32.

<sup>1232</sup> Nicholas, *The Holy Eucharist*, 60.

Eucharist.<sup>1233</sup> The basis of Ratramnus' treatise was an attempt to answer two questions raised by the emperor after reading Paschasius' work. First, on whether the faithful receive the body and blood of Christ "in truth" (*in veritate*) or "in a figurative way" (*in figura*)? Second, on whether the Eucharistic body and blood of Christ is same body and blood which Mary bore?<sup>1234</sup>

In response to the first question, Ratramnus states that the Eucharist is received not *in veritate*, but *in figura*, because the Eucharist, according to him, is "an action which exhibits one thing outwardly to the human senses and proclaims another thing inwardly to the minds of the faithful."<sup>1235</sup> In other words, for him, as Liam Walsh points out, the *veritas* of the Eucharist is bread, while "the body of Christ is in the bread in *figura* because it is perceived through the symbolism of the bread."<sup>1236</sup> His response to the second question, is that the Eucharistic body of Christ is not the same as his historical body which Mary bore. For him, what the faithful receive in the Eucharist is not the earthly body of Jesus, that died, rose again and is seated at the right of the Father in heaven, but a figurative representation of it. Ratramnus proposed a spiritual view in which the Eucharistic bread and wine represent Christ's body and blood figuratively "to serve in commemoration of him."<sup>1237</sup> While accepting that the faithful do really receive the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, he insisted that this was a spiritual reality, invisible to the senses and perceived only by faith, and not the same body born of Mary. The Eucharist "appeals to faith, not to any natural mode of recognition whether sensate or intellectual,"<sup>1238</sup> he writes.

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<sup>1233</sup> See Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 81

<sup>1234</sup> See Ratramnus, *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, 5. Quoted in Cumming, *Eucharistic Soundings*, 32.

<sup>1235</sup> *Ibid.*, 9,10. Quoted in Nicholas, *The Holy Eucharist*, 60.

<sup>1236</sup> See Liam Walsh, *The Sacraments of Initiation* (London: Geoffery Chapman, 1988), 230.

<sup>1237</sup> Willemien Otten, "Between Augustinian Sign and Carolingian Reality: The Presence of Ambrose and Augustine in the Eucharistic Debate Between Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus of Corbie," in *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis-Dutch Review of Church History*, vol. 80, no. 2 (2000), 137-156.

<sup>1238</sup> See Ratramnus, *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, 9. Quoted in Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy*, 82.

It is precisely in his use of *veritas* and *figura* that Ratramnus seems opposed to Paschasius.<sup>1239</sup> For while Paschasius maintains that the Eucharistic body and blood of Christ is received by the faithful in truth (*in veritas*) because it was, in reality, what it affirmed to be,” Ratramnus on the contrary “allegorized the physical element in the Eucharist as the figuration (*figura*) of a truth which resided elsewhere.”<sup>1240</sup> He applied truth (*veritas*) to the natural world of the five senses, such that whatever is perceptible to the senses is what really exists, while what is not perceptible to the senses he designates as symbol (*figura*). Thus for him, what really exist (*veritas*) in the Eucharist is the visible elements (bread and wine), which represents figuratively the invisible body and blood of Christ present in the Eucharist. Paschasius for his part, “sees *veritas* as that which faith teaches, while *figura* for him has the pejorative ring of outward appearance.”<sup>1241</sup> Owen Cummings observed that “the real issue between Paschasius and Ratramnus was philosophical: What is real?” For while they both believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist (that the Eucharist is Christ’s body and blood), they “formulated that belief differently because of their varying philosophical positions about the nature of reality.”<sup>1242</sup>

Subsequently, the emperor Charles the Bald accepted Paschasius' formulation on the nature of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and that became the Church’s position and what characterized its official belief on the Eucharistic presence,<sup>1243</sup> through the ninth and tenth centuries, before the emergence of another controversy (championed by Berengarius) in the eleventh century, that challenged this view, as we shall see below.

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<sup>1239</sup> Otten, “Between Augustinian Sign and Carolingian Reality,” 137-156.

<sup>1240</sup> Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 102.

<sup>1241</sup> Otten, “Between Augustinian Sign and Carolingian Reality,” 137-156.

<sup>1242</sup> Cummings, *Eucharistic Soundings*, 34.

<sup>1243</sup> See Zirkel, “The Ninth Century Eucharistic Controversy,” 2-23.

### 5.3.2 Berengarius of Tours (999-1088) and Lanfranc of Bec (1005-1089)

Ratramnus' contrary view on the nature of Christ's Eucharistic presence was revived in the eleventh century (with a more precise distinction between the physical and spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist than he did), by Berengarius, a theologian and a canon of the cathedral at Tours in France. Like many other intellectuals of his time, "Berengarius was fascinated by grammar and the logical property of terms," hence, he advanced "a simple but penetrating logical objection to the belief" in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.<sup>1244</sup> He declared that there is an essential difference between the historical body of Jesus Christ which Mary bore, who is now seated at the right side of the Father in heaven, and his Eucharistic (sacramental) body present on the altar. He considered that the Eucharistic body of Christ must be some kind of "symbol or figure" of his historical body now reigning in heaven, "since the heavenly body of Jesus is beyond change or corruption, whereas the Eucharistic elements are, obviously enough, changed and corrupted over time."<sup>1245</sup> He backed up his position with St. Paul's statement in his letter to the Corinthians that "even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer."<sup>1246</sup> Commenting on this passage, Berengarius states that "the words of the Apostle stood as a refutation of anyone who says that the empirical bread consecrated on the altar is, after the consecration, truly the body of Christ that exists above."<sup>1247</sup> Berengarius seemed to be have been operating "with a rough and ready empiricism" which supposes that "the reality of a thing is known by its appearance,"<sup>1248</sup> such that if for instance, what is on the altar resembles wine, tastes like wine, feels and smells like wine, then it must be actually wine, otherwise it is something else.

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<sup>1244</sup> Barron, *Eucharist*, 108-109.

<sup>1245</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>1246</sup> 2 Cor. 5:16.

<sup>1247</sup> Barron, *Eucharist*, 109.

<sup>1248</sup> Cummings, *Eucharistic Soundings*, 35.

For Berengarius, the Eucharistic bread and wine still remain bread and wine even after consecration;<sup>1249</sup> the words of consecration only adds a spiritual significance to them making them signs of the body and blood of Christ. In other words, the consecrated bread and wine far from containing the actual body and blood of Christ, remain a mere representation of them. He admits that in so far as the consecrated bread and wine were “given an added spiritual significance, a change did take place during consecration...but they do not cease to exist.”<sup>1250</sup> They (the elements) still continue to exist as bread and wine, “and had no personal relation to the earthly or risen body of Christ.”<sup>1251</sup> He utterly denied and categorically rejected any “notion of a substantial conversion of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.”<sup>1252</sup> What happens during consecration according to him, is that the element receives a new religious value and significance, but they don’t undergo a substantial change. Liam Walsh summed up Berengarius’ position as follows: “In his view what happens at consecration is that, while continuing to be what it is, the bread begins to be the sign of the life-giving body of Christ that is thus present and eaten spiritually.”<sup>1253</sup>

When Berengarius’ Eucharistic views first became known in 1050, it was immediately condemned by the Councils of Rome and Vercelli (1050), but because the condemnation was “issued *in absentia*,” it “did little to silence him.”<sup>1254</sup> Thus, he maintained his position unabated. Subsequently, in 1059 another Council was convened by Pope Nicholas II (+1061) in Rome at which Berengarius participated. At the end of the deliberations, his Eucharistic view was condemned, and he was forced to take an oath formulated by Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida (1015-1061), which according Aidan

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<sup>1249</sup> See Henry Chadwick, “Ego Berengarius,” in *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 40 (1989), 414-445.

<sup>1250</sup> Teresa Whalen, *The Authentic Doctrine of the Eucharist* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1993), 5.

<sup>1251</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>1252</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>1253</sup> Walsh, *The Sacraments of Initiation*, 231.

<sup>1254</sup> Charles M. Radding and Francis Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics in the Eucharistic Controversy, 1078–1079: Alberic of Monte Cassino Against Berengar of Tours* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 17. For More on the Council of Rome I and the Council of Vercelli, see, H. E. J. Cowdrey, “The Papacy and the Berengarian Controversy,” in *Auctoritas und Ratio*, Peter F. Ganz, et al, eds (1990), 109-136.

Nicholas “revived Paschasius’ ultra-realism in its sharpest form.”<sup>1255</sup> In the oath, he was compelled “to swear to Christ’s *real presence*,”<sup>1256</sup> in the most crudely physical terms, namely, “that the bread and wine which are placed on the altar after the consecration are not only signs (*non solum sacramentum*), but also the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that sensually, not only in sign, but in truth (*non solum sacramento, sed in veritate*) they are handled and broken by the hands of the priests and crushed by the teeth of the faithful.”<sup>1257</sup>

Berengarius was not pleased with the oath. For upon his return to France from Rome, “he published a book attacking the decision of the 1059 Roman Council and the role of his principal adversary Humbert.”<sup>1258</sup> He also repudiated the oath he took (the reason being that he took it under duress), overthrowing the doctrine expressed by it, and maintaining his position and expressing it more boldly than ever. Berengarius’ actions and his views prompted a response from some scholars and theologians who were not only concerned with refuting him “but also with defending the Council of 1059 and the specific oath that Berengarius had been forced to swear.”<sup>1259</sup> Chief among them was Lanfranc of Bec, a Benedictine abbot of the monastery of St. Stephen in Caen, who later became the Archbishop of Canterbury. Lanfranc wrote a reply to Berengarius’ Eucharistic theology in a work titled, *Liber de Corpore et Sanguine Domini* (“A Book Concerning the Body and Blood of the Lord”), bearing the same title as Paschasius’ treatise on the Eucharist. Though he “took the title of Paschasius’ treatise as his own,” Lanfranc’s work “showed a notable theological

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<sup>1255</sup> Nicholas, *The Holy Eucharist*, 62

<sup>1256</sup> Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 21.

<sup>1257</sup> Gary Macy, “The Theological Fate of Berengar’s Oath of 1059: Interpreting a Blunder Became Tradition,” in *Interpreting Tradition: The Art of Theological Reflection*, ed. Jane Kopas (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 27-38.

<sup>1258</sup> Radding and Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics in the Eucharistic Controversy*, 6.

<sup>1259</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

advance on his monastic predecessor.”<sup>1260</sup> His Eucharistic theology relied heavily on the work of St. Ambrose, especially on his sacramental realism.

Lanfranc opposed Berengarius’ view which considered the Eucharist as a sign of Christ’s body and blood, hence, not the same as his incarnate flesh and blood. Affirming the Church’s belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist; of the unity between the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist and Christ’s incarnate body and blood, he writes:

We believe...that the earthly substances, which on the table of the Lord are divinely sanctified by the priestly ministry, are ineffably, incomprehensibly, miraculously converted by the workings of heavenly power into the essence of the Lord’s body. The species and whatever other certain qualities of the earthly substances themselves, however, are preserved, so that those who see it may not be horrified at the sight of flesh and blood, and believers may have a greater reward for their faith at the sight. It is, nonetheless, the body of the Lord himself existing in heaven at the right side of the Father, immortal, inviolate, whole, uncontaminated, and unharmed. Truly it is possible to say, therefore, that it is the same body that was assumed from the Virgin, and also not the same body, which we receive. Indeed, it is the same body as far as it concerns its essence, true nature, and its own excellence. It is not the same body in its appearance, however, if one is considering the species of bread and wine and the rest of the qualities mentioned above.<sup>1261</sup>

Lanfranc’s defence above, “proposed for the first time the idea of transubstantiation: the conversion of the substance, but not accidents, of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ’s being.”<sup>1262</sup> It later came to be used in the Berengarius’ oath of 1079, and subsequently by the Fourth Lateran Council “in its dogmatic proscription of the Albigensians.”<sup>1263</sup>

Berengarius replied Lanfranc in his *De Sacra Coena* (on the Lord’s Supper). In this work he argued against Lanfranc’s view on the real presence insisting that “Christ’s body be treated as incorruptible, and as residing on the right of God in heaven, and not dwelling on

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<sup>1260</sup> Nicholas, *The Holy Eucharist*, 63.

<sup>1261</sup> Lanfranc of Canterbury, *On the Body and Blood of the Lord*, trans. Mark G. Vaillancourt (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2009), 66.

<sup>1262</sup> Nicholas, *The Holy Eucharist*, 63.

<sup>1263</sup> Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery*, 211. The Albigensians represented a rebirth of the ancient dualist heresy sustained by the Gnostics and the Manichaeans which considered matter to be evil.

the altar.”<sup>1264</sup> He maintained that if Christ had truly died, rose from the dead and is seated at right hand of the Father in heaven, then he could not be said to be present in the Eucharistic bread and wine on the altar. He accused Lanfranc of removing the Eucharist from the sacramental order by his insistence that “the visible forms of bread and wine are metaphysically combined with the invisible reality of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1265</sup> For him, instead of saying that the Eucharistic bread and wine lose their being at consecration, one should rather say that they are elevated into something better.

Consequently, a sequence of attack and counterattack ensued between him and Lanfranc.<sup>1266</sup> This became a great concern for the Church. Hence, the Church authority intervened, and in 1079, Berengarius was summoned again to Rome by Pope Gregory VII (1015-1085), and was forced to take another (a new) oath. It reads:

I, Berengarius, believe in my heart and openly profess that the bread and wine that are placed on the altar are through the mystery of the sacred prayer and the words of our Redeemer substantially changed into the true and proper and life-giving flesh and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord; and that after the consecration is the true body of Christ, which was born of the Virgin, as an offering for the salvation of the world hung on the cross, and sits at the right hand of the Father, and (is) the true blood of Christ which floods from his side; not only through the sign and power of the sacrament but in his proper nature and true substance... Thus I believe, and I will not teach any more against this faith. So, help me God and this holy Gospel of God.<sup>1267</sup>

This new oath was very similar to the previous oath he took in 1059, except for the addition of the phrase “substantially changed,” and the term “substance.” This addition was according Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, “the result of the recent recovery of the

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<sup>1264</sup> Berengarius, *De Sacra Coena*, 177. Quoted in Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>1265</sup> See the new edition of Berengarius’ *De Sacra Coena*, by R.B.C. Huygens entitled, *Berengerius Turonensis, Rescriptum contra Lanfrannum*, quoted in Nicholas, *The Holy Eucharist*, 64.

<sup>1266</sup> For more on the controversy between Berengarius and Lanfranc, see, Gary Macy, *The Theology of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period: A Study of the Salvific Function of the Sacrament According to the Theologians c. 1080-c.1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 35-43.

<sup>1267</sup> Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 700. Quoted in Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2012), 225.



philosophy of Aristotle (d. 322 BCE) in the medieval schools.”<sup>1268</sup> In his *Categories*, Aristotle argued that the “most basic metaphysical reality is primary substance, an intelligible substrate that lies ‘underneath’ the various accidents of color, shape, size, position, and so forth that qualify it.”<sup>1269</sup> In other words, while a thing such as a chair might be said to possess different accidents such as shape, colour, size, hardness, etc, there is an underlying substance (the substratum), not directly perceived by the senses, or seen by the bodily eye, but is rather grasped by the intellect alone, that makes it a chair and not, for instance, a table.<sup>1270</sup>

On account of the growing influence of Aristotelian thought, the word transubstantiation became a common term used in describing the Eucharistic change and real presence in the first half of the twelfth century. Though it was used during this period by individual authors (beginning from Lanfranc before them), to denote the change in substance of the Eucharistic bread and wine into the substance body and blood of Christ after consecration, it was at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), convoked and endorsed by Pope Innocent III (1161-1216), that it first appeared in an official ecclesial document.<sup>1271</sup> The Council in the opening paragraph of its Constitutions decreed as follows:

There is one universal Church of the faithful, outside which no one at all is in a state of salvation. In this Church, Jesus Christ himself is both priest and sacrifice; and his body and blood are really contained in the sacrament of the altar under the species of bread and wine, the bread being transubstantiated into the body, and the wine into the blood, by the power of God, so that, to effect the mystery of unity, we ourselves receive of that which is his, what he himself received of that which is ours.<sup>1272</sup>

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<sup>1268</sup> Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies*, 225.

<sup>1269</sup> Barron, *Eucharist*, 112.

<sup>1270</sup> S. Marc Cohen. Aristotle’s Metaphysics. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*-<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/>(accessed August 13, 2019).

<sup>1271</sup> For more on the history surrounding the development of the doctrine of transubstantiation, see James F. McCue, “The Doctrine of Transubstantiation from Berengar Through Trent: The Point at Issue,” in *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 61 (1968), 385-430. Also Joseph Goering, “The Invention of Transubstantiation,” in *Traditio*, vol. 46 (1991), 147-170.

<sup>1272</sup> Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43<sup>rd</sup> edition, ed. Peter Hunermann (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 802.

As a result of the Council’s declaration, transubstantiation became orthodoxy. Thus, “any discussion of what happened in the Eucharist that deviated” from this decree, was henceforth to be considered heretical and the person involved is excommunicated.<sup>1273</sup>

Like Lanfranc and others, the Fourth Lateran Council in its declaration also employed the word transubstantiation (in a “non-technical sense”) in describing the Eucharistic change, without clarifying it. They only offered a definitive statement of its essential features without providing a proper explanation of the process involved.<sup>1274</sup> The reason being perhaps as Barron observes, that “the church never wanted to identify itself too strongly with a particular philosophical position or mode of explanation.”<sup>1275</sup> Thomas Aquinas was to make up for the lack of explanation and clarification by the Lateran Council on the process involved in the Eucharistic (substantial) change of the elements of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. He will provide a “full theological justification and philosophical explanation”<sup>1276</sup> of this change in his masterpiece, the *Summa Theologiae*, as we shall see below.

### **5.3.3 Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274): Real Presence and Transubstantiation**

Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth century Dominican theologian and Doctor of the Church wrote at length on the mystery of the Eucharist. Far from being just a topic of academic interest, the Eucharist was at the core of his spiritual life. He would usually celebrate Mass daily “and would then assist at another Mass immediately afterward.”<sup>1277</sup> When contending with a very difficult intellectual question, “he would pray before the Blessed sacrament, frequently resting his head on the tabernacle itself, begging for inspiration.”<sup>1278</sup> Thomas believed that

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<sup>1273</sup> See Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation*, 21.

<sup>1274</sup> See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2017), 398.

<sup>1275</sup> Barron, *Eucharist*, 113-114.

<sup>1276</sup> Everett Ferguson, *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, vol. 3 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 92.

<sup>1277</sup> Barron, *Eucharist*, 114.

<sup>1278</sup> *Ibid.*

Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist, hence, he approaches him to beg for enlightenment as he wrestled with complex questions of an intellectual nature. This foreshadowed Teresa's belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist; a presence that became for her (especially after receiving him in the Holy Communion), a source of inspiration as she struggled to put into words things of a mystical nature. As was the case in Teresa's experience in relation to the Eucharist (as we saw in chapter four of this work), "one of the most mysterious events in Aquinas's life" revolved around the Eucharist.<sup>1279</sup> A very well-known legend has it that having finished his long discourse on the Eucharist in the third part of his masterpiece the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas, doubtful of the accuracy of what he had written about the Eucharist, placed the text before a crucifix and prayed. Then, there came a voice from the crucifix saying: You have written well about the sacrament of my body (*Bene de hoc mei corporis sacramento scripsisti*).<sup>1280</sup>

Like the scholastic theologians of his time (who were beginning to appreciate the power of reason in reaching a deeper understanding of Christian dogma), Aquinas believed in the use of reason in theology as is evident in his *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>1281</sup> He devoted a great deal of attention in his treatise on the Eucharist to a systematic and a comprehensive exposition of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and of the doctrine of transubstantiation, using the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accidents to explain what happened during and after consecration. His notion of transubstantiation asserts that while the substance, (that basic and invisible substratum which constitutes what a thing is in itself) becomes the body of Christ, the accidents (visible appearances such as colour, shape, smell, etc) of bread and wine remain unchanged after consecration. He used his explanation of transubstantiation to justify the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. He

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<sup>1279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1280</sup> See Edmund Colledge, "The legend of St. Thomas Aquinas," in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies*, vol. 1 (1974), 13-28.

<sup>1281</sup> See Whalen, *The Authentic Doctrine of the Eucharist*, 11.

believed that “transubstantiation provided the only way in which the real presence could be explained in such a way as to preserve the physical presence without gross materialism and to preserve the sign quality of the sacrament without a purely symbolic interpretation.”<sup>1282</sup> This, concludes Everett Ferguson, was an instance of Aquinas’ “program of fusing Aristotelian philosophy with Catholic theology.”<sup>1283</sup>

For Thomas, real presence is a fact that is beyond any reasonable doubt. He began his discussion on the reality of Christ’s Eucharist presence (in article 1 of question 75 of part 3 of his *Summa Theologiae*), by asking whether the body of Christ is in this sacrament “in very truth (*secundum veritatem*) or merely as in a figure or sign (*secundum figuram*)?”<sup>1284</sup> Quoting from the Church Fathers, Aquinas went for the former, affirming that Christ is present in the Eucharist in truth. Such a presence according to him is suitable “for the perfection of the New Law.”<sup>1285</sup> He explained his position as follows: First, the sacrifices of the Old Law were according to him, prefigurements of the true sacrifice of Christ’s Passion; therefore, it was necessary “that the sacrifice of the New Law instituted by Christ should have something more,” than that.<sup>1286</sup> And this “something more” is that the Eucharist as “the sacrifice of the New Law instituted by Christ” should contain “Christ himself crucified, not merely in signification or figure, but also in very truth.”<sup>1287</sup> This means as he wrote elsewhere that the “Eucharist contains something which is sacred absolutely, namely, Christ’s own body (*ipsum Christum*), whereas the other sacraments contain something which is sacred in relation to something else, namely, the sanctifying power.”<sup>1288</sup>

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<sup>1282</sup> Ferguson, *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, 93.

<sup>1283</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>1284</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 75, art. 1.

<sup>1285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1286</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1288</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 73, art. 1, resp. to obj. 3.

Secondly, such a real presence according to Aquinas, “belongs to Christ's love,” which led him to assume “a true body of our nature” at the incarnation.<sup>1289</sup> He explained that as “it is the special feature of friendship to live together with friends,”<sup>1290</sup> as Aristotle stated, so Jesus gave us (his friends) his bodily and abiding presence in the Eucharist. Thus, for Aquinas, according to Reinhard Hütter, “the Eucharist is Christ’s central token of surpassing friendship,” the greatest sign of his love towards us.<sup>1291</sup> For even while on our earthly pilgrimage, he does not deprive us (the friends he so much loved) of his bodily presence; “but unites us with himself in this sacrament through the truth of his body and blood.”<sup>1292</sup> Hence, he says in chapter six of John’s gospel: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”<sup>1293</sup>

Having established that fact of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, Aquinas went on to address another very important question, which is, on whether the substance of the bread and wine do remain in the Eucharist after the consecration?<sup>1294</sup> Aquinas’ reply to this question is that the substance of the bread cannot co-exist after the consecration. To buttress his points, he argued that Christ’s body can only come to be in the Eucharist by either of the following two ways: First by it being brought in through some kind of local motion; by change of place (that is by the bread going away and the body of Christ coming in). Secondly, by something already there being changed into it.<sup>1295</sup> Aquinas asserts that Christ’s body could not exist in the Eucharist through local motion, because it would entail him ceasing to be in heaven: “for what is moved locally does not come anew to some place unless

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<sup>1289</sup> See *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 75, art. 1.

<sup>1290</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IX. Quoted in *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 75, art. 1.

<sup>1291</sup> see Reinhard Hütter, *Aquinas on Transubstantiation: The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 66.

<sup>1292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1293</sup> John 6:57.

<sup>1294</sup> *Summa Theologiae* III, q.75, art. 2.

<sup>1295</sup> See *Ibid.*

it quits the former one.”<sup>1296</sup> If the body of Christ does not begin to be in the Eucharist by local motion, then it must be said to be there by the change of the substance of bread into itself. And this according to Aquinas accounts for why Christ said “this is my body,” and not “here is my body.” He argued that the statement “this is my body,” would not be true if the substance of the bread were to remain in the Eucharist after consecration, for the substance of bread is not on any occasion the body of Christ.

Given that “what is changed into another thing, no longer remains after such change,” Aquinas concludes that the substance of the bread cannot remain after the consecration.<sup>1297</sup> According to him, the co-existence of the substance of the bread with the substance of the body of Christ after consecration would go against the Church’s veneration of the Eucharist as the body of Christ, for it would involve venerating what was still bread, together with the substance of Christ’s body. It would mean adoring the substance of bread which should “not be adored with adoration of latria.”<sup>1298</sup>

Aquinas reckons that this change of the substance of bread into the substance of the body of Christ is “beyond the power of nature.”<sup>1299</sup> It is brought about purely by God’s power. Unlike created agents (such as human beings), who are limited in their actuality, “God is unlimited actuality (*actus infinitus*), and his agency reaches the whole nature of an existing

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<sup>1296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1297</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>1298</sup> See *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 75, art. 2. Latria (from Latin *Latrīa* and Greek λατρεία, *latreiā*, meaning service or worship), is the Church’s terminology used to refer to “the veneration due to God alone for his supreme excellence and to show people’s complete submission to him.” Latria could be absolute or relative. Absolute latria, is the adoration given only to God, or one of the Trinitarian Persons, especially to Jesus Christ present in the Holy Eucharist. While relative latria is the veneration due to images connected with the divinity. The veneration is given not to these images, but to the divinity whom they represent. For more on the history of Eucharistic adoration, see John A. Hardon, *The History of Eucharistic Adoration: Development of Doctrine in the Catholic Church* (Illinois: CMJ Marian Publishers, 2003), 4-32. And on the treatment on Latria, see John A. Hardon, *Catholic Dictionary: An Abridged and Updated Edition of Modern Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Image Book, 2013), 259. Also John F. O’Grady, *Catholic Beliefs and Traditions: Ancient and Ever New* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 144.

<sup>1299</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 75, art. 4.

thing.”<sup>1300</sup> Thus, he is able to bring about “the change of all being, so that, to wit, the whole substance of one thing be changed into the whole substance of another.”<sup>1301</sup> As the author of being God can “change into whatever there is of being in the other, withdrawing that whereby it was distinguished from the other.”<sup>1302</sup> In the case of the Eucharist, he changes “the whole substance of the bread into the whole substance of Christ's body, and the “whole substance of the wine into the whole substance of Christ's blood,” while the accidents of the bread and wine remain unchanged.<sup>1303</sup> Aquinas called this unique (substantial) change, “transubstantiation.”<sup>1304</sup> This complete change of the substance of the bread and wine was, according to him, the only way to render Christ present in the Eucharist. It takes place at the moment of consecration when the words “This is my body” and “This is my blood,” are spoken over the elements of bread and wine by the minister. In speaking these words, the minister is acting as an instrument through which Christ spoke. He “does nothing in perfecting this sacrament, except to pronounce the words of Christ,” as if it was him speaking in person.<sup>1305</sup> These words bring about the miraculous conversion (by divine power) of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood. Thus, “like the act of creation, *creare ex nihilo*, a conversion of substance embodies a divine rather than a human possibility.”<sup>1306</sup> Aquinas’ treatment of transubstantiation therefore, shows among other things that the mode of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist is spiritual (invisible) and not physical. Christ’s body is not present in the Eucharist in its natural form, but in an invisible manner under the sacramental appearance of bread and wine. Thus, his body is present “in

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<sup>1300</sup> Jan Heiner Tück, *A Gift of Presence: The Theology and Poetry of the Eucharist in Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Scott G. Hefelfinger (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 2018), 74. Also *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 5, arts. 1-6.

<sup>1301</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 75, art. 4.

<sup>1302</sup> *Ibid.*, resp to obj 3.

<sup>1303</sup> *Ibid.*, III, q. 75, art. 4.

<sup>1304</sup> *Ibid.* For an in depth study of Thomas’ treatment of transubstantiation, see Hütter, *Aquinas on Transubstantiation*, 27-56. Also S. L. Brock, “St. Thomas and the Eucharistic Conversion,” in *The Thomist*, vol. 65 (2001), 529-566.

<sup>1305</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 78, art. 1.

<sup>1306</sup> Tück, *A Gift of Presence*, 75.

the Eucharist sacramentally.”<sup>1307</sup> This invisible, sacramental presence of Christ’ body and blood in the Eucharist is not perceptible neither by the senses, nor understanding “but by faith alone.”<sup>1308</sup>

Aquinas’ systematic and in depth exposition of the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and his explanation of the mode of this presence using the terminology of “transubstantiation,” was not only accepted by the Church of his time, but it also became normative for the Church’s faith in the real presence of Christ in the whole of the late medieval period and part of the early modern period (in which Teresa lived).<sup>1309</sup> But things took a different turn in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when this approach was challenged heavily by Protestant Reformers at the time of the Reformation. Chief among these Reformers were Luther, Zwingli and Calvin.

#### **5.4 Protestant Reformers on the Real Presence and Transubstantiation**

The Church’s Eucharistic faith came under severe attack by Protestant Reformers who, among other things, were opposed to Church’s belief and teaching on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and on its use of the term transubstantiation in explaining the mode of this presence. For the purposes of this work, we shall limit ourselves to the counter-opinion of the key Reformers on Christ’s Eucharistic presence and on transubstantiation.

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<sup>1307</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.73, art. 5.

<sup>1308</sup> *Ibid.*, III, q.75, art. 1.

<sup>1309</sup> It is important to note that though the Church settled for transubstantiation as the mode of Christ’s Eucharistic presence, not everybody in the Church agreed with that. Notable scholars of the nominalist school such as the Scottish Franciscan philosopher–cum–theologian John Duns Scotus (1266-1308), the English Franciscan philosopher and theologian William of Ockham (1285-1347) and a host of others had expressed deep reservation about transubstantiation. Duns Scotus for instance, was more sceptical about it for he found no basis for it in Scripture. Despite their doubts about transubstantiation, they were ready to accept it because it was a doctrinal formulation of the Church. See Michael Schmaus, *Dogma: The Church as Sacrament*, vol 5 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 2004), 90-95. Also Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 32-37.



#### 5.4.1 Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Luther's major discourse on the Eucharist is contained in his work entitled *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, published in 1520. This "polemic and lengthy work" has been described as what "provided the foundation for Protestant theologies of the sacraments in general," and as containing "the first detailed attack against the medieval sacramental system of the Western Church in general."<sup>1310</sup> In it, Luther described Rome as "the new Babylon, the tyrannical power that prevented God's people from living and worshiping as they should."<sup>1311</sup> He states that just as the Jews were held captives in Babylon, so the sacraments (namely, baptism, penance and the Eucharist), "have been subjected to a miserable captivity by the Roman curia," and the church "robbed of all her freedom."<sup>1312</sup> He enumerated three "captivities" to which the sacrament of the Eucharist had been subjected in the late medieval Church. First, is the denial of both kinds (the body and blood of Christ) to all the faithful. That is, the introduction of the practice of receiving communion under one species. Second, which he described as "less grievous" than the other two, is the doctrine of transubstantiation. And third, the belief that Mass is a sacrifice.<sup>1313</sup> Our emphasis here will be on the second captivity (the doctrine of transubstantiation) which Luther found "to be philosophically incoherent and resented its imposition by Church authority."<sup>1314</sup>

Luther believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist; that Christ's body and blood are truly present in the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine after consecration. He often "refers to this presence as a 'substantial' one, using the term substantial in its traditional

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<sup>1310</sup> See Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies*, 235-237.

<sup>1311</sup> Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 173.

<sup>1312</sup> See Luther, *Babylonia Captivity in Luther's Work*, 36:17. Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>1313</sup> See Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *The Essential Luther*, ed and trans. Tryntje Helfferich (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2018), 58-73.

<sup>1314</sup> Brett David Salkeld, "*Transubstantiation: Sign and Reality in Ecumenical Dialogue*" (PHD diss, Regis College, 2013), 4.

sense,”<sup>1315</sup> but he never subscribed to the idea of the bread and wine undergoing a substantial change; of them losing their reality. Neither was he in support of any attempt at rationalizing the mode of Christ’s Eucharistic presence. What was of paramount importance for him was that Christ is really present in the Eucharist (as is testified in the Scriptures) and “not some particular theory as to how he was present.”<sup>1316</sup> He writes:

Indeed, if I cannot comprehend how the bread can be the body of Christ, nevertheless I will take my understating captive in obedience to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5) and, adhering simply to His words, firmly believe not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is the body of Christ. Thus I will give heed to the words that says: “He took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and said: ‘Take, eat: this (i.e., this bread that He had taken and broken) is my body.’” And from Paul: “The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” He does not say participation in the body of Christ is “in the bread,” but that it is the bread itself. So what if philosophy does not grasp that? The Holy Spirit is greater than Aristotle.<sup>1317</sup>

Luther further expressed his faith on the reality of Christ’s presence in his 1528 *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*,<sup>1318</sup> as follows: “It is completely true to say, ‘This is Christ’s body’ if one points to the bread, and whoever sees the bread, sees Christ’s body...It is also true to say, ‘He who takes hold of this bread, takes hold of Christ’s Body; and he who eats this bread, eats Christ’s Body...’”<sup>1319</sup>

While Luther (unlike other Reformers) championed the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, he rejected the Church’s “specifically Aristotelian interpretation of it associated with transubstantiation.”<sup>1320</sup> In the Smalcald Articles of 1537 he writes:

As for transubstantiation, we have no regard for the subtle sophistry of those who teach that bread and wine surrender or lose their natural substance and retain only the appearance and shape of bread without any

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<sup>1315</sup> James T. O’Connor, *The Hidden Manna: A Theology of the Eucharist*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 136.

<sup>1316</sup> See, Alister E. McGrath, *Theology: The Basics*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 174.

<sup>1317</sup> Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” in *The Essential Luther*, 65.

<sup>1318</sup> This work has been described as “the most detailed and the most profound of Luther’s treatises on the Lord’s Supper. See O’Connor, *The Hidden Manna*, 136.

<sup>1319</sup> Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, 300. Quoted in O’Connor, *The Hidden Manna*, 136-137.

<sup>1320</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 197.

longer being real bread, for that bread is and remains there agrees better with the Scriptures, as St. Paul himself states, “The bread which we break,” and again, “Let a man so eat of the bread.”<sup>1321</sup>

Luther argued against the Church’s use of the term transubstantiation in explaining the mode of Christ’s Eucharistic presence for according to him, it relied so much on Aristotelian philosophy and not on the words of Jesus contained in the Scriptures. Instead of relying on Aristotelian categories in trying to understand and to explain the mystery of Christ’s Eucharistic presence, he suggested we “simply adhere to the words of Christ, prepared to be ignorant of whatever may be taking place there (on the altar), and content that the true body of Christ is present by virtue of the words” of consecration.<sup>1322</sup> He believes we don’t necessarily have to fully understand the method of divine operation.

But if at all we need to explain the mystery of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist for the sake of clarity, he proposed “we use simple every day analogy...instead of rationalizing it using some scholastic subtlety.”<sup>1323</sup> A good example of what he proposed was in his use of the image of iron and fire (which he borrowed from Origen), to illustrate the mode of Christ’s Eucharistic presence. “In red-hot iron, for instance,” he writes, “the two substances, fire and iron, are so mingled that every part is both iron and fire.”<sup>1324</sup> In other words, both iron and fire are present in a heated and glowing iron. This analogy explained his views on the coexistence of both the substance of bread and wine with the substance of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist after consecration.

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<sup>1321</sup> See Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, quoted in B. W. Teigen, “The Real Presence in the Book of Concord,” in *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 2 (1977), 41-57. The Smalcald Articles were written as a summary of Lutheran doctrine in preparation for the general council of the church. Luther wrote them towards the end of 1536, and submitted them to the Smalcald League for adoption early in 1537. They were meant to be his “last testament” before his death in 1546. In the preface to the articles, he writes: “I have decided to publish these articles so that, if I should die before a council meets...those who live after me may have my testimony and confession...to show where I have stood until now and where by God’s grace, I will continue to stand.” See Theodore G. Tappert, trans and ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 289. Also Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532-1546*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 178-185.

<sup>1322</sup> See Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” in *The Essential Luther*, 64.

<sup>1323</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 197.

<sup>1324</sup> See *Luther’s Works*, 36: 32. Quoted in Egil Grislis, “The manner of Christ’s Eucharistic presence according to Martin Luther,” in *Consensus*, vol. 7 (1981), 3-15.

Hence, in place of transubstantiation (as a mode of explaining Christ's Eucharistic presence), Luther opted for an approach widely referred to (but not by himself) as 'consubstantiation,' "according to which the bread and wine after the consecration remain in their natural substances but co-exist with the body and blood of Christ."<sup>1325</sup> Recounting what informed his opinion, he writes:

Some time ago, while indulging in scholastic theology, I was given occasion for thought by the cardinal of Cambrai. In his pointed discussion of the fourth book of the *Sentences*, he argued that it would be much more probable, and require fewer surplus miracles, to regard the true bread and true wine as present on the altar, not their accidents alone—if only the church had not determined otherwise.<sup>1326</sup>

What Luther was saying in effect was as a student he was challenged to critical reflection after reading the mode of Eucharistic presence proposed by the "Cardinal of Cambrai" in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. The said Cardinal had proposed a mode of Christ's Eucharist presence, whereby after consecration, the substance of bread "remains where the body of Christ begins to be, and thus the substance of bread would be said to pass into the substance of the body."<sup>1327</sup> This position (also known as consubstantiation), is quite realistic for it does not suppose accidents existing without a subject or the substance of the bread existing aside from its accidents. It holds that the substance of bread would co-exist with the substance of the body Christ after consecration, without the bread losing its substance, as in the case of transubstantiation. The Cardinal believes that this theory (which

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<sup>1325</sup> Raymond Moloney, *The Eucharist* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 146. Luther's approach was also reflected in the confessions of the Lutheran Church after him. They not only rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, but also affirmed Luther's doctrine of consubstantiation or sacramental union. They write: "In addition to the words of Christ and of St. Paul (the bread in the Lord's Supper 'is true body of Christ' or 'a participation in the body of Christ'), we at times use the formulas 'under the bread, with the bread, in the bread.' We do this to reject the papistic transubstantiation and to indicate the sacramental union between the untransformed substance of the bread and the body of Christ." See Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 575.

<sup>1326</sup> Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *The Essential Luther*, 62-63.

<sup>1327</sup> David Grumett, *Material Eucharist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 179.

according to him requires fewer miracles for it to be explained), would have been the better option, if the Church had not decided otherwise at the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>1328</sup>

The above mentioned “Cardinal of Cambrai” is Pierre d’Ailly (1351-1420), the foremost French scholastic theologian and philosopher linked with the rise of nominalism,<sup>1329</sup> and who, like so many in his era, produced a commentary on Peter Lombard’s authoritative work, the *Sentences*. He was one of the leading theologians at the Council of Constance (1414-1418) and had presided at its third session (March 26, 1415) which condemned the Czech pastor and church reformer John Hus (1369-1415). D’Ailly was a student of William of Ockham (1285-1347), one of the founders of the nominalist school who himself had expressed reservations about transubstantiation.<sup>1330</sup> Like d’Ailly after him, Ockham regards transubstantiation as “the opinion of the theologians” which he accepts “on account of the determination of the Church (*determinationem Ecclesiae*) and not because of any argument (*non propter aliquam rationem*).”<sup>1331</sup> He maintained that “consubstantiation, would be very reasonable (*multum rationabilis*) if the determination of the Church were not opposed to it,”<sup>1332</sup> for it is “not only consistent with scriptural teaching—it also avoids the difficulties that follow from the separation of the accidents of the bread and wine from their subject,”<sup>1333</sup> as is the case in transubstantiation. It is obvious that Ockham, d’Ailly and a host of others from the nominalist school were not in favour of the theory of transubstantiation. But despite their

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<sup>1328</sup> The Cardinal was referring to the Church’s official endorsement of the theory of transubstantiation against the theory of consubstantiation.

<sup>1329</sup> “Nominalism was that movement in the late medieval philosophy and theology which tended to treat universal concepts and the natures to which they refer as mere names (*nomina*).” Nominalists believe for instance, that the use of a general word such as humanity, “does not imply the existence of a general thing named by it.” They also believe that “only individuals and no abstract entities (such as essences, classes, or propositions) exist.” Nominalist beliefs were common among both Catholic and Protestant theologians in the sixteenth century. See Moloney, *The Eucharist*, 149-150, note, 25. Also Encyclopaedia Britannica. Nominalism. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nominalism> (accessed, December 25, 2019).

<sup>1330</sup> See Reinhard Hütter, “Transubstantiation Revisited: Sacra Doctrina, Dogma, and Metaphysics,” in *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life*, ed. Reinhard Hütter and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 21–79.

<sup>1331</sup> See Ockham, *Quodlibet IV*, q. 30. Quoted in John T. Slotemaker, “Ontology, Theology and the Eucharist: Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham,” in *The Saint Anselm Journal*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2014), 1-20.

<sup>1332</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1333</sup> Slotemaker, “Ontology, Theology and the Eucharist: Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham,” 1-20.

misgivings about this theory, they still accepted it because the Church had officially endorsed it at the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>1334</sup>

Luther subscribed to the theory of consubstantiation as is expressed in d'Ailly's commentary on the *Sentences*. But unlike him (d'Ailly) and Ockham, (who despite their preference for consubstantiation, still pledged their allegiance to the Church's position on transubstantiation) Luther didn't feel obliged to stick to what the Church decreed on transubstantiation. He writes:

Afterward, when I saw what church it was that had decreed this the-Thomistic<sup>1335</sup> one, of course; that is, the Aristotelian<sup>1336</sup>—I became bolder. At first, after floundering in great difficulty, I anchored my conscience in the former opinion, namely, that it is real bread and real wine in which Christ's real flesh and real blood are present in no other way and to no less a degree than they propose them to be under their accidents. I decided this because I saw that the opinions of the Thomists, whether approved by a pope or by a council, remain opinions, nor would they become articles of faith even if an angel from heaven were to decide otherwise. For what is asserted without Scripture or a proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but it is not necessary to believe it.<sup>1337</sup>

Luther's rejection of the Church's decree on transubstantiation as expressed above was because of its reliance on Aristotelian philosophy. He believes that the Church had for centuries maintained the true faith until its adoption of Aristotelian philosophy in defining its articles of faith. He writes: "For more than twelve hundred years the church believed rightly. In no place and at no time did the holy fathers mention...transubstantiation until the counterfeit philosophy of Aristotle took hold within the church these last three hundred

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<sup>1334</sup> See Moloney, *The Eucharist*, 146.

<sup>1335</sup> He meant that the Church of his time was "a Church dominated by the ideas" of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas' doctrines did indeed influence the Church in the late medieval period.

<sup>1336</sup> Luther was alluding to the fact that Thomas Aquinas "and other scholastic theologians drew heavily on the writings of the ancient Greek Philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC)." See Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *The Essential Luther*, 63, note, 27.

<sup>1337</sup> Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *The Essential Luther*, 62-63.

years.”<sup>1338</sup> This practice according to him, seemed to corrupt and obscure the witness of Scripture, and if allowed to continue, it would “sweep aside the entirety of Scripture.”<sup>1339</sup>

His rejection of transubstantiation also leads to his condemnation of the practice of Eucharistic adoration. Though Luther believed in the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, he however, “drew back from some practices that the Church had come to see as a consequence of this great truth.”<sup>1340</sup> He rejects for instance, the practice by which the Eucharist “was reserved in the tabernacle for adoration.”<sup>1341</sup> According to him, Christ instituted the Eucharist (the sacrament of his body and blood) for Christians to eat and drink,<sup>1342</sup> and anything outside of that defeats its purpose. Hence, he recommends “the consumption of all the elements” remaining after the Eucharistic celebration “so that the question about the duration of Christ’s presence would not come up at all.”<sup>1343</sup>

#### **5.4.2 Ulrich (or Huldrych) Zwingli (1484-1531)**

Ulrich Zwingli, a Swiss Catholic priest turned reformer, was Luther’s main opponent among the reformers with regard to Eucharistic teaching. He was ordained a priest in 1519, and “by 1523 he was writing on the Eucharist and propounding a teaching markedly different from that of the Church and of Luther.”<sup>1344</sup> Unlike Luther who (notwithstanding his outright rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation) had retained “an objective understanding of

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<sup>1338</sup> Ibid. 64. He was alluding to the fact the Aristotelian philosophy found its way into the Church with the official endorsement of transubstantiation by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.

<sup>1339</sup> Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” in *The Essential Luther*, 64.

<sup>1340</sup> O’ Connor, *The Hidden Manna*, 137.

<sup>1341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1342</sup> See Martin Luther, “Handbook: The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther for Ordinary Pastors and Preachers,” in *The Book of Concord*, 362-363. Quoted in Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation*, 115-116.

<sup>1343</sup> See The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 55. “Luther had instructed the Lutheran pastor Simon Wolferinus not to mix leftover consecrated Eucharistic elements with unconsecrated ones.” He asked him instead, to “do what we do here (i.e., in Wittenberg), namely, to eat and drink the remains of the Sacrament with the communicants so that it is not necessary to raise the scandalous and dangerous questions about when the action of the Sacrament ends.” See (WAB)*Weimarer Ausgabe, Briefwechsel*, 10, 348f. Quoted in Ibid, 55, note 47.

<sup>1344</sup> See O’Connor, *The Hidden Manna*, 142.

Christ's Eucharistic presence,"<sup>1345</sup> Zwingli held a radical Eucharistic view that reduced Christ's Eucharistic presence to a symbolic one.

One of his reasons for rejecting the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was on the basis of his metaphorical interpretation of the words of the institution *hoc est corpus meum* ("this is my body,"<sup>1346</sup>), which had been "the cornerstone of traditional Catholic views of the real presence, and which Luther had seized upon in his defence of the real presence."<sup>1347</sup> Zwingli interprets the verb "is" in the words of the institution to mean "signifies," meaning that it has to be taken metaphorically. He reckoned that other passages of Scripture "must be considered and used as keys to understanding the words of institution," for there are many biblical passages where the word "is" was used as in the institution narrative, but not in a literal sense. Thus, instead of understanding the words as they stand, he argues that they need to make sense in the context of other Scriptural texts.<sup>1348</sup> One among the different instances he gave was in the parable of the sower (according to Luke's gospel<sup>1349</sup>), where Jesus mentioned that "the seed is the word of God." Zwingli states that though Jesus referred to the seed as the word of God, "the word of God was not a seed."<sup>1350</sup> Hence, he argued that the word "is" in Jesus's statement above, cannot be taken for "being," but for "signify," for according to him, "Christ is disclosing to the apostles by these words the

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<sup>1345</sup> Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies*, 257.

<sup>1346</sup> See Matthew 26:26.

<sup>1347</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 400-401. The issue of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was the bone of contention between Luther and Zwingli. They agreed in almost everything, but not on the real presence. This led to a strong polemic that almost divided the camp of the Reformers. Even the Marburg Colloquy of 1529 could not resolve their differences on the real presence. Their differences revolved mainly around their different understanding and interpretation of the words of the institution, and on their "different understanding of the nature of Christ's body in heaven." See John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 127.

<sup>1348</sup> See Herman Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Adelaine, SA: Openbook Publishers, 1977), 193-194.

<sup>1349</sup> See Luke 8:4-15.

<sup>1350</sup> Ulrich Zwingli, *In Search of True Religion: Reformation, Pastoral, and Eucharistic Writings*, vol. 2. trans. H. Wayne Pipkin (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 138.



parable he had put forth about the sowing of the seed, saying, ‘The seed of which I speak is,’ that is, signifies, ‘the word of God’<sup>1351</sup>

Applying the above allegorical method of interpretation to the words of the institution “take, eat; this is my body,” (that is, by substituting the word “is” for the word “signifies.”) it becomes “take, eat; this signifies my body which is given up for you.”<sup>1352</sup> In that case, Christ’s words of the institution according to Zwingli should be taken to mean “take, eat, for this which I bid you do will signify to you or remind you of my body which presently is to be given for you.”<sup>1353</sup> His exegesis above indicates that Jesus Christ in the narrative of the institution, could not have literally meant, “This is my body,” but rather, “This (bread) signifies my body.”<sup>1354</sup> This interpretation means that Christ is only present spiritually in the Eucharist, and not bodily; “not identified with the communion elements.”<sup>1355</sup>

Zwingli employed his exegesis of John 6:63 to strengthen his claim that Jesus (in the institution of the Lord’s Supper) could not have literally meant “This is my body.”<sup>1356</sup> The passage reads: “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” According to him, these words which Jesus spoke immediately after his bread of life discourse whereby he claimed that his flesh is food indeed and his blood is drink indeed,<sup>1357</sup> and that anyone who eats his flesh and drinks his blood abides in him, and he in the person, suggests that Jesus did not attach any literally meaning to his bread of life discourse or to his words of the institution of the Eucharist.<sup>1358</sup> Zwingli believes that since according to Christ “the flesh is of no avail,” the eating of his flesh as he

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<sup>1351</sup> See Ibid., 138-139.

<sup>1352</sup> Zwingli, *In Search of True Religion*, 139.

<sup>1353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1354</sup> See Paul H. Jones, *Christ’s Eucharistic Presence: A History of the Doctrine* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 125.

<sup>1355</sup> James F. White, *The Sacrament in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 78.

<sup>1356</sup> See Craig R. Koester, “John Six and the Lord’s Supper,” in *Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 4 (1990), 419-437.

<sup>1357</sup> See John 6:55-56.

<sup>1358</sup> see Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, eds. Samuel M. Jackson and Clarence N. Heller (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 231. Zwingli’s *Commentary on True and False Religion* published in 1525, contains his complete treatment of the Eucharist.

commanded is therefore, a metaphor for believing in him; of coming to him in faith. “To eat the body of Christ spiritually, then, what is it but to trust in Christ,”<sup>1359</sup> He asked. Thus, for him, faith (not the physical elements of bread and wine) “is the essential means by which the believer feeds on Christ.”<sup>1360</sup> He reckoned that a literal rendering of the words “this is my body” will imply a cannibalistic eating of Christ’s flesh in the Eucharist, which is far from what Christ intended when he instituted the Eucharist.

By his interpretation of John 6:63, Zwingli drew a sharp line between the spiritual and the physical, and established that the Eucharist must be understood in an exclusively spiritual manner devoid of any element of flesh; the Eucharist where the body of Christ is to be eaten spiritually and symbolically and not “in a carnal way.”<sup>1361</sup> The Eucharist (or the Lord’s Supper as Zwingli called it) in this sense, becomes nothing but a remembrance of Christ’s death until he returns. In his letter to the Princes of Germany, written in 1530, he compares the Eucharist to the ring a man gives his wife (on embarking on a long journey) to remind her of him in his absence. According to him, just “as the ring, though not itself the husband, has a touch of the husband’s value because it was given by him as a sign of undying love,” and because it reminds his wife of him whenever she looked at it, so the Eucharist “though not Christ’s material body rises to high value because it was given and instituted as an everlasting sign of the love of Christ...”<sup>1362</sup>

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<sup>1359</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>1360</sup> Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 127.

<sup>1361</sup> Sasse, *This Is My Body*, 192.

<sup>1362</sup> See Zwingli, *Letter to the Princes of Germany*, in *On Providence*, 123. Quoted in O’Connor, *The Hidden Manna*, 145.

Thus, he concludes that his exegesis of John 6:63 was aimed at refuting “the senseless notion about bodily flesh...and to prove that to teach that the bodily and sensible Flesh of Christ is eaten when we give thanks to God is not only impious but also foolish and monstrous, unless perhaps one is living among the Anthropophagi.”<sup>1363</sup> His attack was directed at the Catholic Church (and also at Luther) who proffered a literal interpretation of the words of the institution, which gave rise to the belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Another of Zwingli’s reasons for rejecting the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the use of the term transubstantiation (or consubstantiation as attributed to Luther) in explaining the mode of this presence, was based on his belief that the body of Christ as the Scriptures rightly pointed out, is now at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. He argued that Christ’s physical body cannot be in heaven and be present in the Eucharist at the same time.<sup>1364</sup> This according to him contradicts “common-sense logic.”<sup>1365</sup> He believes that if Christ’s body is in heaven as Scripture teaches, then he can only be symbolically present in the Eucharist. In other words, nothing happened to the bread and wine after consecration. They remain nothing other than bread and wine, nor are they means of conveying any particular grace. They are only symbols of Christ’s presence, and nothing more.<sup>1366</sup> His was not a realist understanding of the Eucharistic presence, but a memorialist understanding of it, “in which the idea of presence was at best analogical.”<sup>1367</sup>

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<sup>1363</sup> Ibid., 216. O’ Connor describes Zwingli’s reference to Anthropophagi (cannibals), as “an interesting revival of the ancient pagan charge against the Christians.” See O’ Connor, *The Hidden Manna*, 144, note, 86. Cannibalism in the theological jargon of the sixteenth century was known as Capernaite eating, a term that originates from John 6:52, where the people in the synagogue of Capharnaum reacted against the idea of eating the flesh of Jesus. The term Capernaite was also used by some Protestant Reformers to refer to those (Catholics, especially), who adhered to the doctrine of transubstantiation.

<sup>1364</sup> Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 127.

<sup>1365</sup> See Dan Aurelian Botica, “The Eucharist in the Theology of Martin Luther,” in *Perichoresis*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2010), 279-302.

<sup>1366</sup> See Albert Ayers Forrester, *Essays and Questions on Catholic Theology* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2002), 200. Also Darwell Stone, *The Eucharistic Sacrifice* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 41.

<sup>1367</sup> Botica, “The Eucharist in the Theology of Martin Luther,” 279-302.

Zwingli rejected what he perceived as the Church's practice of localizing the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine (as against his actual location in heaven), and in supposing them to be the true body and blood of Christ. This belief according to him, gave rise to the practice of reserving the consecrated host to be venerated and worshipped, and to be carried about at Corpus Christi processions.<sup>1368</sup> Himself and other reformers condemned these practices regarding them as element worship, which is a form of idolatry.

### 5.4.3 John Calvin (1509-1564)

The Frenchman John Calvin (a second-generation Reformer), is often referred to as the "first systematic theologian of the Protestant Reformation" because of his "multivolume *Institutes of the Christian Religion* originally published in 1536 with the final version appearing in 1559."<sup>1369</sup> His writings on the Eucharist are considered as the "most systematic and comprehensive among the works of the founding reformers."<sup>1370</sup> He draws a lot on the Church Fathers "especially St. Augustine, whose writings he frequently interprets with great insight, although he never cites" his more 'realistic' Eucharistic texts.<sup>1371</sup> Calvin took a midway position between Luther's extreme "realistic" view and Zwingli's extreme "symbolic" views on the Eucharistic presence. His position has come to be known as a theory of "virtual presence." Though he shared Zwingli's view about the localization of Christ's body in heaven,<sup>1372</sup> Calvin "considered that Zwingli neglected the fact that the bread and wine 'are signs in such a way that the truth is joined with them.'"<sup>1373</sup> He posits that the

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<sup>1368</sup> See Herman Wegman, *Christian Worship in East and West*, 230-231. Quoted in Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 123.

<sup>1369</sup> See Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies*, 264.

<sup>1370</sup> O'Connor, *The Hidden Manna*, 146.

<sup>1371</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1372</sup> See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol.2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 4.17.14

<sup>1373</sup> See Calvin, "Petit traité sur la Sainte Cène," in *Opera selecta*, vol. 1, 529. Quoted in Moloney, *The Eucharist*, 156.

connection between the substance of Christ's body and blood and the elements of bread and wine is the power of the Holy Spirit, "in virtue of which the bread and wine, much like the water of Baptism, become objectively 'effectual means of grace.'"<sup>1374</sup> He writes thus: "We say that Christ descends to us by the outward symbol and by His Spirit, that He may truly quicken our souls by the substance of His flesh and blood."<sup>1375</sup>

Like Zwingli, Calvin denied the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. And with Luther, he rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, describing it as "this ingenious subtlety" by which "bread came to be taken for God."<sup>1376</sup> He considers transubstantiation as a term that was fabricated by the Church (apart from God's Word) to enforce its belief that "through consecration, what was previously bread is made Christ, so that thereupon Christ lies hidden under the appearance of bread."<sup>1377</sup> He chided the "fabricators" of this term for their inability to explain how "Christ's body might be mixed with the substance of bread without many absurdities immediately cropping up."<sup>1378</sup> He argued that instead of providing an explanation of the illogicality of their claims, they took "refuge in the fiction that a conversion of the bread into the body takes place; not that the body is properly made from the bread, but because Christ, to hide himself under the figure, annihilates its substance."<sup>1379</sup>

Like Luther, he denied the claim that the bread and wine lose their substances after consecration. He acknowledged that some Church Fathers (particularly Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose and John of Damascus) did use the term "conversion" sometimes, (in relation to Eucharistic presence), but this according to him was not "because they intended to wipe out the substance in the outward sign, but rather "to teach that the bread dedicated to the mystery

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<sup>1374</sup> Moloney, *The Eucharist*, 156.

<sup>1375</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.14. Quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>1376</sup> See *Ibid.*, 4.17.13.

<sup>1377</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1378</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.17.14.

<sup>1379</sup> *Ibid.*

is far different from common bread, and is now something else.”<sup>1380</sup> He reckoned that the Fathers proclaimed everywhere “that the Sacred Supper consists of two parts, the earthly and the heavenly; and they interpret the earthly part to be indisputably bread and wine.”<sup>1381</sup> Hence, he denounced the use of the term transubstantiation (in describing the mode of Eucharistic presence) on the ground of it being a recent formulation with no support of antiquity. He writes: “For transubstantiation was devised not so long ago; indeed, not only was it unknown to those better ages when the purer doctrine of religion still flourished, but even when that purity already was somewhat corrupted.”<sup>1382</sup>

Like Zwingli, Calvin’s denial of the real presence was also anchored on his view on the localization of Christ’s body in heaven. He believed that Christ’s body is contained in heaven (where it was once and for all received) until he returns in judgment, and so he deemed it as “utterly unlawful” to draw his body back under the corruptible elements of bread and wine “or to imagine it to be present everywhere.”<sup>1383</sup> In other words, for Calvin, that Christ is in heaven means that he is by no means present in bodily form on earth. He acknowledged that we do always have Christ with us, “yet not with his fleshy presence, but that of his majesty, of his Holy Spirit.”<sup>1384</sup> His bodily presence is only limited to heaven. This implies that Christ cannot be bodily present in the Eucharistic bread and wine. Calvin wants to emphasize the bodily glorification of Jesus Christ, but this for him however, excludes the possibility that Jesus ‘may dwell in the bread (of the Eucharist),’ or else he may have to exit from heaven.<sup>1385</sup> He is of the opinion that we don’t need Christ’s bodily presence in the visible elements of bread and wine, for “the secret working of the Spirit, which unites Christ

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<sup>1380</sup> Ibid., 4.13.14.

<sup>1381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1383</sup> Ibid., 4.17.12.

<sup>1384</sup> Ibid., 2.16.14. Quoted in Schonborn, *God sent his Son*, 342.

<sup>1385</sup> See Schonborn, *God sent his Son*, 342-343.

himself to us,” is sufficient for us to have him present.<sup>1386</sup> For Calvin, the main problem with the Church’s Eucharistic belief (especially on the real presence), “was the implicit physical connection between the bread and the body of Christ.”<sup>1387</sup> His denial of Christ’s bodily presence in the elements of bread and wine, also led to his rejection of the adoration of these elements; a practice he argued, that had no Scriptural basis. This practice according to him, amounts to transferring the worship and reverence due to Christ to earthly elements. This for him is nothing but idolatry: “For what is idolatry if not this: to worship the gifts in place of the Giver himself?”<sup>1388</sup>

From the foregoing, it is obvious that with the Protestant Reformation, many divergent ideas emerged among the Reformers regarding the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Though they held different opinions in respect to the real presence, the Reformers unanimously rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation. They were united in the belief that the Eucharistic bread and wine does not undergo a substantial change after consecration; that they continue to exist without losing their ontological reality (their substances) so as to assume that of body and blood of Christ. If the elements of bread and wine remained what they were before and after consecration, then they are from the Reformers point of view, not to be reckoned as the body and blood of Christ, and if they are not the body and blood of Christ, then all sorts of worship centring on the reserved Eucharist, namely; Eucharistic adoration, exposition, benediction, processions at Corpus Christi, etc., are nothing but idolatry.

Luther, Zwingli and Calvin rejected the practice of reserving the Blessed Sacrament not only because it “contradicted their insistence on the Eucharist as banquet, but also because it embodied the Catholic belief in the objective and permanent presence of

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<sup>1386</sup> See Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.31.

<sup>1387</sup> Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation*, 161.

<sup>1388</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.36.

Christ.”<sup>1389</sup> For Zwingli and Calvin, Christ is not present in the Eucharist as the Church (and Luther) taught. What is present in the Eucharist according to them, is a thing (the elements of bread and wine) and not a person.<sup>1390</sup> Hence, for them, the Eucharist should not be reserved and venerated. Luther himself who, though he believes in the real presence, also rejected the practice of reserving the consecrated Host for veneration. For him, it should rather be consumed than reserved. It was on the basis of their rejection of the Eucharist as the real presence of Christ, and on their non-acceptance of the Church’s use of the term transubstantiation as a means of explaining how Christ becomes present in the Eucharist, that led the Reformers to remove the Eucharist from Churches and places of reservation. This practice left the Eucharist “vulnerable to theft and to various kinds of...desecration.”<sup>1391</sup>

The Reformers’ views on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist represents a departure from the Church’s traditional view. It was a denial of a very significant aspect of the Church’s belief and teaching. Such viewpoint was too serious for the Church to ignore. The Council of Trent not only reaffirms and defends the Church’s view on the real presence, but also condemns the opinions of the Reformers.

## **5.5 The Council of Trent**

The Reformers’ attack on the Church’s traditional teaching on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and their hostility towards the reserved Blessed Sacrament prompted a response from the Church at the Council of Trent. In the course of its thirteenth session (October 11, 1551), the Council issued a definitive statement (a decree) on the Church’s doctrine on the Eucharist with special emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.<sup>1392</sup> In addition to affirming and defending the Church’s Eucharistic belief, this decree (entitled “Decree on

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<sup>1389</sup> Moloney, *The Eucharist*, 156.

<sup>1390</sup> See John Coventry, “The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist,” in *Understanding the Eucharist: Papers of the Maynooth Union Summer School 1968*, ed. Patrick McGoldrick (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1969), 65-76.

<sup>1391</sup> See Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation*, 132.

<sup>1392</sup> See Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol.2, 693-698.



the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist”), was also aimed at responding to the Reformers’ criticisms of the doctrines of the real presence and of transubstantiation. The decree opens (in chapter one<sup>1393</sup>) with a robust affirmation of the real substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It states:

In the first place, the holy council teaches and openly and without qualification professes that, after the consecration of the bread and the wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really and substantially contained in the propitious sacrament of the Holy Eucharist under the appearance of those things which are perceptible to the senses. Nor are the two assertions incompatible, that our Saviour is ever seated in heaven at the right hand of the Father in his natural mode of existing, and that he is nevertheless sacramentally present to us by his substance in many other places in a mode of existing which, though we can hardly express it in words, we can grasp with minds enlightened by faith as possible to God and must most firmly believe...<sup>1394</sup>

The Council’s declaration above, is directed against Berengarius, Zwingli and Calvin (and all those) who held the view that Christ’s Eucharistic presence is only a mere symbol or a sign “pointing away from itself to a body that is absent, perhaps somewhere in the heavens,”<sup>1395</sup> and that he is not received really and sacramentally in the Eucharist, but only spiritually. In addition to its declarations, the Council also denounced sharply (in numbers 1 and 8 of its “canons on the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist.”), those who held views that are contrary to those stipulated in the aforementioned decrees. In Canon 1, the Council states:

If anyone denies that in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist there are contained truly, really and substantially, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ together with the soul and divinity, and therefore the whole Christ, but says that he is present in it only as in a sign or figure or by his power: let him be anathema.<sup>1396</sup>

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<sup>1393</sup> The “Decree on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist” (October 11, 1551), is made up of eight chapters and eleven canons. Our attention will be focused mainly on chapters and canons which contained the Council’s specific affirmations and teachings on the real presence, and their response to and condemnation of the Reformers stance on the Eucharistic presence and on the adoration due to Christ present in the Eucharist.

<sup>1394</sup> Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol.2, 693-694. The Council’s teaching on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and on the mode of this presence as quoted above, “remains today as normative as ever.” It has been quoted by several popes and official documents of the Church. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* repeated it word for word. See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1374; 1376-1377. Also Dulles, *Church and Society*, 456.

<sup>1395</sup> Dulles, *Church and Society*, 456.

<sup>1396</sup> Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol.2, 697.

And in Canon 8, it adds that “if anyone says that Christ, when presented in the Eucharist, is consumed only spiritually, and not also sacramentally: let him be anathema.”<sup>1397</sup>

Having affirmed and defended the truth of Christ’s Eucharistic presence, the Council also referred to the process by which this presence comes about (known as transubstantiation). This process involves the change of the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ; an ontological change whereby the bread and wine “cease to be what they were and become what they were not.”<sup>1398</sup> The Council writes:

But since Christ our redeemer said that it was truly his own body which he was offering under the form of bread, therefore there has always been complete conviction in the Church of God—and so this holy council now declares it once again—that, by the consecration of bread and wine, there takes place the change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. And the holy catholic church has suitably and properly called this change transubstantiation.<sup>1399</sup>

The above doctrinal declaration on the mode of Christ’s Eucharistic presence (which is very Thomistic in nature<sup>1400</sup>) was a response to Luther’s theory of consubstantiation, which posits that the substance of the bread and wine do not change into the substance of the body and blood of Christ; that the substance of the bread and wine and that of the body and blood of Christ are present together after consecration. The Council utterly condemned this view in number 2 of its canons. The canon states:

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<sup>1397</sup> Ibid., 698.

<sup>1398</sup> Dulles, *Church and Society*, 457. It is worth mentioning that though the Council used Aristotelian philosophical concepts to support its explanation of the mode of Christ’s Eucharistic presence, it was not its intention “to settle, by its definition, a question of Aristotelian philosophy.” Rather, it employed philosophical concepts as a means of articulating the faith attested in Scripture and advanced in the Church’s tradition. The Council considered transubstantiation as a fitting and an appropriate term that not only indicates the reality of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but also denotes the complete change of the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. It is “the official means by which the radical ontological change demanded by the real presence was expressed and safeguarded.” See Schmaus, *Dogma: The Church as Sacrament*, 92. Also David N. Power, *The Sacrifice We Offer: The Tridentine Dogma and its Reinterpretation* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987).

<sup>1399</sup> Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 695.

<sup>1400</sup> The wording of the Council’s declaration on how Christ is present in the Eucharist is identical with Thomas’ teaching on the mode of Christ’s presence. See *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.75, art.4.

If anyone says that in the venerable sacrament of the eucharist the substance of the bread and wine remains together with the body and blood of our lord Jesus Christ, and denies that marvellous and unique change of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood, while only the appearance of bread and wine remains, a change which the catholic church most aptly calls transubstantiation: let him be anathema.<sup>1401</sup>

The Council condemned the theory of consubstantiation because of what it perceived as a flaw in its expression and explanation of the mode of Christ's Eucharistic presence. The Council believes that for Christ to be truly present in the Eucharist, the substance of the bread and wine must give way; they must change into the substance of Christ's body and blood, for "it can never be enough to say that Christ is truly present in, with and under the bread and wine,<sup>1402</sup> as Luther proposed. By the change of the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ after consecration, Christ becomes really and substantially present in the Eucharist. In other words, the bread and wine of the Eucharist becomes "in a mysterious way, Christ Himself,"<sup>1403</sup> who remains present in the Eucharist "until the species are consumed."<sup>1404</sup> Christ's Eucharistic presence therefore, "begins with the consecration and ends only with the corruption of the species," which occurs "either with age or consumption."<sup>1405</sup> With the corruption of the species (the bread and wine) of the Eucharist, the body of Christ "ceases to be present because the signs are gone."<sup>1406</sup>

Belief in Christ's real, substantial and permanent presence in the Eucharist is therefore, the basis of the adoration of the reserved Eucharist. The Council upholds that if Christ himself (true God and true man) is really and substantially present in the Eucharist, and if this presence is permanent, then, the Eucharist is not only to be reserved, but also to be

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<sup>1401</sup> Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol.2, 697.

<sup>1402</sup> Moloney, *The Eucharist*, 162.

<sup>1403</sup> Dulles, *Church and Society*, 457.

<sup>1404</sup> Moloney, *The Eucharist*, 165.

<sup>1405</sup> See W. F. Dewan, "Eucharist as Sacrament," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. v (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1967), 599-609. Also Kenneth Baker, *Fundamentals of Catholicism*, vol. 3 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 244-245.

<sup>1406</sup> Ibid.

adored. Christ is to be adored in this sacrament “by the worship of adoration.”<sup>1407</sup> This worship is also to be expressed outwardly by an annual celebration (in honour of the Eucharist) whereby “this sublime and venerable sacrament should be hailed with particular veneration and solemnity and carried with reverence and honour in processions through streets and public places.”<sup>1408</sup> Though the Council accepted the truth in the point made by the Reformers that Christ’s primary purpose of instituting the Eucharist is for it to be consumed (in Holy Communion),<sup>1409</sup> it however argued that “this purpose does not exclude the secondary one of adoration, just as the Son of God was adored by the angels, the Magi and the apostles.”<sup>1410</sup>

### **5.6 Teresa’s Response to the Activities of the Reformers Against the Real Presence**

Teresa shared in the concern of the Council of Trent<sup>1411</sup> about the radical teaching and activities of the Reformers against the Church’s belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. She was aware of the chaos caused by the Reformers, and how they constituted a serious threat to the unity of the Church. But unlike the Council that responded by issuing decrees, canons and anathemas to curb the excesses of this dissident group, Teresa “will provide theoretical and practical solutions that would rekindle the fervour and faith of the Catholics in the Blessed Sacrament, empowered as she was by her own extraordinary mystical experiences.”<sup>1412</sup> At the start of *The Way of Perfection*, Teresa presented her reform project in terms of her response to “the crisis of Eucharistic faith and devotion provoked by

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<sup>1407</sup> Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol.2, 698.

<sup>1408</sup> *Ibid.*, 695. The above is a reference to the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi. See Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, 163-186.

<sup>1409</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>1410</sup> See Moloney, *The Eucharist*, 165. Also Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol.2, 695.

<sup>1411</sup> Teresa lived at the time of the Council of Trent and made mention of it in her writings. She referred to it in *The Book of Her Foundations*, as the “holy Council.” See *Foundations*, 9:3; 17:8 and 16; 24:15. And in her *Letters* she called it “the Council.” See *Letters* I, 11:9; I, 79:10; I, 89:3; I, 98:3; I, 102:15; I, 134:3; I, 211:4. Álvarez states that Teresa’s “mystical life as well as her activity as founder coincides with the celebration and execution of the Council of Trent, which she frequently refers to as the *holy Council*.” See Álvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on Her Life and Work*, 41.

<sup>1412</sup> Maroto, *Vida eucarística de Santa Teresa*, 62.

the Reformers.”<sup>1413</sup> She considered the Reformation as an absolute disaster; as a serious threat to the unity of the Church. For her, the Reformation was almost “conterminous with a ‘Lutheran’ revolt not only against ecclesiastical authority but—far more importantly—against sacramental religion, a matter of the destruction of churches and the discarding of the reserved sacrament.”<sup>1414</sup>

What did Teresa know about the Reformation and what was her source of information? Much of what she knew about the Reformers and their activities was mainly from hearsay. For instance, in the first chapter of *The Way of Perfection*, she narrates how she heard about the news of the religious violence in France (at the beginning of her reforming work), and how it prompted her to modify her initial plan for her new foundation. Her initial plan was that there will be not “so much external austerity or that the house have no income.” She desired “that nothing be lacking” in her new reformed communities.<sup>1415</sup> But these changed as a result of the news she received of the turmoil occurring in France during the French Wars of Religion.<sup>1416</sup> She describes the entire situation as follows:

At that time news reached me of the harm being done in France and of the havoc the Lutherans had caused and how much this miserable sect was growing. The news distressed me greatly, and, as though I could do something or were something, I wept with the Lord and begged him that I might remedy so much evil. It seemed to me that I would have given a thousand lives to save one soul out of the many that were being lost there. I realized I was a woman...and incapable of doing any of the useful things I desired to do in the service of the Lord...As a result I resolved to do the little that was in my power; that is, to follow the evangelical counsels as perfectly as I could and strive that these few persons (referring to her nuns), who live here do the same.<sup>1417</sup>

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<sup>1413</sup> Williams, “Teresa, the Eucharist and the Reformation,” 67-76.

<sup>1414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1415</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 1:1.

<sup>1416</sup> French Wars of Religion was the war between Catholics and Huguenots, (that is, the French Reformed/Calvinist Protestants) which took place between 1562 and 1598 in the Kingdom of France.

<sup>1417</sup> Rowan Williams observed that Teresa’s little or lack of understanding of the theology of the Reformers “is evident in her indiscriminate use of ‘Lutherans’ to describe the very un-Lutheran Protestants” (namely, the France Calvinists), “as well as the more distant and exotic heretics of Northern Europe.” The sad news Teresa heard was about the religious war between the Catholics and the Huguenots in France. See Williams, “Teresa, the Eucharist and the Reformation,” 67-76.

With this news, she became “aware of the great needs of the Church.”<sup>1418</sup> In a sense, she awoke to the sufferings of the Church; a Church “wounded by division and heresy,”<sup>1419</sup> as a result of the Reformation. She compared the Church to a ship journeying “in a tempest.”<sup>1420</sup> Conscious of the needs of the Church, she thought of what “she could do to help within the limitations imposed on women of her day.”<sup>1421</sup> Consequently, she decided to change the initial plan of her reform by intensifying the austerity (especially with respect to the vow of poverty) of the new reformed houses “as an act of reparation for the ‘Lutheran’ rebellion and all that it brought with it.”<sup>1422</sup> Teresa believes that by faithfully observing the evangelical counsels (especially in the practice of radical poverty), by giving up everything for God, and living their lives as perfectly as they could, God will answer their prayers for the Church. He will act to defend his Son (the bride of the Church) from the menace of the “Lutherans.”

In addition to living their vows with utmost perfection, she also ensured that the nuns followed her apostolic ideal which among other things includes “praying for the defenders of the church and for preachers and for learned men who protect her from attack.”<sup>1423</sup> They would therefore be apostles who “could help as much as possible this Lord of mine who is so roughly treated by those for whom he has done so much good.”<sup>1424</sup> They are to accomplish these through their prayers, for that is the reason the Lord brought them together as nuns of the Discalced Carmelite reform; that is their vocation. She reminded them that praying for the needs of the Church, for defenders of the Church, for preachers and theologians must be the “business matter” they are engaged in, the things they desire, and the object of their

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<sup>1418</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 3:7. Also *The Way of Perfection*, 1:4.

<sup>1419</sup> Jose Pereira, and Robert Fastiggi, *The Mystical Theology of the Catholic Reformation*, (New York: University Press of America, 2006), 239.

<sup>1420</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 35:5.

<sup>1421</sup> Steven Payne, *The Carmelite Tradition*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>1422</sup> Williams, “Teresa, the Eucharist and the Reformation,” 67-76.

<sup>1423</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 1:2.

<sup>1424</sup> *Ibid.*

petitions.<sup>1425</sup> They are to be less concerned about “the business matters of the world,”<sup>1426</sup> and be watchful not “to waste their prayer on the trivial petitions that were placed before them by men and women of the world,”<sup>1427</sup> for according to her, “this is not the time to be discussing with God matters that have little importance.”<sup>1428</sup> Teresa reckons that the situation at hand (namely the nefarious activities of the Reformers), calls for serious actions. “The world is all in flames” she writes, “they want to sentence Christ again, so to speak, since they raised a thousand false witnesses against him; they want to ravage his church.”<sup>1429</sup> She realizes that “human forces” are not enough to stop the spread of this fire (the great evils as she called it) caused by these heretics (referring to the Reformers), even though according to her, “people have tried to see if with the force of arms they could remedy all the evil that is making such progress.”<sup>1430</sup> But such effort was of little or no effect.

She was of the view that this battle (which she saw as battle between God and the devil) should not be engaged in with the “secular arm,” but with the “ecclesiastical arm.”<sup>1431</sup> It should be waged by preachers and theologians who are well advanced in the way of the Lord. Her role and that of her nuns then, would be to support these servants of God with their prayers that they “may receive protection from the Lord so as to remain free of the many perils there are in the world, and stop their ears in order not to hear the siren’s song on this dangerous sea.”<sup>1432</sup> She trusts that if some of these requests (of theirs) are answered, then they shall be fighting for the Lord even though they are enclosed.

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<sup>1425</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 1:5.

<sup>1426</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1427</sup> Luti, *Teresa of Avila’s Way*, 54.

<sup>1428</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 1:5.

<sup>1429</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1430</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:1. Álvarez states that the passage where Teresa refers to the people who have tried using “the force of arms” to “remedy all the evil that is making such progress” was crossed out by the censor, because it was perceived as a statement directed at King Philip II who championed the use of military force against the French Calvinist Protestants during the French Wars of Religion. Álvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on Her Life and Work*, 44.

<sup>1431</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 3:2.

<sup>1432</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:2 and 5.

She elaborates further on the havoc caused by the “Lutherans,” which according to her includes destroying Churches, desecrating the Eucharist and removing Jesus Christ (present in this sacrament) from his dwelling place. She writes: “these heretics have so little regard for the Blessed Sacrament that they take away its dwelling places by destroying churches,”<sup>1433</sup> thereby, making him homeless. Hence, for her, Christ has continued to suffer “in reality in his torn and persecuted Church...and especially in the profaned Eucharist.”<sup>1434</sup> She saw the evil of the divided Church as Christ being crucified once again. “It seems these traitors would want Him to be crucified again,”<sup>1435</sup> she writes. Teresa was deeply pained by the havoc caused by the violence of the Reformers (Lutherans or heretics as she called them); by the many evils perpetrated by them, and the threat they posed to the unity of the Church which is the body of Christ. She was most especially hurt by the fact that the Real Presence is being denied, the Mass is being scorned, and the Blessed Sacrament profaned;<sup>1436</sup> that the Reformers had abandoned devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and had shown a great disrespect for Churches as a sacred place of worship and where the Eucharist is housed. She perceived the Reformers and the whole of the Reformation movement not only as a crisis in the Eucharistic devotion, but also “a rejection of the Eucharistic focus of the Church by means of the rejection of the Church as home of the sacrament.”<sup>1437</sup> She makes no pretence as

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<sup>1433</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:8.

<sup>1434</sup> Antonio Sicari, “Teresa of Avila: Mystical Experience in Defence of Dogma” in *Communio*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1989), 89-104.

<sup>1435</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 1:2. Teresa considers attacks on the Church as attack on Christ since the Church is Christ’s “mystical” body. She identifies Christ and the Church as one reality. This identification became more concrete for her considering the attitude (disrespect) of the Reformers towards the Eucharist which is the real and visible presence of Christ in the Church. Christ continues to suffer and is despised in the Church that is divided, criticized and attacked especially in the Eucharist which for Teresa is the heart of the Church. See Pereira and Fastiggi, *The Mystical Theology of the Catholic Reformation*, 239.

<sup>1436</sup> See Emmanuel Renault, *The Apostolate of Contemplatives according to St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Darlington Carmel (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1981), 26.

<sup>1437</sup> Rowan Williams, “Teresa of Avila as a Theologian of the Eucharist,” A presentation given during a conference entitled *Teresa of Avila 1515 to 2015: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition* which took place between 18-20 June 2015 at St. Mary’s University Twickenham in London. The conference was part of the “Teresa 500” celebrations marking the 5th centenary of the birth of St. Teresa of Avila. Williams’ presentation can be viewed on this link-<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TNKipIBUko> (accessed December 10, 2019).



to how she felt about the Reformers and their activities. She writes: “For nowadays these heretics have so little regard for the Blessed Sacrament that they take away its dwelling places by destroying Churches.”<sup>1438</sup> She wondered why God could have allowed this to happen to Christ, whether his sufferings weren’t sufficiently pleasing to him? Addressing the Father on Christ’s behalf, she writes:

Was something still to be done to please you? But he (Christ) did everything. Wasn’t it enough, eternal Father, that while he lived he did not have a place to lay his head—and always in the midst of so many trials?” But now they have taken away the places he has at present to which he can invite his friends, for he realizes that we are weak and knows that the laborers must be nourished with such food.<sup>1439</sup>

Again, alluding to the “Lutheran” violence and irreverence against the Eucharist, Teresa writes: “and how many insults will be committed today against this Most Blessed Sacrament! In how many enemies’ hand must the Father see him! How much irreverence from these heretics!”<sup>1440</sup> In her powerlessness, she beseeched the Father to put an end to “the very great evil and disrespect committed and shown in places where” the Eucharist “is present among those Lutherans...”<sup>1441</sup>

Accordingly, Teresa became an intercessor offering prayer to God the Father and making reparation for what she believed to be the blasphemies committed against Christ (in the Eucharist) and his Church by the “Lutherans.” Being an unworthy intercessor (as she sees herself), she associates herself with the intercession of all the martyrs and saints in heaven, and above all, with the merits of Jesus and “those of his glorious Mother.”<sup>1442</sup> She also convoked her nuns “for a great Eucharistic prayer for the Church.”<sup>1443</sup> The pages of *The Way of Perfection*, according to Álvarez, “serve as her stage for the ‘synaxis;’ she in the centre of

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<sup>1438</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 3:8.

<sup>1439</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1440</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:3.

<sup>1441</sup> *Ibid.*, 35:3.

<sup>1442</sup> See *Ibid.*, 3:8.

<sup>1443</sup> See Tomás Álvarez, “Comunión eucarística” in *Diccionario de Santa Teresa: Doctrina e Historia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, editor. Tomás Álvarez (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2006), 152-155.

this unusual, unexpected group, in the name of all concerned, improvises” a magnificent Eucharistic prayer directed to the Father,<sup>1444</sup> as follows:

Obeying and trusting in the Lord’s command...Let us beseech his Majesty in the name of Jesus that, since nothing remained for him to do and he left sinners a gift as great as this one...Let us beseech him that, since his Son provided a means so good that we may offer him many times in sacrifice, this gift may avail...I beseech you, Eternal Father...Behold that your Son is still in the world. Through his reverence may all these ugly and abominable and filthy things cease...Do not answer for our sakes, Lord...Do it for your Son’s sake...If something appeases you, it is having a loved one like this here below...O my God, would that I might have begged you much and served you diligently...Well, what is there for me to do, my Creator, but offer this most blessed bread to you...And beg you through the merits of your Son to grant me this favor...<sup>1445</sup>

Teresa considers the Eucharist as the sole great good they can offer to the Father to bring an end to the evils that afflict the Church. She believes that such an offering will bring calmness in the sea, and that through it, the ship “which is the Church” will be spared the pain of journeying “in a tempest like this.”<sup>1446</sup> She concludes her Eucharistic prayer beseeching the Father “to save us” through the Eucharist, “for we are perishing.”<sup>1447</sup>

### **5.6.1 Home for the Homeless Christ**

Since Christ is being dishonoured and rendered homeless once more by the Reformers (who were destroying Churches and removing the Eucharist), Teresa sees any of her new reformed foundations as an opportunity of providing a dwelling place for him; of establishing one more Church where the Blessed Sacrament would be reserved. It meant one more place for adoring and venerating the Lord present in the Eucharist. She puts it as follows:

From what I now remember, fear of the hardship involved never prevented me from making a foundation even though I felt strong aversion to the travelling, especially the long journeys. But once we got started, the journey seemed easy to me, and I considered for whose service it was made

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<sup>1444</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>1445</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 35:3-5. We took the block quotation above from Kavanaugh’s extraction of Teresa’s Eucharistic prayer in his interpretative notes on chapter 35 of *The Way of Perfection*. See interpretative notes, 397.

<sup>1446</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 35:5

<sup>1447</sup> *Ibid.*

and reflected that in that house the Lord would be praised and the Blessed Sacrament reserved. This is a special consolation for me: to see one more church, particularly when I recall the many that the Lutherans are suppressing...For although we do not take note, it ought to be a great consolation for us that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is present in the most Blessed Sacrament in many places.<sup>1448</sup>

Given that Christ is being made homeless, and in his “vulnerability in the Eucharist exposes himself to dishonour and probably repudiation, as if he is to be crucified again,” Teresa according to Williams tried to make him “another home in the intensity of the religious community.”<sup>1449</sup> She sought to make him a place of abode “in the community where his invitation is heard and honoured, and where the Eucharistic promise of Christ’s faithful presence in our midst is made plain once more.”<sup>1450</sup> This is evident in her reformed foundations whereby she ensured that the Eucharist is reserved at the inception of every new house. She was firmly convinced that a new foundation was only truly established when the first Mass had been celebrated and the Most Blessed Sacrament Reserved. This showed her great love for the Eucharist and its relevance as the foundation of the life of her reformed Carmelite communities. Daily Eucharistic celebration (Mass) held a predominant place in the blueprint of life traced out in the first *Constitutions* of Teresa’s reformed Carmel. It was to be solemnized on Sunday and Feast days. Although not suggesting the practice of daily Communion for the Sisters (since it was not common at that time) she did however, considerably increase the number of Holy Communions permitted in the preceding Norms of the monastery of the Incarnation.<sup>1451</sup>

Teresa derives joy from making new foundations (with convent Churches); she considers them as her own way of counteracting the Reformation, especially the way the

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<sup>1448</sup> *Foundations*, 18:5; 29:27.

<sup>1449</sup> See Williams, Teresa of Avila as a Theologian of the Eucharist. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TNKipIBUko](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TNKipIBUko).

<sup>1450</sup> Williams, “Teresa, the Eucharist and the Reformation,” 67-76.

<sup>1451</sup> See Álvarez, “Eucaristía,” 247-279. The *Constitutions* of the monastery of Incarnation (Teresa’s previous convent) restricted Communion to a few days in the year, but Teresa extended the days for receiving Communion in the *Constitutions* of her reformed Carmel, allowing her nuns to receive Communion on a weekly basis, on feast days and on other designated days. See *The Constitutions*, 5.

Reformers “viewed the Eucharist”<sup>1452</sup> and the Church. She wishes to respond to the activities of the Reformers not only through prayers, but also through her actions. Thus, while the Reformers, “destroyed the church by burning churches, she built the church by raising churches.”<sup>1453</sup> Her aim was that each convent Church she founded should replace those destroyed by the Reformers, and that the Eucharist which the Reformers profaned by removing them from Churches, be installed and revered in her convent Churches.

In addition to providing a place where Christ (in the Eucharist) will not only be housed but also honoured and adored, Teresa also saw it as her duty (as the bride of Christ) to ensure that he is in safe hands. She knew that Christ is vulnerable in the Eucharist, hence, she would do anything at her disposal to provide a safe haven for him against the attacks and profanation by the Reformers. The dramatic episode at the foundation of Medina de Campo (1567) demonstrates this fact.

Teresa and her companions (six nuns and their chaplain Fr. Julián de Ávila) arrived in Medina del Campo in the middle of the night on the eve of the feast of the Assumption to begin a foundation there, in a house that had been purchased by Fr. Antonio de Jesús, who at the time was the prior of the monastery of friars in Medina de Campo.<sup>1454</sup> They dismantled their wagon at the monastery of the friars, carrying with them the basic things for the first Mass (such as vestments, candlesticks sacred linens and vessels, etc), and accompanied by some friars, they proceeded to the house on foot, in case they awaken people from sleep. Fr. Julián de Ávila depicts the scenario as follows: “we were all so loaded down, that it seemed we were gypsies who had robbed some church, for certainly if we met the police, they would

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<sup>1452</sup> See Harvey D. Egan, *Christian Mysticism: The Future of a Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 150-151.

<sup>1453</sup> See Manuel Reis, “Santa Teresa de Jesus: A Santíssima Trindade, a Encarnação e a Eucaristia.

<sup>1454</sup> For Teresa’s account of the foundation of the monastery of St. Joseph in Medina del Campo, see *Foundations*, 3:1-18.

have been obliged to bring us all to jail...until they ascertained where priests, friars, and nuns were going at that hour.”<sup>1455</sup>

When they got to the house, they discovered to their amazement that it was in a state of dilapidation. They got to see even more of its state of decay at dawn. “The walls looked to me quite dilapidated, but not as they looked when daylight came,” Teresa writes.<sup>1456</sup> The outer walls were broken, the inner walls were not plastered, the roof had wide open holes. “A porch, the only covered space large enough to serve as a chapel, was deep in mud; it would have to be shovelled out before it could be enclosed, somehow.”<sup>1457</sup> Seeing the condition of the house, Teresa and her companions immediately responded by clearing up the entire place and putting the necessary things in order. They worked so hard and so quickly “that when dawn came the altar was set up, and the little bell placed in a corridor; and immediately Mass was said,” and the Blessed Sacrament reserved.<sup>1458</sup> Teresa was very pleased by the outcome of their efforts. “I was very happy because for me it is the greatest consolation to see one church more where the Blessed Sacrament is preserved.”<sup>1459</sup> She was delighted that Christ (in the Eucharist), had found a new dwelling place within the monastery where he will be revered and given the honour due to him. But her happiness was short-lived. For after the Mass she went “to look a little bit through the window at the courtyard,” and what she saw shocked her. She writes: “I saw that all the walls in some places had fallen to the ground and that many days would be required to repair them.”<sup>1460</sup> It was then that it dawned on her that

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<sup>1455</sup> See Álvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on Her Life and Work*, 145. Also William Thomas Walsh, *St. Teresa of Avila: A Biography* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1943), 315.

<sup>1456</sup> *Foundations*, 3:8.

<sup>1457</sup> Victoria Lincoln, *Teresa, a Woman: A Biography of Teresa of Avila* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), 115.

<sup>1458</sup> See *Foundations*, 3:8-9.

<sup>1459</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1460</sup> *Ibid.*

the Eucharist her been exposed to danger all night; that she had, in fact, placed the Lord “in the street” at the mercy of “those Lutherans” at such a dangerous time they live in.<sup>1461</sup>

Medina at that time was an industrial town with loads of “merchants from France, the Netherlands and England, some of them no doubt heretics”<sup>1462</sup> who could possibly have attacked and desecrated the Eucharist. Teresa had heard what the Calvinists had done to the Blessed Sacrament and “churches that housed it in Antwerp and other northern cities.”<sup>1463</sup> She was also aware of a profanation of the Blessed Sacrament that occurred in Alcoy in the province of Alicante, south-eastern Spain, almost at the same time as the Medina foundation.<sup>1464</sup> Fearing that such could happen to the reserved Eucharist in the convent Church of Medina (as the walls in some parts of house had fallen apart), Teresa enlisted some men to guard over the Eucharist all night. But worried that they might fall asleep or get distracted, she would get up during the night to watch the Eucharist through a window, “for the moon was very bright” and she “could easily see it.”<sup>1465</sup> She wanted to ensure that Christ was safe.

Similar episodes also took place during the foundations in Toledo,<sup>1466</sup> Segovia,<sup>1467</sup> Cordoba (on the way to Seville),<sup>1468</sup> up until the most difficult foundation of all in Burgos. There in Burgos, the newly appointed Archbishop (whom Teresa diplomatically does not name) caused her extreme distress by delaying her a licence for the foundation for inexplicable reasons. It even went to the extent of him not permitting the nuns to have Mass

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<sup>1461</sup> Ibid. Also Lincoln, *Teresa, a Woman: A Biography of Teresa of Avila*, 115.

<sup>1462</sup> Walsh, *St. Teresa of Avila: A Biography*, 317

<sup>1463</sup> Ibid., 315. See also Guido Marnet, “The Changing Face of Calvinism in Antwerp, 1550-1585, in *Calvinism in Europe 1540-1620*, ed. Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke and Gillian Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 143-160.

<sup>1464</sup> See García, “Eucaristía y experiencia mística en santa Teresa,” 465-483.

<sup>1465</sup> See *Foundations*, 3:13.

<sup>1466</sup> See Ibid., 15:9.

<sup>1467</sup> Ibid., 21:5 and 8.

<sup>1468</sup> Ibid., 24:12-14

in the chapel of the house where they were staying,<sup>1469</sup> thus, obliging them to go through the town streets (which were very muddy) to attend Mass at the nearby parish every day.<sup>1470</sup>

Teresa's erroneous belief that a foundation of hers was only truly established when the Blessed Sacrament was reserved was part of what gave rise to these episodes. In most cases, the houses were quite unprepared and unfit for inhabiting or for reserving the Blessed Sacrament. But because of her mistaken assumption, and her desire "to see one church more where the Blessed Sacrament is preserved," they would go ahead to reserve the Eucharist in them. She later discovered her error and corrected it at the foundation of Salamanca. This was in fact, the first foundation she made without installing the Blessed Sacrament. She writes: "It was the first monastery I founded without reserving the Blessed Sacrament, for I had previously thought that a foundation was not official until the Blessed Sacrament was reserved. And I had now learned that this wasn't necessary."<sup>1471</sup> She was greatly consoled by that, for according to her, the house in Salamanca was in bad condition because the students who had previously occupied it had left it in a mess. "They must not have had a gift of cleanliness," she humorously declared. Hence, instead of the usual rush to say Mass and reserve Blessed Sacrament, this time, they did some cleaning up at night, said the first Mass the next morning, and reserved the Blessed Sacrament later on when everything was ready.<sup>1472</sup>

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<sup>1469</sup> When Teresa and her companion arrived at Burgos, they first stayed in the house of Catalina de Tolosa (1538-1608) who had been longing for a foundation of a Carmel in Burgos. She was the widow of Sebastián Muncharez and a mother of seven children who entered Carmel. With five daughters joining the convent of nuns, and two sons joining the friars. Catalina herself later entered the Carmel of Palencia, where she became the subject of her daughter, Isabel of the Trinity, who was prioress of the community, and of her son Sebastian who was provincial of Castile at the time. Teresa describes her as very virtuous, courageous, intelligent and generous person. "Catalina de Tolosa did everything so well," she writes, "she was so generous and showed so much good will...she provided us all, in a room where we were secluded, with food for a month, as though she were the mother of each one. See *Foundations*, 31:8 and 34. Also Kavanaugh, trans. *The Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2 (Biographical sketches), 622-623.

<sup>1470</sup> See *Foundations*, 31:23-26.

<sup>1471</sup> *Ibid.*, 19:3

<sup>1472</sup> See *Ibid.*, 19:3-13.

## 5.7 Teresa's Eucharistic Teaching

Teresa's Eucharistic teaching is both an expression of her personal experiences of the Eucharist and a testimony to the dogma of "faith regarding the Eucharist that she grew up learning and believing,"<sup>1473</sup> namely, that Christ is really and substantially present in the Eucharist. This indeed, is the focus and the basis of her teaching on the Eucharist. According to Álvarez, "the realism of faith in the real presence of the Lord is, undoubtedly, the most compelling aspect of her pedagogy on the Eucharist."<sup>1474</sup> This in fact, is what distinguishes Teresa's Eucharistic view from that of the Protestant Reformers. For unlike Zwingli and Calvin who viewed the Eucharist from symbolic and spiritual points of view respectively, and Luther who considered it as the real presence of Christ that ends with the liturgical celebration, Teresa saw the Eucharist not only as the real (sacramental) presence of Christ, but also as "so pre-eminently the sign of God's desire to be with us, God's humility and faithfulness, in being unconditionally accessible to us."<sup>1475</sup> She conceives the Eucharist in the words of Walter Kasper, as "the symbolic expression of the new redemptive presence" of the incarnate Word "in and among his own."<sup>1476</sup> For her, Christ remains with us in the Eucharist to encourage, to sustain, to nourish and to heal us as we journey through life.

## 5.8 Teresa's Eucharistic understanding of "Our daily bread."

The core of Teresa's teaching on the Eucharist is contained in chapters 33-35 of *The Way of Perfection* devoted to the commentary on the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." She interprets this petition from a Eucharistic perspective as a testimony of her Eucharistic experience. For her, "our daily bread" is the Eucharist; the "manna and nourishment" of Christ's humanity which provides us with delight and

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<sup>1473</sup> Jorge Cabrera. St. Teresa and the Eucharist.

<http://carmelitefriarsocd.blogspot.com/2013/12/st-teresa-and-eucharist.html> (accessed December 17, 2019).

<sup>1474</sup> Álvarez, "Comunión eucarística," 152-155.

<sup>1475</sup> Williams, *Teresa of Avila* 124

<sup>1476</sup> See Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London: Burns and Oates, 1977), 159.



consolation.<sup>1477</sup> This “sacred bread”<sup>1478</sup> (the Eucharistic bread) from her own point of view, is “not only Holy Communion but also the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, for he nourishes us by both.”<sup>1479</sup> She interprets the petition “give us this day our daily bread,” only from a spiritual point of view, ignoring its material aspect. Fr. Gabriel observed that she was not interested in the other sense of this petition “that exegetes must consider, namely, the material bread.”<sup>1480</sup> She writes:

I don’t want to think the Lord had in mind the other bread that is used for our bodily needs and nourishment; nor would I want you to have that in mind. The Lord was in the most sublime contemplation (for whoever has reached such a stage has no more remembrance that he is in the world than if he were not, however much there may be to eat), and would he have placed so much emphasis on the petition that he as well as ourselves eat? It wouldn’t make sense to me. He is teaching us to set our wills on heavenly things and to ask that we might begin enjoying him from here below; and would he get us involved in something so base as asking to eat?<sup>1481</sup>

The above passage “was crossed out with large strokes by the censor in Teresa’s first draft”<sup>1482</sup> mainly because he reckoned it was not in line with the Church’s traditional way of interpreting the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer. This petition has been considered according to the traditional teaching of the Church as referring to both physical and spiritual bread. The censor, according to Kavanaugh, wrote in the margins: “Christ our Lord asked for everything that pertained to the sustenance of both body and soul, material bread and the Eucharist. And this is what the church asks for in the litany.”<sup>1483</sup>

The Church has always emphasized the two senses (material and spiritual) of the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer. Pope Benedict XVI in his *Jesus of Nazareth*, refers to the two main interpretations of the fourth petition. The first interpretation according to him,

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<sup>1477</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:2.

<sup>1478</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1479</sup> Father Gabriel, *The Way of Prayer: A Commentary on Saint Teresa’s Way of Perfection*, 169.

<sup>1480</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1481</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:2.

<sup>1482</sup> *Ibid.* Interpretative notes, 387.

<sup>1483</sup> *Ibid.*, 387-388.

considers the fourth petition as referring to “what is necessary for existence.”<sup>1484</sup> This reading supposes the petition as asking for “the bread that we need in order to live.”<sup>1485</sup> The second interpretation considers the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer to mean the “‘bread for the future,’ for the following day.” It is thus, according to Benedict XVI, “an eschatological petition, the petition for an anticipation for the world to come, asking the Lord to give already ‘today’ the future bread, the bread of the new world–himself.”<sup>1486</sup> He reckons the “future bread” as that which we receive in the Eucharist, the true bread of our life. This Eucharistic nuance resonates with the teaching of the Catechism which states that “the Eucharist is already the foretaste of the kingdom to come.”<sup>1487</sup>

Benedict XVI mentioned that some ancient translations had emphasized the Eucharistic sense of the fourth petition. An example is Saint Jerome’s Vulgate which translates the strange word *epiousios* (generally translated as “daily”) “as *supersubstantialis* (i.e., super-substantial).”<sup>1488</sup> This translation according to him, points “to the new, higher ‘substance’ that the Lord gives us in the Holy Sacrament as the true bread of our life.”<sup>1489</sup> Jerome’s translation echoes that of Origen before him. Origen in his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, rendered the fourth petition as “give us this day our super-substantial bread.”<sup>1490</sup> For him, the super-substantial bread is Christ himself, the living and true bread

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<sup>1484</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 154.

<sup>1485</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1486</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1487</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2837.

<sup>1488</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 154.

<sup>1489</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1490</sup> Origen (an expert in Greek) believes that the Greek word *epiousios* translated as “daily” in the Our Father was “invented by the Evangelists” (Matthew and Luke), possibly to give an accurate translation of the words of Jesus. According to him, *epiousios* is not found anywhere in any Greek literature. The only recorded reference to it is in the Lord’s Prayer according to Matthew and Luke. Thus, he translated *epiousios* (literally) as “super-substantial or “super-essential,” that is, above substance or essence. With *epi*, meaning “above” or “super;” and *ousia*, signifying “essence,” or “substance.” So, instead of “give us this day our daily bread,” Origen used, “give us this day our supersubstantial bread.” By this he meant the bread that is above all substances; the supernatural bread. This bread is the Eucharist. See Origen, *Prayer, Exhortation to Martyrdom*, trans. John J. O’Meara (Westminster: Newman Press, 1954), 92ff.

from heaven.<sup>1491</sup> In line with the above tradition, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “Taken literally, *epi-ousios* (“super-essential”) refers directly to the Bread of Life, the Body of Christ, the ‘medicine of immortality,’ without which we have no life within us.”<sup>1492</sup> Benedict XVI maintains that though some Church Fathers “were practically unanimous in understanding the fourth petition of the Our Father as a Eucharistic petition,” it does not do away with “the straightforward earthly sense”<sup>1493</sup> of this petition.

The dual sense (material and spiritual) of the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, has always been evoked by the Church in its treatment of the Lord’s Prayer. St. Augustine for instance, specified and explained these senses of the fourth petition clearly in his exegetical homilies devoted to interpreting the Lord's Prayer. In sermon VII, he writes:

This petition for daily bread is doubtless to be understood in two ways, both for the necessary supply of our bodily food, and for the necessities of our spiritual support. There is a necessary supply of bodily food, for the preservation of our daily life, without which we cannot live. This is food and clothing, but the whole is understood in a part. When we ask for bread, we thereby understand all things. There is a spiritual food also which the faithful know, which ye too will know, when ye shall receive it at the altar of God. This also is daily bread, necessary only for this life. For shall we receive the Eucharist when we shall have come to Christ Himself, and begun to reign with Him forever? So then the Eucharist is our daily bread; but let us in such wise receive it, that we may be not refreshed in our bodies only, but in our souls.<sup>1494</sup>

A great deal of the teachings produced in the sixteenth century (in which Teresa lived) also retained the twofold senses of the fourth petition. Prominent among these teachings was that of the Council of Trent as contained in its Catechism. One among the many acts of the Council was to authorize the preparation of a Catechism to be used by parish priests in instructing the faithful in the basic tenets of the Catholic Church. The Catechism was completed and published in 1566 under the title, *Catechismus ex decreto Concilii Tridentini*

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<sup>1491</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>1492</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2837.

<sup>1493</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 154.

<sup>1494</sup> Philip Schaff, ed., *Saint Augustine: Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospels*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1956), 282.

*ad Parochos, Pii V Pont. Max. jussu editus.*<sup>1495</sup> Included in the various themes treated in the Catechism, was an explanation of the Lord's prayer. In its treatment of the Lord's Prayer, the Catechism maintained the Church's traditional dual senses (material and spiritual) of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer. The Catechism states: "In the Sacred Scriptures, by the word *bread*, are signified many things, but especially two: first, whatever we use for food and for other corporeal wants; secondly, whatever the divine bounty has bestowed on us for the life and salvation of the soul."<sup>1496</sup>

If it is in the tradition of the Church to interpret the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer in both material and spiritual senses, why then did Teresa interpret the fourth petition of the Our Father as referring to spiritual bread alone? Was it done out of ignorance or on purpose? It certainly wouldn't be out of ignorance, for she knew about books written on the Lord's Prayer which definitely contained the traditional exegesis on the fourth petition of Lord's Prayer as approved by the Church. Álvarez held that she knew the vernacular versions of Erasmus' and Savonarola's *Exposition of the Our Father*, which were no longer in circulation between 1566 to 1567 when she wrote her commentary on the Our Father in *The Way of Perfection*. They were included on the Index of Forbidden Books published in 1559.<sup>1497</sup> Also her interpreting the fourth petition only from a spiritual perspective wouldn't be purposeful (to differ from the Church's opinion or go against its teaching), for she would not deliberately go against the tenets of the Church. She would rather, according to her, "die a thousand death for the faith or for any truth of Sacred Scripture."<sup>1498</sup>

Teresa is not in any way disregarding the importance of the physical bread for the hungry. She is aware that first of all, the fourth petition of the Our Father "has a humble

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<sup>1495</sup> See McHugh and Callan, *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, xxiii-xxv.

<sup>1496</sup> *Ibid.*, 543.

<sup>1497</sup> See Álvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila: 101 Themes on her Life and Work*, 329-332. Teresa might as well have heard or learnt something of the exegesis of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer from her Dominican confessors and friends some of which were great theologians of the time.

<sup>1498</sup> See *Life*, 33:5.

material sense.”<sup>1499</sup> We ask the Father for the sustenance that he does not deny to the birds of the air. Teresa would consider it quite natural that from this level of biological need, we should tell the Father that we require his help.<sup>1500</sup> When she returned to the subject of “daily bread,” in chapter 37 of *The Way of Perfection* she interprets it as meaning a day's food, when applied to the prayers of “those who still live here on earth;”<sup>1501</sup> those who are not contemplatives. In that chapter, she writes of how the Lord's Prayer should be applied to those in the world. These people according to her, may ask for bread to eat so that “they live in conformity with their state in life,” as “they must be sustained and must sustain their households.”<sup>1502</sup> But this, she maintained, is not the case with the prayer of contemplatives, for they, instead of asking for material bread to eat, will pray for heavenly favours because they “no longer desire earthly things” since they are “already very committed to God.”<sup>1503</sup> Thus, she concludes that Jesus intended the Lord's Prayer “for general use so that each of us could petition according to our own intention...”<sup>1504</sup> He intended the Lord's Prayer to have different meanings according to the state in life of the person who prays it.

It is obvious from Teresa's analysis above on how the Lord's Prayer should be applied to contemplatives and those who are not contemplatives (“those who still live here on earth”), that she was not against the Church's traditional dual sense (spiritual and material) of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer. Rather, she figures that “one reading applies to the prayer of contemplatives, while the other applies to the prayer of those who are in the world” (non-contemplatives), and need to fend for “themselves and their families.”<sup>1505</sup> For her, while

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<sup>1499</sup> Tomás Álvarez, *Comentarios al “Camino de Perfección” de Santa Teresa de Jesús* (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2011), 236.

<sup>1500</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1501</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 37:2.

<sup>1502</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1503</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1504</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1505</sup> Teresa. “Daily Bread” in *Jesus of Nazareth and The Way of Perfection*.

[https://blog-by-the-sea.typepad.com/blog\\_bythesea/carmelites\\_and\\_pope\\_benedict\\_xvi/](https://blog-by-the-sea.typepad.com/blog_bythesea/carmelites_and_pope_benedict_xvi/) (accessed December 29, 2019).

contemplatives ask for spiritual needs in their prayer, “those who still live here on earth” should ask for their material needs. Each should ask according to their state in life.

Teresa therefore, was not ignorant of our material needs and the need to ask for them in prayer, but because she was writing to her contemplative nuns (in *The Way of Perfection*, where she commented on the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer), she preferred to emphasize the spiritual needs, “the need of trans-substantial bread, the bread of the soul, the bread par excellence, that is, the Eucharist.”<sup>1506</sup> She wrote *The Way of Perfection* to teach her nuns how to pray. Like the disciples who had asked Jesus to teach them how to pray,<sup>1507</sup> the nuns had asked Teresa to teach them how to prayer.<sup>1508</sup> She knew their desires and eagerness to learn more about prayer, thus, she wrote with that in mind. According to Kavanaugh, she regarded *The Way of Perfection*, “as a book of counsels and advice about prayer, and the life of prayer, presented in a familiar tone and destined for the few nuns who had embraced the form of Carmelite life” she established in Ávila.<sup>1509</sup>

That Teresa wrote her commentary on the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer (in *The Way of Perfection*), for a praying community (for her contemplative nuns), explains why she limits the meaning of this petition only to the spiritual sense. She believes that for those who have given up everything for the sake of the kingdom of God, and have dedicated themselves to living a contemplative life (like herself and her nuns), their focus should be more on their spiritual needs than on the material needs. For once they “start worrying about bodily needs, those of the soul will be forgotten.”<sup>1510</sup> Thus, she enjoined on her nuns (as those who have sincerely surrendered themselves to the will of God), not to worry about the “other bread,” especially during prayer when they should be dealing with more important things. “Carefully

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<sup>1506</sup> Álvarez, *Comentarios al “Camino de Perfección” de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, 236.

<sup>1507</sup> See Luke 11:2-3.

<sup>1508</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, prologue, 1. The nuns requested Teresa to write something for them on prayer because at that time, they were deprived of books on prayer written in the vernacular following the publication in 1559 of Valdés’ Index of Prohibited Books which banned the circulation of such books.

<sup>1509</sup> See Kavanaugh, “Introduction” in St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 1.

<sup>1510</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:2.

avoid wasting your thoughts at any time on what you will eat,” she writes. “Let the body work, for it is good that you work to sustain yourselves; let your soul be at rest. Leave this care...to your Spouse; he will care for you always.”<sup>1511</sup> She urged them to adopt the attitude of servants whose priority is to please their master in everything, while the master in turn, is obliged to provide them “with food as long as they are in the house and serve him.”<sup>1512</sup> She feels that since they have a master who “always is, and will be rich and powerful,” it would be out of place for them to go asking for food when they know that the master “takes care of providing it for them, and must do so.”<sup>1513</sup>

It is important to bear in mind that Teresa’s convents were founded in poverty (with no income or endowment). Without an income or an endowment, the nuns will have to trust that God would always provide them with their material needs. They had to learn poverty of spirit and complete dependence on God for their sustenance. She dealt with this topic earlier on in chapter two of *The Way of Perfection* as follows:

Don’t think my Sisters, that because you do not strive to please those who are in the world you will lack food. I assure you that such will not be the case...Your eyes on your Spouse! He will sustain you. Once he is pleased, those least devoted to you will give you food even though they may not want to, as you have seen through experience...Since you have given up income, give up worry about food. If you don’t everything will be lost. God wants some to have an income, and in their case it is alright for them to worry about their income since that goes with their vocation; but for us to worry, Sisters, would be absurd.<sup>1514</sup>

It is clear from the above admonition that the nuns would have to rely on providence and on people to provide for their necessities.

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<sup>1511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1512</sup> Ibid., 34:5.

<sup>1513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1514</sup> Ibid., 2:1

This means that there would be times when they could go without food or other basic needs.<sup>1515</sup> But then, Teresa asked them not to be worried about this concern. She reminded them that with Jesus given to them in the Blessed Sacrament they would not only be nourished, but also be strengthened to bear the trials, persecution and challenges that their way of life entails. She writes: “His Majesty gave us the manner and nourishment of his humanity (in the Eucharist), that we might find him at will and not die of hunger...there is no need or trial or persecution that is not easy to suffer if we begin to enjoy the delight and consolation of this sacred bread.”<sup>1516</sup>

Teresa wants her nuns to ask only for spiritual bread in their prayers. “Sisters,” she writes, “let whoever so wants be concerned with asking for” material bread. “As for ourselves, let us ask the Eternal Father that we might merit to receive our heavenly bread in such a way that the Lord may reveal himself to the eyes of our soul...”<sup>1517</sup> For her, praying for physical bread is unnecessary as long as they have the Eucharist, the only bread that merits our asking the Father for each day. She believes that in the petition “give us this day our daily bread,” the Lord “is teaching us to set our wills on heavenly things and to ask that we might begin enjoying him from here below,”<sup>1518</sup> in the Eucharist, where he is just as truly present as he was when he lived on earth.<sup>1519</sup>

## 5.9 The Eucharist: Aid in Doing God’s Will

Teresa began her commentary on the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer in chapter 33 of *The Way of Perfection*. She began this chapter by highlighting the connection between the third

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<sup>1515</sup> Teresa relates one of such times as follows: “For some days we had no more than the straw mattresses and the blanket, and even that day we didn’t have so much as a stick of wood to make fire to cook a sardine...The experience was very good for us; the interior consolation and happiness we felt were so great that I often think about what the Lord keeps stored up within the virtues. It seems to me this lack we experienced was the cause of a sweet contemplation.” See *Foundations*, 15:13-14.

<sup>1516</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:2.

<sup>1517</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:5.

<sup>1518</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:2.

<sup>1519</sup> See *Ibid.*, 34:6.



petition (“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”), and the fourth petition (“Give us this day our daily bread”) of the Lord’s Prayer.<sup>1520</sup> She understands the latter as Jesus’ means of helping us to carry out the former. In other words, the bread we ask for in the fourth petition is Christ himself in the Eucharist that we need in order to carry out the will of God which we prayed (in the third petition) to be done in us each day—something that would be so difficult and almost impossible without help. She states that Christ saw the difficulty involved in doing the Father’s will, so, he provided for us through the Eucharist. She gave practical examples of the difficulty people have in doing God’s will. She writes:

If we tell a rich man living in luxury that it is God’s will that he be careful and use moderation at table so that others might at least have bread to eat, for they are dying of hunger, he will bring up a thousand reasons for not understanding this save in accordance with his selfish purposes. If we tell backbiters that it is God’s will that they love their neighbor as themselves, they will become impatient and no reason will suffice to make them understand. We can tell religious who have grown accustomed to freedom and comfort that they should remember their obligation to give good example and should keep in mind that when they say these words they should do more than just say words; they should put them into practice since they have promised them under vows. And we can tell them they should remember that it is God’s will that they be faithful to their vows...and that since they promised poverty, they should observe it without subterfuge, for this is what the Lord wills.<sup>1521</sup>

With the above difficulties in mind, Teresa acknowledged that if the Lord had not provided us with the remedy he gave to assist us in doing God’s will, there would have been “only a very few who would have carried out these words he spoke for us to the Father, *fiat voluntas tua*.”<sup>1522</sup> The remedy which Jesus provided to help us in doing God’s will is nothing else according to Teresa, than the Eucharist. She states that seeing how hard it is to do God’s will, Jesus sought out a wonderful means by which to express his immense love for us in our weakness. Thus, “in his own name and in the name of his brothers he made the following

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<sup>1520</sup> See Álvarez, *Comentarios al “Camino de Perfección” de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, 261.

<sup>1521</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 33:1.

<sup>1522</sup> *Ibid.*

petition: ‘Give us this day, Lord, our daily bread.’”<sup>1523</sup> Teresa believes “the request for bread is made by Jesus on our behalf, and, in making it, he is asking his Father to give us Jesus in the Eucharist.”<sup>1524</sup> Without our "daily bread" of the Eucharist we could not do the will of God.

Jesus saw the great offering he is making on our behalf, and how we are called to imitate him, as Teresa says, “we are the way we are: inclined to base things and with so little love and courage that it was necessary for us to see his love and courage in order to be awakened—and not just once but every day.”<sup>1525</sup> Seeing all these, Jesus decided to give us a perpetual sign of his love, namely, by remaining “with us here below”<sup>1526</sup> in the Eucharist to help us in our struggle to do the will of the Father. The greatest manifestation of Christ’s love for us according to Father Gabriel, “is in the incarnation and in the Eucharist that perpetuates the incarnation.”<sup>1527</sup> In the incarnation, Christ assumed our human nature to be with us, and in the Eucharist he desires to go on being with us as he was with us in the incarnate life. Teresa summed up Jesus’ reason for remaining with us as follows: “He...doesn’t remain with us for any other reason than to help, encourage, and sustain us in doing this will that we have prayed might be done in us.”<sup>1528</sup> Thus, in the Eucharist, Christ invites us to himself to strengthen us in our weaknesses. This resonates with his invitation to us in chapter eleven of Matthew’s gospel: “Come to me, all who...are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”<sup>1529</sup>

### **5.10 Give us this day Our Daily Bread: An Expression of the Humility of Christ**

Teresa, as we mentioned, held that by asking the Father to “give us this day our daily bread,” Jesus was praying to remain with us. This request according to her, was a demonstration of

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<sup>1523</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1524</sup> Matthew, “St. Teresa and the Prayer of Offering,” 124-134.

<sup>1525</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 33:2.

<sup>1526</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1527</sup> Father Gabriel, *The Way of Prayer: A Commentary on Saint Teresa’s Way of Perfection*, 168.

<sup>1528</sup> Ibid., 34:1.

<sup>1529</sup> See Matthew 11:28.

the humility of Jesus. For though he is one with the Father, “and he knew that what he did on earth God will do in heaven and consider good—since his will and that of his Father were one,”<sup>1530</sup> he still deemed it necessary to seek the consent of the Father in asking to remain with us. Being one with God in all things, Jesus does not need a go-ahead from the Father to remain with us, but his humility according to Teresa, “was such that he wanted as it were, to ask permission. Jesus felt that since to remain with us “was something so serious and important,” it should “come from the hand of the Eternal Father.”<sup>1531</sup> He also understood that by asking the Father to “give us this day our daily bread” (in other words, to be allowed to remain with us in the Eucharist), he was asking for more in this petition than he was in the other petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. He was aware of what this petition would cause him, the death it “would make him die and the dishonors and insults he would suffer.”<sup>1532</sup>

### **5.11 The Eucharist: Self-giving Love of the Father and the Son**

Having reflected on the humility of Jesus in asking to remain with us, Teresa went on to consider the self-giving love of the Father in giving us his Son to remain with us in the Eucharist, and the self-giving love of the Son in wanting to remain with us in the Eucharist despite the suffering and the ill-treatment he received. “What Father could there be, Lord,” she writes, “who in having given us his Son, and a Son like this who receives such treatment, would consent that he remain among us every day to suffer?”<sup>1533</sup> Teresa maintained that she was not surprised about Jesus’s immense generosity in his self-giving love for us (that is, in asking to remain with us), “for since he had already said, *fiat voluntas tua*, he had to do that will, being who he is.”<sup>1534</sup> She was rather surprised that God consented to Jesus’ petition. “O

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<sup>1530</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 33:2.

<sup>1531</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1532</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1533</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:3.

<sup>1534</sup> *Ibid.*

eternal Lord! Why do you accept such a petition? Why do you consent to it?”<sup>1535</sup> She asked. Love was the motivating factor of both the asking by Jesus and the permission of the Father. Jesus asked to be allowed to remain with us because of his love for us, the Father consented to his request also because of his love for us. “What a great love from the son and what a great love from the Father!”<sup>1536</sup>

Furthermore Teresa affirms that by asking “the Father to give us this daily bread,” and in repeating it again requesting that it be given “to us this day,”<sup>1537</sup> Jesus was asking the Father to allow him to serve us each day (since he belongs to us now) until the end of the world;<sup>1538</sup> to be allowed to “spend the entire day of creation’s history ‘in servitude’ or ‘slavery,’ the slavery of being wholly at our disposal through ‘the manna and nourishment of His humanity.’”<sup>1539</sup> Teresa also observed that Jesus used the phrase “our bread,” which is indicative of his having assumed our nature and become one with us. She writes: “Since by sharing in our nature he has become one with us her below...he reminds the Father that because he belongs to him the Father in turn can give him to us. And so he says, ‘our bread.’”<sup>1540</sup> By so doing, according to Teresa, Christ identifies with us completely. “He doesn’t make any difference between himself and us,”<sup>1541</sup> she writes. Though he was God, Christ took our human nature to identify with our condition and to serve and nourish us with his Eucharistic presence. Thus, it could be said that Teresa’s Eucharist theology “is strikingly

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<sup>1535</sup> Ibid., 33:4.

<sup>1536</sup> Ibid., 33:3.

<sup>1537</sup> Ibid., 33:4. It is important to note that in the Castilian version of the Our Father which Teresa would have prayed, the order in the fourth petition would literally be: “Give us our daily bread this day”—the word order being the reverse of the English version. Irrespective of the difference in the word ordering of the fourth petition in both the Spanish and English versions, “these two complementary aspects ‘day’ and ‘daily’ are the same in both languages: the emphasis is jointly on the bread *for today*, and this bread *every day*.” In other words, “the bread for the whole day’s needs, which we ask for each day. See Rego, *St. Teresa and the Our Father: A Catechism of Prayer*, 88 and 144, note, 35. Also St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 493, note, 4.

<sup>1538</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 33:4; 34:1-2.

<sup>1539</sup> Williams, “Teresa, the Eucharist and the Reformation,” 67-76. See also *The Way of Perfection*, 34:2.

<sup>1540</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 33:5.

<sup>1541</sup> Ibid.

Chalcedonian: the Eucharist makes sense because of Christ's dual nature."<sup>1542</sup> He is, to begin with, "the one who is eternally the faithful respondent to the Father's will," who according to Augustine, is "the one who eternally knows that he is 'from' the Father, and is able to perform in his life on earth what the Father intends, since there is nothing he knows of himself that is not to do with the Father's will."<sup>1543</sup> At the same time, he is also "the one who is in complete solidarity with humanity—a solidarity shown in his patient enduring of the wounds and insults that are given him in his incarnate identity as also now in his ignored and abused sacramental identity."<sup>1544</sup>

It is evident from the foregoing, that Teresa in her Eucharistic teaching was affirming the Eucharist as the real presence; as Christ's abiding presence with us for as long as creation endures. This real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is by the will and decision of Jesus who unites with us in asking for the gift of Eucharistic bread from the Father. However, it is primarily the Father himself who gives us the bread of the Eucharist, and in it, he gives us the Son so that he can be with us until the end of the world.<sup>1545</sup> To a large extent then, we are speaking of the sacrament of the self-giving love of the Father and the Son who gave themselves to us in the Eucharist as the saving and sanctifying power, the goal and glory of our existence, "life of our life and sustenance that sustains us."<sup>1546</sup> The Eucharist is therefore the highest manifestation of the Father's love and that of his son towards us. In it, their self-giving love reached its utmost sublime level. The Father, who consents and concedes to the petition which his Son presents him in the name of us all (namely, to be with us), in a sense,

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<sup>1542</sup> Williams, "Teresa, the Eucharist and the Reformation," 67-76.

<sup>1543</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>1544</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1545</sup> Álvarez holds that Teresa in commenting on the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer (which she did from a Eucharistic perspective), "proposes the 'Johannine' theme that the Eucharist is the gift of the Father, his gift *par excellence*, not the manna of the desert, but the gift of his own Son." This according to him is the 'gift-of-person' that we ask of the Father when praying that he give us 'our daily bread.' We ask it for the passing 'day' of this present life and for the 'daily' unending of eternity. See Álvarez, "Eucaristía" 247-279.

<sup>1546</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, 7:2:6.

compromises and gives himself with Christ (in the Eucharist). The Eucharist therefore “reminds us of the very essence of God's being—always Love in act”<sup>1547</sup>

### 5.12 The Eucharist as the Real Presence of Christ

Teresa teaches that the Eucharist is the real presence of Christ. Her teaching flows from her personal experience. In her experience, the Eucharist is the real presence of the Lord, which our faith tells us.<sup>1548</sup> This means that for her, the Eucharist is also the sacrament of faith. Speaking of herself (in the third person) and on how she reinforces her faith in the real presence of Christ, she writes:

I know a person...that for many years, when she received Communion, this person, though she was not very perfect, strove to strengthen her faith so that in receiving her Lord it was as if, with her bodily eye, she saw him enter her house. Since she believed that that this Lord truly entered her poor home, she freed herself from all exterior things...And entered to be with him...She considered she was at his feet...And even though she didn't feel devotion, faith told her that he was indeed there.<sup>1549</sup>

Teresa believes that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is just as real as was his historical existence. Her “living faith” in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist allows her to laugh at people who said they would have loved to have been alive in the time of Christ. “She wondered what more they wanted since in the most Blessed Sacrament they had him just as truly present as he was then.”<sup>1550</sup> For her, it would amount to foolishness for any believer in the real presence to desire to have been alive when Christ lived on earth, since they have him really present in any tabernacle of the world. She believes “there is no *substantial* difference between Jesus' *sacramental* presence *now* (in the Eucharist) and his physical presence *then*” when he lived on earth. “The only difference is that now we behold him by faith not by sight.”<sup>1551</sup> Simply put, while those who lived during Christ's time on earth, saw him with

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<sup>1547</sup> See Cuartas Londoño, “Humanidad de Cristo y Eucaristía,” 61-100.

<sup>1548</sup> See *Life*, 28:8.

<sup>1549</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:6-7.

<sup>1550</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:6.

<sup>1551</sup> Rego, *St. Teresa and the Our Father: A Catechism of Prayer*, 91.

their bodily (physical) eyes, we behold him now in the Eucharist with the eyes our soul (by faith).

In talking about the real presence of Christ, Teresa understood she was dealing with “an overwhelming, and an almost disconcerting presence.”<sup>1552</sup> She knew that in the Eucharist we don’t see Christ’s physically as he was during his earthly life, or as he is now glorious in heaven, that he is neither visible nor glorified and clothed in majesty in his Eucharistic presence. Thus, she describes Christ Eucharistic presence as a veiled presence—that in the Eucharist Christ is “disguised” under the “accidents of bread”<sup>1553</sup> and wine. He “disguised” himself in the Eucharist, according to Teresa so that we can approach him at ease. If we were to see him in his actual glorified state, “on account of our natural weakness there is no person capable of enduring such a glorified sight, nor would anyone in the world want to continue in it.”<sup>1554</sup> She likens Christ’s Eucharistic presence to that of a king who decides to show up disguised to make himself approachable and easy to talk with without much formalities or a feeling of fear amid the people.

If a king were disguised it wouldn’t matter to us at all if we conversed with him without so many gestures of awe and respect. It seems he will be obliged to put up with this lack since he is the one who disguised himself. Who would otherwise dare approach so unworthily, with so much lukewarmness, and with so many imperfections!<sup>1555</sup>

Thus, Teresa concludes that in the Eucharist, Christ makes himself accessible to all and sundry. “Beneath that bread he is easy to deal with,”<sup>1556</sup> she writes. In other words, in his “disguise” under the appearance of bread and wine, “he can be approached without fear or embarrassment or excessive formality, like a monarch going among his people.”<sup>1557</sup>

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<sup>1552</sup> Tomás Álvarez, *Paso a paso: Leyendo con Teresa su Camino de Perfección* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1998), 241.

<sup>1553</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 34:3. See note 1018 above for our explanation of Teresa’s use of the term “accidents.”

<sup>1554</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:9.

<sup>1555</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1556</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1557</sup> Williams, “Teresa, the Eucharist and the Reformation,” 67-76.

So, when Teresa insists on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, she was referring to the Eucharist as the prolongation of the presence of Christ on earth, “a ‘veiled’ presence of his humanity, just as the incarnation as was a veiled presence of his divinity. A new ‘disguise’ of his glorious person, but in the most mysterious closeness.”<sup>1558</sup> In this case, the Eucharist according to Teresa becomes christophanic (a revelation of the person of Christ). In it he allows us to know Him in a special way: “He reveals himself to those who he sees will benefit by his presence. Even though they fail to see him with their bodily eyes, he has many methods of showing himself to the soul.”<sup>1559</sup> One and the most significant of these methods is that of Christ making himself known to the eyes of one’s soul (of revealing himself to one’s eyes of faith). This according to Teresa depends to a great extent on one’s disposition to being present with Christ and attentive to his presence especially after receiving Communion. To this end, she advised her nuns to be with Christ willingly, “not lose so good an occasion for conversing with him as is the hour after having received Communion.”<sup>1560</sup> Again she adds, if after receiving communion, “you immediately turn your thoughts to other things, if you pay no attention and take no account of the fact that he is within you, how will he be able to reveal himself to you?”<sup>1561</sup>

For Teresa therefore, preparing the way for Christ to reveal himself to us that we might taste him, requires an exercise of the theological virtue of faith. This virtue not only puts one in direct contact with Christ, but it also disposes one to receiving the graces that he wishes to give. Teresa was gifted with such a living faith that she saw Christ (with the eyes of faith) coming to her after receiving Communion. She was convinced at that moment it was Christ himself who came to her, as claimed by her, “he comes with such great majesty that no one could doubt but that it is the Lord himself. Especially after receiving communion—for we

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<sup>1558</sup> Álvarez, “Comunión eucarística,” 152-155.

<sup>1559</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:10.

<sup>1560</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:10.

<sup>1561</sup> *Ibid.*



know that he is present, since our faith tells us this.”<sup>1562</sup> Thus, she requested her nuns to focus their attention after receiving Communion on the act of faith: to see Christ really entering into them to keep them company and to nourish them. Since they have the Lord himself present (after receiving Communion), she urged her nuns to strive to close their bodily eyes and open the eyes of their soul to ‘see’ (through this post-Communion recollection) the Lord who though “he comes disguised, the disguise does not prevent him being recognised in many ways, in conformity with the desire we have to see Him.”<sup>1563</sup> In other words, they are to turn their “eyes inward” after receiving Communion to encounter the Lord who at that moment will show himself to them, “even if not in the obvious visual sense,”<sup>1564</sup> or any form of visions or apparitions.

### **5.13 Christ’s Eucharistic Presence: More Real Than Visions of Him**

In chapter three of this work, we presented Teresa as a “visionary” who had a series of mystical experiences of visions of Christ. She not only wrote about these visions, she also believed in them with such certitude. But we want to show here, that irrespective of how much she believed her visions to be genuine, she is still more certain about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist than she is about her visions. We shall begin by looking at her expressions of certitude in relation to her visions of Christ, followed by her certitude about the realism of the Eucharistic presence which for her surpasses all visions and revelations of Christ.

In chapter 27 of *The Book of Her Life*, Teresa describes her certitude of her intellectual vision of Christ whose presence she felt always at her side.

Being in prayer...I saw or, to put it better, I felt Christ beside me; I saw nothing with my bodily eyes or with my soul, but it seemed to me that...Jesus Christ was always present at my side; but since this wasn’t an

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<sup>1562</sup> *Life*, 28:8.

<sup>1563</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:10.

<sup>1564</sup> Williams, “Teresa, the Eucharist and the Reformation,” 67-76.

imaginative vision, I didn't see any form. Yet I felt very clearly that He was always present at my right side and that He was the witness of everything I did.<sup>1565</sup>

She spoke to her confessor about this experience but he could not understand and accept these supernatural occurrences. "He asked me in what form I saw Him. I answered that I didn't see Him. He asked me how I knew it was Christ. I answered that I don't know how, but that I couldn't help knowing that He was beside me, that I saw and felt Him clearly..."<sup>1566</sup> "She tried to explain that it was certain, but she had no words with which to compare it: it is not a bodily vision, nor imagination, but simply an idea, a mere contact of spirit, a kind of brightness that did not seem anything like our light."<sup>1567</sup> But there is always certainty of the highest order in the intellectual vision, for in it, according to her, one sees "clearly that Jesus Christ, the Son of the Virgin, is present"<sup>1568</sup> Likewise, she continued to see successively over a period of time the hands, the face, the entire humanity of Christ as he revealed himself to her. She writes:

One day, while I was in prayer, the Lord desired to show me only His hands...After a few days I saw also that divine face...One feast day of St. Paul, while I was at Mass, this most sacred humanity in its risen form was represented to me completely...with such wonderful beauty and majesty.<sup>1569</sup>

She is absolutely sure that it is a risen and the living Christ, who "comes with such great majesty that no one can doubt but that it is the Lord Himself."<sup>1570</sup> Despite her expression of certainty concerning her visions of Christ, "something remains in a foggy obscurity: she does not see Christ with such a realism, with the clairvoyance that she would like."<sup>1571</sup> She writes, though I was "strongly desiring to know the colour of His eyes, or how tall He was, so that I

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<sup>1565</sup> *Life*, 27:2.

<sup>1566</sup> *Ibid.*, 27:3 and 5.

<sup>1567</sup> See Maroto, *Vida eucarística de Santa Teresa*, 22.

<sup>1568</sup> *Life*, 27:4.

<sup>1569</sup> See *Ibid.*, 28: 1-3

<sup>1570</sup> *Ibid.*, 28:8.

<sup>1571</sup> See Maroto, *Vida eucarística de Santa Teresa*, 22.

could be able to describe these things, I never merited to see them. Nor was I able to obtain this knowledge; rather, by trying to do so, I would lose the vision entirely.”<sup>1572</sup>

Her spiritual maturity, supported by a later mystical experience of Christ (written for her then Jesuit confessor Martín Gutiérrez (1504-1573) in April of 1571), served as a confirmation to her on the significance of Christ’s real presence in the Sacrament; on the realism of his Eucharistic Presence—the only one that could be compared to the historical presence and far superior to all the visions and revelations. She writes:

One day after Communion, it seemed most clear to me that our Lord sat beside me; and He began to console me with great favors, and He told me among other things: ‘See Me here, daughter, for it is I...’ From certain things he told me, I understood that after He ascended to heaven He never came down to earth to commune with anyone except in the Most Blessed Sacrament.<sup>1573</sup>

This experience testifies to the fact that Christ is much more present in the Eucharist than in any vision of him that one has received after his ascension into heaven. Teresa gathered from this revelation, that “when we are at the presence of the Eucharist and even more” when we receive it, “we are having an encounter with Christ that is much more real than having any vision or apparition of him.”<sup>1574</sup> This experience brought to her awareness that her visions are not Christ Himself, but rather a distant resemblance, that Christ only really existed in His historical life and in the Blessed Sacrament. This means that the extraordinary presences of Christ felt by people at one point or the other “are imaginary, intellectual, perhaps illusionary, hallucinations, the expression of an excessive belief.”<sup>1575</sup> It is only in the Eucharist we have Christ “just as truly present as he was” when he lived on earth.<sup>1576</sup>

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<sup>1572</sup> *Life*, 29:2.

<sup>1573</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 12:6.

<sup>1574</sup> See Jorge Cabrera, “St. Teresa and the Eucharist.”

<sup>1575</sup> See Maroto, *Vida eucarística de Santa Teresa*, 22.

<sup>1576</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 34:6.

## 5.14 The Eucharist: A Source of Bodily Healing

Teresa teaches that in addition to providing spiritual sustenance, the Eucharist (as the real presence of Christ) is also a source of physical healing; a medicine for bodily ailments. “Do you think this heavenly food fails to provide sustenance, even for these bodies, that it is not a great medicine even for bodily ills? I know that it is.”<sup>1577</sup> Writing (in the third person) about herself and her experience of the healing power of the Eucharist, she states:

I know a person with serious illnesses, who often experiences great pain, who through this bread had them taken away as though by a gesture of the hand and was made completely well. This is a common experience, and the illness are very recognizable, for I don’t think they could be feigned.<sup>1578</sup>

This testimony echoes what she testified earlier on her experience of the Eucharist as a source of bodily well-being. For instance, in chapter 30 of *The Book of Her Life*, she writes: “Sometimes...after receiving Communion I was at peace. And sometimes in approaching the Sacrament I felt at once so good in...body that I was surprised.”<sup>1579</sup> And in the early part of her *Spiritual Testimonies*, she writes: “I have experienced for more than a half year that at least when I am receiving Communion I noticeably and clearly feel bodily health.”<sup>1580</sup>

Teresa’s belief in the healing power of the Eucharist is anchored on her faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. She is convinced that if Christ is truly present in the Eucharist just as he was when he lived on earth, then, he would perform the same healing and miracles he worked while on earth if we receive him with faith. She writes: “If when he went about in the world the mere touch of his robes cured the sick, why doubt, if we have faith, that miracles will be worked while he is within us...”<sup>1581</sup>

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<sup>1577</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1579</sup> *Life*, 30:14.

<sup>1580</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 1:23.

<sup>1581</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 34:8.

### 5.15 The Eucharist and the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer

Teresa began her commentary on the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer as we saw, by drawing a connection between the third and fourth petitions, that is, by showing how the Eucharist helps, encourages, and sustains us in doing the Father's will which "we have prayed might be done in us," in the third petition.<sup>1582</sup> She did the same when she turned to the next (fifth) petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," "assuming the Eucharist as the rationale and the nourishment" of what this petition looks to.<sup>1583</sup> She writes:

Since our good Master saw that with this heavenly bread everything is easy for us, save through our own fault, and that we can carry out very well what we have said about the Father's will being done to us, he now tells the Father to forgive us our debts since we ourselves forgive.<sup>1584</sup>

Teresa conceives the practice of forgiveness (which is one of the ways of doing God's will) as flowing from the Eucharist. She believes that everything is simple for whoever has requested and received the Eucharistic bread, not only to ask for God's pardon but also guaranteeing that we will forgive others.<sup>1585</sup> Thus, just as the Eucharist provides for, and sustains us in doing the Father's will, it also "facilitates what we need" for the fifth petition, in which we ask for forgiveness from God.<sup>1586</sup>

The Eucharist therefore, occupies an important place in Teresa's commentary on the third, fourth and fifth petitions of the Lord's prayer as contained in chapters 32 to 36 of *The Way of Perfection*. Kavanaugh observed that these petitions "bear resemblance to a triptych, with its centre piece dedicated to the Eucharist."<sup>1587</sup>

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<sup>1582</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 33:1; 34:1

<sup>1583</sup> See Williams, Teresa of Avila, 127.

<sup>1584</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 36:1

<sup>1585</sup> Álvarez, *Comentarios al "Camino de Perfección"* de Santa Teresa de Jesús, 261.

<sup>1586</sup> See Kavanaugh, *The Way of Perfection*, summary of chapter 36, 406.

<sup>1587</sup> See *Ibid.*, interpretative notes, 408.

## **5. 16 Conclusion**

Our aim in this chapter has been to explore Teresa's teaching on the Eucharist. Her understanding of the sacrament of the Eucharist is rooted in the Church's belief in the Eucharist as the real presence of Christ. This belief became controversial from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when it came under severe attack by the Reformers during the Reformation.

In addition to their attack on the doctrine of the real presence, the Reformers were also particularly against transubstantiation, a term employed by the Church in describing the mode of Christ's Eucharistic presence. They equally condemned the practice of reserving the Eucharistic in the tabernacle for adoration, and in carrying the Eucharist in processions for the Feast of Corpus Christi. Such practices, according to them, amount to worshipping earthly elements in place of their maker. To this effect, the Reformers and their proponents went on removing the Eucharist from Churches and places of worship.

We considered how the Church at the Council of Trent responded to the activities of the Reformers, namely, by issuing decrees which affirmed and defended the Church's view on the real presence, as well as canons which condemned the contrary views of the Reformers on the Eucharist, especially on their denial of Christ's real and substantial presence in the Eucharist.

We also showed that Teresa following the footsteps of Trent also condemned the activities of the Reformers. She perceived their activities as a rejection of the Eucharistic focus of the church, and a disrespect for Churches as a sacred place of worship and where the Eucharist is housed. Thus, she sees her new foundations as a way of responding to the activities of the Reformers. For while the Reformers went about destroying Churches and removing the Blessed Sacrament, Teresa was busy establishing houses (convent Churches) where the Blessed Sacrament would be reserved and adored. Her Eucharistic response to the

activities of the Reformers is therefore, rooted in her faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The real presence (the abiding presence of Christ in the Eucharist) is also the focus of Teresa's Eucharistic teaching. Her teaching on the Eucharist is contained in chapters 33-35 of *The Way of Perfection* devoted to the commentary on the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." She reckons that in this petition, Jesus was asking the Father that he be allowed to remain with us forever here below in the Eucharist. Thus, for her, "our daily bread" is the Eucharist; the prolongation of Christ's presence among us. In the Eucharist, Christ nourishes our will to become one with that of the Father. His Eucharistic presence is also a source of healing.

Teresa's sacramental theology is Christological; it is centred on the person of Jesus Christ in who instituted the sacraments, and in whose name the Church administers them. She sees the seven sacraments as conveyors of grace; as means through which we encounter Christ. She believes that Christ is present in the sacraments and that he dispenses his grace through them. For her, the effectiveness of the sacraments hinges on Christ who acts through them. Though She believes that Christ is present in other sacraments, Teresa was aware of his unique presence in the Eucharist; of his "presence in the fullest sense." For unlike other sacraments which are means through which grace is conferred on the soul, the Eucharist contains the giver of grace himself, our Lord Jesus Christ, really present in the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine. Her strong devotion to the Eucharist attests to her understanding of this sacrament as the real and abiding presence of Christ. She sees in the Eucharist the fulfillment of Christ's promise to remain with us forever. In the Eucharist, Christ gave us his whole being; the whole of his humanity and divinity.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to demonstrate that Teresa's experience of Christ has two aspects: the ascetical and the mystical, and to show how the Eucharist powerfully informs both of these aspects of her Christological experiences. Much has been written on Teresa's experience of Christ in prayer and on her mystical experience of him through locutions and visions, but the central place of the Eucharist in these aspects of her Christological experiences has often been neglected. This work therefore, has attempted to give it the attention it deserves.

This thesis argues that the Eucharist is at the core of Teresa's experience of Christ in (ascetical) prayer and in her mystical experiences of him through locutions and in visions of him. The period after the reception of the Eucharist was Teresa's intense moments of encounter and communion with Christ in prayer; moments of adoration, petition and thanksgiving to Christ who comes to her and is present within her sacramentally. Teresa's understanding of prayer as a relationship of friendship with Christ; as an intimate sharing and friendly conversation with him finds its highest expression in the Eucharist. She longed for friendship with Christ in prayer; to spend time alone with him always, by meditating on the mysteries of his life and keeping him present within herself. This desire finds fulfilment in the Eucharist, where she encountered the object of her devotion—the risen and the glorified Christ in his bodily (sacramental) presence.

Teresa's pattern of ascetical prayer; her means of experiencing the presence of Christ (namely, through meditation and recollection), is at its peak in the context of the Eucharist. For after receiving the Eucharist, she encounters the person of Jesus she sought for in her meditations, and he enables her to pray (to meditate) without the aid of books and images by controlling her wandering thoughts. Christ's Eucharistic presence also afforded her the opportunity to withdraw from the external world, (through her post-Communion recollection)



and enter within herself in order to experience his indwelling presence in the silence of her heart. “After having received the Lord, since you have the Person himself present,” she writes, “strive to close the eyes of the body and open those of the soul and look into your own heart.” She believes that if practiced always, this post-Communion recollection will lead one to an experience of encounter with the indwelling presence of Christ.<sup>1588</sup> Eucharistic Communion provides Teresa with the opportunity of an encounter with the Lord in her innermost self. She reckons that in the context of the Eucharist, Christ permits himself to be interiorised within her in order to deepen her prayer of recollection.

The Eucharist is at the centre of Teresa’s mystical experiences of Christ. Most of these experiences took place after receiving Communion. In the context of these extraordinary experiences, Teresa received locutions from Christ and saw him in her visions. These Christological experiences (often triggered by receiving the Eucharist) were the basis of Teresa’s life as a reformer and founder, of her coming to a deeper knowledge and understanding of divine things and of the mysteries of faith.

The Eucharist therefore, is central to Teresa’s experience of Christ in prayer and in her mystical experiences of him. It keeps her firmly connected to the person of Jesus Christ in his humanity. Moltmann, observes that “what holds Teresa so indivisibly fast to Christ is...the experience of the Eucharist. The body and blood of Christ in bread and wine—broken and shed for us—this is for her the humanity of Christ.”<sup>1589</sup>

Teresa’s Eucharistic experiences are rooted in her faith in the real presence. This is also the focus of her Eucharistic theology as discussed in chapter five. For her, the Eucharist is the real presence of Christ; the prolongation of his presence among us. Her emphasis on the real presence is in line with the traditional Eucharistic faith of the Church of her time. It was

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<sup>1588</sup> See *The Way of Perfection*, 34:12.

<sup>1589</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “Teresa of Avila and Martin Luther: The Turn to the Mysticism of the Cross,” in *Studies in Religion/Science Religieuses*, vol.13, no. 3 (1984), 265-278.

also her way of responding to some Reformers who denied the Church's doctrine of the real presence.

The significance of this thesis therefore, lies in its contribution to a better and a deeper understanding of the central place of the Eucharist in Teresa's experience of Christ in prayer and in her mystical experiences of him in locutions and visions. In addition to demonstrating the centrality of the Eucharist in Teresa's Christological experiences, this thesis also explores her mystical experiences related to the Eucharist and her Eucharistic teaching. These two themes have received little attention till now.

### **Areas of Further Research**

In the course of this work I noted the central place of the Eucharist in Teresa's foundations (her new small communities). I pointed out for instance, that she only considered a new foundation to be truly established when the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in it. She regards her foundations as Eucharistic communities; as homes for the Eucharistic Christ, where he will be adored accordingly. This makes the Eucharist an essential element of her new houses. The Eucharistic Christ is the Lord and master of Teresa's new foundations. This aspect of her thought deserves further attention.

Again, for lack of time and space I was not able to focus in detail on Teresa's sense of the Church; on the ecclesial aspect of her teaching. Though I mentioned her concern and passion for the suffering Church in Chapter five of my work, I suggest that her entire ecclesiology is as an aspect of her teaching that needs further exploration. Teresa identifies Christ and the Church as one reality. The Church is for her that mystery within which the mystery of Christ is expressed. The elements that make up the Church according to her are Christians, Sacred Scripture, the Eucharist, the Hierarchy and theologians.

## GLOSSARY

### **Affective Dionysianism**

“Affective Dionysianism” is a stream of interpretation of the Dionysian *corpus* that emerged in the later Middle Ages, championed by the Victorine interpreters. These interpreters emphasised the role of love (*amor, affectio*) over knowledge in the pursuit of union with God. Their position differs from that of the “Speculative Dionysianism” that prioritises knowledge over love in the highest stage of the mystical journey.

### **Alumbrados** (illuminated or enlightened ones)

The *Alumbrados*, were the adherents of an unorthodox mystical movement which was denounced by the Inquisition in Spain during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. As their name indicates, they claimed that one is capable of understanding the Scriptures when inspired or directly illumined by the Holy Spirit who is the only teacher and master. They believed it is in private inspiration and through direct and unmediated communication with, and experience of God in prayer, that one’s soul is nourished. The *alumbrados* are divided into two groups, namely: the *recogidos* (the “recollected”) and the *dejados* (the “abandoned”). Though they shared a lot in common, these groups also have certain differences between them. For instance, while the former attached highest importance to recollection, the latter centred their spirituality on the idea of complete abandonment of the soul in all its faculties to God.

### **Ascetical**

The term “ascetical” is used in this work to describe the stage of prayer (namely, ascetical prayer), that depends on human efforts aided by grace. In this stage of prayer (also known as active prayer), one makes the effort to pray by practicing meditation and recollection.

### **Beatas** (holy women)

This term refers to the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries Spanish women who, for different reasons, could not join traditional religious orders, but chose to live the ‘religious’ life outside monastic enclosure. They often became lay members (tertiaries) of one of the known religious orders, following their rules or the rule they made for themselves. Some of these women were known to have mystical experiences and possessed supernatural powers, and had lots of followers and admirers, including priests, religious and prominent people in society. *Beatas* lived in houses called *beaterios*.

### **Conversos** (converts)

*Conversos* were Jews who became Christians (by accepting Christian baptism) under duress in the process of unifying the different kingdoms and religions of Spain into one

(Catholic) nation by the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452-1516) and Isabella I of Castile (1451-1504). This followed the fall of Granada (the last Muslim dynasty in Spain), in 1492. Teresa's paternal grand-father, Juan Sánchez de Toledo Cepeda was a *converso* and one of the Jews who were punished by the Inquisition as secret judaizers in Toledo.

### **Dionysianism**

Dionysianism is a term used to denote the different traditions of Dionysian interpretation that emerged in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. There are two streams of these traditions. Namely, the “affective Dionysianism” (that is, the affective interpretation of Dionysius) and the “speculative Dionysianism” (that is, the speculative interpretation of Dionysius).

### **Espirituales** (spiritual people)

*Espirituales* is a term generally used to refer to theologians and spiritual writers (mostly Franciscans and Jesuits), who gave special importance to mental prayer and direct religious experience over doctrine. They believed the knowledge of God obtained through mental prayer and direct religious experience was true. Teresa shared in this school of thought.

### **Letrados** (lettered ones)

*Letrados* is a term commonly used at the time to refer to theologians (mostly Dominicans), who belonged to a current of thought that prioritized doctrine over personal experience in prayer. They believed that only a few trained theologians should be allowed to speculate on theological and spiritual issues, and the laity be encouraged to practice their devotion as prescribed by the Church and to prioritize the pursuit of virtues in their devotion. The *letrados* are particularly suspicious of mental prayer. They considered it as the first step to heterodoxy.

### **Mental prayer**

Mental prayer is a prayer that involves an exercise of the conscious mind. It is classified as prayer of effort (active prayer), because it entails the use of one's mental powers and efforts aided by divine grace to pray. Mental prayer involves an inward conversation with God by recollecting the senses and meditating on passages from the Scriptures, especially on the passion of Christ. Teresa defines mental prayer as “an intimate sharing between friends; as taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.”<sup>1590</sup>

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<sup>1590</sup> *Life*, 8:5.

## **Mystical**

The term “mystical” is used in this work to refer to a stage of prayer that is not attained by human effort. Prayer at this stage (also known as passive or supernatural stage of prayer) is divinely infused; a gratuitous gift from God. It is a stage of prayer in which one is drawn to God in indescribable ways. Teresa used the term mystical (theology) four times in *The Book of Her Life*, mainly in reference to her experience of contemplation. For her, “mystical theology” is synonymous with contemplation, which she describes as the stage of prayer that is divinely infused. Mystical theology (or contemplation), from Teresa’s point of view therefore, could be seen as one’s experience of encounter with God, through love. It is a state of being able to have a taste (*sabor*) of God and to enjoy (*gozar*) his presence. This notion about mystical theology is based on the affective interpretation of the Dionysian *corpus* by the theologians of St. Victor (the Victorines) in Paris in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their interpretation proposed that the Dionysian mystical union with God is achieved through love (*affectus*) instead of intelligence (*intellectus*).

## **Prayer**

The term prayer is used in this work to refer to a dialogue or a friendly conversation with God. There are two stages of prayer: the ascetical or active stage and the mystical or infused stage. The former is attained by human effort aided by grace, while the latter is a gift from God. Prayer for Teresa involves a journey from the ascetical to the mystical; from going in search of God in prayer (through meditation and recollection) to experiencing his presence in a mystical way.

## **Recollection or Recogimiento (gathering together)**

Recollection is a method of prayer advocated and taught by the Franciscans at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In prayer of recollection, one gathers one’s faculties together and enters within oneself to be with God. Teresa learnt about recollection from reading Francisco de Osuna’s *Third Spiritual Alphabet*, and she used it a great deal of times in her works. She considers this method of prayer as “an excellent path,” which disposes one for attaining the prayer of contemplation. She refers to another kind of recollection, known as passive recollection, which, according to her, is a supernatural gift from God—not acquired by human effort.

## **Speculative Dionysianism**

“Speculative Dionysianism” is a tradition of interpretation of the Dionysian *corpus* that emerged in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, championed by the Dominican Albert the Great (1200-1280). Dionysian interpreters of this tradition, proposed an intellectual approach to union with God, with no reference to love. They held that Dionysius’ mystical union with God is achieved through intelligence (*intellectus*) rather than love (*affectus*). This position contrasts with that of the “Affective Dionysianism” that gave a special place to love over knowledge in the highest stage of the mystical itinerary.

## **Victorines**

The Victorines were group of theologians and commentators (with special interest in the Dionysian *corpus*) linked with the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris. Prominent among them were Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141), Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), and Thomas Gallus (c.1200-1246). They “were at the forefront of the reintroduction and re-examination of the corpus, introducing innovations that have been referred to as the interpretation of ‘affective Dionysianism.’”<sup>1591</sup>

## **Vocal Prayer**

Vocal prayer is the Church’s traditional pattern of prayer. It involves recitation of formulated prayers (like the Our Father, the Hail Mary and other devotions), approved by the Church. The core of vocal prayer for Teresa is being aware of what one is saying and to whom one is speaking; being aware of the one to whom the prayer is addressed.

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<sup>1591</sup> Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical*, 71.

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