The Beauty of the *Interior Castle*

Many others are noting that this year, 1982, marks the fourth centenary of the death of St. Teresa of Avila. Sir Kenneth Clark in his television series on Civilisation, during the program entitled « Grandeur and Obedience », has called attention to another important date for the study of this great Doctor of the Church, her canonization.

> The mid-sixteenth century was a period of sanctity in the Roman Church almost equal to the twelfth. St. John of the Cross, the great poet of mysticism; St. Ignatius of Loyola, the visionary soldier turned psychologist; St. Theresa of Avila, the great headmistress, with her irresistible combination of mystical experience and common sense; and St. Carlo Borromeo, the austere administrator—one does not need to be a practising Catholic to feel respect for a half-century that could produce these great spirits. Ignatius, Teresa, Filippo Neri and Francis Xavier were all canonized on the same day, 22 May 1622. It was like the baptism of a regenerated Rome (1).

Whatever one may think of these clever characterizations, it is a curious fact that such diverse personalities were officialy recognized as saints 360 years ago, almost a year of years. What is also somewhat striking is that, of the entire group mentioned, only two, both Carmelites, have been declared Doctors of the Church: a priest, St. John of the Cross, and more recently, the nun, St. Teresa of Jesus.

A doctor of the church, one would think, might be fittingly honored at this time of official celebration, by a study of his—or in this case, almost unique, her—writings. The *Interior Castle* has been chosen here, because, in the opinion of experts, it

(1) KENNETH CLARK, *Civilization* (NY: Harper, 1969), p. 175.

represents not only the mature fruit of her genius, but the central jewel of Carmelite spirituality, and one of the very greatest spiritual classics (2).

THE IMAGE

The image of the title has its own beckoning charm; the castles of Spain are, at least in the English language, both a source for a common proverb and romantic legend, as alluring as the famous lines of Keats:

> Charm'd magis casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

But for St. Teresa herself, however beautiful she might imagine one to be for her own doctrinal purposes of allegory, castles were not so much subjects for romantic poetry as they were fortresses; their battlements, turrets and moats spoke to all not of antique decoration but of their hard purpose; defence from the attacks of enemies. One whose grandparents could tell tales of the Moors and the *Reconquista* would have a keen sense of the importance of defence. This aspect of the castle is introduced at the outset and mentioned in the earlier Mansions; the invasion of the castle by serpents, reptiles and other venomous creatures is, as will be seen, a secondary aspect of the allegory.

Nevertheless, those seeking the origin of St. Teresa's image in some real castle have unhesitatingly identified it with the city which was the birthplace of St. Teresa and the scene of much of the activity of her life, Avila. Even though Avila is not exactly a castle but rather a fortified city, the Spanish philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno stated categorically time and again:: « The castle of the *Mansions* is the city of Avila » (3).

(2) Cf. P. MARIE-EUGENE, O.C.D., *I Want to see God,* tr. Sr. M. Verda Claire, C.S.C. (Chicago: Fides, 1953), p. viii.

(3) Cited by Dr. E.W. TRUEMAN DICKEN, « The Imagery of the Interior

Professor Ricard in his study of the symbolism of the *Interior Castle,* although initially dubious about this identification insisted upon by Unamuno, finally accepts it. He does so for an important reason; the principal point of St. Teresa's allegorical framework is not defence but rather presence. In her time of relative peace on the peninsula, the purpose of fortification was not so immediately necessary, and the castles became palaces, places of royal residence in which those seeking audience with the Majesty passed through a series of apartments constituing the outer court until one could be ushered into the interior throne-room.

The very success of the identification which is the relation of the Divine Presence of the Lord in the innermost part of the soul, the principal point of St. Teresa's allegory, to the Eucharistic Presence of Christ in the Cathedral, may well be its failure. The Cathedral of Avila is not at the center, but is itself part of the external fortification. Another proposal for a real, material castle has been made: the *Castillo de la Mota* in Medina del Campos, the birthplace of St. John of the Cross, and a place with which St. Teresa was very familiar. There the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in a chapel at the very center of the castle, if not exactly the mathematical center, at least in appearance, so that it looks from the outside as if this central point could be reached only by passing through a series of concentric barriers.

Although St. Teresa herself with her own hand wrote on the back of the first page of the manuscript, « This treatise, called 'Interior Castle'..., the book is generally known in Spanish as *Las Moradas,* the Mansions, which does occur in each of the seven sections of the book. This is significant, for it calls attention to the Saint's purpose in choosing this particular image. She underlines this in her own explanation:

> Let us now turn to our castle with its many mansions. You must not imagine these mansions as arranged in a row, one

Castle and Its Implications », *Sancta Teresia a Jesu Doctor Ecclesiae,* ed. Pontificia Facultas Theologica O.C.D. (Roma: Edizioni del Teresianum, 1970), p. 201.

> behind another, but fix your attention on the centre, the room or palace occupied by the King. Think of a palmito, which has many outer rinds surrounding the savoury part within, all of which must be taken away before the centre can be eaten. Just so around this central room are many more. Just so around this central room are many more, as there also are above it [4].

Perhaps enough has been said here about the imagery even for those who have not actually read this spiritual classic to indicate that there is no question here of the kind of detailed, sustained allegory found, say in Dante's *Divina Commedia,* or on a lesser level, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.* The Castle, the Mansions are simply devices by which St. Teresa is able to convey her teaching on prayer. This is not underestimate the value of the device; the critics have praised the order of the book as superior to the chronological order of the *Life* and the commentary on the Lord's Prayer which constitutes the major part of the *Way of Perfection.* Allegory as a literary form after a long and vigorous life throughout the Middle Ages was dying; perhaps Spenser's *Faerie Queene* was its last gasp.

owever that may be, St. Teresa's intention is quite obvious in her introduction:

> Few tasks which I have been commanded to undertake by obedience have been as difficult as this present one of writing about *matter related to prayer...* I was told by the person who commanded me to write that, as the nuns of these convents of our Lady of Mt. Carmel need someone to solve their *difficulties concerning prayer...* anything I might say would be particularly useful to them ([5]).

The circumstances to which she alludes are better known

([4]) *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus,* tr. E. Allison Peers (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950), Vol. II, p. 207. Subsequent references to the *Interior Castle* will use the system of the *Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos*: M for Mansions (Moradas) with Roman numeral for one of the seven divisions, small letter for chapter within the mansions, Arabic numeral for paragraph. Thus for the present, M I.ii. 8.

([5]) M 1.

from a manuscript note, in Fray Gracian's hand, in Ribera's biography:

> Once, when I was her superior, I was talking to her about spiritual matters at Toledo, and she said to me: « Oh, how well that point is put in the book of my life, which is at the Inquisition! » « Well ». I said to her, « as we cannot get at that, why not recall what you can of it, and of other things, and write a fresh book and expound the teachings in a general way, without saying to whom the things you describe have happened ». It was in this way that I told her to write this *Book of the Mansions*, telling her (so as to persuade her the better) to discuss the matter with Dr. Velásquez, who used somtimes to hear her confessions; and he told her to do so too. (6).

Another testimony from still another friend of St. Teresa's, the Hieronymite, Fray Diego de Yepes, confirms that her intention was to write a treatise on prayer; yet, at the same time a new note is sounded which indicates her intention may have been somewhat more complex. In a letter to the Augustinian Fray Luís de León, dated September 4, 1588 and repeated more briefly in his biography of St. Teresa, Fray Diego tells of a chance meeting with the Saint some nine years earlier when they were snowed in at an inn in the town of Arévalo on the bleak Castilian plateau.

> This Holy Mother had been desirous of obtaining some insight into the beauty of a soul in grace. Just at that time she was commanded to write a treatise on prayer, about which she knew a great deal from experience. On the eve of the festival of the Most Holy Trinity she was thinking what subject the should choose for this treatise, when God... granted this desire of hers, and gave her a subject (7).

He goes on to give the details of the vision of the most beautiful crystal globe, made in the shape of a castle, and containing seven mansions, in the seventh and innermost of which was the King of Glory, in the greatest splendor, illumination and

(6) Quoted by Peers, *op. cit.*, II, 188-189.
(7) *Ibid.*, 187-188.

beautifying them all. This is basically the same « thought » St. Teresa presents in the First Mansion, although she simply says, without any mention of a divine vision:

> While I was beseeching Our Lord today that He would speak through me, since I could find nothing to say and no idea how to begin to carry out the obligation laid upon me by obedience, a thought occurred to me which I will now set down, in order to have some foundation on which to build (8).

She continues thinking « of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal in which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there many mansions ». It might be noted in passing that she speaks of a diamond first, which Diego does not mention, and that he speaks of a globe, which she does not mention. Likewise she speaks of rooms (*aposentos*, more like apartments; both use the word *moradas*, dwelling-places) but she speaks of the many mansions in heaven, a reference to Jn 14.2.

To return to Diego's account of the « vision » as he recalled Teresa telling him is to discover a brief account of another, a negative aspect, which is in her first chapter, developped in the second chapter, but mentioned less and less as she proceeds into the more interior mansions:

> While she was wondering at this beauty, which by God's grace can dwell in the human soul, the light suddenly vanished. Although the King of Glory did not leave the mansions, the crystal globe was plunged into darkness, became as black as coal and emitted an insufferable odour, and the venomous creatures outside the palace boundaries were permitted to enter the castle (9).

St. Teresa herself in the second chapter begins:

> Before passing on, I want you to consider what will be the state of this castle, so beautiful and resplendent, this Orient

(8) M I.i. 1.
(9) Quoted by Peers, *op. cit.*, II, p. 188.

> pearl, this tree of life, planted in the living waters of life — namely in God — when the soul falls into mortal sin ([10].

The rest of this chapter is devoted mostly to a particularly intense writing on the ugliness of sin and seems to confirm Diego's report:

> This was a vision which the Holy Mother wished that everyone might see, for it seemed to her that no mortal seeing the beauty and splendor of grace, which sin destroys and changes into such hideousness and misery, could possibly have the temerity to offend God ([11]).

She says quite explicitly:

> I know of a person to whom Our Lord wished to show what a soul was like when it committed mortal sin. That person says that, if people coul understand this, she thinks they would find it impossible to sin at all; and, rather than meet occasions of sin, would put themselves to the greatest trouble imaginable. So she was very anxious that everyone should realize this ([12]).

THE TEACHING

It is obvious then, that St. Teresa in obedience intended to write a treatise on prayer; in the fulfillment of her task she managed to give « some insight into *the beauty of a soul in grace* » and to communicate « a vision which the holy Mother wished everyone might see, for it seemed to her that to mortal seeing the *beauty and splendour of grace*, which sin destroys and changes into such hideousness and misery could possibly have the temerity to offend God » ([13]). Whether there is actually more in the *Interior Castle* than a treatise on prayer and an insight into the beauty of a soul in grace remains to be seen.

([10]) M I. 2.1.
([11]) Quoted by Peers, *op. cit.;* II, p. 188.
([12]) M I. 2.2.
([13]) See my note 11. Italic mine.

The Reverend Doctor E.W. Trueman Dicken, in an excellent article on « The Imagery of the Interior Castle and its Implications, » apparently thinks an important implication of the imagery is a forceful restatement of the classical doctrine of spiritual development through the purgative, illuminative and unitive ways ([14]). This seems to him especially significant for his overall purpose, which is to show some influence, or at least connection between St. Teresa's work here and the later doctrine of St. John of the Cross. Moreover and more immediately, he is righteously (and rightfully) indignant with « several exponents of the so-called New Spirituality... (who) have suggested that in the climate of the present day most Christians would find it more suitable to begin with the prayer of the Unitive Way and only later to work through to the Purgative Way ([15]).

The teaching on growth in charity is an integral and necessary part of theology in general and the major concern of spiritual theology and it is at the very least a presupposition of, and a constant underlying basis for the geography of the *Interior Castle.* Whether it is a part of theology which may have received the wrong kind of attention, and whether it is the primary or merely secondary intent or execution of the *Interior Castle* are questions which may be explored later.

For the present, it is sufficient to say: 1) that not only the intention but the result St. Teresa produced was indeed a treatise on prayer; 2) that the intention and the product, especially in the initial chapters, but in a less explicit way throughout, show something of the beauty of a soul in grace; 3) that the implication of the image as well as the structure of the book involve growth or development. To mention these three does not foreclose the possibility of still other themes and teachings, especially in the impact the book has on the reader which may be uncovered in a more careful exploration of the Castle.

But before taking up these themes individually, and in a

([14]) DICKEN, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
([15]) *Ibid.*, p. 206.

different order, something shoul be said of the *Castle's* structure. If, for evample, there are classically three ways or stages of the spiritual life, why are there seven mansions (*moradas*)? And why do some Mansions receive such a disproportionate amount of treatment? The second Mansion, for instance, has only a single chapter; the sixth mansion, eleven.

Professor Dicken replies rather lightheartedly that « from a doctrinal point of view, the number of mansions, seven appears itself to be somewhat arbitrary » ([16]). In support of this, he offers an analogy with « the similarly Procrustean procedure by which Scholastic theologians arrived at a list of seven vices or capital sins where the earlier tradition (e.g. in St. John Cassian) knew of eight-not always the same eight! ». This is not a happy analogy, as there were sound doctrinal and psychological reasons offered for the revision of the list of capital sins ([17]).

Still, careful students of the *Castle* will likely agree not only with the conclusion that the arrangement is arbitrary but even with the « shrinkage » Dicken proposes. Thus, the first three mansions serve as introduction to the Castle itself, the importance of perseverance, then or humility and finally of aridity in prayer-all essential to the beginner. The fourth mansion, with its consideration of consolations and the Prayer of Recollection, would appear to belong to at least some stage of the middle (illuminative) way. The Fifth Mansions, with its discussion of the Prayer of Union, the Professor sees as a transition from the Fourth to the Sixth Mansions, which, as already mentioned, is the longest and most detailed section. In the Seventh Mansions, we are obviously at the heart of the matter, where Spiritual Marriage is discussed, and though St. Teresa did not use such terminology, it is the phase classically called Unitive.

([16]) *Ibid.*, p. 209, note 45.
([17]) See U. VOLL, « Sins, Capital », *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v.
([18]) See my note 16.

GROWTH IN GRACE

Physical growth (and decline) is a phenomenon which cannot be evaded. Less obvious, and often unhappily lagging behind physical development, is psychological maturity. Yet the need for adult discernment, control of emotions, when recognized, is often confused with total human development. There is a higher level still, one charted by the masters of the spiritual life, and that is growth in grace and charity.

Many metaphors have been used to describe it, the most natural being that of a journey . Thus early Biblical allegorists pictured the soul passing over the Red Sea into the wilderness where there was a wandering for forty years until at last one crossed the River Jordan into the Promised Land. Some even attempted to fit the development of the apostles after their first call to be disciples and companions of the Master through the crisis of the Passion into the glory of the Resurrection, then through the crisis of the Lord's departure into heaven and the reception of the Holy Spirit. St. Thomas prosaically (characteristically) speaks simply of three stages in charity, beginning, progressing and perfect, but suggest greater richness in an analogy with physical and psychological infancy, youth and maturity. (S. Th. 2a2ae, 24.9) The criteria of growth — negatively resistance to sin and its occasion, positively union with God — is developed by the manualists of spirituality. An interesting example is the use of Dom Chautard's *Soul of the Apostolate* by Dom Thomas Verner Moore who, as a psychologist, sent questionnaires to priests, sisters and laypeople (married and single) who responded with interesting descriptions of their prayer and life.

And there perhaps is the peril of a conception of the life of the Spirit which can be measured along the lines of the *Scouts' Handbook* into tenderfoot and second class, and with a sufficient accumulation of merit badges, even first class. When one walks a narrow path, indeed a tightrope, it is essential not to look down at one's feet to see how they are doing, but to keep one's eyes fixed on the goal. It would indeed be helpful for the spiritual director to know the paths of prayer

in order to give the needed instructions in the crisis; it might well be a counterindication to find someone more interested in the exact point of progress rather than in the One who is the goal of the journey, and the object of charity, the Lord himself.

St. Theresa does not spend much time or space on what has come to be called asceticism. Not that she does not recognize its crucial role, but because she was addressing, as she said on the back of the first page, « her sisters and daughters the Discalced Carmelite nuns ». Nonetheless she is quite realistic and graphic in the First Mansion on the hideousness of sin. Moreover she insists on the need for avoiding venial sin as far as possible and giving up the occasion of sin. In the first three Mansions there is indeed a strong emphasis on a really good life, but even in these first stages, it is perseverance in prayer; and the rest of the work, which is its bulk, is exclusively devoted to the true topic of the treatise: prayer.

PRAYER

One historian of spiritual writers has remarked that it is impossible to read St. Augustine without learning to love humility and impossible to read St. Teresa wihtout learning to love prayer. It has already been noted that the original purpose of her writing in fulfillment of her obedience to a com mand was to write this book as precisely a treatise on prayer.

And she is very explicit about her understanding, and the importance of prayer at the very outset:

> As far as I can understand, the door of entry into this castle is prayer and meditation: I do not say mental prayer rather than vocal, for, if it is prayer at all, it must be accompanied by meditation. If a person does not think Whom he is addressing, and what he is asking for, and who it is that is asking and of Whom he is asking it, I do not consider that he is praying at all even though he constantly moves his lips. True, it is sometimes possible to pray without heeding these things, but that is only because they have been thought about previously; if a man is in the habit of speaking to God's Majesty

> as he would speak to his slave, and never wonders if he is expressing himself properly, but merely utters the words that come to his lips because he has learned them by heart through constant repetition, I do not call that prayer at all—and God grant no Christian may ever speak to Him so! (19)

In the Second Mansions, in the discussion of the difficulties of those who are not yet sufficiently resolute but have made some progress in prayer as well as life, the strong exhortation is to perseverance, and perseverance, despite falls, in the practise of prayer. She speaks of what has been described more technically as « external » graces: « the conversations of good people... sermons... good books... sickness and trials, or by means of the truths which God teaches us at times when we are engaged in prayer; however feeble such prayers may be, God values them highly » (20). Even though these « calls » are not « the precise way I shall describe later », they are indeed « favours » and are not « to be despised », nor despite the dichotomy between actual life-practise and the desires expressed in prayer, the « sisters (are) not to be disconsolate even though (they) have not responded immediately to the Lord's call; for His Majesty is quite prepared to wait for many days, and even years, especially when He sees we are persevering and have good desires » (21).

It is at the beginning of the Fourth Mansions that the Saint feels constrained to commend herself to the Holy Spirit, « for now we begin to touch the supernatural ». It is at this very point that the proverbial average person may well feel that, as in the *Life,* he has a real contact of sympathy with the Saint who has described so well his own feeble efforts, at least in his « peak experiences » but is now leaving him to soar to heights unknown, in much the same way that the eye follows an aircraft lumbering along the runway to takeoff and then disappearing from sight. Is there any use in continuing through the Mansions to the center when the reader is still very much

(19) M I.i. 6.
(20) M II.i. 4.
(21) *Ibid.*

grounded on this earth? The Prayer of Recollection perhaps on a rare occasion, but the Prayer of Union and Spiritual Marriage—interesting phenomena perhaps, but perhaps at this point it would be more realistic, and even humble to leave Teresa and her nuns to such empyrean realms and return to other spiritual classics such as the popular *Imitation of Christ* which speak more to our condition.

St. Teresa in her introduction to the comparison of the castle suggests rather:

> perhaps God will be pleased to use it to show you something of the favours which He is pleased to grant to souls... If the Lord grants you these favours, it will be a great consolation to you to know that such things are possible; and, if you never receive any, you can still praise His great goodness. For, as it does us no harm to think of the things laid up for us in Heaven, and of the joys of the blessed, but rather makes us rejoice and strive to attain these joys for ourselves, so it will do us no harm to find that it is possible for so great a God to commune with such malodorous worms, and to love Him for His great goodness and boundless mercy (22).

And she continues in this vein, pointing out that such graces of prayer are sometimes given by God to manifest his power. She then cites the words of Christ in the Gospel incident about the cure of the man born blind (Jn 9.2) and offers the further examples of St. Paul and the Magdalen.

In the section on the *Teaching* of the *Castle* a problem — whether the primacy of theme of the work was prayer or progress in the spiritual life — was postponed. Doctor Dicken appears to say, though not explicitly, that the very topography of the castle of the soul indicates that it is progress, development. He writes: « The great concern of both St. Teresa of Jesus and of her disciple St. John of the Cross is to instruct us in the nature of the obstacles to spiritual progress and to help us to adopt at each barrier the most suitable tactics for surmounting it » (23). It has already been mentioned that he

(22) M I.i. 3.
(23) DICKEN, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

is incidentally agitated by a current and serious error which does not accept the connection between life and prayer and that his scholarly purpose is to show how St. John of the Cross used St. Teresa's work as, in a sense, the foundation of his own. At the same time, Dicken very fairly brings up a text which apparently tells against his thesis:

> It seems that, in order to reach these Mansions (the Fourth), one must have lived for a long time in the others; as a rule one must have lived in those which we have just described, but there is no infallible rule about it, as you must often have heard, for the Lord gives when He wills and as He wills and to whom He wills, and, as the gifts are His own, this is doing no injustice to anyone ([24]).

To this « a a rule », which is « no infallible rule », he responds that, in effect, the exception proves the rule since, « if one does so, it is purely by the unmerited grace of God » ([25]). But, on the contrary, the rule is the exception, not that it might happen that way more frequently, but that the theological emphasis is in fact on God's free gift. His rather technical phrase, « unmerited grace of God » simply does not have the force of St. Teresa's « when... as... and to whom He wills... the gifts are His own » ([26]). One might add the earlier examples she used of St. Paul and the Magdalen.

A discussion of which theme — progress or prayer — is primary would probably be unfruitful, and once the theological point of the absolutely free character of God's gifts is made and remembered, there is surely no harm, and probably much profit in charting out the paths on which we may as a general rule dispose ourselves to receive greater graces of prayer. The saints with more and better experience who have gone before us have in instances such as St. Teresa mentioned, left convenient markers on the way. The trail-blazing of St. Teresa was, for the greater part of her work, her teaching on prayer.

([24]) M IV.i. 2.
([25]) DICKEN, *op. cit.*, p. 207, note 39.
([26]) M IV.i. 2.

Yet it should be said quite honestly that St. Teresa did not teach a method of prayer. If she practised her own art, and left brilliant descriptions for us, she still insisted that others should be left their personal freedom under God's grace to choose their own ways of prayer:

> It is very important that no soul who practises prayer... should be subjected to undue constraint or limitation. Since God has given it such dignity, it must be allowed to roam through these mansions — through those above, those below and those on either side. It must not be compelled to remain for a long time in one single room—not, at least unless it is in the room of self-knowledge ([27]).

PRESENCE

Still, it may well be that in her descriptions and her use of the image of the Castle, St. Teresa is teaching us something of an extremely important and enormously helpful element of prayer. If she began her onerous task with the obedient intent to write on prayer and found herself, as Doctor Dicken says, writing on the geography of the spiritual life, is it likely that again, by reason of the intended subject of the force of the image, she actually produced a work which has both subjects and still another which at times may have the most profound impact on the reader?

It is curious to note in an earlier citation in which she is describing prayer in general, St. Teresa repeats herself by mentioning the one to whom the prayer is addressed twice: « If a person does not think *whom* he is addressing, and what he is asking for, and who it is that is asking and of *whom* he is asking it, I do not consider that he is praying at all » ([28]). And of course anyone who has the slightest grasp of the image of the castle recognizes that it is the Lord of the castle who imparts to all the rest the loveliness of his light and warmth.

([27]) M I.ii. 8.
([28]) M I.i. 6.

Surely the recognition of God's presence in prayer cannot be overemphasized. We human beings, living in the immediate context of a particular place in a particular moment of time, find it difficult to escape that space-time context in thought, even when the thoughts are prayerful. Perhaps it is less difficult to escape the tyranny of the present by having recourse to memory. St. Teresa's first effort at writing was simply the story of her *Life*, what had happened. Biography, and especially autobiography, when it is done well, has a special attraction; that was true before St. Teresa in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine and it is true afterwards in St. Thérèse' *Story of a Soul* and the contemporary *Seven Story Mountain* of Father Thomas Merton.

Holy Scripture itself for the most part is sacred history and Vatican Council II has restated the importance of salvation-history. But some have acted as if time were the only relevant category; for instance, the study of the Bible has for a long time been preoccupied with the quest for the historical Jesus, the problem of getting beneath the varied theologies of the evangelists to the real Jesus. One extreme reaction quoted the complaint of Mary of Magdala: « They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him ». (Jn 20.2) Vatican II, in its very first Constitution, spoke of many modes of the presence of Christ: « in the person of his minister... but especially in the eucharistic species. By his power he is present in his sacraments... He is present in his word... Lastly He is present when the Church prays and sings... » ([29]).

St. Teresa for her part seemed ayways concerned about the presence of God. One commentator remarked that, if for St. Thomas, the first question was « What is God? » it was for St. Teresa, « Where is God? » On the dogmatic level, the problem was satisfactorily solved by one of the theologians (*letrados*) she consulted early in her career. Here in the mature work of her genius, St. Teresa succeeds, in so far as success

Austin Flannery, O.P. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1975).

([29]) Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Sacred Liturgy) § 6. Ed.

has been so far possible, by conveying through the very force of the image, the special presence of the Blessed Trinity in the souls of those in grace.

Père Yves Congar has made a very careful exegetical study of the theme of God's presence from Genesis to Apocalypse which he entitles, the *Mystery of the Temple.* What he shows after the many encounters of the holy patriarchs with God is the permanent presence of God to Israel in the temple. In the New Testament of course this *shekinah* (presence) is transferred, as it were, to Jesus himself, and communicated after his Resurrection to the Church, that is, to those who have received his Holy Spirit in baptism. Recent theology, especially Moral and most especially Spiritual Theology, has much of the importance of experience. While agreeing on the importance of experience, one is constrained to ask—« Whose? » Polls have their place as do ballots, but the experience of saints is the real norm. St. Teresa has given us the benefit of her experience in prayer of the presence of God.

BEAUTY

In the course of her introduction to the *Castle* the number of times Saint Teresa speaks of beauty is noteworthy. Her interest in the beautiful is almost unique, with of course the exception of St. Augustine. Theologians generally have been more concerned with the true and the good than with the beautiful. In fact, some seem to have a positive prejudice against what they seem to regard as the lure of beauty. What is one to think when a treatise on grace begins: « The first meaning of *charis* is grace... beauty... which finds no place in theological language »? Eric Gill, a sculptor who produced beautiful works of art, once suggested that we should look after truth and goodness, and that beauty would take care of itself. Johannes Jörgensen, at the beginning of his Life of St. Catherine of Siena, a book filled with beautiful descriptions, gives a warning about the primacy of the truth of Christianity with a suggestion that its goodness and beauty somehow only

follow that, and Dom Aelred Graham cites that precise passage at the beginning of his work, the *Love of God.* And yet the ordinary Christian seems especially susceptible to the quality of beauty, perhaps because there is in real beauty something of both truth and goodness.

To speak of the beauty of the *Interior Castle* is to speak not just of the beauty of the image or even St. Teresa's frequent reference to the beauty of a soul in grace. It is in some sense to speak of St. Teresa herself. Those expert in the language have praised the beauty of her Castilian, and even those who are only able to read a translation sense the beauty of her literary style. But the style is the man—in this case, the woman. Although the *Castle* is not like the *Life* an autobiography, it retains much of the person and is the record of personal experience. Thus the beauty of her personality is so reflected in her pages that it is possible to be almost as enamored of her as her Sisters and friends were.

One of her sisters wrote of her physical beauty. But perhaps that remark is misleading. Sir Kenneth Clark thinks so:

> Bernini went very far—just how far one realises when one remembers the historical St. Teresa with her plain, dauntless, sensible face. The contrast with the swooning sensuous beauty of the Cornaro Chapel is almost shocking ([30]).

« Her plain, dauntless, sensible face » must be a reference to Teresa's portrait painted from life and reproduced many times in the long history of her iconography. « Plain and sensible » perhaps, but the lady was in her sixties and if « beautiful » is too strong, the eyes, which have been called « windows of the soul » might in the opinion of some at least warrant the word, handsome. And perhaps Bernini should not be condemned too harshly for trying to depict the beauty of a soul during a mystical experience in the medium of cold, white marble.

([30]) CLARK, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

Of course, because St. Teresa was « sensible », which might be translated genuinely humble which implies in her an excellent sense of humor, she might well think all such talk was great nonsense. Nor perhaps would she have had much more patience with another artist, whose work was not in cold marble; but like her own work, in warm words. If she accepted Richard Crashaw's metaphysical « Hymm » and « Ode » ith the kind of reservation she half-humorously accorded to St. John of the Cross' undue subtlety, it would surely be to refer it from herself to the Lord of the Castle.

Whatever praise then might be given to the charm of her personality which could elicit the artistic praise of Crashaw and Bernini, and excercise its attraction over quite ordinary folk who chanced on her writing, she would surely refer that praise and her success, as she very often does in the course of her writing, to God and his grace. And, in a sense, an important sense, that is the secret of her success and the success of the device of the Castle.

The critics have suggested that the use of the Castle as an image enabled her to give a greater unity to her work than was possible by the use of chonology in the *Life* and the commentary on the Lord's Prayer in the *Way of Perfection.* Still, there is no rigid adherence to a structure. If the reader was expecting a guided tour to all manner of curiosities—sparkling fountains in brightly-tiled courtyards, gargoyles on carved wooden-ceilings, gorgeous tapestries, exquisite vases that dazzle even when they are given allegorical meaning—he might be sadly disappointed, except that he would not notice that he was seeing very little, but only listening to the excellent conversation of a charming guide. For Teresa does not give up her lifelong habit of what appear to be delightful digressions and tantalizing tangents even when she apologizes for wandering. It is her personality which is much more interesting than the castle.

Her personality is indeed one that is witty and wise, but the general impression given is one of a lady who is hard-headed, full of common sense, definitely down to earth. And these are the qualities that make her mystical flights so credible,

so persuasive. It is fairly easy to dismiss talk of the numinous when it comes from an obviously somewhat deranged person; St. Teresa simply cannot be dismissed that facilely. Even if one did not know from history how this woman succeeded in her project of reform and foundations against overwhelming odds stacked against her, and the way she commanded respect from learned theologians with their own claims to a place in history for their intelligence, and even earned the admiration of nobility and the royalty of Philip II, one need only turn to her writing itself to experience the force and, one might well say, the balance of her personality. If the short citations in the course of this article are too brief to form a judgment, the reader is recommended to go directly to the sources—certainly the *Life* as the best introduction, but the *Way of Perfection* as a primer of prayer and both the *Foundations* and her letters for background.

Nevertheless it is not of herself that she speaks. Indeed her writing is always intensely personal; not only the *Life* but all her work is autobiographical. Still, not only her intention but the actual impact of her writing is to introduce the reader to that Other, mysterious Person he already knows, has heard about from others, but Whom Teresa obviously knows intimately. True, she does not say a great deal about God in the way the evangelists narrate the details of Christ's life, death and resurrection. St. Teresa writes on prayer, the means of union with God, but she is not interested in techniques. What she is interested in is the very nature of prayer, but her mode is not that of other doctors who deduce from the data of revelation. She describes her own experience, and while the brilliance of her description has been acclaimed and officialy recognized by the Church so that she is called Mystical Doctor and Teacher of Prayer, it may not be amiss to add a small tribute in saying she conveys the reality and the beauty of the indwelling God.

Usually when a reviewer is very enthusiastic about a book, he urges people to read it, saying something like the voice St. Augustine heard in the garden, « *Tolle, lege!* » Pick it up and read it. To do so in the case of a classic might be an

impertinence. In such an instance, the role of those who would praise is to help the reader understand the purpose of the author, the themes treated, the devices used so that the barriers the very greatness of the work may offer will be at least olwered for the beginner. St. Teresa wrote a great, spiritual classic not for admiration and appreciation but for edification in the Pauline sense of building up the Church. Her intention was that those who read her book would each enter into his or her own interior castle and discover the light and love of the Lord that dwells therein. What she has given is a very great, possibily the greatest, guidebook.

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