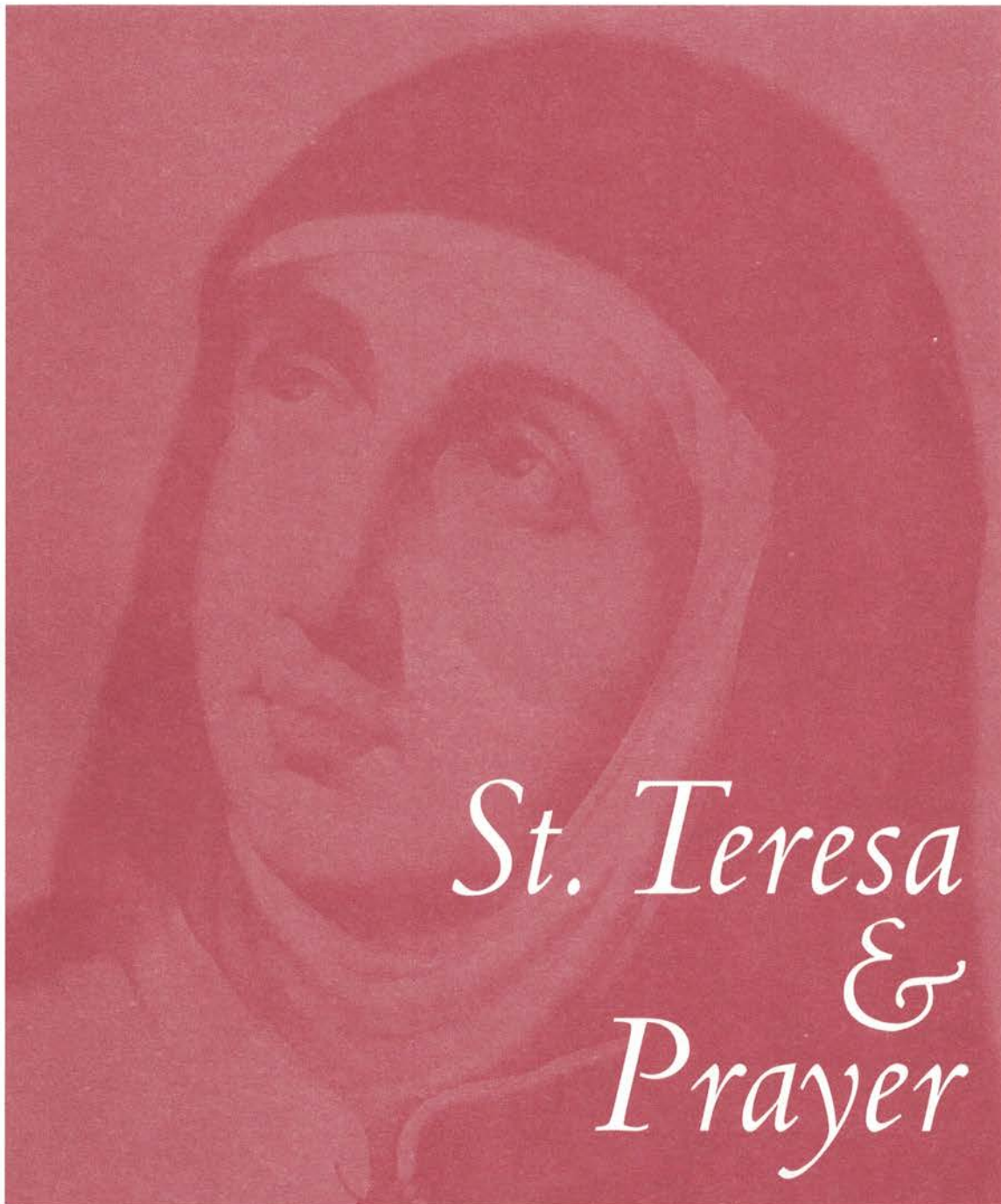


CARMEL CLARION

March - April 2006 Volume XXII No. 2



*St. Teresa
&
Prayer*

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Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington, D.C.

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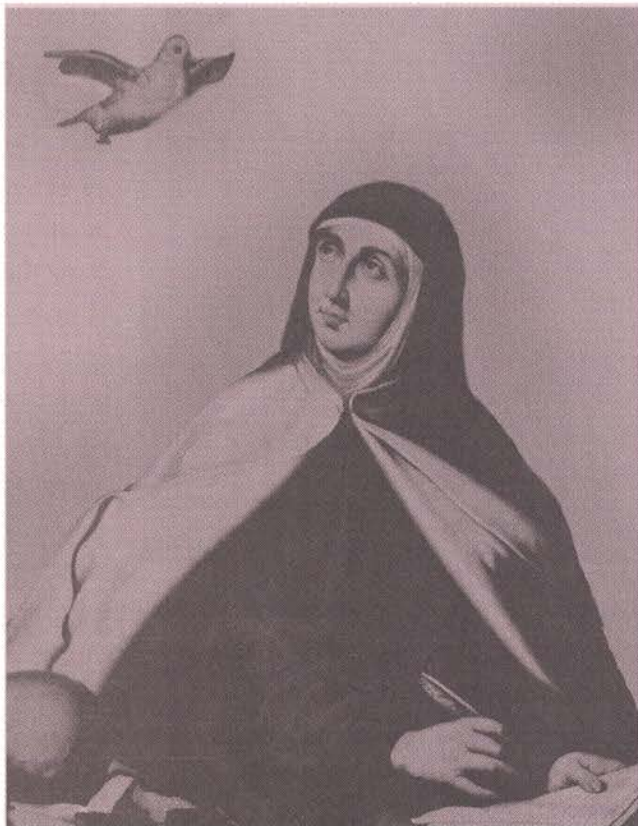
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Editorial

In this issue of the *Clarion* we are presenting more resource material on the teachings of our Holy Mother, St. Teresa. The article by Tomas Alvarez makes the point that it was through prayer that Teresa came to a deeper understanding of the Christian life. Paul-Marie shows us that Teresa's contribution to Christian spirituality was not only made through her writings, but in her work as foundress of a new way of life within Carmel and the Church. As Paul-Marie says, "she re-thought and reformed the whole contemplative life in terms of the true and pure Carmelite ideal: she renewed and deepened the life of prayer founded in Christ." Fr. McCaffrey gives us the many resources that influenced Teresa and how these were important elements in her journey toward union with God.



We hope that these articles will be helpful to each of you on your journey and a valuable resource for the formation program of your community.

We now have a new OCDS Provincial Council made up of members of various communities throughout the Province. The first meeting of this Council with Fr. Phillip, our Provincial and his three OCDS delegates took place at Holy Hill, WI the last weekend of March.

We would also like to call your attention to our "In Memoriam" section. Please inform us of the death of any member of your community so that we can acknowledge their service to Carmel and the Church.

Although you will receive this after Easter I want to wish each of you a very blessed Easter season. May the Risen Lord reign in your hearts.

Fr. Regis

St. Teresa's Concept of Prayer

Tomas Alvarez, O.C.D.

This is the first of a two part article by Tomas Alvarez, OCD. The second part will be in the next issue.



Introduction

Prayer is the central theme of St. Teresa's message. Her own life revolved around prayer to such an extent that it became an adventure in prayer, and her prayer, in turn, became the richest element in her spiritual make-up. It was through her understanding of prayer that she came to understand the mystery of the Christian life, and she used it to great effect in initiating others into that life.

That alone would justify the relevance of her message to us. Today prayer

has become a pressing problem. People look to theologians for a radical and complete answer to such questions as: what is Christian prayer? How do we go about it? How does it fit into our daily lives? The relevance of the lesson Teresa has to teach us does not just stem from the fact that her words have come down to us, full of their original freshness and vibrant with the appeal of conviction, it is also due to her affinity with our approach to the subject, with our crisis in prayer. It would be difficult to find a page in her writings that do not speak to our situation. We can put most of our problems to her: why there should be personal as well as liturgical prayer; how to overcome our inner limitations and that of the physical world about us, in order to really speak to God; how to reconcile prayer and work (the eternal option between contemplation and action); how to bring Christ into our prayer; how to keep vocal prayer real; how to revive, or revitalize, community prayer; how to imbue the liturgy with the intensity and power of personal prayer; and, finally, the problem most keenly felt by Teresa herself: what is the meaning of infused prayer, powered by the charismatic efficacy of the mystical life, as eulogized by the classical authors on Christian prayer? Does it exist in the Church?

In coming to grips with St. Teresa's thinking, we are not going to look for her answers to today's problems. We shall go directly to her teaching, and find out what

prayer is and how we ought to go about it. Even so, this subject is so rich and complex in her writings that a few limitations must be imposed from the outset.

First, we shall leave aside the historical background to her thinking, in spite of its undoubted importance, especially as an initial stimulant. Teresa was born into a Church in crisis, and at such times there is always a rediscovery and intense revival of certain values. Prayer was as much appreciated as an expression of and a means of Christian living in the Church of the sixteenth century as today. But its theologians and spiritual writers saw it in different terms than ours and consequently wrote with a different emphasis. Controversies about contemplatives and vocal prayer were live issues to them, and that is the context in which Teresa's experience and her reflections on it must be seen. It explains the vehement and sometimes polemical tone of certain pages in the *Life*, as well as the firmness and originality of her testimony. We shall take account of it, therefore, but without allowing our attention to wander in that direction.

The subject of degrees of prayer is another important aspect of Teresa's thought which we must leave aside. One of the basic ideas in her thinking is that prayer is not marginal to life, but rather something internal and essential to it. As such, it must be an ongoing process. This is not just because it is subject to the progress taking place in the Christian life, but because it is itself an evolutionary process, like the love of two people for one another. Hence the necessity of bearing in mind the stages of this process if one is to understand the essence of prayer precisely. We shall bear it in mind, then, but without making a study of it.

And a final, important limitation: it is clear that for St. Teresa personal (non-liturgical) prayer reaches its full perfection only in mystical prayer. It is here that one would presumably find prayer at its purest, the achievement of a dialogue with God that is free of deforming frustrations. Nevertheless, we must confine ourselves to practicalities and seek out the most basic and universally applicable expressions of her thinking on prayer.

Having set ourselves these limitations, it is easy enough to follow her thinking. Like any other subject she teaches, that of prayer comprises three superimposed layers: experience, reflection and teaching. She starts with her own case; a detailed, almost verbose, testimony of the history of her own prayer life, its beginnings, the drama and crisis, and its full flowering. It is but a short step from her experience to her understanding of it: she understood prayer as she lived it. Hence her particular conception of prayer and related ideas. Her understanding is in turn the starting point of her teaching: she does not really theorize about prayer; she communicates her experience and invites and guides the reader into it.

I. Experience of Prayer

At present, we are interested only in those aspects of St. Teresa's prayer experience which prepare the way for her doctrine. Even so, her account is so rich that we must keep to those aspects that had a determining influence on her teaching. In bringing

these together, we will confine ourselves to her own testimony, leaving aside entirely the fine studies which some of her contemporaries made of her prayer life. That testimony is spread throughout her writings from the first account in 1560 to the sixth formal account, written in 1581, with important information being provided in all her major works and even in her letters. But the richest and most fruitful source of our analysis will be her *Life*, written in 1585.

St. Teresa might, roughly speaking, be said to have gone through the three situations which are typical of the Christian before God: spontaneous prayer, without problems;—the critical stage of difficult prayer; and the flow of infused prayer, received, imposed almost, from the other end of the prayer line. Of these three experiences, the second (the struggle to pray) is the most interesting for the purposes of this study. Through it Teresa's doctrine on prayer takes shape. In her *Life* it is framed, so to speak, between the other two experiences; so, even if only in passing, we shall have an opportunity of speaking about them too.

The First Experience

We are told of this in the very first chapter of the *Life* "I had one brother about my own age. We used to get together to read the lives of the saints. . . . When I considered 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 in the same way. I did not want this on account of the love I felt for God but to get to enjoy very quickly the wonderful things I read there were in Heaven. And my brother and I discussed together the means we should take to achieve this. 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. It seemed to me the Lord had given us courage at so tender an age, but we couldn't discover any means. Having parents seemed to us to be the greatest obstacle. What we read about pain and glory lasting forever made a deep impression upon us. We spent a lot of time talking about this and took delight in often repeating: forever and ever and ever. Through the frequent repetition of these words, the Lord was pleased to impress upon me in childhood the way of truth" (*L*, I, 4).

Despite the forty years that had elapsed between those events and the time of writing, Teresa's account is clear and full of detail. The outstanding feature of this passage is the contemplative atmosphere of these childhood activities: the idea of eternity caused amazement, was turned over again and again, so that the truth of "for ever and ever" remained a lasting impression. Other noteworthy aspects are: great openness except for the last remark, the whole experience is shared by both children; the two-fold direction of those childhood meditations—dynamic (going off to the 'land of the Moors') and eschatological (longing for the "wonderful things" of Heaven, with the emphasis on their lasting for ever rather than on their content). Nor does the passage lack that merciless self-criticism she displays in subsequent chapters; her motivation was not love of God, but haste to enjoy the blessings of Heaven cheaply.

She mentions this first experience only once more in her writings, on rediscovering “the truth I learned as a child”— the nothingness and transitory nature of everything here below. But, as her niece was to testify later, she did retain pleasant memories of these beginnings all her life. The opposition between the vanity of the perishable and the truth of what was eternal would be a recurring theme with her, a theme enriched by subsequent experiences; but it does not become the chief channel or object of her prayer. The rest of that first experience: religious feeling, spontaneity, fascination for ideal types like martyrs, God and eternity, and prayer as a playful pastime all passed away quickly, and for ever. She tells us herself, in the *Life*, how easily the first breath of adolescence blew it all away.

The Second Experience

That was how she came to her second experience: the struggle to recover the sense of prayer and the ability to pray. There was a new emphasis in this striving: it was no longer a question of raising her mind to god about temporal and eternal matters, but of being able to speak to him, converse with him.

This would be a long day’s work: eighteen to twenty years of “great aridity” and intense struggle. In Teresa’s account, these years are presented en bloc as if they were continuous, bound together by a painful memory. In reality, her experience was not always the same, nor was her aridity unrelieved. During these years, there were times when she was completely powerless, but they were also interspersed with brighter moments and even periods of intense mystical prayer. We will forget for the moment about these variations and the chronology of her progress, in order to concentrate on just one aspect: her struggle to pray, that arduous seedbed of future doctrinal positions.

Once the cooling off of early adolescence is over, recourse to prayer re-appears in Teresa’s account, together with her first mention of a vocation to the religious life. It is not clear whether this happened spontaneously, coming from within herself as it had before, or was stimulated from without by people and books. It was certainly stimulated by the “good books in Spanish” (*L*, 3) which, apparently for the first time, turned her towards Christ and his passion and eventually made her decide to train herself systematically to pray according to the method of recollection taught by the Franciscan writer, Francisco de Osuna. She had begun reading these books when, already a nun, she was staying with Don Pedro Sanchez during an illness. He was a keen student of Osuna’s Third Alphabet and spoke highly of it to her. It was there and then that she decided to follow his method.

According to herself, Teresa had not till then “known how to go about praying” (*L*, 4, 7). Yet, we know from what she tells us elsewhere that she did not have to wait for this external stimulus to make a start. Her prayerful, and almost contemplative recourse to the humanity of Christ dated from her childhood. She had always remained faithful to a kind of nightly appointment with him in the Garden of Olives. These were brief moments, with no interference from books or meth-

ods: "I feel sure my soul gained a great deal through this custom, because I began to practice prayer without knowing what it was" (L, 9, 4). This is her earliest recollection of personal prayer, and it was to influence her future development no less than the teachings of Francisco de Osuna. Its importance lay chiefly in the fact that it rendered "the practice of prayer" a stable means of cultivating the life of the spirit. On the basis of it, the young nun was not only able to remain faithful to short, occasional efforts at praying, like that mentioned above, but she committed herself to prayer with typical determination: "I was determined to follow that path of prayer with all my strength" (L, 4, 7). At first the results were marvelous. And then came the crisis, normal but persistent, that characterized the next eighteen to twenty years.

A brief summing up of her own detailed analysis of it gives the following picture: there were no rules about personal, private prayer in her community; the consistent practice of what she had "determined" herself made up for this; her new "way" consisted chiefly in setting aside a time for daily prayer and filling it in. This

was not the cold, conventional gesture it might seem; it was heartfelt and sincere. She easily made contact with Christ and, through him, with God.

However, she met with two difficulties, which gradually increased to the point where they became unbearable. The first was her inability to reason; she just could not picture things to herself, or think, or meditate in God's presence. The second was that she found she could not control her thoughts; they refused to obey her and made a mockery

of her "determination." In several places she likened them to flighty moths, "having a madman in the house," etc.

Together, these difficulties smothered her first efforts at prayer. They reduced it to a fleeting moment which she was unable to prolong. They showed up the insignificance and fragility of her prayer; it was slipping from her grasp without satisfying her or in any way becoming part of her life. Looking back, she felt that God must have borne her up: "I now think it was the Lord's provision . . . for it would otherwise have been impossible to persevere for eighteen years in this trial and great aridity which I suffered through being unable to reflect discursively. In all those years, except for the time after Communion, I never dared to begin prayer without a book. For my soul was as fearful of being without it during prayer as it would have been should it have had to battle with a lot of people. 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 not usually felt, but it was always felt when I was without a book. Then my soul was thrown into confu-

. . . there were no rules about personal, private prayer in her community; the consistent practice of what she had "determined" herself made up for this; her new "way" consisted chiefly in setting aside a time for daily prayer and filling it in. This was not the cold, conventional gesture it might seem; it was heartfelt and sincere.

sion and my thoughts ran wild. With a book I began to collect them, and my soul was “drawn to recollection” (L, 4, 9). “For some years I was often more anxious that the hour I had determined to spend in prayer be over than I was to remain there, and more anxious to listen for the striking of the clock than to attend to other good things. I would often have preferred to undergo any penance rather than recollect myself in the practice of prayer. It is certain that so unbearable was the force used by the devil, or coming from my wretched habits, to prevent me from going to prayer, and so unbearable the sadness I felt on entering the oratory, that I had to muster up all my courage (and they say I have no small amount of that . . .) in order to force myself” (L, 8, 7).

Later there was a second crisis. This was when Teresa became aware of something more serious: the fact that her life was not consistent with her prayer. God’s demands and those of her conscience made themselves clearly felt during prayer, and they concerned her way of life. To be precise, they made her feel how mispent some of it was: she wasted time, and was impoverishing her spirit with affections and friendships which had too strong a hold on her. This inconsistency between her “asides” of prayer and the rest of her life eventually became a painful and anxious dilemma for Teresa’s conscience. In such a situation life became “the shadow of death” (L, 8, 12), and prayer was a painful and battle-filled encounter with God.

The crossing of this “stormy sea took twenty years continually falling and rising, and living far from perfection. I think it is one of the most painful lives one can imagine, for I neither enjoyed God nor found happiness in the world. When I was experiencing the enjoyments of the world, I felt sorrow at the thought of what I owed God. When I was with God, the attachments of the world disturbed me. This kind of war is so painful that I don’t know how I survived even a month of it, let alone so many years” (L, 8, 2).

All this did not preclude an encounter with God; it was just that a contradictory element had crept into it. “I was ashamed to return to God and to approach him in the intimate friendship that praying is” (L, 7, 1). And Teresa was weak enough to give in to her shame. She felt unable to adjust her life to the overwhelming demands of prayer, and honestly believed she was unworthy to continue her dialogue with God. So she fled the battlefield; but only for “a year and a half” or maybe a year, for, as she said herself: “I do not remember too well about the half” (L, 19, 4).

It is worth drawing attention to the fundamental features of the above two crises. In neither is the crisis caused by the barrier of transcendence—the inaccessibility of God. On the contrary, God was no problem. Christ especially was always within Teresa’s reach, and, as we shall see in a moment, she had many ways of ap-





proaching him. The whole difficulty lay in Teresa herself. The first crisis was psychological: the inner mechanism for thinking, reasoning and imagining did not synchronize with her will, soul and person, thus frustrating and breaking down the continuity of her contact with God. In order to be able to do something, or go on doing it, it is not enough to will it. Teresa's realization of this partial, but unavoidable, impotence was so keen that she sometimes wished she was dead, to get away from it (cf. *Way* 31, 8).

The second crisis was more clearly human in origin: her life was not in tune with the time reserved for God. Teresa was able to determine the time of her encounter with God, but not the content and meaning of her life. Without this, she no longer believed in the truth or authenticity of her prayer, a state of mind she called "false humility." Since in Teresa's vocabulary humility meant walking in truth, and truth is the essence of things, that phrase sums up what was at

the bottom of her problem: a great fear of the God she had to meet at prayer, and shame of herself. Later, the gravity of this situation terrified her, especially her rejection of converse with God. She called it "the beginning of the temptation of Judas."

This giving up of prayer occurred about 1543-44, half way through her twenty-year struggle. During the previous ten years, and again in the nine or ten that followed, she ploughed the difficult furrow of prayer in her own way. We will look now at the salient features of that long struggle.

Several times in her writings, St. Teresa assures us that her way of praying was a simple one. Essentially it consisted of "representing Christ to herself" as being near or within her, and speaking to him. Later, we shall see exactly what she meant by "representing." But here is her first description of how she proceeded: "I used to try 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 on some incident in his life, I represented it inwardly, though most of the time I spent reading good books, which was my only relaxation. For God did not give me the gift of reasoning with the mind or making use of my imagination. In fact, my imagination is so dull that, try as I might, I could never manage to think about the Lord's humanity or imagine it to myself" (*L*, 5, 7).

"Thinking of Jesus Christ as present within me" was not only the starting point: it was her way of entering into prayer. A simple and effective way, yet so fragile and so exposed to the fluctuations of the mind and to the whim of the imagination that she felt it necessary to protect it with all sorts of supports. Reading was the one she used most. Sometimes it was enough to have the book beside her, like a weapon: "Often it was enough just to open the book. Sometimes I read a little, sometimes a great deal, depending on the Lord's favor" (*L*, 4. 9).

The book was an external support. But she also used some ruses of her own, all of them invariably geared to achieve the aim of the initial effort: to make Christ

present and meet him. They were all meant to make this simple act more concrete and realistic. Her preference was for Gospel characters and scenes which could bring her nearer to the historical Christ and help her to transfer him from the biblical framework to that of her own inner life, or at least as near as possible to it. Let us look at some of her favorite ruses; through them we can see the threads with which her adventure in prayer was being woven.

She reproduced and relived with special care and affection the scenes which portrayed the Master's dealings with the Samaritan woman and with Mary Magdalen.

"How often I recall the living water which the Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman about! I am so fond of that passage. Indeed, I always have been, ever since I was a child, though without understanding this good then as I do now. I often begged the Lord to give me that water, and I used to carry a little picture of the episode of the Lord at the well, with the inscription: Domine, da mihi aquam" (L, 30, 19).

Her evocation of the scenes and characteristic attitude of Mary Magdalen was equally effective: "I had great devotion to the glorious Magdalene, and often 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. And I didn't know what I was saying (he did a great deal who allowed me to shed them for him, since I so quickly forgot that sentiment); and I commended myself to this glorious saint that she might obtain pardon for me" (L, 9, 2).

The moments immediately after Communion were especially favorable for St. Teresa's method of praying and for her ruses. In a delightfully confidential passage of *The Way of Perfection* she wrote: "I will omit many of the things I could say about this person. The Lord had given her such living faith that when she heard some persons saying they would like to have lived when Christ our Good Lord walked this earth, she used to laugh to herself. She wondered what more they wanted since in the most Blessed Sacrament they had him just as truly present as he was then. But I know 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 eyes, she saw him enter her house. Since she believed that this Lord truly entered her poor home, she freed herself from all exterior things when it was possible and entered to be with him. She strove to recollect the senses so that all of them would take notice of so great a good, I mean that they would not impede the soul from recognizing it. She considered she was at his feet and wept with the Magdalene, no more or less than if she were seeing him with her bodily eyes in the house of the Pharisee. And even though she didn't feel devotion, faith told her that he was indeed there" (Way, 34, 6-7).

This testimony is very rich in detail. It witnesses to the realism, the depth of conviction, and the lively faith reached by Teresa in her "practices" of prayer. But



Domine,
da mihi
aquam

of all of them, the “practice” she cultivated most and liked the best was one that had evolved from a childhood custom: that which centered on Christ’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. “This is the way I used to pray. . . I would try to picture Christ within me, and it did me greater good—in my opinion—to picture 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 of this kind. I found the scene of his prayer in the Garden especially comforting; I strove to be his companion there. I used to think of that sweat and how afflicted he was, and I wished I could wipe that grievous sweat from his face. But I recall that I never actually dared do it, since my sins appeared to me so serious. I used to stay with him as long as my thoughts allowed me to, for there were many distractions that tormented me” (*L*, 9, 4).

This is a scene that 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.

The same could be said of that biblical scene with which the liturgy of Holy Week opens Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. She refers to it in one of her Spiritual Testimonies (No. 22): “On Palm Sunday (probably 1572) after Communion, my faculties remained in such deep suspension that I couldn’t even swallow the host; and, holding it in my mouth, after I returned a little to myself, it truly seemed to me that my entire mouth was filled with blood. I felt that my face and all the rest of me was also covered with this blood, as though the Lord had just then finished shedding it. It seemed to me warm, and the sweetness I then experienced was extraordinary. The Lord said to me: ‘Daughter, I want my blood to be beneficial to you, and don’t be afraid that my mercy will fail you. I shed it with many sufferings, and you enjoy it with the great delight you are aware of: I repay you well for the banquet you have prepared for me this day.’ He said this because for more than thirty years I have received Communion on this day when possible and have striven to prepare my soul to make the Lord welcome. For it seems to me cruel of the Jews, after giving him such an enthusiastic reception, to have let him go so far away to eat: and I imagined I invited him to stay with me, which was very bad lodging for him, as I now see. Thus I made some foolish reflections, and the Lord must have accepted them.”

These “simple thoughts” and “foolish reflections” were Teresa’s usual aids to prayer. The examples we have given are probably the themes she used most, and they reflect faithfully the various manifestations of the simple strategy by which she achieved and enriched what was basic and central to all her private prayer.

No doubt her resources were more varied. She did call on many more biblical characters, though these were carefully chosen and one might say, functional. Thus, for example, our Lady at the foot of the cross (*Way*, 26, 8), St. Paul at the moment of his conversion (*Way*, 4(1, 3), St. Peter in tears or in that legend where he meets Jesus and asks: “Quo vadis, Domine?” (*IC*, VII. 4. 5). St. Joseph in silent contempla-



tion and service at home in Nazareth (*L*, 6, 6-8), the patience of Job and his dialogue with Yahweh (*L*, 5, 8). She was also very fond of pictures and statues, especially of Christ crucified,

the *Ecce Homo*, or indeed, any likeness of Christ (*Way*, 34. 11).

It is surprising how she keeps going back to biblical motifs, with the humanity of Christ as the focal point and dominant theme of them all. "All my life I had been so devoted to Christ, so I always returned to my custom of rejoicing in this Lord, especially when I received Communion. I wanted to keep ever before my eyes a painting or image of him since I was unable to keep him as engraved on my soul as I would have liked . . . Where have all my blessings come from but from you?" (*L*, 22. 4).

Sublime thoughts about the next life are pushed into the background: "Ascending by means of reflection to the high things of heaven or of God, to the grandeurs of heaven and the great wisdom of God, is something I have never done. I did not have that kind of ability." (*L*, 12, 4). The subject of her sins and reflections on her life in general arose spontaneously on coming into the presence of the suffering Christ, or simply when she was forced to engage in serious dialogue with him. She was compelled to overcome the barrier of her own wretchedness in order to rise toward his mercy or his person.

She sometimes made use of Nature to draw near to God, but only as a kind of aid to recollection, an ante-chamber to the encounter with the Divine Person: "It helped me also to look at fields, or water, or flowers. In these things I found a remembrance of the Creator. I mean that they awakened and recollected me and served as a book and reminded me of my ingratitude and sins. But when it came to heavenly, or sublime things, my mind was so coarse that it could never, never imagine them until the Lord showed them to me in another way" (*L*, 9. 5). A related practice of hers, and associated perhaps with her daily mental journey to the Garden of Olives, was to picture her own soul as a garden: "This comparison has its charm for me, because often in my beginnings . . . it was a great delight to me to think of my soul as a garden where the Lord was walking. I begged him to increase the fragrance of the little flowers of virtue which appeared to be about to bloom, and that they might give him glory and he might sustain them, for I desired nothing for myself. And I asked him to cut the ones he wanted, for I knew that better ones would flower in their place" (*L*, 14, 9).

The use of such helps to recollection never lessened Teresa's concentration on the principal target of her attention: Christ. Praying was being gradually reduced to approaching him. Gospel scenes and characters became access roads, so to speak, and the inner garden only a way of inviting him inside. The reason she reproduced Gospel scenes within her praying self was to transpose their central figure, Christ, into her own life, in order to establish a real relationship with him.



Hence her constant effort to “represent Christ,” make him present near or within her. This is absolutely central to Teresa’s praying.

The exact meaning of her expression “to represent Christ” is not easy to grasp. At first reading one is surprised to find her apparently contradicting herself. First she says her way of praying was to “try and represent Christ” within her. Almost immediately afterwards said: “I had so little ability to represent things with my intellect that unless I had seen the things my imagination was no use to me, unlike other persons who can imagine things and thus recollect themselves. I could only think of 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. I was like one who is blind or in darkness; he speaks with a person and sees that that person is with him because he knows with certainty that he is there (I mean he understands and believes that he is there. but he does not see him). That is how it was with me whenever I thought about our Lord” (L, 9, 6).

This second, more detailed, passage enables us to understand clearly the double meaning which the word “to represent” or “to picture” had for Teresa: when praying, she neither imagines Christ nor is she even trying to do so. Her whole effort is to re-present him to herself, enter into the fact of his presence, make it felt within her, objectify what she believes. As she expressed it elsewhere: “I try to think of Jesus . . . as present within me” (L. 4, 7), so there is no

setting the scene, imagining what he looked like, etc. She just goes directly to him 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. Nothing more.

It was at a moment such as this, a particularly intense moment prepared for by long practice, that Teresa’s definitive conversion took place. Here is her account of it: “On entering the oratory one day, I happened to see a statue which had been brought there in preparation for a certain feast we observed in the house. It represented the much-wounded Christ and was very devotional, so that beholding it I was utterly distressed at seeing him that way, for it well 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” (L, 9, 1).

She had made a similar gesture many times before, especially when she re-lived scenes about Mary Magdalene. "But on this occasion of the statue . . . I think I profited more . . . I think I told him then that I would not rise from there until he granted what I was begging him for" (*L*, 9, 3). Later in the same chapter she recounts another episode, in which she again tries to appropriate the gesture and circumstances of another convert. Accustomed to getting inside Gospel characters, she now came across St. Augustine's account of his own conversion, in the Confessions "I seemed to see myself in them . . . When I came to his conversion and read how he heard that voice in the garden. I couldn't help feeling in my heart that the Lord was speaking to me" (*L*, 9, 8).

These were the last episodes of her way of working at prayer; she used them to make a smooth transition to the subject of mystical prayer.

II. Mystical Prayer

It was on the foundation of that humble tactic of hers that Teresa's third form of prayer, mystical prayer, originated and developed. She found it a short step from the "re-presentation" of the Person she was speaking with to his "presence." The experience of this presence was to be the determining factor. Yet, despite the fact that she experienced it constantly during the remaining twenty-eight years of her life, mystical prayer always remained something of a novelty for Teresa. The form of prayer she had so laboriously cultivated during the preceding twenty years continued to co-exist harmoniously.

In fact, whenever she speaks of her first experiences of mystical prayer, she invariably reduces them to the basic experience of the presence of God. "I sometimes experienced . . . though very briefly, the beginning of what I will now speak about. When I represented Christ within me in order to place myself in his presence, or even while reading, it sometimes happened 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" (*L*, I). In other words, one's entry into this new form of prayer is "a presence of God . . . such that anyone who commends himself to His Majesty will find him."

The remaining history of Teresa's prayer, the degrees and variations of her mystical contemplation, correspond quite simply to an intensification of this presence. She still made use of her well-known stratagems, but she no longer needed them to bring Christ near. He was there and might be said, in a way, to be forcing his presence on her. As time went on she discovered that presence more and more, and with that typical note of surprise and enjoyment that usually accompanies great personal discoveries. It is possible to define that process in its three peak moments by pointing out the three key discoveries: becoming aware of the presence of God everywhere, within and without; discovering the presence of Christ beside her and within herself; experiencing the presence of the Trinity within her soul. Let us recall her testimony concerning each.

In the *Life* and in the *Interior Castle* Teresa tells the reader, simply and truthfully, how one day, greatly surprised at her theological knowledge, and even at her belief, she came to discover that God himself was everywhere: "There was one thing I was ignorant about at first: I didn't know that God was in all things. So, even though he seemed to me to be very much present, I thought it was impossible. I couldn't stop believing he was there because it seemed almost obvious to me that I had perceived his very presence. Those who had no learning told me that he was present only by grace. I couldn't believe this, because, as I say, it seemed to me he was present; and so I was troubled. A very learned man of the Order of the glorious St. Dominic freed me from this doubt, for he told me that God was present and of how God communicates himself to us; these truths consoled me tremendously" (*L*, 18, 15).

Another day, and even more unexpectedly, a further presence was revealed to her: that of Christ "God and man." Again she mentions how unprepared she was and how totally ignorant that anything of the kind could happen between her and him: "At the end of two years . . . I had the following experience. When I was praying on the feast 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, and I knew it was he who was speaking to me. Since I was completely unaware that there could be such a vision as this, it greatly frightened me in the beginning . . . It seemed to me that Jesus Christ was always present at my side; but since it was not an imaginative vision I did not know what he looked like. Yet I felt very clearly that he was always at my right side and that he witnessed everything I did. Whenever I was a little recollected, or not very distracted, I was unable to ignore his presence at my side" (*L*, 27, 2).

She had certainly read statements in the Gospels and in St. Paul concerning our insertion into Christ and his presence in the believer, but they had passed over her head and probably over her prayer too. Being interested only in having direct personal contact with him, she had pictured him beside her or within herself, or else found in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. But now, all of a sudden, she discovered the reality: Christ present in her very spirit, not as a picture but as the "Living Christ."

Her final discovery was that of the presence of the Three Divine Persons within her soul. This is the experience she has written most extensively about; we must be satisfied with only the most important of her testimonies here. At a certain stage on the "road," "God decided to remove the scales from my eyes" and show her "the Most Holy Trinity in all three Persons" in the central dwelling place of her soul. "Here all three Persons communicate themselves to the soul, speak to it" (*IC*, VII, I, 6). Her initial reaction was one of surprise: "Since I was accustomed to experience only the presence of Jesus, it always seemed to me there was some obstacle to my seeing three Persons" (*Sp. Test.*, 14). But surprise gave way to growing admiration: "Each day this soul becomes more amazed, for these Persons never



seem to leave it any more; it clearly beholds . . . that they are within it. Deep inside, in a part so deep that it can't explain it, the soul experiences this divine company" (*IC*, VII, I. 7).

Mystical prayer then not only enriches and deepens prayer; above all, it simplifies it. It achieves all at once what has been the object of a long and arduous search, finally reaching the Person and entering into communication with him.

Looking back at Teresa's progress in prayer from this final vantage point, one can easily master it and grasp the mainline of her experience. We have already established one important fact: Teresa did not find transcendence a problem. Her religious gesture simply sailed past the barrier of her own self and reached God, without humanizing him or dehumanizing herself. The whole of her prayer was essentially a seeking effort, a pursuit of the Person, a matter of reaching God.

Teresa paid much less attention to the subject matter of her prayer; such things as what to say, how to love, adore, ask, praise, etc. These were things that she regarded as automatically determined by the life style of the person praying. In her own case, the way she lived had a decisive influence on the way she prayed.

Christ appeared to be the solution to all her problems. The Gospel provided a mine of opportunities for finding and reaching him. But the historical Christ was of interest only to bring the living Christ as deeply as possible into her own life "within" her and not just "with" her.

All of this is part of the mystery of Christian life. Living at the level of mystical experience one enters into real possession of it and through the higher stages of prayer, makes full use of it.

From left to right: Suzanne Treis, Burtonsville, MD, Pedro Gonzalez, Fort Myers, FL, Anne Lex, Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN, Fr. Phillip Thomas, OCD Provincial, Kathryn Blumbagen, Tampa, FL, Virginia Chromczak, Utica, NY, Thomas McCabe, Rockbridge Baths, VA and John Leidy, Dexter, MI.



OCDS Provincial Council Holds First Meeting at Holy Hill

During the weekend of March 31, - April 2, 2006, Fr. Phillip Thomas, OCD convened the first meeting of the OCDS Provincial Council at the Motherhouse of the friars of The Immaculate Heart of Mary Province at Holy Hill Monastery in Hubertus, WI. Our three Provincial Delegates, Fr. Regis Jordan, OCD, Fr. Paul Fohlin, OCD and Fr. John Grennon, OCD were also in attendance

We had a lot of work to do and accomplished a great deal. It was the first time most of the Council members met and we all feel that a strong foundation was laid that will help us to be of service to our brothers and sisters in the Secular Order. We elected Tom McCabe from the St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Community of Roanoke, VA as President of the Council. We felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and the power of the prayers that were being offered on our behalf throughout the weekend and are very grateful for the support we have received. Please keep the prayers coming!

The OCDS Constitutions stipulate that "where there is an organized circumscription of the friars of the Order, the Secular Order is to form a Provincial Council to assist one another better in formation and the apostolate, but not for intervening in the government of the local communities." As a Provincial Council we will be responsible for writing the local statutes for our province. Section 58 of the OCDS Constitutions says that the statutes are to determine the following:

- the development of an adequate program of formation;

- the acceptance and formation of those new members who do not live near an established community; in every case these new candidates must be identified with and formed by an established community. They are considered members of that community;
- the procedure for elections and the responsibilities of the three councilors;
- the remembrances for the deceased members of the community;
- the circumstances and the conditions for taking vows;
- the minimum and maximum age to accept new members;
- the maximum number of members of a community before dividing the community to form another;
- the coordination of apostolic endeavors within the community or Province;
- the form and use of the external signs of membership in the Secular Order;
- the practices of mortification and expressions of devotion to our Blessed Mother and our Carmelite Saints.

We have begun to work on the statutes and once we have a working draft, we will submit the statutes to the membership for feedback and input. We are also in the process of organizing how to implement the work of the Provincial Council. The Regional Advisory Boards will continue as they are for the time being and will continue to be a resource and support for the Delegates and members of the secular order.

Annual Summer Seminar on Carmelite Spirituality

Theme for Year 2006 -

**TRANSFORMATION IN CARMEL:
HOW GENTLY YOU WAKE IN MY HEART**

June 18 - 24 , 2006

Center for Spirituality at
Saint Mary's College
Notre Dame, IN

PRESENTERS

Daniel Chowning, OCD
Kevin Culligan, OCD
Keith Egan, T.O. Carm
Mary Frohlich, RSCJ
Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD
Gregory L. Klein, O. Carm
Ernest E. Larkin, O. Carm
Wilma Seelaus, OCD
John Welch, O. Carm

COSTS

\$ 35 Non-refundable registration Fee
\$200 Tuition
\$110 Single Room in Regina Hall
\$145 Board: Includes Sunday dinner through
Saturday lunch
\$495 Total

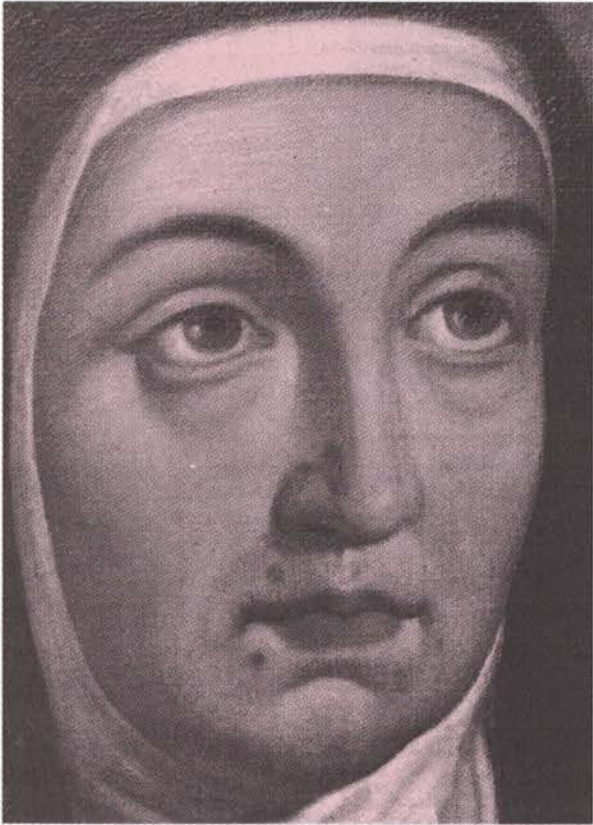
Registration – Send a non-refundable \$35 fee made payable to
Saint Mary's College with registration form to:

Center for Spirituality
Saint Mary's College
Notre Dame, IN 46556-5001
E-Mail: kegan@saintmarys.edu

Or call: 574/284-4636

Saint Teresa

Fr. Paul-Marie of the Cross, O.C.D.



That St. Teresa was first and foremost a contemplative cannot be denied. It is in fact in the domain of prayer and mystical life that she deepened and enriched Carmelite spirituality. But her personality and her role went further than this, because it was with her whole being that she gave herself to a life of union with God. Stripping herself of all things without repudiating any of them, it is the totality of her aspirations, her heart, her strength, and her life that she willed to make subject to God. So it is not only the understanding of religious life but also of the spiritual life that was enriched and renewed, first in St. Teresa herself, and then in the Carmel of which she was the mother and the reformer.

St. Teresa's realism is so deep and so authentic that even unconsciously she strove to make an organic whole and a living unity of the different parts of her existence. Prayer is the source of the life and movement of this organic whole: it is the principle of unitive transformation. But it attains its end only when it is able to orient all the different parts of religious life toward the same end, and to give the

same directive idea to every aspect of daily life and even to the most humble forms of activity.

St. Teresa's contributions to Carmelite spirituality are not to be found merely in her writings (revealing though these may be), for they were never anything more than occasional compositions in which were mirrored God's action in her soul or in her life. Her contributions are to be discovered and examined first in her work as a reformer because, in a certain sense, she modeled Carmel after her own image—not that she pointed her ideal in a new direction, but that she strongly impressed it with her genius. So it is in the Constitutions and in the form of religious life that she asked her daughters to follow, no less than in her writings, that we must look for the elements that henceforth were to characterize Carmel's spirituality.

In this, St. Teresa's influence is sharply distinguished from that of St. John of the Cross. There can be no doubt, as we shall see, that he was, from the first instant, won to the cause of reform. Moreover, he remained at Carmel only on condition that the reform be carried out. But even though he worked heroically for its

success, he is preeminent because it was in this setting that he achieved perfect spiritual liberty, and complete mystical development. St. Teresa first reconstructed the Carmelite dwelling, then reestablished its foundations and created therein a climate eminently favorable for true spiritual life; St. John of the Cross, having come to the end of the most amazing of journeys to the realm of mystical union, then laid down its principles, traced its routes, and described all its riches.

Like the commandment bequeathed to us by our Lord, Carmel is wholly concentrated on a double and single movement of love. Double, because it is directed to God and to our brothers and sisters. Single, because the one theological virtue of charity informs the two movements, the two tempos of Carmelite spirituality that give it its vital rhythm and are, as it were, its heartbeat and its breath. Even before she thought of this rhythm, Teresa had lived it intensely. Therefore this double movement marks her reform because her life was lived according to the spirit of Carmel; that is to say, she gave the preponderant place, the "better part," to contemplation.

She was a realist, so she understood that the whole life of Carmel had to be re-considered as a function of contemplative life. Strict enclosure, silence, and work in solitude must be established so that union with God could develop in the most favorable surroundings. Under an original yet basically traditional form, Carmel was to live again the life and spirit of its origins, thanks to St. Teresa. The best proof of this is given us by the response the Carmelites themselves made to the reform. If St. John of the Cross and the first discalced were won over to the reform, it is because they discovered in it what we have attempted to analyze: this primitive spirit, this original soil, without which nothing would flower, without which Carmel would cease to be.

Only the analysis of the ensemble of the works of St. Teresa, of her spiritual counsels, of her mystical experiences—all of which help to restore true contemplative life, the true life of union with God—can reveal her true role.

It cannot be denied that the Saint has her own way of looking at contemplative life. Her experience of this life, on the mystical plane, is unique. But this way and this experience, however original they may be, are situated well within the boundaries of Carmelite spirituality. And the form of life that she established appears, in the light of experience, to be the best adapted to the requirements and aspirations of contemplative souls.

A woman's way of thinking about union with God cannot be exactly the same as that of religious men. Although the ideal is the same for all, it must be approached differently and attained by different paths. St. Teresa understood this perfectly. Beginning with a conviction and a deep contemplative and mystical experience, she considered each detail of religious life not only as a function of the sought-for goal but also in terms of concrete feminine nature.

A highly developed sense of moderation, coupled with a penetrating psychology, in short, a profound wisdom mark the Constitutions to which she gave a

realistic foundation. Because of her unflagging efforts, the idea of contemplative life ceased to be abstract and vague. It found its way into and became an integral part of the tiniest acts of life. An intimate bond united prayer and life, morality and mysticism, exterior conduct and union with God. Between a life of highest mysticism and the gift of self, between the soul's need to love and the most lowly forms of fraternal charity, Teresa created links, established relations, forged tight bonds.

In contemplative and religious life as she understood and organized it, an organic unity was realized, not by outer pressure but by an inner principle both gentle and strong: this principle was love. The soul that contemplates must long to give itself to the one whom it loves. It must long to be one with God and to serve God.

This organic unity was realized according to the norms of a higher wisdom. As Frederico Ruiz, one of her recent biographers, has correctly observed:

“Teresa was able to resolve with classic good sense, let us say catholic good sense, two delicate problems: that of the requirements of human nature and union with God; that of the relation between the personal development of the mystical life and the framework in which common religious life is inserted. If the asceticism that she practiced, and on whose necessity she insisted, was always intransigent, it was also always reasonable. The humble realities of life here below are the foundation on which one must build in order that the spirit may ascend to God. Progress is conditioned by these foundations, just as the life of the tree is determined by its roots; to neglect the first, to destroy or to paralyze the second, would be fatal.”

To St. Teresa, Carmel owes its élan and its psychology. Carmelite psychology was always realistic. Under the reformer's influence it became more so. In fact, her prudence and supernatural wisdom made her require that contemplative life—and mystical experience when this is added—be made more and more dependent on [Christian doctrine], the sacraments, obedience to the church and to superiors, the practice of virtues, fidelity to the Rule. Only in this way can sentimentalism, illumination, and quietism in any form whatsoever be avoided.

Better than anyone else did she understand and highlight what is basic in the spiritual life: the need to make everything rest on the renunciation of self-will, generosity carried to the point of perfection in carrying out the duties of one's state of life, charity to one's brothers and sisters, bearing with one's neighbor. It is virtues like these that, in their realism, support the whole spiritual edifice and assure its unity. There can be no division in being, no dichotomy between life that is purely human and life-made-divine.

A mystical life that insists on purest realism ensures the supreme unity of its being. This organic unity—with all the intercommunication of all its inner elements whose life is derived from a higher principle—this is one of the most pre-

cious legacies that Carmelite spirituality owes to St. Teresa.

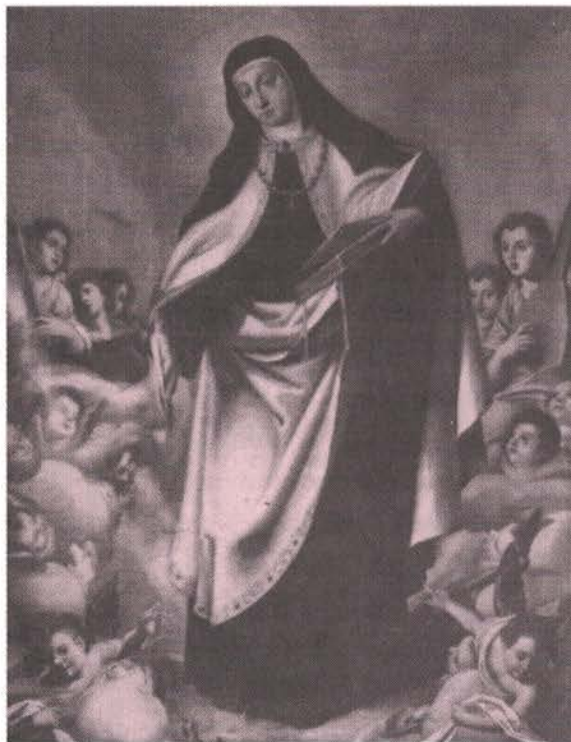
It is essentially by means of prayer that St. Teresa believes this higher principle will reign in the soul and will provide this organic unity. Everyone knows that St. Teresa was the great teacher of prayer. On this capital point her contribution is as traditional as it is original.

It is traditional because, like all the spiritual men and women who preceded her, St. Teresa wanted to orient contemplatives toward the summit of union with God. This result and this grace she thought they would find in prayer, because in prayer God and the soul, although working on different planes, unite their efforts. She was also traditional in teaching (on this point she resembled her predecessors) that the contemplative ideal of transforming union is not extraordinary. She believed that it was the integral fullness of spiritual life. So she aspired to it, though with humility, because infused contemplation always remains an absolutely gratuitous divine gift.

At the same time, St. Teresa showed her originality in not being satisfied with assigning this goal to the contemplative life; she pointed out the paths that lead to this goal. Her teaching was marked by a wealth of experience and a psychological depth that have not yet been equaled, as well as by a singularly noble and profound conception of a life of union with God. "The important thing in prayer is not to think much but to love much" [*Castle*, 4, I, 7]. And for Teresa:

"To love is to surrender one's self without reserve. This means to surrender one's will in such a way to the divine will, however crucifying it may be, that one finds joy in suffering when this is pleasing to the Beloved; and this intense love is a call for God's presence. The soul enraptured by God tends spontaneously to possess God. The ideal of perfect self-donation corresponds quite naturally in her doctrine with the desire for mystical union. God must be generous to the generous soul . . . The soul's total gift calls for the total gift of God" (Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen).

In prayer, as Teresa experienced it and as she taught it to her daughters, Christ's position is dominant. This is one of the original points of her spirituality. Admit-



tedly before her time Christ's presence was implicit and active in every part of Carmel's spiritual life, but his role was not sharply defined. St. Teresa brought him to the fore as never before. "This method of keeping Christ present with us is beneficial in all stages and is a very safe means of advancing in the first degree of prayer, of reaching in a short time the second degree, and of walking secure against the dangers the devil can set up in the last degrees" (*Life*, 12, 3), No statement could be clearer.

Because Teresa gave so important a place to Christ in prayer, it is highly important to understand what he meant to her. No less important is it to trace her spiritual evolution on this point.

Christ was everything to Teresa. This is undeniable. "Speak with him as with a father, or a brother, or a lord, or as with a spouse" (*Way*, 28, 3). She cherished him with the tenderness of a mother, the respect of a daughter, the love of a spouse. But in this love there "is never anything that is not spiritual" (*Castle*, 5, 4, 3). In fact "the spiritual joys the Lord gives when compared to the delights married people must experience are a thousand leagues distant," since "it is all a matter of love united with love" (*Castle*, 5, 4, 3).

If Christ is able to raise Teresa above every sensible affection, while "keeping alive her powers of loving, it is because she realizes that he is the eternal, the transcendent: it is because he is the absolute, the infinite; it is because he is God." There can be no doubt that even in God, Teresa cannot get along without a heart that loves. But Teresa never forgets that the heart that Christ gives her to love in his humanity is a divine Heart. If some souls find that the humanity of Christ is for them an obstacle, it is because they do not think of him as they should.

"This Lord of ours is the one through whom all blessings come to us.... 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 the 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" (*Life*, 22, 7).

So Teresa's decision was made. On this road there are so many advantages of love and faith, that she offered her daughters the humanity of Jesus as the path par excellence and the ordinary way for all (see *Castle*, 6, 7, Iff.).

Yet the evolution of Christ's role in the St.'s prayer is no less revealing than the position he holds. At the beginning Teresa kept Christ before her eyes, but gradually she began to meditate on the mystery of his Person. Soon she saw in him most of all a guide and a companion; then Jesus Christ became for her the way, the path

to the Father, the light in which we see him. Teresa united herself to God by the Word Incarnate. Finally, with Christ's help, Teresa was led to the Blessed Trinity whose importance never ceased to increase in her interior life.

“From this we must not conclude that Jesus Christ was relegated to a secondary place but that he no longer was seen in the same perspective. He continues to be Man who, being God, reveals God to all who will listen to him and contemplate him . . . but he is above all the Incarnate Word with whom the soul must be united in order to make some return through him to the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit” (Lépée).

This was the way Christ led Teresa to the Triune God. He taught her to be aware of God as her last end, absolute Omnipotence, the answer to the call of her whole soul. He led her to the heart of the mystery that is the origin and goal of all mystical life. It is true that Christ's role, indispensable though he be, since “no one comes to the Father” except through him (in I 4 6), is apparently less visible in certain mystics who seem lost in the divine darkness; but in St. Teresa's teaching he shines with a brilliant light from which Carmelite spirituality will always benefit.

Teresa's first intention was merely to found a monastery where she and those who wished to follow her could, with the help of a more strict enclosure and a more austere life, keep the promises they had made to the Lord according to the vocation of their Order. Later, realizing the vast needs of the church, and desiring in her great charity to assist those who were fighting for her, she went still further, as far as this was possible.”

In strengthening the bonds that united her with Jesus Christ and his church, Teresa acted according to the most orthodox mysticism. This was also according to Carmelite spirituality. On this point, as well as on the two preceding questions, no one can fail to see the richness and the originality of her contribution.

It is, in fact, with Jesus Christ that St. Teresa begins her deep understanding of the reality of the church. Of course her submission to the church had always been completely loyal and even fervently joyous—and remained so until the end. Yet there is more than this in her dying cry: “I am a daughter of the church.” She was referring not only to the visible church, the traditional church rooted deep in her Spanish soul, this church from whom, without ignoring its human aspects and its weaknesses, she never ceased to ask for a rule of faith, a rule of life and light for the guidance of her soul. To her, the church was Christ, above all else.

This enlightened and universal view of the church and the absolute confidence she pledged to it are possible only because of her mystical union with Christ. To Teresa, the church is not only an intensely vital reality, it is also an institution established on dogmatic foundations that are very sure and very rich. It is the church that asks of us in Christ's name not merely a contemplative and unitive love, but an active love. To Teresa the church means Christ and souls, that is to say, now and

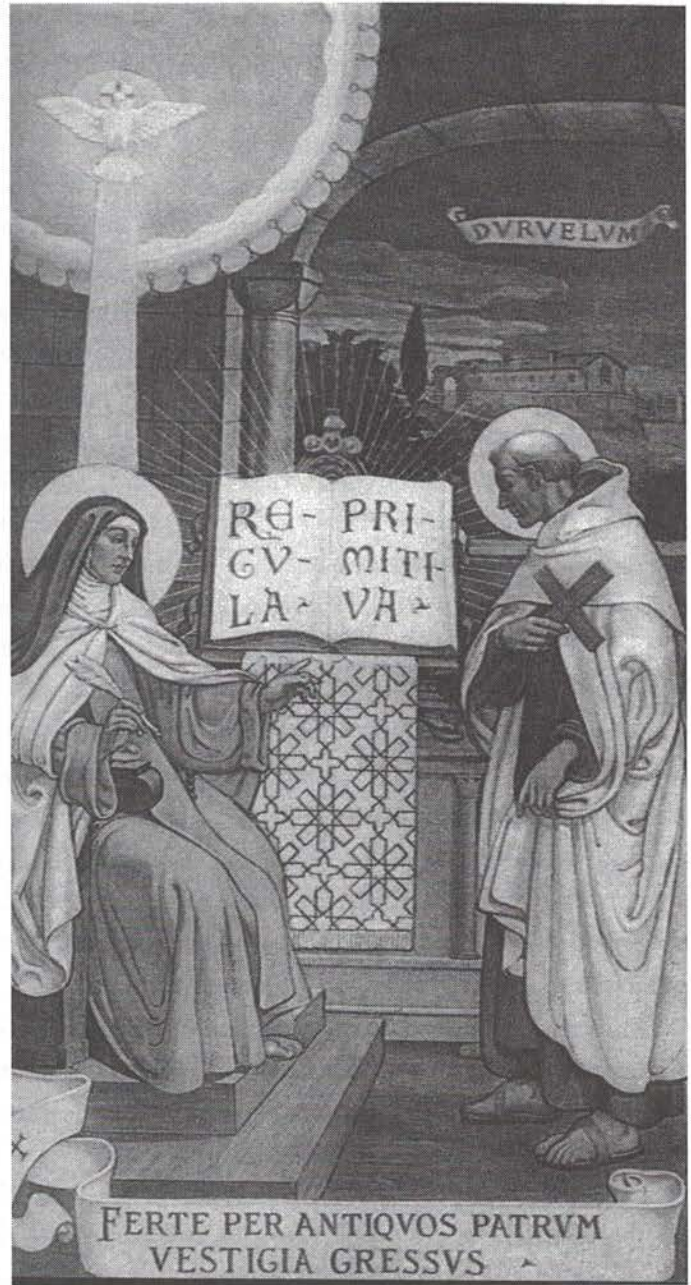
always she considered the mystery of Christ from the apostolic point of view. The second commandment is like the first [cf. Mt 22:39] and flows from it.

It follows that divine love, in Teresa's eyes, never ceases to grow but radiates in ever widening concentric circles, just as waves move outward from a center. Fraternal and supernatural charity is directed first to all those who live in the monastery, then with constantly renewed fervor and strength it is transformed into a love for souls, for all souls, that is to say, for the whole church. "A soul who aspires to become the spouse of God himself . . . cannot allow itself a sluggard's rest. The redemptive God gives his life and self-giving love to the soul

who gives herself to him" (cf. *Castle*, 5, 4, 10). Less than a century later a voice from "beyond the Pyrenees" answered like an echo: "This is no time to sleep."

Christ is always "the center of this apostolate," and Teresa never forgets that this apostolate must be contemplative above all else. So she sees that this is first the practice of virtue, fidelity to the Rule, renunciation and the cross. Then (and this is its real meaning) she sees that the apostolate is a form of prayer, that is to say, it is love in action. "The more persons advance in this kind of prayer and the gifts of our Lord the more attention they pay to the needs of their neighbor, especially to the needs of their neighbors' souls" (*Meditations on the Song of Songs*, 7, 8).

Just like her [spiritual] daughter St. Therese of the Child Jesus, the first Teresa burned with the desire to be a doctor, a missionary, an apostle; she longed to



make God's name known and his kingdom come in every part of the world. A zeal much like that of her father Elijah entered her prayer and made it a prayer of fire. Her writings are in their own way another form of this zeal, and they show us that she was constantly "filled with the ardent desire of being useful to souls." She was "grief-stricken over the loss of so many souls" (Foundations, I, 7). She "would have given a thousand lives to save one soul" (Way, I, 3). She spent her time "occupied in prayer for those who are the defenders of the church and for preachers and for [theologians]" (Way, I, 3). She wrote: "I tried to please the Lord with my poor prayers and always endeavored that the Sisters would do the same and dedicate themselves to the good of souls and the increase of his church . . . And these were the things with which my great desires were taken up" (see Foundations, I, 6ff.).

But this active and apostolic woman never failed to give to her action and her apostolic work the seal of Carmelite spirituality, which is primarily contemplative. She said that at the beginning of the contemplative life we ought to "consider that there is nothing on earth but God and oneself" (*Life*, I3, 9). Otherwise the soul would "lose" itself in the world. When it is a little more advanced—its faculties now at rest—God will ripen the fruits of its garden so that it can draw strength from them. This is what God wants. However, he does not want the soul to distribute the fruits of its garden before it has first been strengthened by them. Otherwise the "soul will only learn to taste them...and will eventually die of hunger."

It is . . . when the soul has attained to union, and God has taken possession of the very depths of the soul, that good works are required: "Once the soul has reached this point, it no longer offers God simple desires; his majesty gives it the strength to carry them out."

Therefore to become an apostle, the soul must love, love without any reserve, and give itself totally to God. Once again, Teresa has rediscovered and completely renewed the spirit of her Order, which has two purposes, one dependent on the other: contemplation that unites the soul with God and reveals the infinite value of souls, then overflows in the apostolate.

These are the contributions that St. Teresa made to Carmelite spirituality: she re-thought and reformed the whole contemplative life in terms of the true and pure Carmelite ideal; she renewed and deepened the life of prayer founded in Christ, experiencing and describing all its stages as far as the highest states of pure mysticism; she held broad and safe views of the church and of Carmel's apostolate. She poured out these riches in a climate marked by freedom, fervor, and balance, in an atmosphere of expansive and undisturbed joy.

So we see why she continues to be the most radiant figure of Carmel and how, like the spouse of the Canticle, she continues to attract souls to Christ: "Draw me: we will run after thee" (Song I:3).

St. Teresa And Her Environment

Eugene McCaffrey, O.C.D.



As we reflect on the writings of St. Teresa and the development of her teaching, it is natural to ask what, if any, were the influences that shaped and formed this spiritual doctrine. As with any other author, Teresa's writings did not evolve in a vacuum, but were affected and conditioned by the circumstances and situations in which she found herself and in which she wrote. In a golden age of spirituality providential 'agencies' seemed to converge on her; a whole host of saints, eminent theologians, writers, reformers and spiritual movements came together for the enrichment of her personality and the deepening and clarification of her doctrine.

Teresa had a naturally quick and enquiring mind. Her deeply sensitive and sociable nature disposed her to make the most of whatever providential influences came her way. Her insatiable thirst for knowledge and for truth, and the sheer profusion of the mystical graces she received, forced her to share her experiences with others and to seek constant guidance and enlightenment. As her personality developed, so too did the confidence and maturity of her own judgments and insights, and she learned to discern more accurately between the truth and falsity of what she read and heard. In her *Life*, for example, we can see a certain dependence on the oral teaching of others; this influence is less marked in *The Way of Perfection*, where only general patterns or movements of spirituality are discernible; in the *Interior Castle* she writes freely and independently, a master in her own right.

It is possible, however, to distinguish three levels of influence in St. Teresa and her writings and these help us to understand better the development of her personality and of her spiritual teaching: (1) the literary influences, (2) the living influence of other people, and (3) the influence of the spiritual movements of her day.

I. Literary Influences

We know from her youth Teresa was an avid reader. With a certain mixture of curios-

ity and a thirst for knowledge, she devoured whatever books she could find in her father's library and which we know included most of the best books of the age. This was a lesson Teresa never forgot. In her cell in the convent of the Incarnation she kept the religious best-sellers of the day and later on when she came to write the Constitutions for her sisters she included a list of certain 'good books' which she felt were as 'necessary for the soul as food is for the body'

From her own writings and from the testimony of others, "Teresian scholars have been able to put together a fairly accurate list of the books that Teresa read and that, in one way or another, influenced her writing. It is helpful and instructive to keep this list before our minds:

1. Books of Chivalry: read in her early years. It is difficult to say either how many of these she read or exactly which ones they were.
2. *Flos Sanctorum*: a collection of biographies of the saints. Most of the references she makes to incidents from the lives of the saints seem to have been drawn from this collection.
3. *The Letters of St. Jerome*: read in 1533 at Hortigosa during her stay with her uncle Don Pedro de Cepeda.
4. *The Moralia of St. Gregory*: which she read in 1538 during her second illness. The copy she used is kept in the convent of St. Joseph's with marginal notes attributed to her.
5. *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* by Francisco de Osuna: which she first read in 1538. Again, the copy she used is found in St. Joseph's with over One hundred pages heavily scored and underlined by her.
6. *The Life of Christ* by Rudolph of Saxony—often referred to as "The Carthusian": a four-volume commentary on the Gospels.
7. *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis: which she herself referred to as 'Contemptus Mundi'.
8. *The Art of Serving God* by Alonso de Madrid: a popular sixteenth century book of spirituality.
9. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*: the spiritual classic which Teresa read in 1554 at the time of her 'conversion'.
10. *The Ascent of Mount Sion* by Bernadine de Laredo: read in 1557 under the direction of her confessors.
11. *The Way of the Spirit* by Bernabe de Palma: a popular handbook of mystical theology.
12. *The Oratory of Religious* by Antonio de Guevara: another spiritual best-seller of the day.
13. *The Book of Prayer and Meditation* by Luis de Granada: she probably also read some of his other books. St. Teresa thought kindly of this famous Dominican friar and one of her letters of the year 1575 is addressed to the author himself.

14. *Treatise on Prayer and Meditation* by St. Peter of Alcantara: probably read on the occasion of his visit to Avila in 1569.
15. Carmelite Books: especially the Rule and Constitutions of the Order.

Teresa also seems to have had some familiarity with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the writings of St. Vincent Ferrer and the Conferences of John Cassian.

As regards Sacred Scripture, it is certain that Teresa never read the whole Bible through. She knew no Latin and the translations in Spanish were limited and restricted. Her knowledge of Scripture came through the liturgy, partial translations and through quotations from spiritual writers. In this respect, the *Life of Christ* by Rudolph of Saxony seems to have been her chief source of instruction.

Teresa confesses to a great love of Scripture, from which she quotes freely, if not always accurately. Had not our Lord himself impressed this truth on her: 'All the harm that comes to the world comes from its not knowing the truths of Scripture in clarity and truth' (*Life*, 40). She herself quotes the Scriptures nearly two hundred times. Over half of these quotations come from the New Testament—St. John's Gospel in particular, and the Epistles of St. Paul—the rest are mostly from the Psalms and the Song of Songs. Indeed, like her beloved soul-friend and companion John of the Cross, one of her favorite books was the Song of Songs and among her minor works is a commentary on some of the verses from it.

Yet, having given the above list of books, the important question must still be asked: in what way and to what extent did these books influence her in her writing?

In the first place it must be said that Teresa never took any one book as a model for her spiritual life and never became slavishly dependent on the ideas of any one particular author. While her books reflect a certain familiarity and indeed similarity with some of the ideas expressed by other authors, yet in no way can her writings be said to be a synopsis or a synthesis of what they had written. Teresa was not that kind of a writer. She did not write from memory or with any conscious effort to recall the ideas or thoughts of others. She was an original writer, writing out of her own living experience, a creative genius who absorbed influences into her blood-stream and welded them into a living synthesis. Nor, indeed, was Teresa that kind of a reader either. She did not read for 'ideas' or 'theories', but for practical solutions to her own life-problems; she sought guidance and enlightenment on concrete and particular situations. Certainly, as she read, she absorbed principles and guidelines regarding prayer and the things of the spirit, but only in so far as they were appropriated into her own interior life. Nothing ever influenced St. Teresa as a teacher which did not first influence her as a person. Her life was her criterion and her own personal, living relationship with the Lord was the only model by which she judged the value and the worth of what she read and wrote.

Nevertheless, we can distinguish a two-fold influence that these books had on St. Teresa. Some of them affected her more deeply in her own interior life and supported her through her various crisis-points; others helped her more in her understanding of the principles that governed her own spiritual life and so, more directly, influenced her teaching.

Thus, for instance, the *Flos Sanctorum* influenced her mostly by way of example and inspiration drawn from the lives of the saints and by a certain appeal to tradition. The Letters of St. Jerome

had a significant part to play in the development of her religious vocation and in her understanding of the relationship between the 'world' and the 'cloister'. The *Moralia* of St. Gregory supported her through a period of grave illness which she bore with much patience and resignation. Finally, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine profoundly affected her in her final 'conversion' and in the development of her prayer life, especially in its movement towards interiority.

As regards her doctrine, three books were of special significance: Osuna's *Third Alphabet*, Laredo's *Ascent of Mount Sion* and Luis de Granada's *Prayer and Meditation*. Osuna's *Third Alphabet* was Teresa's favorite spiritual reading for many years. She first read it in 1538 at the beginning of her religious life and returned again for light in those early stages of contemplation which were for her a period of such anxiety and confusion. She found there a basic understanding of 'passive prayer' and a certain reassurance regarding her own experiences. Some of Osuna's sayings and comparisons—for example that of the caterpillar—are found in her writings as well as some of his terminology; for instance, one of her favorite terms, 'the prayer of recollection'. Laredo, on the other hand, she read in 1558 in response to her first experience of the prayer of union and of her first strong mystical favors. She read it under the direction of her two friends and confessors at this time, Gaspar Sala and Francisco de Saledo, who were as much baffled by the whole experience as she herself was. She seems to have gleaned a number of important facts and ideas from the book; for example, the absolute necessity of self-knowledge, the importance of the affective element in prayer; she also retained some of its terminology; for instance, the phrase 'prayer of quiet' used repeatedly by Laredo. Nevertheless, over the years Laredo's book has come in for a certain amount of criticism. When St. Teresa refers to 'certain books on prayer' that down-grade the role of the sacred humanity and



emphasize passivity as a way of inducing mystical experiences, it is often thought she is referring to the Ascent of Mount Sion. Though this teaching was in vogue at the time, Laredo was by no means a deliberate exponent of it. It can, however, be found in another book also read by Teresa, a book by Bernabe de Palma entitled *The Way of the Spirit* and it may well be to this book that Teresa refers rather than the Ascent of Mount Sion. Finally, from Luis de Granada's book on prayer she seems to have found support for one of her own favorite themes, the relationship between prayer and the practice of virtue.

Christ the 'Living Book'

Nevertheless, having traced the various literary influences on St. Teresa we must come back again to the same fact—that the extent of the relationship between these books and her own writings is always uncertain and can be ascertained only in general terms. Of far greater importance is the direct influence of Christ himself on her soul, of whom she could quite confidently say 'His Majesty has always been my teacher'. Her own personal relationship with him in prayer was, for her, of much greater significance than anything she read in books, and without this she herself is convinced she would have understood nothing at all:



'I used to read these books and gradually began to think was, learning something. I found out later that, if the Lord had not taught me, I could have learned very little from books, for until His Majesty taught me by experience, what I learned was nothing at all. I did not even know what I was doing' (*Life*, 22). When in 1559 the Inquisition published an Index of Books which included, not only heretical books, but a great many devotional ones as well, among them some of Teresa's own favorites, she was greatly distressed until our Lord comforted her with the words: 'Do not be sad, I will give you a living book.' And so it happened: 'Our Lord showed me so much love and taught me by so many methods, that I have had very little need of books—indeed, hardly any. His Majesty has been to me a Book in which I have seen what is true. Blessed be such a book which leaves impressed upon us what we are to read and do, in a way that is unforgettable' (*Life*, 26).

2. Influence of Others

In a sense, Teresa's whole character disposed her to be more influenced by people than by books. She was a natural conversationalist and in the living dialogue situation she could, with the greatest of ease, question, probe and exchange her ideas with others. It is part of God's providence to use human instruments and circumstances to mold the souls of his saints. This he did to an extraordinary degree in the case of St. Teresa. Rarely, if ever, in the history of the Church, have so many providential agencies come together to contribute to the shaping of a soul and of its spiritual doctrine. She was

privileged to number among her closest friends and advisors saints like John of the Cross, Peter of Alcantara, Francis Borgia, Julian of Avila, as well as many of the outstanding theologians and spiritual writers of the day: Luis de Granada, Baltasar Alvarez, Domingo Banez, Pedro Ibanez and Garcia de Toledo. She drew, not only from the tradition of her own Carmelite Order, but also on the support and experience of all the other major religious orders as well—Dominicans, Jesuits, Franciscans, Hieronymites and Augustinians. She was able to avail the very best spiritual direction of the day and it is quite remarkable how readily these saints and theologians placed themselves, their knowledge and their experience at her disposal.

St. Teresa's whole training and spiritual formation was essentially Carmelite. Teresian scholars have shown that, whatever the defects that existed in regard to discipline or community life in the convent of the Incarnation, the formation and spiritual training, both in liturgy and in the method of prayer, was basically Carmelite. Apart from this, the two most significant Carmelite influences in her life were, undoubtedly, Jerome Gracian and John of the Cross. From 1576 onwards, Gracian, to whom she made a vow of personal obedience, was her closest guide and confidant. His influence, however, was mostly of a practical nature, and it was as mother and superior to an ever-increasing number of houses that she turned to him for support and counsel during those last troubled years of her life. The influence of John of the Cross was much more profound, yet, at the same time, not always easy to determine. Of their mutual esteem and admiration for each other there is no doubt, yet, in temperament and character, they were very different. When they met in 1567, Teresa had already written her *Life* and *The Way of Perfection* and received very many special mystical graces from God. She had not, however, reached the pinnacle of her spiritual life and his influence seems to have been providentially placed to guide her through the final stages of the mystical life to the grace of transforming union. His influence is, perhaps, most apparent in the clarity and precision with which she herself was able to describe the final development of the mystical life in her masterpiece, the *Interior Castle*.

Among the other religious orders, the most important were the Dominicans and the Jesuits. During her life Teresa came in contact with no less than fourteen Dominican and ten Jesuit theologians. Their influence began about 1556, at the time of her first spiritual crisis, and continued almost uninterrupted until her



soul! And
what else
do you search for outside,
when within yourself you
possess your riches,
delights, satisfaction,
fullness, and kingdom -
your Beloved whom you
desire and seek? Be
joyful and gladdened in
your interior recollection
with him, for you have
him, so close to you.
Desire him there, adore
him there.

- St John of the Cross
The Spiritual Canticle

death. The difference between the two orders was significant. The Dominican emphasis was mostly in doctrinal matters, helping her to clarify her ideas and her understanding of the principles of the spiritual life; that of the Jesuits was, for the most part, practical and more concerned with the ordering of her own life. All in all, their influence was significant and important and can, perhaps, be best seen in the facility with which she herself was eventually able to write about spiritual matters; especially in her ability to discern, according to her own experience, between true visions and those that were false, or explain, with such clarity, the essential nature of contemplation, the manner of God's Indwelling in the soul and the relationship between the humanity of Christ and all true prayer.

3. Spiritual Movements

Sixteenth century Spain was the scene of intense spiritual revival. There was a general atmosphere of fervor and a proliferation of religious groups and spiritual movements. But not all were of the same thinking and a basic rivalry and opposition soon emerged between two particular opposing groups known as 'los teólogos' and 'los espirituales', the theologians and the spirituals. We have seen how deeply Teresa was helped and encouraged by a score of the theologians in question; her relationship with the spirituals, though not as significant, is nevertheless important.

The authors of nearly all the books we mentioned as having been read by St. Teresa—Osuna, Laredo, Luis de Granada—would all fit into the category of those known as 'spirituals'. Their outstanding living representatives and spokesmen would, undoubtedly, have been Peter of Alcantara, Julian of Avila and the Dominican Vincent Barron. The general emphasis within the group was on the importance of religious poverty, the virtue of asceticism and the need for experience in spiritual direction. Teresa herself was happy enough with this particular emphasis, but she strongly rejected any form of extreme asceticism sometimes found with the movement and she differed sharply with St. Peter of Alcantara in her preference: for learned men as spiritual directors as opposed to his choice for those who were spiritual.

Under the heading of this spiritual group can be placed the group generally known as the Illuminists—a general title for a popular movement of interior prayer, recollection and penance. They were basically a well-intentioned group, fired with the reforming zeal of the day and with the spirit of the Counter Reformation. Most were genuine enough, though some tended to be anti-intellectual and inclined towards false mysticism and semi-quietism. Others, like the Alumbrados, were extreme in this regard and even heretical. St. Teresa's contact with this latter group was minimal, but with the spiritual movement as a whole her relationship was, significant and for the most part, fruitful.

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Memorial

LESTER MILLER, Bedford Virginia. Community of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Roanoke, VA.



Letters to the Editor

I was very happy when I read the latest *Clarion* and learned of the plan to emphasize Carmelite spirituality through the Carmelite saints. The timing of this issue is perfect for our community because we have been studying John of the Cross's writings for several years and are about to return to the study of St. Teresa with special attention to what she has to teach us about prayer. Thank you a wonderful *Clarion* from cover to cover.

M.C., OCDS, Salisbury, MD Community



Thank you so very much for the subscriptions. The original order came through shortly after I talked to you, but I will make good use of the spare copies for Carmelites who are unfamiliar with the "*Carmel Clarion*" - a great magazine! Keep up the good work and God bless you.

M.W., OCDS, Nodal Ontario, Canada



"A friend gave me your 2006 meditation calendar. Wow! How Wonderful! She said she received it from being on your mailing list for the *Carmel Clarion*. Though I belong to the Oklahoma Province, I would like to receive your *Clarion*."

C.N., OCDS, Quincy, IL

O.C.D.S. NEWSLETTER

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