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The Feast of the Transverberation of Saint Teresa of Avila

Saint Teresa de Jesús (of Avila) on Prayer

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Façade of the Monastery of the Incarnation, Avila, Spain

(Picture 2019)

August has two major feasts: the Transfiguration of Our Lord (6), and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (15). However, there is one feast- though not a major one- associated with Saint Teresa of Jesús (commonly known as Saint Teresa of Avila). Though her solemn feast is celebrated by the Church universal on October 15, there is a little known Teresian feast mainly celebrated by Discalced Carmelites on August 26, and referred to as the feast of the Transverberation of Saint Teresa. This feast commemorates the profound mystical experience she had when she was forty-four years old. In chapter 29 of her spiritual autobiography, *The Book of Her Life* (referred to as “*Life*” hereafter), she described the appearance of an angel which plunged a fiery spear into her heart, causing it to burn deeply for the love of God. The Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila, Spain, where Saint Teresa lived as a nun and also one of

its prioress, preserved the place of this mystical encounter. [Incidentally, this is immortalized by a sculpture of Bernini, The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa in the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome,]

I chose to write of Saint Teresa in this paper since she was one of Dorothy Day's favorite saints.¹ In her *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy mentions that she was first introduced to the saint when she read William James' book, *The Variety of Religious Experience*. The impact was profound that when Dorothy gave birth to her daughter Tamar, she gave her also the name Teresa. Dorothy read and reread Teresa's writings, especially exploring the relationship between prayer and social action. While Dorothy is well known for her social justice advocacy, she was as much a pray-er as she was an activist. Her passion for justice flowed from her deep prayer life. There was no opposition between Mary and Martha, something that Saint Teresa indicated four hundred years before. It would have been interesting had Dorothy wrote a book about Saint Teresa as she did about Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.

Saint Teresa is perhaps often well known as one who experienced various mystical phenomena- visions, locutions, and states of ecstasy and raptures. Tucked in my breviary is a simple relic of a piece of wood with the following inscription, "*De la cocina donde Santa Teresa se quedó arrobada con la sartén en la mano*" ("From the kitchen where Santa Teresa went into mystical ecstasy while having a frying pan in her hand."). The story goes that while she was frying eggs she went into rapture and levitated towards the ceiling. Fearing that she would set the monastery on fire, some of the nuns held onto her legs, brought her down, and sat on her waiting for the rapture to end so she wouldn't go up like a balloon. Stories like that would make us want to think that the attainment of extraordinary spiritual experiences is the *sine qua non* of the spiritual life. Saint Teresa herself probably believed that earlier on, but her views evolved and she corrected her earlier teachings.

The theme of this essay is to explore the evolution of Santa Teresa's views on prayer, focusing on two of her major works: her autobiographical *Life* and her final work, *The Interior Castle*.²

¹ A good discussion on Dorothy's interest in Saint Teresa can be found in Mark and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins*. (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005).

² The following abbreviations will be used when citing Saint Teresa's works:

L - *The Book of Her Life* [referred to simply as *Life* in the essay]

IC- *Interior Castle*

ST- *Spiritual Testimonies*

WP- *Way of Perfection*

Translations of Saint Teresa's writings are that of Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume 1 and Volume 2* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976-1987). For the *Life*, the first number refers to the chapter and the second to the paragraph within the chapter. For the *Interior Castle*, the first number refers to the dwelling place, the second to the chapter, and the third to the paragraph within the chapter. For the *Spiritual Testimonies*, the number simply refer to its enumeration in Kavanaugh's and Rodriguez's translation

However, before I do that, let me briefly provide the context for her views on prayer. Prayer, simply put, is the supreme human act of loving and union with God. For Saint Teresa, the human is created by God Who is Love for the purpose of loving him with all one's being. All of a person's energies, desires, and spiritual faculties- the intellect (the soul's organ of knowing), memory (the organ of imagination), and will (the organ of love) and desire- as well as the body- must be employed for the loving service of God. The difficulty is that since the Fall, human love has been infected by self-serving, selfish, and self-centered love. It is no longer purely oriented to the love of God, but, due to inordinate self-love, the human seeks the self's satisfaction and happiness. Or, even if it loves God, the loves of other things- e.g., material objects, riches, power, ambition, or career- dilutes the love of God. Thus the soul's love is diffused, dispersed, fragmented and not centered in God. Moreover, excessive self-love also obstructs the purity of the love of neighbors. God and one's neighbors are loved not for who they are in themselves but loving them as a means to benefit to self.

For Saint Teresa, the growth in the Christian life is about the progressively healing of self-centered love- the transformation of disordered human loves towards purity of love through divine grace. Saint Teresa speaks of two kinds of prayers: ascetical and mystical. Ascetical is when the human person, of its own accord, begin to actively purifies its disordered loves, but it cannot do so completely. God needs and does take over the work of transformation of bodily desires and faculties of the human soul so that they progressively become centered in God. This is mystical prayer. The various progressive stages of union of the embodied soul with God which Saint Teresa refers to, for example as prayer of quiet, recollection, union, spiritual betrothal, and marriage- are all about God quieting the noise of the soul's faculties, and recollecting the fragmented soul and concentrating it back to God.

Saint Teresa discusses these two prayers in *the Life* and *Interior Castle*.

Santa Teresa ordered by her spiritual directors and confessors to write an account of her spiritual life- *the Life* begun in 1562 when she was forty seven years old, but underwent revision so that it was "completed" in 1565.³ She had her experience of transverberation in 1559. This and other mystical experiences became the spiritual curiosities of her directors and confessors who asked her to write of them. Their goal was to determine if these experiences were coming from God, or the Evil One. In 1577, Teresa, at the age of 62 (five years before her death), she was again commanded by her superiors to write a treatise on prayer at the request of her nuns. Within the span of six months (with a three month interruption), she finished her *Interior Castle*. This is her most mature work on prayer. A period of twelve years separated the *Life* and *Interior Castle*.

³ Tomas Alvarez, OCD, *St. Teresa of Avila, 100 Themes on her Life and Work*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2011), 267-70. There were in fact two redactions. The first, now lost, was finished in 1562. Only the second is available to us. The second redaction was a significant expansion of the first, with her spiritual advisors and confessors asking her to clarify certain things she wrote in the first draft.

She also wrote *The Way of Perfection* (referred to as *Way* hereafter) begun in the year 1566 at the request of her nuns who wanted her to teach them about prayers. Since her *Life* - which contained her views on prayer- was not allowed to be publicly disseminated, Saint Teresa obliged her sisters with the permission of her superiors. It underwent several revisions per the order of her confessors and superiors, attaining its final form in 1567. I didn't include this beautiful work not because it is not important, but because- space constraints notwithstanding- I believe that the themes in the *Way* would be adequately covered by the present format.

In the Prologue of the *Interior Castle*, we can detect her apprehension concerning writing another book on prayer because she felt that she had said what she had to say about it in the *Life* and the *Way*:

...I don't think I have much more to say than what I've said in other things they ordered me to write...I fear that the things I write about will be nearly all alike. I'm literally, just like the parrots that are taught to speak; they know more than what they hear or are shown, and they often repeat it (2).

Yet, later, she says

And although in other things I've written the Lord has given me some understanding, I know there were certain things I had not understood as I have come to understand them now, especially certain difficult things (1 IC 2.7).

There are something most difficult to explain, if His Majesty doesn't do so, as was said in another book I wrote fourteen years ago, more or less, in which I dealt with these experiences to the extent of my knowledge of them at that time... I think I now have a little more light about these favors the Lord grants to some souls... (4 IC 1.1)

Teresa wrote the *Interior Castle* for at least two reasons. First, her friend and Carmelite Provincial of Andalusia, Jeronimo Gracian, told her that her nuns "had questions about prayer" (and that she was in the best position to teach them [Prologue, 4]). Her *Life* -which contained valuable insights would have been helpful to her nuns. However, since it was sequestered by the church authorities, she could not give it to her nuns for instruction⁴ Secondly, though Teresa felt that in her *Life* her "soul had been captured", she now believed that it was incomplete.⁵ Perhaps, she also felt that what she wrote in the *Way* could also be expanded in light of new spiritual insights and experiences she had gained since the time of writing these. Encouraged and ordered by Gracian, and her spiritual director, Alonso Velásquez (also a friend

⁴ Alvarez, p.337.

⁵ Alvarez, p. 337.

of Gracian), her most mature work was born.⁶ After she finished this new book, she apparently commented to Gracian that the *Interior Castle* was “superior” to the other books she wrote.⁷

In sum, in the *Interior Castle*, Teresa does not merely “parrot” what she says earlier. She clarifies certain things in light of new understandings and experiences that now surpass those she mentions in the *Life*. With conviction, she mentions that it is not her, nor her confessors who are responsible for the new book. It is the Lord (Prologue, 4; 4 IC 4.1; 5 IC 4.11; 6 IC 4.9).

This is not to say that Teresa discounts what she says in the *Life*. As McGinn, says, there is “overlap” of themes between the *Life* and the *Interior Castle*.⁸ In enumerating the main differences between the two works in their treatment of prayer, I think it is well to discuss first a few of their commonalities.

Both writings share the theme of prayer as **the** way of union with God. In the *Life*, prayer is about establishing a relationship of intimate sharing and communion with the divine Friend who loves us much (L 8.5). In the *Interior Castle*, the “door of entry” to the interior castle of the soul where God lives is prayer (1 IC 1.7). Moreover, the deepening of union with God through one’s progressive journey in the different Mansions of the castle-soul is achieved through prayer.

Both works also share the theme of prayer as the means of spiritual transformation. For Teresa, prayer is not just about union with God. It is also about transformation in Christ.⁹ Slade says that in the *Life*, the “terminus of [Teresa’s] mystical experience” is her transformation.¹⁰ In commenting on the prayer of union, for example, Teresa speaks of its ultimate purpose and effect as “complete transformation of the soul in God...” (L 20.18). In the *Life*, she mentions that there are really two books in the *Life*. The first book (Chapters 1-22) deals with the life she lived as “mine” but the second book (from chapter 23 onwards) is the life that “God lived in me” (L 23.1). In the *Interior Castle* (5 IC 2), Teresa presents the image of a silkworm which dies by spinning and entombing itself in a cocoon only to rise as a beautiful butterfly. The silkworm is a metaphor for the soul’s transformation in Christ through a mystical death. It is a “metaphor for the paschal mystery” in which the soul partakes.¹¹ In the seventh Mansion, this transformation is completed in Spiritual Marriage.

As mentioned, the *Life* and the *Interior Castle* also divide prayer life between the ascetical/ active (i.e., in which human activity is primary) and the mystical/passive (in which

⁶ Alvarez, p. 338.

⁷ Bernard McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain: 1500-1650. Volume 6, Part 2, The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2017), p. 179.

⁸ McGinn, *Mysticism*, p. 207.

⁹ This is the main thesis of Mark O’Keefe in his book, *The Way of Transformation: Saint Teresa of Avila on the Foundation and Fruit of Prayer*. (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 2016).

¹⁰ Slade, p. 84.

¹¹ O’Keefe, *The Way*, p. 169.

God gradually takes over prayer and the human person becomes more passive).¹² The treatise on the four waters of prayer in the *Life* (chapters 11-22) outlines the progression from the ascetical to the mystical, and so does the seven Mansions in the *Interior Castle*. The first three Mansions deal with the ascetical and the last four, with the mystical. Such progression describes the “different modes of consciousness”¹³ of the human person in terms of his/her relationship with his/her self (self-knowledge) and God. Whereas the progression (degrees) of prayer in the *Life* is expressed through the metaphor of water, in the *Interior Castle*, the main metaphor is the journey through the various dwelling places (or “mansions”) within the interior castle-soul. Though she does not abandon the motif of water entirely, she never gives it “the central role it enjoyed in the *Life*”.¹⁴

Another theme that the *Life* and the *Interior Castle* share is an extensive discussion of the mystical phenomena. Saint Teresa’s *Life* is peppered with accounts of her experiences of mystical phenomena. But Saint Teresa focuses on them primarily in her discussion of the highest degree of prayer (Fourth Water). Alvarez says Saint Teresa “dedicates to them more space” than she does to the discussion of the mystical life in general.¹⁵ In the *Interior Castle*, mystical phenomena figure centrally in the Sixth Mansion (comprising of eleven chapters, by far the longest of all the Mansions, taking up more than a third of the *Interior Castle*) in her discussion of the state of union she calls Spiritual Betrothal.

Another important shared theme is the role of the sacred humanity of Christ in prayer. In the *Life*, Teresa says that grace in prayer, even the highest mystical favors, can only be received “through the most sacred humanity of Christ” (L 22:5). Even when a soul has attained a high degree of mystical prayer, it should not lack the “human support” of the humanity of Christ (L 22.9). In the *Interior Castle*, when she speaks of the higher states of Spiritual Betrothal and Spiritual Marriage, she affirms the importance of the sacred Humanity of Christ (6 IC 7.5-6; 7 IC 2.1, 3). She encourages her nuns to “Fix your eyes on the Crucified...” (7 IC 2.4.8).

What is it, then, that Saint Teresa wants to communicate in the *Interior Castle* that she hasn’t done before? What “superior” understanding, insight or experience does she want to add now? In commenting on another work of Saint Teresa- *Meditations on the Song of Songs*- written between 1571-1574- that is, after the *Life* but before the *Interior Castle*- McGinn, says that this often neglected work is in fact not a minor and marginal work but “central”. It testifies to a “crucial transformation in Teresa’s view of mysticism, away from the ecstasy-dominated view of the goal of mystical life found in the *Life*, towards the mature mystical theory of

¹² McGinn, *Mysticism*, p. 187.

¹³ McGinn, 183. Noel O’Donoghue speaks of the “progressive illumination of the soul” (in *Adventures in Prayer: Reflections on St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Therese of Lisieux*, London: Burns and Oates, 2004, 55)

¹⁴ McGinn, *Mysticism*, p. 184. For the water motif in the IC, see, e.g., 4 IC 2.2-4, 9-10; 3.8-9 and 6 IC 5.3.

¹⁵ Alvarez, p. 431. To see the correspondence of discussion of the types of mystical phenomena in both writings, see McGinn, *Mysticism*, p. 227, no. 302.

combining action and contemplation laid out in detail in her *Interior Castle*..."¹⁶ This is not to say that mystical phenomena were minimized in the *Interior Castle*. However, Saint Teresa clarifies and recasts the role of these mystical phenomena in the soul's union with God; that is, they do not constitute the highest union which is, for her, Spiritual Marriage, a stage that sees a diminishment of the mystical phenomena. In the midst of writing her *Meditations*, she experienced Spiritual Marriage, but took her some time to reflect on and inwardly digest it. By the time she wrote the *Interior Castle*, she was ready to speak about it.

Thus, the reason the highest union of Spiritual Marriage did not make its appearance in the *Life* is that she had not attained to this union until seven years after she wrote the *Life*, i.e., November 18, 1572, when she was fifty seven years of age, nine years before she died (see her *Spiritual Testimonies* 31). This is why the nuptial motif which is marginally present in the *Life* (L 27.10; 36.29), does not occupy a central role in it as it does in the *Interior Castle*.¹⁷ This experience has significantly shifted her understanding of what constitute union with God. I shall explain this in greater detail but for now, let me summarize by quoting McGinn:

In the *Life* union is temporary, ecstatic and marginal to the body's senses and faculties, which are in absorption. In the *Interior Castle*, the union of spiritual marriage is permanent in the center of the soul...The body and its apostolic activity partake of this union and receive strength to act from the union enjoyed in the center of the soul.¹⁸

McGinn notes that many scholars feel that "there is lack of order in her presentation of the progress of prayer in the *Life*."¹⁹ The *Interior Castle* affords her an opportunity to make the necessary clarification, reorganization and synthesis of her views.

Now I turn to the discussion of the differences between the *Life* and *Interior Castle* in their views on prayer.

In the *Life*, Teresa expounds her views on the stages or degrees of prayer in the Treatise of Four Waters of Prayer (Chapters 11-22). The first degree/first water (Chapters 11-13) describe the ascetical phase in which human activity is primary in prayer. That is, humans actively work to re-collect their faculties and focus them on God in prayer. Teresa likens this to fetching water from a well to water the soul-garden, a laborious act. This ascetical phase, more or less, corresponds to the first three Mansions of the *Interior Castle* in which the human person makes a laborious effort of entering into prayer

¹⁶ Bernard McGinn, "One Word Will Contain Within Itself a Thousand Mysteries.": Teresa of Avila, the First Woman Commentator on the Song of Songs" *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, Volume 16, Number 1 2016 pp.21-40 (23-24)

¹⁷ Alvarez, pp. 365-366.

¹⁸ McGinn, *Mysticism*, pp. 207-208.

¹⁹ McGinn, *Mysticism*, p. 150.

In the second degree (Chapters 14-15), prayer becomes easier so that the human gardener of the soul does not do as much work. Teresa uses the metaphor of drawing water with the use of a waterwheel which makes watering easier. Prayer is less laborious because God begins to intervene and takes over prayer though the human person and its faculties continue to be somewhat active. Here, the soul becomes more “supernatural” (14.8) because of God’s action in it. Teresa speaks of the “prayer of quiet”. In it, God unites the will to himself though the faculties or memory and intellect are still active and distracted though the will is drawing them towards recollection (15.1). For Teresa, the prayer of quiet is the beginning of mystical prayer (15.15), corresponding to the Fourth Mansion. In the *Life*, the prayer of quiet and recollection are mentioned together as if these two are the same (15.1). No distinction is made. In the *Interior Castle*, however, these two are not interchangeable terms.

In the *Interior Castle*, the prayer of quiet (4 IC 2.2-7; 4 IC 3:9-13) is equated with *gustos*, i.e., “spiritual delight” (4 IC 2.2) that comes from God. It is to be distinguished from the *contentos*, i.e., consolations produced by human effort. To explain this, Teresa uses the water motif. She likens *gustos* with filling a trough with water from a nearby spring, while *contentos* is likened to filling the trough with water from an aqueduct far away (4 IC 2.3). Because God-infused *gustos* involve a “profound possession of the heart by divine presence” the person feels his/her soul being enlarged in its capacity for union with God, as well as an expanded capacity for love of neighbor.²⁰ Consolations do not have this effect of enlargement. In the prayer of quiet, the faculties are “not united but absorbed” (4 IC 2.6). Moreover, the body experiences pleasure as spiritual sweetness flows into the senses (4 IC 2.6).

In regards to the prayer of recollection (4 IC 3:1-8), Teresa distinguishes between the recollection acquired by human effort aided by grace, and the mystical/infused prayer of recollection. In describing the latter, Teresa uses the image of the divine Shepherd who “whistles” at the soul (4 IC 3:2) and at this, the soul “noticeably senses a gentle drawing inwards...It doesn’t come when we want it but when God wants to grant us the favor” (4 IC 3:3). Prayer of recollection is not humanly acquired but divine in origin.²¹ Acquired recollection, properly speaking, is not prayer of recollection.²²

The intellect is “suspended even though for only a very brief moment.” (4 IC 3:7). It can still be very active and can create disturbances for the soul. Yet, the “will has deep rest in God” even though the “clamor of the intellect is a bother to it”; in this state, one should just “leave the intellect go and surrender oneself into the arms of love” (4 IC 3:8). It simply should not bother to understand what is going on, because the understanding is “given to the will” (4 IC 3:7). Here, Teresa distinguishes two ways of “knowing”: the understanding of the intellect and the higher, supernatural understanding of the will.²³ In this prayer, instead of “striving to

²⁰ O’Donoghue (p. 75) says that *gustos* lead one from superficial relationships to divine universal love for all.

²¹ Because prayer of recollection is divine in origin, it is often described as supernatural recollection, infused recollection or passive recollection.

²² McGinn, *Mysticism*, p. 190. In the *Way*, prayer of recollection is not mystical (WP 29.4).

²³ McGinn, *Mysticism*, pp. 190-191.

engage in discourse”, the soul should simply “listen” and “remain attentive and aware of what the Lord is working in it” (4 IC 3:4).

When discussing the third degree of prayer in the *Life* (16-17), the human gardener of the soul does even less because God “practically...does everything” (L 16.1). Teresa discusses three kinds of union. The highest one is called “sleep of faculties” (16) in which the faculties are *almost* united but not completely absorbed that they fail to function. They are mainly occupied with God and the intellect is unable to engage in active meditation. This is the highest degree of union here. The second highest is one she describes in 17.5-7 in which the will and intellect are occupied in God but the memory and imagination are distracted. She describes in 17.1-4 a lower union than the other two. Here, the will is in deep quiet but the intellect and memory engage in works of charity – Mary and Martha working in tandem. In this prayer the active and contemplative come together. The soul is “conscious of the world” and not “totally dead” (18.1). The differences have something to do with the degree of the faculties being united to God.

The highest union in the *Life*, however, comes in the fourth degree. The metaphor of rainfall watering the garden (which means the gardener no longer does the watering) signifies God (and not the human person) doing the work in prayer. The soul “isn’t in possession of its senses” but nevertheless enjoys without understanding what it is enjoying (18.1). “[N]o power remains in the body...” (18.2). It is accompanied by a rapturous “elevation of the spirit”. Elevation is distinguished from the union in that elevation produces much detachment from creatures (18.7). It is experienced as a “swoon” as the faculties and senses fail, becoming oblivious to things around them. Because “all the bodily energies are gradually lost” and “[a]ll external energy is lost”, the soul uses all the energy to be interiorly occupied with God (18.10). Yet, when the faculties and senses return to themselves, the will remains united with God, imbued with a certitude that the union comes from God. In this union, Teresa says (using the Pauline language of Galatians 2:20), it is Christ now who lives in the soul (18.14).

In chapter 20 of the *Life*, however, she tries to distinguish between union and raptures, which she also equates with the “elevation of the spirit”, “flight of the spirit”, “transport”, and “ecstasy”. She says that the “advantage that rapture has over union is great” and that rapture is of “higher degree” than union. It is accompanied by a feeling of the soul being carried off (20.2-5, 7) and levitation (20.7, 18). The body is rendered “as though dead” because of immobility (20.18). The senses are inoperative. The “faculties are lost” in this rapturous union (20.18). In this, the “complete transformation of the soul in God” is accomplished (20.18). However, such rapturous union “lasts only a short time” (20.18) and occurs at “intervals” (20.19). The union in rapture is not permanent. When the faculties return, the will remains absorbed in God and the mystic is not “fully awake” but half-asleep and in a dreamy state. (20.20) The aftereffects include detachment, conformity to God’s will (20.22) and the soul becoming “obsessed with serving the Lord” (20.23).

Three things to remember in this discussion in the *Life*.

1. First, the highest mystical union is rapture and is the goal of the mystical life.
2. Secondly, the attainment of rapture is equated with the soul's transformation in Christ.
3. Thirdly, primacy is given to contemplation, and apostolicity is secondary. The body also seems marginal.

Saint Teresa revised these three in the *Interior Castle*.

In the *Interior Castle*, union is discussed as a matter of “intensifying degrees”.²⁴ According to McGinn, Teresa discusses three kinds of union: the prayer of union in the Fifth Mansion, Spiritual Betrothal in the Sixth Mansion, and Spiritual Marriage in the Seventh Mansion.²⁵

In the prayer of union, the faculties are completely silent, suspended, and “asleep...to the things of the world and ourselves” as if “without its senses” (5 IC 1.4). With the language of sleep, this appear to correspond to the third degree of prayer in the *Life*, the “sleep of faculties”. The sleep renders the soul as if it “has died to the world to live more completely in God” (5 IC 1.4). This prayer is superior to the prayer of quiet of the Fourth Mansion because the soul comes to have certainty that it is in God whereas in the prayer of quiet, there is lingering doubt (5 IC 1.5,9). In this union the whole soul (all its faculties) is united to God whereas in the lower stages of prayer, there is only a union of a part of the soul. However, the union here is fleeting (5 IC 1.9). She illustrates the manner of this dying to the world through the image of a silkworm which dies by spinning and entombing itself in a cocoon only to rise as a beautiful butterfly. It is a metaphor of a soul that must die to sin and evil by cocooning itself in Christ: “...let this silkworm die”, Teresa cries out (5 IC 2:6). Yet, even at this level of union, the soul is “not entirely surrendered to God’s will” (5 IC 2.10), and backsliding is possible (5 IC 4. 7,8). The union is insecure. She likens this stage to a short encounter between two new lovers (5 IC 4.4) that precedes espousal and marriage. The prayer of union induces in the soul a desire to die to the world. However, to add to the confusion, she also discusses another “true union” in which the soul on its own effort should seek by conforming its will to God’s will, (5 IC 3.3). If a person is not granted the gift of mystical union, he/she can try to achieve “true union” by uniting his/her will to God (5 IC 3.5, 7).

Spiritual Betrothal (Sixth Mansion) is similar to the fourth degree in the *Life* in that the soul becomes occupied with and united in God through the experience of a plethora of mystical phenomena. The soul is “made one with God” (6 IC 4:8) and the soul penetrates into things of God. Betrothal comes about “when He gives the soul raptures that draw it out of its senses” (6 IC 4.5)²⁶. The soul is said to have no consciousness of what is going on outside itself. Yet there is no loss of interior senses so that “the soul [is] never so awake to the things of God” and it comes to have “deep enlightenment and knowledge” of God (6 IC 4.4). God shows the soul

²⁴ McGinn, p. 191.

²⁵ McGinn, p. 191.

²⁶ God “carries off for Himself the entire soul” (6 IC 4.9);

“some secrets, things about heaven” (6 IC 4.5). These favors are experienced in the “very interior part of the soul and never forgotten” (6 IC 4.6). They produce deep yearnings for full union with God. Because experiences of union “remain passing”,²⁷ the soul is “subject to times of great distress and plunged into darkness”.²⁸ In the *Life*, this stage characterized by mystical phenomena (Fourth Water) constitutes the highest degree of mystical prayer and union. In the *Interior Castle*, she amends this by discussing another higher state.

Spiritual Marriage (Seventh Mansion) is the main reason Teresa wrote the *Interior Castle*. She corrects her previous assertion that fleeting raptures are the summit of the mystical life. While the prayer of union and raptures unite the soul to God, they do so only in its “superior part”, not in its “center” (7 IC 1.5). Spiritual marriage is superior to rapture. The union in Spiritual Marriage is lasting and permanent because “the soul always remains with its God in that center.” (7 IC 2:4). Moreover, in this Mansion, the “person abides in the Persons of the Trinity.”²⁹ In Spiritual Betrothal, God and the soul could be separated (like two lit candles which could be joined and separated), but in spiritual marriage, they could not (like rain falling into the sea and become inseparable) (7 IC 2:4).³⁰ The soul attains to “a durable substantial peace that is very rarely disturbed”.³¹ Such is its state of security that it does not need mystical phenomena anymore (which thus diminish).³² Burrows says, “The state of security Teresa enjoys destroys any need for impressive, reassuring ardours, visions and raptures.”³³ Saint Teresa suffered from “endemic anxiety”³⁴ before and was always looking for reassurance that she “[was] loving God, doing something for God”.³⁵ But in this state, she is no longer anxious for self-assurance since God has hollowed her out of all egocentrism that it is as “though the soul no longer existed.”³⁶ This is in contrast to the *Life* where mystical phenomena are valued as proof of highest union and her love of God. In the *Interior Castle*, mystical phenomena are no longer primary.

In Spiritual Marriage, “[t]he self is dead to self, it lives in God, he does all”³⁷ so that “its life is now Christ” (7 IC 2:5). Totally surrendered to God, God takes complete possession of the soul

²⁷ O’Keefe, *The Way*, 24. When speaking of spiritual betrothal, Teresa says, “union with the Lord passes quickly” and thus the soul “remains without that company” (7 IC, 2:4).

²⁸ O’Donoghue, p. 101.

²⁹ O’Keefe, *The Way*, p. 25.

³⁰ Spiritual betrothal is “like the joining of two wax candles to such an extent that the flame coming from them is but one...but afterward one candle can be easily separated from the other...In the spiritual marriage, the union is like...when rain falls from the sky into a river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river...” (7 IC 2:4)

³¹ O’Donoghue, p. 101.

³² Ruth Burrows, *Interior Castle Explored: St Teresa’s Teaching on the Life of Deep Union with God* London: Sheed and Ward, 1981), p. 115.

³³ Burrows, p. 115.

³⁴ Burrows, p. 113.

³⁵ Burrows, p. 115.

³⁶ Burrows, p. 115.

³⁷ Burrows, p. 115.

so that Christ now becomes the agent of its actions. This union produces much works of service of God and neighbor.

Unlike in the *Life*, the body in the highest union of Spiritual Marriage is not marginal but partakes of divinization. Body as well as the soul participates in the deification of the human person. Divine energies now flow from the soul to the body and its senses, resulting in apostolic life of “good works” (7 IC 4.6, 9). Mary and Martha “must join together” (7 IC 4.12-13). True contemplatives are apostolic. In the *Life*, a life of combined contemplation and apostolicity occupies a lower degree (third degree) with rapture (fourth) as the highest degree. In the *Interior Castle*, contemplation and apostolicity come to occupy an important role in the highest degree of union in Spiritual Marriage.

In sum, the *Interior Castle* differs from the *Life* in the following respects:

- The *Interior Castle* discusses the distinction between prayers and quiet and recollection, expanding discussion on both.
- Union is defined three ways in ascending degrees: Prayer of Union, Spiritual Betrothal and Spiritual Marriage.
- Spiritual Marriage- not rapture- is the *highest* degree of union with God, and this union is lasting and permanent.
- Raptures diminish/cease in the highest degree of union, and Teresa no longer regards extraordinary mystical phenomena with primary importance.
- Teresa establishes that the *highest* form of union of the soul flows to the body so that the body acts in the service of God and neighbor. The human person is divinized (transformed in Christ) soul and body. The body- and the world- is not marginal to the Christian mystical life. Christian spirituality is embodied spirituality.
- Related to the embodied spirituality of Teresa is her emphasis on the contemplative-apostolic life as the fruit of the highest union. The authenticity of the mystical (contemplative) life is known by its apostolic fruit- the perfect harmony of Mary and Martha.

I can think of at least four implications of Saint Teresa’s teachings on prayer for the Catholic Worker.

1. Prayer is central to the Catholic Worker life. This was certainly true of Dorothy: “I am convinced that the life of prayer, to pray without ceasing, is one of prime importance” (The Catholic Worker, March/April 1975, 2,8). A mystic in her own right, Dorothy had a rich prayer life, praying three hours a day. She went to Mass daily, partook of the Sacraments, engaged in mental prayer, especially meditating on Scripture and praying the Eastern Jesus Prayer. She took great care to say intercessory prayers for her family, friends and associates, her enemies and the world. Prayer was where she brought the world to God.

2. Dorothy, like Saint Teresa, believed in the deification of human life- body and spirit/soul. Dorothy believed in the power of prayer to divinize the human since prayer is but union with God. Moreover, for Dorothy, the Christian life involves progressing in deeper union with God through unceasing prayer which, in turn, progressively transform the human person into Christ. Thus, even as her life was coming to an end, she managed to write that she was still “trying to grow in the life of spirit...” (*Catholic Worker*, March/April 1975, 2,8). In prayer here and beyond, we are forever falling in the loving arms of God. While a robust mystical life is God’s own doing, we cooperate with grace by doing our part (ascetical prayer) to receive mystical graces.

3. In progressive deification of the human through grace, Saint Teresa believed that both body and spirit are divinely transformed. Thus, body cannot be neglected in favor of the spirit. Dorothy reflects on the social dimension of this Teresian doctrine in her insistence of both the spiritual and corporal/bodily works of mercy as the core to the ethics of the Catholic Worker Movement. Dorothy, when speaking of Saint Teresa in chapter 13 of *From Union Square to Rome*, discussed the ethical and social implication of the Teresian doctrine of the Sacred Humanity of Jesus. Dorothy did not simply related the Sacred Humanity to its sacramental (Eucharistic) dimension, but also to its social dimension. Our hunger for our Jesus our Spiritual Food must lead us to meet the hunger of our impoverished brothers and sisters, in the same way Jesus made himself available to us in our hunger.

4. Like Saint Teresa, Dorothy believed that the fruit of prayer is charity. For Saint Teresa as for Dorothy, extraordinary spiritual experiences were not the highest manifestation of deepest union with God, and so these did not interest Dorothy when speaking of Saint Teresa. Rather, love of God and neighbor are the authentic manifestation of the life of the Spirit. Thus, prayer is both Godward, and worldward. There is no opposition between prayer and social justice.

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Community Notes

This year Nazareth House will celebrate its tenth year with a Mass and lunch on Saturday, December 12, 2026. We give thanks to God for sustaining us this past decade. We also thank our families and friends who pray for and with us, and who believe in what we do...The house itself remains small, a rather deliberate act. We receive no endowment, nor do we solicit donations in our ten years. (We do solicit prayers.) While some Catholic Worker houses have obtained a non-profit status in order to legally accept donations, or corporate and governmental funding, our model we use relies on own personal resources to sustain ourselves, each other, and our external ministries. We simply, by choice, exist as a marginal house- with no legal and formal ecclesiastical status- in solidarity with the lowly of our world, those living in the edge, in the margins.

We have received some criticisms about our model. Some say that if we raise more money, we can help more people. If we choose to receive external funding, we can grow exponentially. However, we do not strive to be another charitable institution with a big budget. Ours is of the Little Way (so dear to Dorothy))- of doing whatever little we can with love to contribute to the larger sum of acts of love committed by other Christians. We hope that whatever small things we do will be leavened by God to bring far greater results and impact on the lives of others. As Pope Leo XIV says in his *Magnifica Humanitas* (213) "The civilization of love will not arise from a single or spectacular gesture, but from the sum total of small and steadfast acts of fidelity that serve as a bulwark against dehumanization." (<https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html>) We are under no illusion that our small acts will transform the world, but we heed the Pope's challenge to "reflect on some aspects of how we, each in our own way, can cooperate in the building the civilization of love (Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas*, 213). We do not see ourselves doing what we do in isolation, but that we are joining other people of goodwill in the work of justice to tilt the world's the moral scale towards goodness and righteousness.

...AC continues to work at a call center; he leads our weekly rosary and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament... RN continues to work as an HIV counselor at a local clinic. He will be turning 60 this year, which makes him a Senior Citizen. EN is in Arizona for cancer treatment monitoring, while NB is assisting him, and at the same time, volunteering and engaging in activism amidst the rise of US fascism. A few years ago, NB converted part of the Arizona house into a hermitage, and called it Bethlehem House, which he considers an extension of Nazareth House. He uses it for prayers, an important Catholic Worker apostolate since praying for the world is a spiritual act of mercy. He is turning 62 this year, and plans to get his Social Security retirement from the US which will augment funding for Nazareth House...

...Nazareth House continues to provide rental assistance to a few persons living with HIV/AIDS to maintain their housing, and prevent homelessness. The house also extends limited financial assistance for medical needs of persons living with HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, the house extends school subsidies- either as full or partial scholarships to ten children and youth in elementary and high school, and three college students (nursing and law school). We also subsidize schooling for a former political prisoner who was recently released. It is our hope to extend school subsidies to a family member of a victim of Duterte's War on Drugs (that killed almost 40,000 people between 2016 and 2022)... One of the political prisoners, Marilyn, we visited at the Correctional Institution for Women was released in June. Nazareth House was able to fund her return to her family in July. A few years ago, I thought my wallet was stolen only to find it in July in a hidden compartment of a bag. When I found it, I immediately thought that God had something in mind for that money. Sure enough, a request came almost immediately to assist Marilyn reunite with her family. God does provide...

What keeps us awake all night? The recent conference on AIDS in Brazil has highlighted the deleterious effects of funding cuts disruption of AIDS-related work under the current regime of President Trump. (See D. Bouscaren, "Amid U.S. funding cuts, the International AIDS

Conference faces an Uncertain Future”, July 28, 2026, *National Public Radio*, <https://www.npr.org/2026/07/28/nx-s1-5909368/international-aids-conference-hiv>). The article quotes the executive director of UNAIDS: “The question is no longer whether [we] can end AIDS, the question is whether we choose to end AIDS... When prevention disappears, infections rise. When treatment is interrupted, people die.”

HIV/AIDS is a rising public health emergency in the Philippines since there is a 400-500% increase in HIV infections from 2010-2022 (D. Cordero, “Exploring the HIV Epidemic in the Philippines: Initiatives and Challenges,” *Journal of the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care*, January 6, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23259582241312294>). This year alone, there are 4,633 new HIV cases between January to March 2026 (See the Department of Health Epidemiology Bureau’s HIV & AIDS Surveillance of the Philippines, <https://doh.gov.ph/hiv-aids-surveillance-of-the-philippines/>) Of the total 288,000 persons living with HIV/AIDS< only 69% are in treatment.

In his State of the Nation Address (SONA) in July of this year, the Philippine president, Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., mentions his ongoing support for HIV/AIDS treatment (See Cristina Bacilig, “Philhealth, Yakap, Gamot programs to expand in 2027, says Marcos” July 27, 2026, *Inquirer.Net* <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2271693/philhealth-yakap-gamot-programs-to-expand-in-2027-says-marcos>) I am concerned that the confluence of funding cuts from abroad, the negative impact of Middle East wars on international and local economy, as well as the whimsical/ficklish political will of the Philippines will affect access to life-saving treatment.

Earlier this year, a friend who is an HIV/AIDS-advocate shared a memorandum from the Department of Health that was secretly shared with him, the document warned medical institutions of a possible shortage of HIV/AIDS medications until September 2026. Therefore, medications were rationed, and some clinics in the rural areas began to ran out of medications. I was afraid that our roommates would not be able to access medications. One has to plan options in case public clinics ran out of medications. However, it was announced in July that the Philippines was able to procure medications. This shortage is not the first time this happened. It can be very stressful. It just shows the precarity of HIV/AIDS treatment services in this country.

Incidentally the quality of HIV/AIDS (antiretroviral) medications in the Philippines is not the same as in the developed nations. Many antiretrovirals available in the Philippines are “older” medications that are no longer used, or are being phased out in developed countries due to side effects. The long lasting injectable anti-retroviral that would eliminate daily oral medications (thus increasing treatment adherence, and treatment success) are still not available in the Philippines.

The Philippines is grappling with the impeachment of the Vice President, Sarah Duterte, for her threats against the life of the President and his family, her corruption and fraud. She is the daughter of the former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, who is in the International Criminal Court, the Hague, for his crimes against humanity... The Philippines is also gripped by the

government filings of charges against politicians involved in corruption. It is our hope that these charges would not be selective, but that all, including allies of the President who have been involved in corruption, would be held accountable.

The Philippine current alliance with the United States increases the US military presence in the country, a stain on the sovereignty of the Philippines. Through that alliance, the Philippines becomes a pawn in the conflict between China and the US. The Philippines relies on the US to defend it from Chinese aggression. However, given the United States recent destabilization (abandonment?) of its international alliances, the Philippines should not rely on that alliance. Instead, it should seek multilateral non-violent, non-military diplomatic solution...

One of the ways the US seeks to impose its economic and military domination on the Philippines is through *Pax Silica*. The Ibon Foundation defines it as “the US Strategy to secure dominance in chips, AI, and advanced technologies by controlling supply chains, critical minerals, and industrial hubs in the US and among allied countries. It integrates industrial policy with military strategy in the name of so-called national security” (Will Pax Silica industrialize the Philippines?” May 14, 2026 <https://www.ibon.org/tl/will-pax-silica-industrialize-the-ph/> Accessed August 25, 2026.) (For Ibon Foundation’s analyses of Pax Silica as detrimental to the sovereignty and well-being of the Philippines, see various articles in <https://www.ibon.org/tl/tag/pax-silica/>)

Nazareth House (Bahay Nazareth) is an ecumenical house of hospitality rooted in the spirit of the worldwide Catholic Worker Movement founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in 1933. We seek to embody the Gospel ideals of unceasing prayer, corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which include acts of non-violent peace and justice, solidarity with the poor, radical hospitality, and life in community. Located in Manila, Philippines, we are not a social service or a registered charitable institution, nor a not for profit corporation but simply a group of Christians who feel called to an apostolic ministry of providing shelter to persons living with HIV or AIDS who do not have adequate financial means for housing, and who are unable to secure assistance from any source. We are LGBTQI friendly. Email: bahaynazareth@gmail.com