

Anthropological Connotations of Saint Teresa's Visions

I. INTRODUCTION

This year has been declared Teresian Year to honor the great woman Doctor and Saint of the Church, Teresa of Avila. For us who are especially engaged in Education, Teresa can indeed be "an everflowing source of strength and inspiration in our never-ending lifelong search for truth."

It is with this hope in mind that we begin this study on Teresa de Jesús, with special attention to her privileged encounters with God, the Eternal Truth, in her so called visions.

"In Castille you cannot help but follow the path of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa. I think that Avila, by her environment, her sky, her geographical view is the expression of their journey, the expression of that path to the fathomless. In this sense, Avila preserves the landscape, and on the other hand, there is the language, that still well-spoken Spanish language in spite of the television... Avila is one of the important landmarks of the world."¹

¹ José María Muñoz Quiroz, *Entrevista con José María Méndez*, "Avila de Santa Teresa," Suplemento del Boletín Oficial del Obispado, Abril 1982, n. 23, pp. 8-9.

Avila inspired Teresa and Teresa immortalized Avila. We cannot understand Teresa without knowing Avila, and Avila cannot claim such a place in world history, in spite of her many saints and famous men, without Teresa. This holy Teresian Year puts the pilgrim staff in the hands of millions of men who want to experience the same purity of sky, the walled city of Avila, a prototype of the *Interior Castle*: they would like to take the same road on which St. Teresa walked, to pray in front of the same images to which she prayed. It is not the material path that matters but the spiriual journey to the innermost *mansion* where the King of kings waits for us "where the very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place."² Since this *Interior Castle* is the soul, the journey that we undertake is inspired by this two-fold aim: first to know a little better the nature of man and second, to express our admiration and love for "La Santa" of Avila in this Teresian Year.

St. Teresa, who together with St. Catherine of Siena, is the first woman Doctor of the Church, deserves all our attention and study of her life to bring into a new light her insights of human nature and to reflect on the thirst of a soul searching for God and peace. Today, when the West is looking at the oriental thinkers for guidelines to reach the innermost of self; today when the peaceful balance of the inner self of the East becomes so appealing to the Western Culture which is dissatisfied with its rationalistic approach and searches for new beginnings by means of Phenomenology, existentialism, etc.; today when the West is tired and frustrated with efforts of trying to explain the world, and wishes only to see what is there in the world without disturbing nature, without manipulating and distorting it, the works of St. Teresa may be a refreshing approach, for we see in her the human struggle with herself, and how the victory came by means of different encounters she had with God, and how these encounters made her surrender more and more to the eternal love of God.

However, the simple reading of her works is not enough to perceive the great understanding of human nature that is hidden

² Teresa de Jesús, *Interior Castle*, "Collected Works of Saint Teresa of Avila" Translated by Otilo Rodriguez, O.C.D., and Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., (ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, D.C., 1890) I Dwelling Place, 2.1.

in her literary output. It is at the root of this understanding of human nature that we can explain her fears of being confused or blinded by her own desires, of being misled by the enemy, the devil. Fears and doubts about the origin of her visions and interior life made her go from person to person seeking reassurance, begging for guidance on a decision that will bring peace to her mind.³ She needed the external testimony that her mystical experiences were from God since she was not content with her own certainty. It is in the understanding of human nature that we can perceive the intention of her confessors when again and again they put her spirit to the test in order to see clearly and without any doubt whether her experiences were from God or from the devil.

Teresa's account of the different visions and mystical phenomena, her life of prayer were no doubt astonishing and extraordinary. However, in those days there were so many pretensions of supernatural revelations, that those who came in contact with her became aware of the possibility of being deceived by her as many other wise men were deceived by false spirituality, under the pretext of mystical phenomena, by persons even nuns who wished to get the attention of theologians and enjoy popularity. Thus, her confessors were hesitant to proclaim her experience as supernatural or coming from God.⁴

An objective and sympathetic look at these things in their historical perspective of the XVIth Century will reveal that some of those confessors did not have solid theological foundation. It was after the Council of Trent that the seminaries were established for the formation of the clergy. She was fortunate that there was a faculty of theology in the convent of Santo Tomas in Avila and many of the eminent dominican theologians of the XVIth Century passed by Avila at one time or another. One of them was Domingo Bañez, who became her confessor for six years, and who approved the book of her life and defended the founding of San Jose in the Council of Avila. At the same time, men of great holiness

³ Cf. *Statement of Fr. Pedro Ibañez, on the Spirit of Saint Theresa*. In "Complete Works of Saint Theresa", Allesen Peers, (Sheed and Ward, London, 1946) Vol. III, p. 328.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

comforted her in her fears about the nature of her mystical experiences especially St. Pedro de Alcantara and St. Francisco de Borja. What the dominican theologians approved as theologically sound, the saints confirmed by their experiences.⁵

Her search for God and her encounters with Him seemed such a novelty that her life was put to test. Her life was questioned, doubted by her confessors and even pious men. This gave rise to an inner conflict in her life and the certitude she had from God was shaken by the incertitude of her confessors and advisers. She endured long years of fear and doubt until she began the foundations and the reformation of the Carmelite Order.⁶ It is part of our undertaking to examine the role of these doubts in and how they revealed human nature. Furthermore, we wish to venture into her visions in order to gain some insight of the human intellect and of how the human soul relates herself to God. Our interest in the epistemological connotations may arise from the fact that for the past twenty years we have been studying the questions of truth. Thus, our approach to the life of St. Teresa is not with the idea of discovering something new, but to clarify and stress the point that the intellect of man is in search for truth, and that only the Divine Truth will wholly satisfy him.

II. *Concept of Vision*

The term vision lends itself to confusion. Let us make the meaning exact. St. John of the Cross once remarked "for a soul to understand is to see." In this sense one can say that any act of knowing, whatever be its object or its mode, is a vision of the truth.

Taken in its ordinary and common usage, the word vision has a much restricted meaning. It is reserved to the perception of a corporeal form by the external sense of sight or by the internal sense of imagination...

Saint Teresa does not use the word vision in its widest sense, applying it to any kind of knowledge; neither does

⁵ Teresa de Jesús, *Spiritual Testimonies*, Collected Works of Saint Teresa", Rel. 58, 3.

⁶ _____, *Relaciones Espirituales*, "Obras Completas de Santa Teresa de Jesús", Spanish Edition, Edited by Alberto Barrientos, 2nd Edit. Espiritualidad (Madrid 1976) Rel. 62.

she reserve it merely to the sense of perception of a corporeal form...⁷

Then in what sense does Saint Teresa use the word vision? What does Saint Teresa mean when she talks about visions? To clarify the meaning and indicate the way Saint Teresa uses the term 'Vision', let us begin with the analysis of the verb "to see", for vision comes from the Latin word *videre* which means to see, and signifies the act of seeing or the object seen by sight.

"To see" means to perceive something by the eye, to behold, to descry. The perception of a thing by the corporeal eye is the primary meaning of the verb to see. Then it was extended to signify the activity of the intellect or imagination since the corporeal sight has some similarities with the act of the imagination and the intellect. When the corporeal eye sees something, it is because it beholds that thing which is a characteristic proper to the presence of the object to the cognitive faculty of the corporeal eye, the imagination and intellect, since the three of them become in act by the way of information. To behold something is to have it in front, to have it present to the senses or understanding for "those things which are present to the senses or understanding are said to be seen."⁸ It is in this sense that Saint John of the Cross¹⁰ says that "for a soul to understand is to see". He clarifies his meaning in the following words:

Since all these apprehensions are intelligible to the understanding, they are described, in a spiritual sense, as 'visible'. And thus the kinds of intelligence that are formed in the understanding may be called intellectual vision. Now, since all the objects of the other senses are all that can be seen, and all that can be heard, and all that can be smelled and tasted and touched, are objects of the understanding in so far as they fall within the limits of truth or falsehood, it follows that, just as to the eyes of

⁷ Marie-Eugene, O.C.D., *I am a Daughter of the Church*. Translated by Sis. M. Verda Clare, C.S.D.C., Christian Classic Inc., Westminster, Me. (The Fides Publishers Association, Chicago, Il, 1979) Vol. II, pp. 251-152.

⁸ *Webster's New College Dictionary*, 2nd Edit., 1956.

⁹ Aquinas, Thomas, *On Truth*, Translated by James V. McGlynn, S.J., Henry Reggebert Company (Chicago, 1953) q. 14, a.2 ad 15.

¹⁰ *Ascent to Mount Carmel*. Translated by Alleson Peers, Image Books, (New York, 1958) Bk. II, Ch. 23, 2.

the body all that is visible in a bodily way causes the bodily vision, even so, to the spiritual eyes of the soul namely, the understanding — all that is intelligible causes spiritual vision; for as we have said, for the soul to understand is for it to see. And thus speaking generally, we may call these four apprehensions visions.

This is what Saint Thomas¹¹ means when he says that “those things are said to be seen that by themselves move the intellect or the sense to know them”. Now, in order to have knowledge, the known thing and the knowing power should be proportionate for “those things are said to be present to the understanding which are not beyond its capacity”.¹² Then, a vision means that something is present and perceived by the eye of the body, the imagination or understanding.

But the primary notion of vision according to the dictionary implies something else, namely, that the object seen by the sight is seen otherwise than the ordinary sight. The extraordinary aspect that vision implies should not be understood as something beyond the natural order, though it does not exclude it as something belonging to the supernatural. What it means is that the object of a vision is perceived by the corresponding sight in a way which is different from that by which man sees ordinarily.

The corporeal sight may have a vision when the object is presented to the eye suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when the thing which appears is of extraordinary magnitude or beauty. The corporeal vision would be supernatural when the object of the sense of sight is made present to the corporeal eye by means of supernatural powers as what happens in supernatural apparitions.

The extraordinary aspect that vision implies with regard to the imagination refers, in the natural order, to the creative power of the imagination. The function of the imagination in the ordinary way is to preserve and to reproduce the images received by the senses, combining the different sensations in order to form the phantasm from which the intellectual abstracts and forms the intelligible species. The creative power of the imagination

¹¹ Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benzinger Brothers, Inc., New York, 1947) II-II, q. 1, a. 4.

¹² ———, On Truth, 1. cit.

is the power guided by the action of intellect in such a way that the new image is something which surpasses the ordinary way of reproducing and representing images in the imagination. It is said that there is a vision because something which was not there appears to the imagination as a result of its power to combine and restructure the images it already had under the influence of the intellect. The vision would be supernatural when the image which appears to the imagination is created by supernatural powers either in the sense that the previous experiences already existing in the imagination are combined in such a way under the influence of a supernatural being, or in the sense that the image is totally imprinted in the imagination by the supernatural power.¹³

In the intellectual level a vision in the natural way refers to an unusual discernment or foresight, or when the object presented to the intellect is of such a nature as to cause in the affection delight and well being. According to Saint John of the Cross,¹⁴ not all intellectual knowledge deserves the term vision in the supernatural aspect, though speaking generally they may be called visions:

But, since these apprehensions present themselves to the soul in the same way as they do to the various senses, it follows that, speaking properly and specifically, we shall describe that which the understanding receives by means of sight (because it can see things spiritually, even as the eyes can see bodily) as vision; and that which it receives by apprehending and understanding new things (as it were through the sense of hearing, when it hears things which are not heard) we describe as revelation; and that which it receives by means of hearing we call locution and that which it receives through the other senses, such as the perception of sweet spiritual fragrance, and of spiritual taste, and of spiritual delight which the soul may enjoy supernaturally, we call spiritual feelings.

Lest some may think that St. John of the Cross is referring to the imaginative visions and not to the intellectual ones, since it seems that the said objects are material objects, let us recall that

¹³ Cf. Royo Marín, *Teología de la Perfección*, B.A.C., 114, Sec. II, (Madrid, 1954) pp. 889-890.

¹⁴ 1. cit

those things which are material, the intellect understands them with matter, and therefore:

From these the soul derives spiritual vision or intelligence, without any kind of apprehension concerning form, image or figure of natural fancy or imagination; these things are communicated to the soul directly by supernatural means and a supernatural process."¹⁵

Therefore, vision for Saint Teresa signifies all apparitions to the external sense of sight as well as those visual images which are in the imagination which are totally produced by supernatural means and a supernatural process. It also includes the intellectual visions in which the intelligible species refer to the object of the sense of sight in understanding material things and, by way of representation, when the objects are immaterial or of spiritual nature, that is, when they are produced by the intervention of supernatural power.

It is not foreign to the mystical experience of Saint Teresa to disclose the manifestation of God according to the need of the moment and with a definite purpose. Some of the mystical experiences are directed to unite the soul with God by way of love, by increasing not only the appreciative aspect of charity, which results from the evaluative judgment of the intellect, but especially the affective part which results from the connaturality of the object of love with the appetite, that make even the pain delightful:

After a short time His Majesty began as He has promised me to give further indication that it was He by increasing the love of God in me to such a degree that I didn't know where it came from (for it was very supernatural); nor did I procure it. I saw that I was dying with the desire to see God, and I didn't know where to seek this life except in death. . . . You hide Yourself from me and afflict me with your love through a death so delightful that the soul would never want to escape from it.¹⁶

And later on, after revealing that the soul only wants God, she came to the manifestation of how the soul is wounded by God.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Teresa de Jesus, *Life*, 29, 8; cf. also 31, 19.

You can't exaggerate or describe the way in which God wounds the soul and the extreme pain this wound produces, for it causes the soul to forget itself. Yet this pain is so delightful that there is no other pleasure in life that gives greater happiness. The soul would always want as I said, to be dying of this sickness.¹⁷

And the culmination of the affective love of God came to her in the Transverberation, when her heart was wounded and set on fire with love of God. Let's hear it from her.¹⁸

I saw close to me toward my left side an angel in bodily form . . . I saw in his hands a large golden dart and at the end of the iron tip there appeared to be a little fire. It seems to me this angel plunged the dart several times into my heart and that it reached deep within me. When he drew it out, I thought he was carrying off with him the deepest part of me; and he left me all on fire with great love of God. The pain was so great that it made me moan, and the sweetness this great pain caused me was so superabundant that there is no desire capable of taking it away; nor is the soul content with less than God. The pain is not bodily but spiritual, although the body doesn't fail to share in some of it, and even a great deal.

In the cognitive aspect there are degrees of manifestations and the vision is limited to what God wants to reveal to her, even when they involve the knowledge of truth. "This is the case in all visions without exception; our effort can neither do nor undo anything when it comes to seeing more or seeing less."¹⁹ And since the visions do not come from herself but from God "we must look at what the Lord desires to show us, when He desires, and as He desires."²⁰ And even when she tried to focus her attention to something in particular, she could not because the vision will cease. Here are her words:²¹

And being aware that He was speaking to me and that I was beholding that great beauty and the gentleness with which He spoke those words with His most beautiful

¹⁷ Ibid.; cf. also *Interior Castle*, IV Dwelling Place, 2, 2-3.

¹⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁰ Ibid., 1.

²¹ Ibid., 2.

and divine mouth — and other times beholding His severity — and strongly desiring to know the color of His eyes, or how tall He was, so that I could describe these things, I never merited to see them. Nor was I able to obtain this knowledge, rather by trying to do so, I would lose the vision entirely.

In the understanding of some truths, there is a progress in knowing them, that goes from the truth manifested in the vision or by other means, to the understanding of its relations with other divine truths and finally to the capability of presenting it in words.²²

Many years passed by in which I read a lot of things and didn't understand anything of what I read. For a long time, even though God favored me, I didn't know what words to use to explain His favors; and this was no small trial. In a way amazing to me, His Majesty when He desires teaches me everything in a moment.

Other visions were prophetic in which she is given the grace not only to see but also to interpret, either in relation to the state of the soul of those who came in contact with her, or the foresight of what will happen in the future as she tells us in her life

It will serve our purpose to say that Saint Teresa distinguished different kinds of mystical phenomena. By visions she is referring to a definite kind of mystical experience, like feelings, locutions, knowing that God is present²³ etc. for, as she said, the Good Lord guided her according to her disposition.²⁴

Finally, to avoid misconceptions and misinterpretations let us have in mind that though there are several appetitive and cognitive faculties in man, there is only one person who executes these activities. The diversity of faculties and powers is a requirement of the nature of man, for man knows and comes in contact with the outside material world only by means of his senses, but the consciousness or awareness of this knowledge and affection, whether it be intellectual or sensitive, transcends the limi-

²² *Life* 12, 6; cf. also *Interior Castle*, VI Dwelling Place, 1, 7-8.

²³ Cf. *Interior Castle*, V Dwelling Place, 1, 1 and VI Dwelling Place, 2, 1-2.

²⁴ Cf. *Life* 25 and 40, 4; also *Interior Castle*, VI Dwelling Place, 4, 8.

tation of matter and is purely immaterial just as the soul is. The reason is simple. The object of this consciousness is not the material world which is understood or loved, but the activity of the soul which is spiritual. This means that even the knowledge of the senses participates of the spirituality of the soul, and that the analysis of how this way of knowing takes place is based on what is generic. It should be understood with the inclusion of what is specific in man, otherwise the "holistic" view will not be attained; even the unity of the person may suffer a blow in such a way that in the metaphysical understanding, the unity of the person will be maintained, but in practice this unity will be threatened.

II. *Visions in the life of St. Teresa and their psychological implications.*

Saint Teresa follows the three-fold division of St. Augustine²⁵, namely: corporeal vision or those things which appear to the eyes of the body; second, the imaginative vision or things which are seen with the eyes of the soul; and thirdly, the intellectual vision which is imageless.

It has to be noted that in the life of Saint Teresa²⁶ the experience of the vision or any other mystical phenomena took place before she knew of their possibility or that it could happen in that way. The other point to be taken into account is that the mystical experience in Teresa does not mean that she can communicate it in words. It was by means of her contact with theologians and most especially by the grace of God that she was able to identify those things which took place in her soul and describe them to us²⁷.

According to Fr. Secundino de Castro²⁸ some mystical authors accuse Saint Teresa of psychologizing too much the spiritual life. Those who accuse her of this forget that she wrote under the rule of obedience, and that the majority of her works are accounts to her confessors of her mystical experience. When she came

²⁵ *De Gen. ad Litt.*, I, 12 c. 7, n. 16; PL 34, 459.

²⁶ Cf. *Life* 7, 7; 28, 1.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ser Cristiano Según Santa Teresa*, Editorial Espiritualidad (Madrid 1981) p. 43.

to teach her sisters she did not follow any manual of theology or prayer, though she had read some, but her personal experience as she often said, especially when she deviated from some common opinion in her time²⁹. Saint Teresa in her simple way of telling things so sublime reveals for us the possibility of human nature, how excellent the human person is that he is capable of entering into so intimate communication with God. It is in this psychological description she offers us, that we will analyze her visions.

1. *Visions with the eyes of the body.*

The sensitive visions are exterior visions of real or apparent objects perceived by our organ of sight. Objectively such a vision is called apparition. We are treating here the supernatural phenomena of vision, hence we are considering only such objects of vision as are made visible to man in a supernatural way. The object may be a natural one, as for example, a living person, but a mode of seeing it is supernatural. It may be a spiritual substance, an angel, a disembodied soul, an evil spirit appearing in human form or other corporeal shape.³⁰

According to St. Teresa, and contrary to what her accounts of visions of Christ, Blessed Virgin, Saints, Souls and other things may seem, she never experienced any corporeal vision or a vision with the eyes of the body. Her way of expressing it is categorical and to the point: "I saw it with the eyes of the soul, for with the eyes of the body I never saw anything or heard anything with the ears of the body..."³¹, and she reiterates it in the same number of the same relation: "never I saw anything with the eyes of the body."³²

Let us examine some of the cases that may call for external vision. There are instances in the life of Teresa when she went into ecstasy by looking at an image of our Lord or some other object. Those instances cannot be interpreted as visions of a supernatural origin since the eyes by natural activity perceive the image of the things seen which is present by natural means, by the existence of the thing or person, the same object that all men

²⁹ Cf. *Introduction to Life, Interior Castle, Way of Perfection.*

³⁰ Pascal Parente, *Mystical Life*, Herald Book Co., (London 1947), p. 227.

³¹ *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 58, 15.

³² *Life* 28, 4.

can perceive. Now, what may be different is the subjective or a personal reaction to the physical and natural vision, since it depends on the condition of the seer and how the subject relates himself to the object that he is seeing. When Saint Teresa went into ecstasy by looking at the image of our Lord, from the natural point of view, she was in love with Jesus Christ, and her love was so great that her only delight was to be with Him. The intensity of love, or concentration is sufficient to put one person in ecstasy or rapture, since rapture and love in the natural way means to put one out of his senses³³. If the rapture or ecstasy had a supernatural source, it has to be under the influence of the supernatural union caused by love, or the intense desire to possess him that puts the person out of his senses, even if there is no corporeal or imaginative vision.

Another kind of vision that may create confusion is the one that took place during compline in the monastery of the Incarnation.

On the eve of the feast of St. Sebastian, the first year in which I was prioress at the Incarnation, at the beginning of the *Salve Regina* I saw the Mother of God descend with a great multitude of angels and sit in the prioress choir stall where there was a statue of our lady. In my opinion I didn't then see the statue but our Lady herself. It seemed to me she looked something like she does in the statue the countess gave me; although the power to discern this was quickly taken away, for my faculties were soon held in great suspension³⁴.

The vision began in a natural way with the external perception of the statue, that later on was transformed into an intellectual vision as she further narrates: "It seemed to me there were angels above the canopies of the stalls in the back and above the front stalls; although they were not in corporeal form, for this was an intellectual vision³⁵". Psychologically speaking it seems that there is a problem; for if it is an intellectual vision, then it has to abstract from the singularity of place and time, and should be imageless, but if it is imageless then how does she describe our Lady in

³³ Cf. Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 28, a.3; II-II, q. 175, a.1; and On Truth, q. 13, a.1.

³⁴ Teresa de Jesús, *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

the vision as looking like the statue the countess gave her? Let us accept that the supernatural aspect of the vision was intellectual as she testifies, and that there is no possibility of confusion for she clearly distinguishes the intellectual from the imaginative one even if they referred to the same object as the angel³⁶. From a close look at the description that Saint Teresa makes of the vision, it can be observed: first, that the suspension of the senses was not sudden but gradual, which means that the senses were active at least at the onset of the vision. Second, though her faculties were in great suspension, it seems that the imagination was informed during the whole vision by the species of the statue of our Lady and the choir. Third, that the vision of the angels was completely intellectual vision, and not by means of any corporeal form. The vision of our Lady was supernatural in terms of the vision of the intellect and the reflection of the intellect to the phantasm, and natural in terms of the singular species that was in the imagination, namely the statue which was in the choir. The psychological development, then, arises from the natural vision of the statue of Our Lady that lingers for a while during the intellectual vision supernaturally present to the intellect. This supernatural intellectual vision causes the suspension of the external senses, and causes the imagination to remain in the representation of the image of Our Lady in the choir. Only the intuitive aspect of the activity of the intellect and the looking at of the imagination remained active, all other aspects of the activity of the other faculties, like comparison, judgment, whether intellectual or imaginative were quiet or "in great suspension". The reason for this kind of vision can be drawn from the purpose for which Our Lady appeared to Saint Teresa "and she told me: "You were indeed right in placing me here; I shall be present in the praises they give my Son, and I shall offer these praises to Him"³⁷.

2. *Imaginative vision, or vision with the eyes of the soul.* The "imaginative visions are visions of objects perceived by the inner sense of the imagination without any outward impressions of the eyes"³⁸, therefore, the imaginative vision is a sensible representation of something which is circumscribed to the imagination and

³⁶ *Life* 29, 13.

³⁷ *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 21.

³⁸ *Pascal Parente*, op. cit., p. 219.

that representation of the object is without any impression of the eyes. In the mental process of the imagination two functions are to be distinguished: the revival of sense images derived from early perceptions and which is called reproductive imagination, and the power to combine these elementary images into new entities which is called the creative or productive imagination. The creative imagination is of two kinds:

a) the fancy which is relatively spontaneous and uncontrolled, and b) the constructive imagination, exemplified in science, inventions and philosophy which is controlled by a dominant plan or purpose.³⁹

No matter how great originality a thing or a creation may have, all its elements have been received in the imagination by previous sensations, whether these sensations remain conscious or unconscious or forgotten. The imagination, even in its creative function of fancy, does not produce any thing which has not been previously experienced. What is new in the creative function is the arrangement, the combination, the utilization of these experiences, *in toto* or partly in the new image that the imagination is producing.

Saint Teresa described the imaginative vision in the book of her *Life* and deals with it again in the *Interior Castle*. Though she has many insights regarding the vision itself, it does not say how it happens for she admits ignorance of this aspect and that "the Lord has not given me understanding of how this is done... And I have never understood, nor have I desired to understand how God causes this vision or how it could come about, nor did I ask, even though I have had contact with competent men of learning."⁴⁰ The supernaturality of the imaginative vision follows the three function of the imagination. The reproductive aspect may be done supernaturally when the species are supernaturally excited or revived. In the constructive imagination the dominant plan or purpose may be distinguished into two aspects: one, natural in the sense that the person is preoccupied with or thinking about something; and the supernatural element, in the sense that the guiding principle is of a supernatural character either through

³⁹ *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Edited by Doget Denis, 1967, "Imagination"

⁴⁰ *Life* 28, 6.

the intellect or directly to the imagination resulting in a new imaginative species surpassing all sense images of previous perceptions. In the case of the fancy, which is more spontaneous, the species of the new image is imprinted in the imagination by a supernatural power. In this latter aspect, only God can imprint new images in the imagination, while the angels and the devil can influence man's imagination in the two first functions.⁴¹

The description that Saint Teresa makes of the imaginative vision refers to the creative imagination in which a new image is produced by the intervention of God. It has spontaneity, it is not the result of a soul who is reflecting on it as it appears in the way our Lord manifested Himself to her "in accordance with my natural weakness," which begins with the hands "which were so beautiful that I would be unable to exaggerate the beauty",⁴² in a succeeding vision Jesus showed her the face and finally Himself entirely. Even the way Jesus Christ appeared to her calls for new imaginative images in a spontaneous way for "it seemed to me in some cases that what I saw was an image, but in many instances it was not; rather it was Christ Himself."⁴³

The imaginative species is of such a nature that it cannot come from the mere activity of man for there is a new species which surpasses the experience of the external senses even if "I should spend many years trying to imagine how to depict something so beautiful, I couldn't have, nor would I have known how to; it surpasses everything imaginable here on earth, even in just its whiteness and splendor."⁴⁴ To erase doubts regarding the newness of the imaginative species and that it was produced by God, here are the words of St. Teresa⁴⁵ when she describes the splendor of the vision.

The splendor is not one that dazzles; it has a soft whiteness, is infused, gives the most intense delight to the sight, and doesn't tire it; neither does the brilliance, in which is seen the vision of so divine a beauty, tire it. It is a light so different from earthly light that the sun's

⁴¹ Cf. Royo Marín, 1. cit.

⁴² Teresa de Jesús, Life 28, 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 5.

brightness that we see appears very tarnished in comparison with that brightness and light represented to the sight, and so different that afterwards you wouldn't want to open your eyes . . . It seems in fact like natural light, and the sunlight seems artificial.

Saint Teresa rejects the possibility that this vision could be the product of the imagination, for there is a great difference between the vision which is produced by God and the one produced by man's activity, for the imaginative vision even when it is "so obscure that it seemed to me an image, not like an earthly drawing no matter how perfect it may be — for I have seen many good ones. It is foolish to think that an earthly drawing can look anything like a vision; it does so no more nor less than a living person resembles a portrait."⁴⁶ Granting that man's imagination has the power to represent our Lord Jesus Christ with a certain degree of vividness, however for Saint Teresa the difference between the representation of Christ in the imaginative vision and the one which is the product of man's activity is like life as compared to death.

When can the soul remain a long while gazing upon this Lord, I don't believe it will be experiencing a vision but some intense reflection in which some likeness is fashioned in the imagination; compared with a vision this likeness is similar to something dead.⁴⁷

In the experience of Saint Teresa visions are mercies and graces of God and therefore they totally depend on the will of God.

God gives it so suddenly that there wouldn't even be time to open your eyes, if it were necessary to open them. For when the Lord desires to give the vision, it makes no difference if they are opened than if they are closed; even if we do not desire to see the vision, it is seen. No distraction is enough to resist it, nor is there power or diligence or care enough to do so. I have clearly experienced this, as I shall say.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 7.

⁴⁷ *Interior Castle*, VI Indwelling Place, 9, 8.

⁴⁸ *Life* 28, 5.

For Saint Teresa goes deeper in her analysis of the imaginative vision and how it differs from those other imaginative impressions which result from man's activity. If they differ in the nature of the imaginative image, it lies in the effects they produce in those who experience them. She distinguishes effects caused in the body when the vision is the result of the activity of man himself:

For if the vision were represented by means of the intellect apart from the fact that it wouldn't produce any of the great effects that a true one produces, the soul would be left exhausted. Doing this would be like wanting to make oneself go to sleep and yet remaining awake because the sleep doesn't come... For if the intellect were to produce the vision, the soul would be left exhausted not sustained and strong, but tired and displeased. One cannot exaggerate the richness that the true vision leaves; it even gives health to the body and leaves it comforted.⁴⁹

She who was so sickly for the great part of her life, experienced how her body regained the necessary health to carry out the works entrusted to her by our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Interior Castle⁵⁰ she excluded from this kind of vision the image which is the product of a weak imagination or of a powerful intellect "that everything they think about seems to be clearly seen" by means of the effects they produced in the soul for "this' imagining doesn't have any effect afterwards, but they are left cold — much more than if they were to see a devotional image..." While the effect that a true vision produces in the soul is a happy peace after great fear and tumult, for in a moment this soul is "left so well instructed about so many great truths that it had no need of any other master."⁵¹

This kind of vision also surpasses the power of the devil, though she acknowledges that the "devil meddles more in these (imaginative visions) than in the intellectual ones" of which she spoke in the previous chapter.⁵² It is true that the power of

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 11.

⁵⁰ VI Indwelling Place, 9, 9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 10.

⁵² *Ibid.* 1.

the devil lends itself to the creation of new images by the utilization of the previous experiences already existing in the imagination, but he has no power to create or to produce new species in the imagination.⁵³ This is the doctrine underlined in the passage of her life when she narrates how the devil cannot be the author of this kind of visions, doctrine that she came to know by her own experience, for the devil can never counterfeit the majesty and splendor of the vision coming from God. According to Saint Teresa there are two ways by which a soul can distinguish a vision coming from God and the one produced by the devil. The first sign is the nature of the image itself:

This vision is very worthy of esteem and, in my opinion, there is no danger in it, because by its effects it is known that the devil has no power here. It seems to me that he has wanted to represent the Lord Himself in this way three or four times by a false representation. He takes the form of flesh, but he cannot counterfeit the image by giving it the glory what it has when it comes from God.⁵⁴

This means that the splendor and majesty and making Himself known as He "is both man and God" etc. cannot be present in the representation of the devil even if that representation takes the form of flesh to make it more real, i.e. that representation is as if it were a living thing and not mere representation. The reason for this is that the representation of the devil cannot go beyond the limits of sense, since all representations, except those in which God produces new imaginative species, originated in the sense for as the Saint⁵⁵ clearly says, "the devil can present a vision, but not with this truth and majesty and these results." What are these results? They are the second way to distinguish one vision from the other since the effects are completely different, even opposed. The effects that the vision coming from God produces in the soul, even if the vision "is represented to it at once and stirs all the faculties and senses with a great fear and tumult" are that it "places them afterward in that happy peace." Contrary to what the vision of the devil does,

⁵³ Cf. Royo Marín, 1. cit.

⁵⁴ Teresa de Jesús, *Life*, 28, 10.

⁵⁵ *Interior Castle*, VI Indwelling Place, 9, 10.

the vision coming from God at first produces a great stirring in this interior world, but "in a moment all remains calm."⁵⁵ The other aspect is the certitude that vision creates in the soul as coming from God for the "more the devil fights against that certitude, the more certain the soul is that the devil could not have left it with so many blessings."⁵⁶ When the representation really comes from the devil, the effects are completely different for the "soul of itself resists and is agitated, displeased, and disturbed since it loses the devotion and delight it had before and remains without any prayer."⁵⁷ Finally she came to share her experience in recognizing what vision is from God and what is from the devil. According to her, anyone who has had the true vision of God can detect the false almost immediately. She based her doctrine in her own experience and advances that according to her even the effective reaction must be different even if they are of the same kind. Here are her words;⁵⁸

although this false vision begins with pleasure and delight, the soul hurls it from itself; and even the delight, I think must be different it doesn't have the appearance of pure and chaste love. The devil very quickly shows who he is.

The first conclusion that can be drawn from what we have been discussing is that of the passivity of the soul in this kind of vision. Generally speaking, what Teresa sees in her imaginative vision is Jesus Christ in His humanity. It is true that there are many other visions in which our Lady, saints, angels, are the objects of her visions, but the imaginative visions of St. Teresa are Christ-centered.

Saint Teresa did have impressions preserved in her imagination as a result of her seeing with the corporeal eyes images representing Christ, and as she said some of them were very good ones.⁵⁹ From all these representations and the description of Jesus Christ by the spiritual authors, and under the control of the intellect, Saint Teresa developed one prototype image of Jesus Christ

⁵⁶ *Life* 28, 10.

⁵⁷ *Interior Castle*, 1. cit.

⁵⁸ *Life*, 1. cit.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Cf. *Life* 22, 3-5

which was a product of her imagination and to which all others were referred, even granting that some statues contributed more than the others to the formation of the image. This prototype image of Christ which was produced naturally was modified or totally changed when the vision of Christ happened in her life.

Saint Teresa⁶¹ clearly states that it was God who produced the image and that the soul is completely passive during the vision. This means that the presence of Christ is not the result of the activity of the saint, rather, it is Christ who makes Himself present to the imagination. The imagination, in order to see something, must be informed by the intentional species caused by the object seen by the external sense. This information takes place simultaneously with the vision of the corporeal eyes requiring the physical presence of the object. However, once the thing is intentionally present in the imagination, its physical presence is no longer needed for the imagination to revive and relive the experience, i.e. to make it intentionally present. These two aspects of the imagination, the act of being first informed by the intentional species when it was produced, and the act of reviving the information after the external sensation ceased, should be clearly understood, specially in the analysis of the supernatural vision.

In the formation of the intentional species of the imagination the physical presence by which the thing exercises its physical causality immutating physically the external sense followed by the psychical immutation, is a prerequisite. It is by means of the external senses that we come in contact with external reality. Since knowledge signifies union of the knower with the known, and the external reality is not united physically with the knowing faculty, then the union takes place by means of the intentional species which "is a creature of God, intended to expand the limited being of some of His creatures so that they might, without being God... become the whole universe."⁶² The intentional species represents the thing existing outside the knower, by way of representation of the image and not of a trace, "for a true image

⁶¹ Cf. o. cit. 28, 7.

⁶² Regis, *Epistemology*, Translated by Imelda Choquette Byrne, McMillan Co. (New York, 1959) p. 213; cf. Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 56, a. 2 ad 3 and q. 80, a. 1.

it is required that: a) one thing proceed from another, b) be like to it, c) in species, or at least in specific sign."⁶³ The third characteristic gives rise to two kinds of image, perfect image which imitates both the true specific nature and the appearance of its model without copying the real nature as the image of kind on a silver coin.⁶⁴ In line with this doctrine we can understand what Teresa means in her comparison of the real person with his protrait for "he cannot look so natural that in the end it isn't recognized as a dead thing" for images cannot represent life, and their causality cannot go beyond their nature. Since the intentional species of the imagination in the imaginative vision represented Jesus and the risen Jesus, then it cannot be caused by an image to which life is added. Life, even when attributed to an imaginary object, is one of the most difficult things to create. What the imagination can reproduce in an inanimate object is the physical movement of external movement to which has to be added the manifestation of the soul, for life transcends the perception of the physical qualities. Jesus is represented as living for if what "is seen is an image, it is a living image, not a dead man, but the living Christ... not as he was in the tomb but as He was when He came out of the tomb after his resurrection."⁶⁵

The question, then, is: Did Teresa see Jesus Christ in an imaginative vision? Though this question generally refers to the external apparitions, there is a reason for asking it here, namely to establish how the species which is in the imagination is representative of Jesus Christ, or how it is formed. The image informing the imagination is the perfect image of Christ, for it has the three characteristics mentioned above. God's action provides the sensible impressions that the physical thing causes with physical activity which the seer exercises in order to produce the imaginative species. There is no productive activity on the part of the seer, only the passive reception of the imaginative species of Jesus Christ, the risen Christ which informs the faculty of imagination, and thus man becomes seer in act when the representative images of Christ is united intentionally with the faculty.

⁶³ Aquinas, Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 10, a. 7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Teresa de Jesús, *Life* 28, 8.

Since the *species intentionalis*, or the representative species which informs the imagination in this vision, is produced by God and the seer is passive, then it is not in the faculty of the seer to direct his vision to this or that particular element. The external causality of the thing in the external senses is substituted by the action of God. Therefore, it does not depend on the activity of the will as to what aspect of the object will be given attention for we must look at what the Lord desires to show us, when He desires, and as He desires . . . If we want to look at some particular thing, the vision ceases." And "our effort can neither do nor undo anything when it comes to seeing more or seeing less." For even when the Saint "strongly desiring to know the color of His eyes, or how tall He was, so that I could be able to describe these things, I never merited to see them."⁶⁶ Saint Thomas⁶⁷ distinguishes two functions in the activity of the sense. One designates the activity by which the sense passes from potency to act by way of information. This he calls apprehension since the things existing in the outside world acquire a new way of being in the faculty of the knower by informing and reducing that faculty to act. Thus the knower becomes in possession of the form of the thing existing outside, as belonging to that thing, which is the first act of the cognitive faculty. The second act is judgment. The judgment of sense is about the object, while the judgment of the intellect is about the conformity of the intentional species with the thing from which it was abstracted. To avoid confusion, we will call the judgment of sense discernment of the object, retaining the term judgment to signify the second operation of the intellect. Discernment of the object results from the completion of the act of knowledge, for 'to know' means a) to possess the form of others, which is accomplished when the intentional species informs the faculty, and b) as belonging to others, which is a kind of discernment not only distinguishing subject and object but also extending itself to signify the consciousness that the representation of the imagination belongs to this thing and not to the other. Thus, the act of knowing is completed when the imagination possesses the intentional form of the thing, and possesses it as belonging to that thing. It is this aspect of

⁶⁶ Cf. Teresa de Jesús, o. cit. 29. 1-3.

⁶⁷ *On Truth*, q. 1, a. 1.

the function of the imagination to which she refers when she tells us: "Certainly it is not necessary here to ask how the soul knows, without having being told, who the Lord is, for it is clearly revealed that He is the Lord of heaven and earth."⁶⁸ and in life⁶⁹ when she was ordered by her confessor, "to make grimaces (higa) to the vision of the Lord caused me the greatest pain. When I saw Him present, I couldn't have believed it was the devil if they broke me in pieces; thus it was a kind of severe penance for me." Saint Teresa saw Christ and by the discernment of the imagination recognized it was Christ, the living Christ and not any other person or mere representation. An indication of this is implied in the phenomenological account of her visions specially in *Life* chapter 28, and *Interior Castle*, VI Indwelling Place.

It has been a tedious task to delve into the imaginative vision by which Saint Teresa became a seer. Our next concern is to consider the function of the imagination by which man is able to revive and relive his experiences. First, let us say that the imaginative visions are brief, and do not last long, which are in consonance with the function of the imagination⁷⁰. The main function of the imagination is to keep the impression of the external senses and to reproduce them even when the object is no longer present. In order that the imagination may be able to revive and to reproduce the previous experiences, these experiences should be received in the imagination itself, which is precisely the act of seeing of the imagination. So the imaginative vision means the reception of the intentional imaginative species in the imagination. The act by which the imaginative species will be impressed in the imagination is the imaginative vision, an act which does not require a long time, since the imagination once in possession of intentional species can revive it as it pleases the seer. Therefore, the imaginative vision itself is a means by which the experience of Christ in His humanity will remain in the soul of Saint Teresa, and in those who experience it. As to how the experience remains in the soul of the seer, the human element should give way to the will of God who is the author of the vision, since the soul is totally passive, receptive. In the ordinary level

⁶⁸ *Interior Castle*, VI Indwelling Place 9, 5.

⁶⁹ 29, 6.

⁷⁰ *Interior Castle*, VI, 9, 4.

the lasting impressions in the imagination depend on the object and the subjective reaction to the vision. On the other hand, in the supernatural level, everything depends on God, for the intensity of the impression and how it will affect the soul belongs to the intention of God in manifesting Himself to the soul."⁷¹ Imaginative vision under the control of a supernatural power.

An imaginative vision, even though the intentional species is not totally produced by the direct intervention of God, belongs to the supernatural level if in the production of the intentional species the guiding principle is not the intellect and will of the seer, but a supernatural power, be it God, angel or devil, which controls the imagination. To this kind of vision belongs that which Saint Teresa⁷² narrates in chapter seven of her *Life*:

While I was once with a person, the Lord at the outset of our acquaintance desired to make me understand that those friendships were not proper for me and give me advice in the midst of such thorough blindness. With great severity, Christ appeared before me, making me understand what He regretted about the friendship. I saw Him with the eyes of my soul more clearly than I could have with the eyes of the body.

Some Teresianists⁷³ question the objectivity of this extraordinary phenomenon, the first vision in the life of Saint Teresa. The reason for their doubts rests on the fact that this vision cannot be compared with those imaginative visions which took place in her life in the succeeding years, the nature of which we have discussed in the preceding pages; and because the saint herself did not mention it in the enumeration of her visions. According to Fr. Castro⁷⁴ and Efrén de la Madre de Dios, this vision was a kind of hallucination produced by the feeling of guilt and anxiety of conscience which little by little reached such proportions that it could not contain the pressure any longer and erupted into the imagination like a volcano.

This assertion contradicts what Saint Teresa says regarding this vision. First, it was an imaginative vision, and a clear per-

⁷¹ Cf. *Life* 28, 9.

⁷² *Life* 7, 6.

⁷³ Cf. Secundino de Castro, o. cit. p. 42.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

ception of Christ who was present to the imagination: "I saw Christ with the eyes of my soul more clearly than I could have with the eyes of my body."⁷⁵ This is the simple narration of the experience, that she saw Jesus Christ. She experienced this kind of vision without knowing that it was possible, a thing that she laments because "it did me much harm not to know that it was possible to see in other ways than with the bodily eyes." She herself wanted to discharge the nature of the vision by imagining that it came from herself or that it came from the devil. Her soul struggled to resist surrender to the Lord and acceptance of the reality of the vision. "The devil urged me in this ignorance and made me think that any other way of seeing was impossible and that I have fancied the vision or it could have come from the devil or other things of this sort." But the reality of the thing, the thing itself, imposed itself upon the Saint and she could not ignore the truth of the thing for "the feeling always remained with me that it was from God and not a fancy. But since the vision was not to my liking, I strove to conceal it from myself", something that she could not do. From her self-analysis, Saint Teresa clearly tells us that the vision was not from her, nor from the devil, but from God, and that even if she wanted to deny it she could not because the vision imposed itself upon her.⁷⁶

Why, then, did Saint Teresa not include this particular vision among those of imaginative nature that she narrated later on? In this vision, though supernatural in the way it was produced, the forms were acquired and already existing in the imagination of Saint Teresa. It was through the intervention of God that the image of Christ became present to her imagination. We are inclined to accept this explanation because its purpose was not, like in the one discussed above, to manifest the glory of Christ, His goodness and Majesty, but only to let her realize once and for all that "He regretted about the friendship". The newness of the vision frightened her to the point that she "didn't want to see that person any more", and she explained the lasting impression it made on her for "though more than twenty years have gone by, it seems to me it is still present".⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Life* 7, 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

3. *Intellectual vision.* An intellectual vision is the intuitive intellectual knowledge of something, without the aid of the sensible image. She described her experience in this way;⁷⁸

Being in prayer on the feast of St. Peter, I saw or, to put it better, I felt Christ beside me. I saw nothing with my bodily eyes or with my soul, but it seemed to me that Christ was at my side — I saw that it was He, in my opinion, who was speaking to me . . . — but since this wasn't an imaginative vision, I didn't see any form. Yet, I felt very clearly that He was always present at my right side and that He was a witness of everything I did. At no time in which I was a little recollected, or greatly distracted, was I able to ignore that He was present at my side.

Similar are the words by which she describes, in VI Mansions of the Interior Castle, this kind of mystical experience as an intellectual vision.⁷⁹ It may happen that someone should think that the description of Saint Teresa belongs to that kind of presence that love requires and that she experienced in a special way. This possible interpretation of the above description is ruled out by the succeeding clarifications she made:

Returning to the discussion of this kind of understanding, it seemed to me that the Lord in every way wants this soul to have some knowledge of what goes in heaven. I think that just as in heaven you understand without speaking (which I certainly never knew until the Lord in His goodness desired that I should see and show Himself to me in a rapture) so it is in this vision. For God and the soul understand each other only through the desire of His Majesty has that it understands Him, without the use of any other means devised to manifest the love these two friends have for each other.⁸⁰

She clarifies that point further when she compares the intellectual vision with the imaginative one, for though they happen simultaneously, each one has its own object.

⁷⁸ *Life* 27, 2.

⁷⁹ IV Indwelling Place 8.

⁸⁰ *Life* 27, 10.

These two kinds of vision almost always come together. This is the way they occur: with the eyes of the soul we see the excellence, beauty, and glory of the most holy humanity; and through the intellectual vision, which was mentioned, we are given an understanding of how God is powerful, that He can do all things, that He commands all and governs all, and that His love permeates all things.⁸¹

In the experience of Saint Teresa the range of the things seen by the intellectual vision goes from the understanding of material beings to the vision of spiritual substances, culminating in the vision of the Holy Trinity. The vision of God is our point of interest, but for reason of clarity we will include in our consideration the visions of other substances.

Phenomenology of the vision: Saint Teresa finds difficulty in explaining this kind of vision because there is no sensible perception either by the external sense or by the imagination, since she "didn't see any form," but a representation "through knowledge given to the soul that is clearer than sunlight." To manifest how the presence of Christ is in the intellect, since there is no sensible form, she utilizes some reference to other kinds of sensations and feelings though she clearly affirms that this kind of mystical experience is by way of vision: "I couldn't help knowing that He was beside me, that I saw and felt him clearly."⁸²

But the kind of presence that takes place in the intellectual vision goes beyond the presence of Christ felt even in the prayer of union. In the prayer of union the presence of Christ is the result of love, while this union is caused by knowledge, which is by way of information. Here are her words:⁸³

This vision is not like the presence of God that is so often felt, especially by those who experience the prayer of union or quiet, in which it seems that in desiring to begin to practice prayer we find Him to speak to, and it seems we know that He hears us through the effects of spiritual feelings of great love and faith that

⁸¹ *Life* 28, 9.

⁸² Cf. *Life* 27; and *Interior Castle*, VI Indwelling Place, 8.

⁸³ *Life* 27, 4.

we tenderly experience, and through other resolutions. This presence is a great favor from God... but it is not a vision. In this vision it is seen clearly that Jesus Christ, son of the Virgin, is present.

Then this kind of vision belongs to the understanding inasmuch as it forms simple quiddities of things as what the thing is, and for this reason it is called by Avicenna the imagination of the understanding.⁸⁴ This poses an epistemological problem. How did the intellect of Saint Teresa understand the singular nature of Jesus Christ, when the intellect of man only knows the singular by means of reflecting over the phantasm. This is the problem we will deal with in the next consideration of the visions of Saint Teresa. But there is another problem that was thrown to her by her confessors; "who said it was Jesus Christ?" How can she recognize it was Jesus when she did not see Him with the corporeal eyes of the soul? Her answer is revealing: "Before He told me He impressed upon my intellect that it was He, and before doing this latter He told me he was present but I didn't see Him."⁸⁵ Though she acknowledges that she could not explain how she knew it was Jesus, nevertheless, despite the absence of corporeal or imaginative vision there was no doubt in her mind it was Jesus.

He asked her how since she didn't see anything she knew that it was our Lord: What kind of face He had. She told him she didn't see anything, she didn't see any face, and that she couldn't say any more than what she had said, that what she did know was that He was the one who spoke to her and that the vision had not been fancied.⁸⁶

And she further continues:⁸⁷

This vision comes in another unexplainable, more delicate way. But it is so certain and leaves such certitude; even much more than the other visions do because in the visions that come through the senses one can be deceived, but not in the intellectual vision.

⁸⁴ Quoted by Thomas Aquinas, *On Truth*, q. 14, a. 1.

⁸⁵ *Life* 27, 5.

⁸⁶ *Interior Castle*, VI Indwelling Place 8, 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Saint Teresa struggles in explaining how she could be so convinced that it was Jesus Christ. She cites some similarities, because that which is intuitively evident cannot be proven. A proof is a kind of mediate evidence but what she is dealing with is a case of immediate evidence, therefore, the intellect is moved by its own object, and it cannot doubt about the visions and the thing seen. These are her words:⁸⁸

If a person who I had never seen but only heard of should come to speak to me while I was blind or in the pitch dark and tell me who he was, I would believe it; but I wouldn't be able to assert as strongly that it was that person as I would if I saw him in the case of this vision, I would; for without being seen, it is impressed with such clear knowledge that I don't think it can be doubted...

Saint John of the Cross⁸⁹ resolves the possibility of knowing material things by means of a special light coming from God:

"The vision of the corporeal things has respect to all material things that are in Heaven and on earth, which the soul is able to see, even while it is still in the body, by the aid of a certain supernatural illumination, derived from God, where it is able to see all things that are not present."

This light that comes from God enables the seer to see even the singular by forms that immediately refer to matter as well as form, and thus, the soul knows by a direct vision not only the matter in general, but also matter in singular.⁹⁰

Man's intellect in the state of union with the body does not know the singular in material things directly and primarily, for the principle of singularity in material things is the individual matter. Man, then, knows the singularity directly; the intellect however, knows the singular immaterially and in the abstract, which is to know the universal,⁹¹ for what the intellect knows directly is the universal, and indirectly the singular represented

⁸⁸ *Life* 27, 5.

⁸⁹ O. cit., Bk. II, 24, 1.

⁹⁰ Aquinas, Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 10, a. 5.

⁹¹ ———, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 89, a. 1.

in the phantasm. Even if the intellect is a higher power than the sense and it can know what the senses know, it does in a higher way. "Thus, the intellect can know what the sense knows, but in a way that is superior. For the sense knows these things according to their material dispositions and external accidents, but the intellect penetrates to the intimate nature of the species which is in these individuals."⁹²

However, man's intellect in the state of separation from the body can know the singular, not by means of abstraction from the phantasm or by a kind of reflection or the phantasm but by:

the infusion of the species by God, in that way it is possible for the intellect to know singulars. For as God knows all things, universal and singulars, by His Essence, as the cause of universal and individual principles, so likewise separated substances can know singulars by species which are a kind of participated similitude of the Divine Essence.⁹³

How these species are infused by God in the intellect is explained by Saint Thomas when he discusses how the angels come to know the singulars, though the angelic knowledge differs from the knowledge of the separated intellect in perfection regarding the comprehension and extension of that knowledge.

The manner in which an angel knows singular things can be considered from this, that, as things proceed from God in order that may subsist in their own natures, so likewise they proceed in order that they may exist in the angelic mind. Now it is clear that there comes forth from God not only whatever belongs to their universal nature, but likewise all that goes to make up their principles of individualization; since He is the cause of the entire substance of the thing, as to both its matter and form. And for that much as He causes, He knows; for His knowledge is the cause of a thing. Therefore, as by His essence, by which He causes all things, God is the likeness of all things, not only as to their universal natures, but also as to their singularity, so through the species imparted to them do the angels know things, not only as in their universal nature, but likewise in their

⁹² Aquinas, Thomas, *On Truth*, 1. cit.

⁹³ ———, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 89, a. 4.

individual conditions, in so far as they are the manifold representations of that one simple essence.⁹⁴

The knowledge of the singular by man's intellect in the state of separation is conditioned by the determination of the former knowledge he had in this life, or by some affection, or by natural aptitude or by the disposition of the divine order.⁹⁵

From this doctrine of how the human intellect knows the singular some clarifications can be made as to how Saint Teresa was able to see material singular things with intellectual vision. First, the intellect must withdraw from the natural way of knowing in the state of union with the body, and thus Saint Teresa experienced her intellectual vision in the state of ecstasy or rapture in which all the sensible powers are suspended, for ecstasy "means to be placed outside of oneself... In the apprehensive power, a man is said to be placed out of himself, when he is placed outside the knowledge proper to him."⁹⁶ Second, the intellectual power is increased by the illumination coming from God, and third, that God creates in the intellect the intelligible species by which man knows the material things in their singularity.

Vision of God. The hidden God, the mystery of God is far beyond the natural range of the cognitive faculties of man. God who abides in the recesses of the soul is there as the hidden God, as the unknown God waiting for the soul to go down, to descend to the bottom of her conscience where God will manifest Himself to the soul. In the experience of Saint Teresa, God manifested himself to her soul through the humanity of Christ. The deepening in the understanding of the mystery of Christ led her to the encounter with the Divinity. Saint Teresa lived the mystery of God in different ways, but we will reduce her mystical experience to three main aspects: a) God as the First Truth, b) the majesty of God in His divinity, and c) the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Saint Teresa's first experience of God as the First Truth, like any other believer, was the virtue of faith. Faith, under the consideration of its formal object, is nothing else than the First

⁹⁴ Op. cit., I, q. 57, a. 2.

⁹⁵ Aquinas, Thomas, op. cit., I, q. 89, a. 4.

⁹⁶ ———, op. cit., I-II, q. 28 a. 3.

Truth, since the reason for the intellect to assent to certain truths is because God had revealed them. This means that the intellect assents to the revealed truth, not because it perceives the identity or non-identity of the subject and the predicate, which is the evidence of the thing but because the revealed truth is considered the good of intellect, for the possible intellect is so determined that it adheres to one member without reservation. This happens sometimes because of the intelligible object and sometimes because of the will, for:

the will chooses to assent to one side definitely and precisely because of something which is enough to move the will, though not enough to move the understanding, namely since it seems good or fitting to assent to this side . . . And

Thus, we are moved to believe what God says because we are promised eternal life as a reward if we believe. And this reward moves the will to assent to what is said, although the intellect is not moved by anything which it understands.⁹⁷

So the evidence of the thing which is what moves the intellect to assent to one part of the contradictory is substituted in faith by the convenience that the act of believing has for the will. The vision that Saint Teresa⁹⁸ narrates in her *Life* seems more of an affirmation of the virtue of faith which reaches God as the First Truth, than the understanding of God as the First Truth.

It seemed I was carried into and filled with that majesty I at other times understood. Within this majesty I was given the knowledge of a truth which is the fulfillment of all truths. I don't know how to explain this because I didn't see anything. I was told without seeing anyone, but clearly understood that it was Truth itself telling me: "This is not a small thing I do for you, because it is one of the things for which you owe Me a great deal; for all the harm that comes to the world comes from its not knowing the truths of the Scripture in clarity and in truth; not one iota of Scripture will fall sort."

⁹⁷ Aquinas, Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 14, a. 1.

⁹⁸ *Life* 40, 1.

The illumination does not go beyond the understanding of the object of faith, and the manifestation that this gift is in itself a great deal. The mystery remains beyond the comprehension of the intellect, but the reason for credibility, or the motive of faith is so strengthened that "one understands very clearly that God alone is Truth, unable to lie."⁹⁹ In this vision, there was not a new truth but the object of faith itself which extends to everything revealed by God because God has revealed it, so she continues: "To me it seemed as I had always believed this, and that all the faithful believe it"¹⁰⁰ Theoretically, her words manifest what is the meaning of believing, but the assent of the intellect does not carry the full conviction and confidence of a true believer, "He told me, 'Alas, daughter, how few there are who truthfully love Me! for if they love me, I would reveal to them my secrets.'"¹⁰⁰ The change here of love for believe indicates that the vision is referring to the virtue of faith for as St. Augustin¹⁰² says: "Man can do other things unwillingly, but he can believe only if he wills it." The movement of the will is love.

The secrets of the Lord were opened to her when God gave the understanding "of what Truth itself is." In the understanding of what Truth itself is the object is God Himself as the eternal Truth, an aspect of the nature of God: "I am the Truth." God's act of being is His own understanding, which means that by the same act by which He is, He understands, for in God there is no potentiality, all is pure and perfect actuality. Truth by definition means the conformity of the intellect with the thing, or when the thing acquires a mode of being in the intellect. Thus, truth is in the intellect when the intellect apprehends the thing and is aware of this apprehension, while truth is in the thing when the thing has the capacity to be known, which capacity is the actuality of what God knows or understands is God Himself, and that the intellect who knows and the thing known are one and the same thing, one and the same act. We understand in a composite way because we are composite and our knowledge is caused by composite beings, even our knowledge of simple things we know

⁹⁹ Teresa de Jesús, *Interior Castle*, VI Indwelling Place 10, 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Life* 40, 1.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *In Joann*, super 6:44, XXVI (PL 25, 1607).

them in a composite manner. For this Saint Teresa says:¹⁰³ "I understand extraordinary truths about this Truth more than if any learned men had taught me." The manifestation of God as the supreme truth, as the first truth is also the manifestation of how the other truths depend on this Divine Truth, and are derived from it.

This truth, which I say was given to my understanding, is in itself truth, and it is without beginning or end; all other truths depend upon this truth, just as other loves depend upon this love, and all other grandeurs upon this grandeur."¹⁰⁴

Vision of one God. God in His dealings with the soul does not not satisfy Himself with strengthening the faith of man, but goes to manifest Himself in ways that are more sublime, so much so that they become even more difficult for Teresa to describe them. The manifestation of God may follow the biblical descriptions as when she saw the throne "where the divinity was." Although, I didn't see the Divinity, I knew with an indescribable knowledge that it was there. Seemingly some animals...¹⁰⁵. Sometimes she uses a comparison to manifest how all things are represented in God especially "every thing we do is visible in this diamond since it is of such a kind that it contains all things within itself,"¹⁰⁶ or when she tries to describe the ugliness of sin which takes place in God Himself: "Let's suppose that God is like an immense and beautiful dwelling or palace and that his palace, as I say, is God Himself. Can the sinner, perhaps so as to engage in his evil deeds leave this palace? No, certainly not; rather, within the palace itself, that is within God Himself the abominations, indecent actions, and evil deeds committed by us sinners take place."¹⁰⁷

The communication of God to the soul increases as God manifests Himself in such a way that "it seems the soul sees the secrets of God himself, for they are not visions of the sacred humanity...

¹⁰³ *Life* 40, 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Life* 30, 32.

¹⁰⁶ *Life* 40, 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Interior Castle*, VI Indwelling Place, 10, 3.

In this vision it is revealed how all things are seen in God and how He has them all in Himself."¹⁰⁸

What strikes her is the majesty of God, that grandeur which catches the soul in awe. That tremendous majesty that even at the thought, of Jesus Christ all the demons tremble, and makes her exclaim: "O my Grandeur and Majesty! What are you doing, my all powerful Lord? Look upon whom You bestow such sovereign favors!... How do You bear it, my God?"¹⁰⁹ The understanding of this Majesty and Grandeur made her realize that "one must not put limits on God... His Majesty has the power to do whatever He wants and is eager to do many things for us."¹¹⁰

The culmination of the revelation of God to the soul is in the Seventh Dwelling Place of the Interior Castle¹¹¹ when "our good God desires to remove the scales from the soul's eyes and let it see and understand, although in strange way, something of the favor He grants it." This understanding is the vision of the Holy Trinity.

Visions of the Holy Trinity. Saint Teresa¹¹² at the beginning of the Interior Castle complains that there are souls who do not "care at all about entering in the castle, nor do they know what lies within that most precious place, nor who is within." Through the different kinds of prayer, she guides us to the interior of this castle where His Majesty awaits to show Himself to those who really seek Him. In the seventh mansion where God abides, the mystery of God envelopes the soul in such a way that she experiences the presence of God as one and Three Persons.

In this seventh dwelling place the union comes about in different ways: our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul's eye and let it see and understand, although in a strange way, something of the favor He grants it.¹¹³

The favor that she is referring to is the vision of the Blessed Trinity indwelling in the soul. "When the soul is brought into

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 2; and cf. *Life* 40, 9.

¹⁰⁹ *Life*, 40, 4.

¹¹⁰ *Interior Castle*, VI Indwelling Place, 11, 1.

¹¹¹ VII Indwelling Place, 11, 1.

¹¹² I Indwelling Place, 1, 5.

¹¹³ VII Indwelling Place 1, 6.

the dwelling place the Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons, through an intellectual vision is revealed."¹¹⁴ The revelation of the Blessed Trinity to the soul goes beyond the knowledge of this truth by faith. "For by means of the strongest painting and a very clear light, I was given an understanding that was an activity very different from merely holding this truth by faith."¹¹⁵

The first aspect of the encounter of Teresa with the Blessed Trinity is the realization of the divine presence: "My soul began to enkindle, and it seemed to me that I knew clearly in intellectual vision that the entire Blessed Trinity was present."¹¹⁶ But the vision did not last a few seconds, but became habitual, and it seems that for some time it was continuous. "I have experienced this presence of the three Persons, which I mentioned at the beginning (May 29, 1571) up to this day which is the feast of the commemoration of St. Paul (June 30). They are very habitually present in my soul."¹¹⁷

The Saint acknowledges this because she was used to the experience of the presence of Jesus, "there was some obstacle to my seeing the three Persons, although I understand there is only one God."¹¹⁸ This should not be interpreted that her previous experiences of the sacred humanity of Jesus interfered with the vision of the Blessed Trinity directly, but as the Lord told her while reflecting on these things, "that I was mistaken in thinking of things of the soul through comparison with corporeal things, that I should know that these spiritual things are very different,"¹¹⁹ and when the consideration is about God, then the words of God to Saint Teresa are clear: Don't try to hold Me within yourself, but try to hold yourself within Me."¹²⁰ For this reason the visions of the Holy Trinity are not direct visions but by way of representations: "In this state my soul understood by way of representation (like an illustration of the truth), in such a way that my dullness could perceive, how God is three and one."¹²¹

The mystery of the Holy Trinity was so clearly unveiled to the mind of Saint Teresa that she manifests to her confessor:

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 42.

¹¹⁶ O. cit., Rel. 13, 1.

¹¹⁷ O. cit., Rel. 14.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ O. cit., Rel. 13, 1.

"I see clearly that the Persons of the Trinity are distinct."¹²² Though one person is not the other, there is only one God, one substance, one knowledge, there are three persons and only one God; a doctrine that according to her is well understood by the soul "through an admirable knowledge" that surpasses that of faith, for "it knows in such a way that what we hold by faith, it understands, we say through sight."¹²³ It seems that before God grants this wonderful vision the soul is prepared in some way as to her powers of the soul.¹²⁴ This is how it happened:

First there comes an enkindling in the spirit in a manner of a cloud of magnificent splendor; and these Persons are distinct, and through an admirable knowledge the soul understands as a most profound truth that all three Persons are one substance, and one power and one knowledge and one God alone.¹²⁵

The revelation of the mystery of the Holy Trinity does not end with the understanding of how in God Who is one, there are three Persons, but this revelation includes the proper act of the Second Divine Person, namely, the Incarnation of the Word. "In this state He gave me an understanding of things I didn't know how to speak afterward. Among them was how the Person of the Son, and not the other, took flesh."¹²⁶ Though she does not mention anything about how one person proceeds from the other or how they are related, she manifests that "these three Persons love, communicate with, and know each other,"¹²⁷ but then when she comes to the consideration of how this can happen: "Well, if each one is by Himself, how is it that we say that all three are one essence, and believe it? Well, how do we see that the three Persons are separate, and how did the Son take on human flesh and not the Father and Holy Spirit? then she clearly says "That this I haven't understood." She was given the vision of the fact but not the understanding of how it happened. What matters for her is that "I know well that in that work so marvelous all the three were present, and I don't get involved

¹²² O. cit., Rel. 59, 21.

¹²³ *Interior Castle*, VII Indwelling Place, 1, 6.

¹²⁴ *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 13.

¹²⁵ *Interior Castle*, 1, cit.

¹²⁶ *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 51.

¹²⁷ O. cit., Rel. 29, 3.

thinking about this.¹²⁸ And that the three Divine Persons communicate with the soul. Each Person speaks to her though the Father only spoke once¹²⁹ and each one granted her a favor¹³⁰ and the three "explain those words of the Gospel: that He and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul that loves Him and keeps His commandments."¹³¹

Though the feeling of the presence of the Blessed Trinity was habitual and one of the visions lasted for a month, from May 30, 1571 to June 30, 1571, it was not experienced to such an extent that the operation of other faculties of the Saint were suspended, for this vision, or habitual experience of the Blessed Trinity "is not felt so fully, I mean so clearly, as when revealed the first time or at other times when God grants the soul this gifts."¹³² The contemplation of the Blessed Trinity in its clear manifestation will mean the suspension of all the other activities, of all other vital operations, and this will signify the end of the pilgrim's way of the seer as she acknowledges "for if the presence were felt so clearly, the soul would find it impossible to engage in anything or live among people." "What happens is that the soul engages in all the activities pertaining to the service of God, for she is confident of the divine company and knows that if the "soul does not fail God, He will never fail it."¹³³ The knowledge of the presence of the Blessed Trinity in an habitual manner is described by her in the following words:¹³⁴

Let us say that the experience resembles that of a person who after being in a bright room with others finds himself, once the shutters are closed, in darkness. The light by which he could see them is taken away. Until it returns he doesn't see them, but not for that reason does he stop knowing they are present.

The opening of the shutters by which the light will enter does not depend on the soul, but entirely on the will of God since "to see them does not lie in its power" but in the power of God Who "desires that the window of the intellect be opened."¹³⁵

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ O. cit., Rel. 59, 23.

¹³⁰ O. cit., Rel. 13.

¹³¹ *Interior Castle*, VII Indwelling Place, 1, 6.

¹³² *Ibid.* 9.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 8.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Did Saint Teresa see the essence of God? We have followed Saint Teresa through her mystical experience and have seen how she encountered God as the First Truth, as God one and three, and the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. The question that naturally arises from the consideration of these encounters is: Did Saint Teresa see the essence of God in this life? The possibility of seeing the essence of God is consequent to the final destiny of man, the knowledge of which is derived both from faith and from reason. If man cannot know the essence of God, then "he never attains beatitude, or his beatitude would consist in something else beside God, which is contrary to faith."¹³⁶ But even in his nature, man experiences the desire to transcend the sensible things and long for that which is beyond. This desire demands fulfillment, for it is contrary to reason for one to have a natural desire and for the nature itself to render that desire void. Then, "it must be absolutely granted that the blessed see the essence of God."¹³⁷ But the question that should be answered is that of the possibility of the vision of God's essence in this present state of wayfaring, for if man cannot see the essence of God in this life, then the vision of Saint Teresa could not have been a vision of God as He really is.

Man does not see the essence of God in his present human condition. The knowledge of God that we can have in this present life should not surpass human nature and our mode of existence. Since our natural knowledge begins with the senses, it cannot go beyond what is included in the sensible things. In this present life, man is restricted to the quiddity of the material thing and those things that he can know through it. The reason for this is that:

Our intellect has, in our present state of wayfaring, a determined reaction to forms abstracted from sensible things... It cannot know God in this life through that form which is His essence, though it is in this way that he is known by the blessed in heaven."¹³⁸

Even our knowledge of separated substances is through the material ones and this knowledge cannot be perfect, for immaterial substances cannot be known by us in such way as to make us

¹³⁶ Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 12, a. 1.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ ———, *The Trinity*, Translated by Sis. Rose Emmanuella Brennan, S.H.N., Herder Book Co. (London, 1946), q. 1, a. 2.

know the quiddity. Then, man comes in contact with the world of spirits indirectly and inasmuch as they are related to the material world. The way opened to man in order to know God is by way of casualty and by way of remotion. The material things, which are the proper object of the intellect in this present life, as effects of God do not equal their cause, and consequently they cannot manifest what the cause is, they can only manifest its existence. From the knowledge of God, by way of remotion, man is able to know something about God, but this knowledge is more of what He is not, than what He is.¹³⁹

Man may know something about God in the positive way, through divine revelation, by which God manifests Himself to man and by which the weakness of the intellect is strengthened by faith. But faith is an imperfect knowledge since the intellect holds something as true not because the thing moves the intellect to assent but because the will moves the intellect to accept that truth as good. This leads us to the question: Can the human intellect aided by God in the state of wayfaring see the essence of God?

...in the attempt to arrive at some knowledge of God, the human mind is treatly assisted when its natural light is fortified by illumination: namely, the light of faith and that of the gifts of Wisdom and Understanding, by which the mind is elevated above itself in contemplation in as much as it knows God to be above anything which it naturally apprehends?¹⁴⁰

But as long as the intellect understands by reverting to the phantasm, the essence of God is unattainable to man. This is because our knowledge in the state of wayfaring begins with the senses and cannot go beyond what is given in the phantasm for our intellect is connaturally related to phantasms. Therefore, the only possible way by which man in the state of wayfaring is can possibly see God is when he is "unconscious of the bodily senses", for to see the essence of God "which is the most perfect act of understanding, there must be an abstraction from those things which of their nature interfere with the excessive intensity of the act of understanding, and which are hindered by this same intensity."¹⁴¹ This means that God is related to the soul directly,

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Aquinas, Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 13, a. 4.

thus the communication of God with the soul is without the act of the senses. However, this does not make the soul blessed as it will be in heaven, since the light of glory, by which the intellect will be able to see God in His essence, can be infused in two ways: First, "it follows the mode of a form which becomes connatural and abiding."¹⁴² This belongs to the blessed in heaven by which the splendor becomes their property. Second: "the mind receives the light of glory as a passing impression" and "they do not see everything as the blessed do, especially after the resurrection."¹⁴³ The soul sees only things which the rapture is ordained to communicate." For the intellect, then, to see God, two things are required: First, on the part of the intellect, God by the similitude called the "light of Glory" increases the power of the intellect to make it fit to see the essence of God; Second, at the same time God unites Himself to the created intellect, not by way of information, but by some kind of relation. By this union God is in the created intellect without any similitude, as the *object* of the intellect, i.e. we see Him "*face to face*."¹⁴⁴

The positive answer to the theoretical possibility that man can see God in this life by special favor from God, does not answer the question formulated about the visions of Saint Teresa, though it is a prerequisite. The answer should be sought in the existential facts of her visions, and her accounts of those visions where she narrates her encounters with God. The words used by her to describe her visions of the Holy Trinity indicate that she saw the blessed Trinity by way of representation rather than a direct vision.¹⁴⁵ The word *representation* indicates that the thing is not reached directly but by means of something else. That she is using the term in this sense is clear from her account of her vision of the Blessed Trinity on May 29, 1571, where she says: "in this state my soul understood by a certain kind of representation (like an illustration of the truth), in such a way that my dullness could perceive how God is three in one."¹⁴⁶ However, this representation is not taken from sensible things, since the sensible things could not give the proper likeness which the vision indicates and she testifies in the subsequent report of conscience:

¹⁴² *Ibid.* a. 2.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Cf. ———, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 12.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Interior Castle*, VII Indwelling Place, 1; and *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rels. 13, 14, 51, 54, etc.; and *Life*, 27, 9, and 39, 25.

¹⁴⁶ *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 13, 1.

"And the Lord told me... that I was mistaken in thinking of things of the soul through comparison with corporeal things, that I should know that these spiritual things are very different..."¹⁴⁷

This way of seeing the Blessed Trinity, by way of representation, seems to contradict what she says later on in the *Interior Castle*,¹⁴⁸ namely, that "these three Persons are distinct, and through an admirable knowledge, the soul understands as a most profound truth that all three Persons are one substance." Is the understanding of this most profound truth by means of a representation seen in the vision or does it signify that the soul is related to God, as the saints in heaven.? The words which follow seem to indicate that she had a direct vision of the Blessed Trinity since she makes reference to knowledge obtained by faith: "It knows in such a way that what we hold by Faith it understands, can we say by sight."¹⁴⁹ This interpretation seems to be confirmed by what she says later where she distinguishes the clear feeling of the presence of the Blessed Trinity and the habitual presence she had during those days, and how in the latter way the soul can engage in other vital activities, while in the former one "it would be impossible to be engaged in anything else, or even to live among people."¹⁵⁰

Another vision, her description of which leads us to think that she was granted the favor of seeing God by His essence, is her vision of God as the First and eternal Truth. "It happens, she says, very quickly and ineffably that God will show within Himself a truth... God is everlasting Truth."¹⁵¹ Her way of describing it indicates that it was a vision of God in His essence, since the understanding was about God as the First Truth, and how all other truths are derived from this First Truth. Here is how she describes her experience;¹⁵²

It happens in deep rapture that after the time is past in which the soul is in union (for when it is in union the faculties are totally absorbed, and this doesn't last long as I said), the soul remains recollected and cannot

¹⁴⁷ O. cit., Rel. 14.

¹⁴⁸ VII Indwelling Place, 1, 6.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Life*, 40, 7.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

yet return to itself in exterior things; but the two faculties, the memory and the intellect, are left almost delirious and mad.

In this state of rapture she was given to understand that God is the Truth and that this "divine Truth showed itself to her..." That the understanding and vision of God as the First Truth was a true vision of the essence of God is derived from the understanding that God as Truth is known as the first act.

Saint John of the Cross¹⁵³ referring to these visions which required the illumination of the light of glory says that they do not occur "in this life save occasionally and fleetingly, when making an exception to the conditions which govern our natural life, God so allows it." We are of the opinion that St. Teresa was one of the exceptions, and that God manifested her His essence. She was one of those very few to whom was given this grace "for God performs such a thing in those that are very strong in the spirit of the Church and laws of God."¹⁵⁴ Our reason is based on the way she described her visions and how God manifested Himself to her, and how by reflection on the things that she saw in her vision she came to understand other things, and that the likeness she recalled after the vision is something like relics that the vision left impressed in her soul.

For although he saw — Saint Thomas¹⁵⁵ is analyzing the vision of Saint Paul — the very Word of God through His essence, and from the vision of that essence knew many truths... nevertheless, by reason of the vision of the Word, certain likeness of the things which he saw were imprinted on his understanding. And with these likeness he could see afterwards the things which he has previously seen through the essence of the Word. Later, by applying these intelligible species to the individual intentions or forms which were stored in his memory or imagination, he could remember things which he had seen previously.

In this way, we can understand all those things she said about the reflection on the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and how the Lord told her that she should not use similarities of the corporeal

¹⁵³ O. cit., Bk. II, 24, 3.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Aquinas, Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 13, a. 2 ad 4.

world to understand the things of the soul. Even the subsequent understanding of how all the things which are contained in the Holy Scripture are true, may be a reflection of the past vision. By the application of the likeness that she had from the visions to the understanding of those truths which are connected in a special way with God, as the First Truth, they should be considered as reflections on the visions and not a proper vision of God.

IV. *Struggle for Certitude.*

"At long last I die as a daughter of the Church" could be the triumphant cry of Teresa after a long struggle. Teresa at the end of her journey enters into the calm waters of knowing her fidelity to her faith. It is true that her faith never faltered "for she always was and is firm in the faith,"¹⁵⁶ but her life has been a continuous struggle, a continuous testing, in order to be reassured that her visions, her revelations, her mystical life were within the catholic orthodoxy. Saint Teresa became uneasy from the very first moment that she experienced God in an extraordinary way for "any supernatural favor the Lord grants me frightens me at first, when it is new."¹⁵⁷ On one hand, she is sure that everything going on in her inner life was coming from God that it was Jesus Christ who appeared to her in different forms and occasions, that the Blessed Trinity manifested itself to her. It could not be any other way. She saw, and her seeing produced in the intellect the certitude of the vision and that is came from God. On the other hand, the testimony of the representatives of God, like her confessors, raised doubts and fears in her mind that these visions could be but a fancy of her imagination or worse still, that it could be the work of the devil. It was a conflict of the inner conviction of self against the external testimony of the exponents of faith.

Let us begin with the torment one meets with from the confessor who is so discreet and has so little experience that there is nothing he is sure of: he fears everything and finds everything something to doubt because he sees these unusual experiences.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Teresa de Jesús, *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 58, 6.

¹⁵⁷ *Life*, 28, 1.

¹⁵⁸ *Interior Castle*, VI Indwelling Place, 9, 10.

In the process, she lost her equilibrium, her peace of mind and she entered into the "dark night of the spirit" as St. John of the Cross describes it. This dark night covers the foundation of human conscience itself, reaches the foundation of the human soul. It was the subjective knowledge and certitude produced by God Himself in her soul as the result of her visions of God against her spirit of faith that moved her to accept the interpretation coming from those who were officially appointed by the Church. Let's see how we can penetrate into this struggle and understand the mystery of her doubt.

1. *Man in the face of truth.* Before we come to the psychological analysis of the doubt of St. Teresa, it would help if we considered the attitude of man in the face of truth, for it is in this light that we will understand her psychological battle.

Man seeks truth since his intellect is ordained to know the truth and to know it with certitude. It is in knowing with certainty, or in this possibility, that man establishes his becoming. So much so, that when man cannot reach this certitude by his own means due to lack of intellectual capacity for truth, he looks for something on which he can base his certitude even outside himself. The different psychological situations of man in the presence of truth go from the pure state of not knowing to the perfect act of knowing with certainty, from the pure potency to the perfect act.

The first psychological state of man regarding truth is the state of not knowing. State which unfolds itself into nescience, which is pure negation of knowledge, and ignorance, which means privation of knowledge.¹⁵⁹ There are several orders in which the knowledge of man can be considered, so according to them there are different ways of defining nescience and ignorance. First, the ontological level considers the subject as nescient or ignorant according to the capacity or lack of it that the subject has to know the truth. This capacity is taken from the natural ordination that the subject has to know. Those things which are not included in the natural range of its cognitive powers cannot be the subject of ignorance which means privation of a perfection which is due to the subject, and it is mere nescience which the non-existence of that subject. On this ontological level rests the psychological and

¹⁵⁹ Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 101, 1 ad 2; and I-II, q. 76, a. 2.

moral analysis. Second, the moral level arises from the fact that man, though he is capable of knowing all material things, cannot know them because of the imperfection of his intellect. Consequent to this ontological situation, is the moral question: What is man obliged to know? In the moral order, then, nescience and ignorance are not related to the capacity or possibility of knowledge but to the moral obligation, to the ought of man. Nescience in the moral order means the lack of knowledge in a subject who is not obliged to know it, while ignorance implies the lack of knowledge in a subject who is supposed to possess it. The moral order rests on the psychological order, since moral conscience presupposes the psychological. Psychologically, nescience and ignorance do not refer to the capability or non-obligation, they refer to the awareness that man has or his lack of awareness of his state of non-knowing. A perfect knowledge of truth requires aside from the knowledge of the truth of the thing, the awareness that we know that truth, which means, that man knows and knows that he knows, man becomes conscious of his lack of knowledge.

Humanly speaking the transition from the state of nescience to the state of ignorance is a great stride forward towards truth. From the psychological state of ignorance man moves to the state of wonder, which is the beginning of knowledge. Through the state of wonder man enters into the questioning state. Question that demands an answer. Ignorance which belongs to the order of knowledge connotes the affectivity of man when it is considered under the aspect of privation, since privation means the lack of something which is due to the subject, and therefore something evil. This imperfection, this evil that ignorance signifies impels man to overcome it. The intensity of the feeling that ignorance may cause in the affective part depends on the value judgment that man makes regarding the lack of knowledge in question. Thus, when the ignorance of something pertains to the fundamental aspect of man, to the reason of his being, to life itself, then it must be known and known with certitude otherwise it will create a psychological anxiety, a drive to risk great evils in order to solve this pressing question, and this will last until man solves the problem, or answers the question.

A state of doubt is created in man when, after the application of his cognitive faculties to answer the question, he is unable to resolve it. Doubt means the suspension of judgment either

because there are no reasons (negative doubt) or because the reasons for each of the contradictory parts are seen equally valid by the intellect (positive doubt).¹⁶⁰ This state of doubt differs from the methodical doubt which is the suspension of the consideration of the evidence at hand in order to verify the truth by way of discovery.

The state of doubt, when it affects the fundamental aspects of human life, creates a feeling of being powerless, of impotency which paralyzes the dynamic projection of man. Doubt means the incapability of the intellect to attain truth at the moment. The intellect cannot be determined to one side of the question more than to the other. Since the decision of the will depends on the determination of the intellect, the indetermination of the intellect means indecision of the will. The whole dynamism of man is at a standstill, unless the will determines the intellect towards one side of the contradictory. But this determination of the will must be preceded by the illumination of the intellect which makes a value judgment not about the truth of the matter but about its convenience or non-convenience to the intellect. In this case the intellect does not judge the truth of the thing but its goodness. When the intellect resolves the doubt, man passes from the state of doubt to the state of opinion,¹⁶¹ since opinion means the inclination to one of the contradictory parts with fear that the opposite may be true.¹⁶²

The opinative state is accompanied by fear, a radical fear, which increases or decreases according to the greater or lesser probability of the chosen part and its relevancy for life. The motive which inclines the intellect to one of the contradictory parts is the evidence of the thing. Though this evidence is not total and perfect, it is sufficient to determine the intellect toward one part of the contradictory. This determination however is weakened by the possibility that the opposite part may be true. When there is no evidence of the thing itself, or when man cannot know a thing with certainty, he looks for that certainty in the external testimonies, which could either be divine or human. When man surrenders his intellect to the external testimony, he becomes a believer.

¹⁶⁰ Aquinas, Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 14, a. 1; cf. also, *In III Sent.* dist. 17, q. 1, a. 4.

¹⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*

"The state of believer is such that the intellect is determined to something though the will does nothing except in so far as it is moved by its object, which is the good to be sought for its end. In view of this, faith needs twofold principle, the first which is the good that moves the will, and the second which is that to which the understanding gives assent"¹⁶³

The weakness of the intellect, and the lack of certainty makes faith necessary, for faith complements by the external authority of the witness what is lacking to the intellectual vision, and thus the intellect arrives at the state of certitude. "Certitude is nothing else than the determination of the intellect to a part of the contradictory... It is said properly of the firm adhesion of the cognitive power to its proper cognoscible."¹⁶⁴ Certitude settles the intellect of man in truth and gives man the inner peace that arises from the knowledge that he is in possession of the truth. The mere opinion, specially with regard to the fundamental option, vital attitude, is a state on which man cannot sit for long. It will create a sense of insecurity, of apprehension and fear, so that all kinds of activity would be a painful decision in man's conscience. It is in the possibility that the opposite of the contradictory may be true that lies the weakness of opinion even when the intellect rightfully is inclined to the part which is really true. The possibility that the opposite part may be true should not be taken from the ontological point of view, but from the epistemological consideration which refers to how the intellect perceives the truth. The fear to be mistaken is removed by faith, since faith, especially divine faith, gives firm assent to the intellect, and thus removes all cause of fear. The reason for the assent in the divine faith is that God, who is the Eternal Truth, has revealed a truth that the intellect accepts as true.

Man, when he firmly assents to one of the contradictory part if he is motivated by the external testimony, i.e. motivated by faith, is not fully satisfied. Man's intellect seeks that his assent be a consequence of his vision, of his intellectual activity. His intellect is created to know the truth, to possess the truth in its totality, in its perfection, and this perfection means to assent to one of the contradictory parts because of the evidence of the

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, a. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Aquinas, Thomas, *In III Sent.*, Dist. 23, a. 2; and dist. 26, q. 2 a. 4.

thing, because the object moves the intellect to know it. For "Certitude can mean two things. First is the firmness of adherence . . . the second is the evidence of that to which the assent is given."¹⁶⁵

2. *Certitude* — tranquility of the intellect. Certitude, then, is a firm assent of the intellect to a truth moved by the evidence of the thing itself which is manifested to the intellect.¹⁶⁶ Human condition makes it impossible for material things to communicate directly to the intellect. Man reaches reality through his senses by which he perceives the sensible qualities of things. This lack of direct communication between the intellect and the material world may be the cause why the intellect may be in the state of error, which is to affirm as true what is false.¹⁶⁷

Man cannot be consciously in error. The intellect itself cannot accept error as such. When the intellect of man assents to one of the contradictory parts it does because it is true, under the aspect of truth, even if the intellect assents to something which in reality is false. Here and now, in the present moment when the intellect judges about something it judges according to truth and subjectively speaking there is no possibility of error. Man, his intellect, cannot accept knowingly something false. When man accepts something which is false objectively, he accepts it because for him it is true subjectively. Then, psychologically, man never is in error subjectively, for he is sure that he is in possession of the truth. Psychologically speaking, certitude does not admit error, not even the possibility of error, because it is contrary to the intellect of men.

The consequences are staggering for truth results from the vital activity of the intellect, and this vital activity is part of the life itself of man. Truth becomes living truth when it becomes directive of the dynamic activity of man, when it influences the course of life, when it inclines man to action. When a truth becomes part of the conscience of man, then it becomes a principle of choice. A truth which does not influence the activity of man is not truth at all for that man, for truth means conviction, i.e. the assent of the intellect and the consent of the will, a conviction so strong that man will die for that truth.

¹⁶⁵ Aquinas, Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 14, a. 1 ad 70.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

When man is in the state of error, in order that this error may be recognized by man as such, he has to be confronted by truth either by external testimonies or by a new evidence. When man is confronted by a new evidence, the process is inverted: from the state of certitude it passes to the state of opinion, doubt, and ultimately rejection of the error and acceptance of the truth. When the question is about the fundamental option, about the fundamental truth that rules human life, then sorrow is tremendous. Man comes to the realization that all his life he has been moving in the wrong direction, and thus, going against the attainment of his perfection that he strongly desires.

When the new evidence is received by means of an argumentative confrontation, inasmuch as the new evidence does not come through the thing itself but the argumentation of one's opponent, and this new evidence is sufficient to show that his position is contrary to truth, man feels frustrated, dejected, and even in a fit of anger that he may reject the new evidence as something evil. However, when the intellect comes to act according to its nature and without the influence of pride, it must accept the truth and reject the previous error.

Man's internal suffering reaches its paroxysm when the evidence presented by the opponent does not clearly manifest his error, but is strong enough to break the firmness of his assent. Then, fear haunts the conscience of man... fear of being in error which reaches the psychological state of doubt. This doubt hurts the spirit of man bringing him to an insufferable situation as he considers the consequences of his life which has been lived not in consonance with what ought to be, but according to what ought not to be. Decisions once taken as good, are now seen from a different angle and from a different light, these decisions now seem evil. We are talking about those actions which manifest the fundamental option, and not actions which may be erroneously judged but do not affect man's fundamental attitude towards life or the direction he imprints in his life. When the fundamental option is in question, when the doubt is about the basic truths on which moral life is founded, man does not and cannot remain in doubt... he has to solve it in one way or another. When this is not possible, man's spirit bleeds to the point of madness.

3. *Saint Teresa and her doubts, and fears* — Saint Teresa never doubted her faith, Her fidelity to the Church is one of the

greatest graces that was granted to her. "For she always was and is firm in the faith, and she experiences the strongest desires for the honor of God and the good of the souls".¹⁶⁸ The fear to die outside the church should be taken as a fear that comes from the great love she had for the Church and not as a real doubt about her faith. Her will was fixed in Christ through His Church as her writings testify. She never doubted the Church and was willing to submit herself to the decision of the Church and her ministers.

"She ever was and ever is subject to all that the Holy Catholic faith holds, and all her prayers and the prayer of the houses she has founded is for the increase of the faith. She used to say that if any of her experiences were to induce her to turn against the Catholic faith or the law of God, she would have no need to go in search of proof, for then she would see it was the devil."¹⁶⁹

For this reason she was not disturbed when her books were brought to the Inquisition, for she was willing to accept the decision of the tribunal.

"Some persons came to me with great fear to tell me we were in trouble and that it could happen that others might accuse me of something and report to me to the Inquisition. This amused me and made me laugh, for I never have any fear of such possibility. If anyone were to see that I went against the slightest ceremony of the Church in a matter of faith, I myself knew well that I would die a thousand deaths for the faith or for any truth of Sacred Scriptures."¹⁷⁰

Her devotion to the Church was so great that she was ready to renounce all her ideas that in a way may be opposed to the revealed truth, proposed by the Church.

"And with this love of the faith, which God then infuses and which is a strong living faith, it always strives to proceed in conformity with what the Church holds, asking of this one and that, as one who has already made a firm assent to these truths. All the revelations it could imagine, even it were to see the heavens open — shouldn't move it one bit from what the Church holds."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Teresa de Jesus, *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 58, 6.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Life* 33, 5.

¹⁷¹ *Life* 25, 12.

The fear of Saint Teresa, then, is a fear of love, a fear which arises from the human condition of wayfaring. While man is in this world, there is a possibility of leaving the faith, of falling into error for as Saint Paul says: "We carry a precious treasure in fragile containers." The acknowledgment of her frailty consequent to her human condition makes her fearful, for "God so guards me against offending Him that I am certainly sometimes amazed."¹⁷² It is true that the virtue of hope gave her confidence to attain God in such a way that she rested in the will of God:

The desire and impulses for death, which were so strong, have left me, especially since the feastday of St. Mary Magdalene; for I resolved to live very willingly in order to render much service to God. There is the exception sometimes when no matter how much I try to reject the desire to see Him, I cannot.¹⁷³

The appreciation, the value judgment which greatly steems the mercy of God and at the same time looking at the human condition and how it is possible to lose it make her fearful to the point of wishing to die: I die because I don't die."¹⁷⁴ This is how Saint Teresa accounts for her feelings:¹⁷⁵

I know a person who, apart from wanting to die in order to see God, wanted to die so as not to feel the continual pain of how ungrateful she had been to One to whom she owed so much and would owe... As for fear of hell, such person does not have any. That they may lose God, at times though seldom distresses them very much. All their fear is that God might allow them out of His hand to offend Him, and they find themselves in as miserable a state as they were once before.

The real problem in the life of Saint Teresa is her doubts about the origin of her mystical experiences. The way was long and painful. In the Interior Castle there are some indications that allow us to perceive the anxiety she underwent in her life: the carefulness in assuming the possibility of error, the pre-occupation in describing the details of those vision that could be

¹⁷² *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 3, 12.

¹⁷³ O. cit. Rel. 17.

¹⁷⁴ Teresa de Jesús: *Vivo sin Vivir en Mí*, Poem.

¹⁷⁵ *Interior Castle*, VI Dwelling Place, 8, 3.

the product of the imagination or the devil, as opposed to the vision that comes from God. She insisted on distinguishing what is natural from what is supernatural, a constant endeavor in her book, since her experience had left profound marks in her spirit and she wished to avoid creating those doubts in her nuns. Saint Teresa describes her sufferings this way.¹⁷⁶

This lasted for a long time, in which I was afflicted on all sides, although I was able to bear those trials by means of the favors the Lord was granting me. I say this so that it might be known what a great trial is not to have someone who has experience of this spiritual path; if the Lord haven't favor me so much, I don't know what would have happened to me. There were enough things to drive me insane, and sometimes I doubt myself in such straits that I didn't know what to do other than raise my eyes to the Lord. For the opposition of good means to a little woman, wretched, weak, and fearful like myself, seems to be nothing when described in so few words; yet among the very severe trial I suffered in my life, this was one of the most severe.

The doubt in Saint Teresa is a clear expression of the confrontation of the internal living experience of God with the external testimony of her confessor and those pious men of tested virtue.

I gave this reason along with others when they told me that the devil was the cause or that I had fancied the vision — and this was often — and I made comparisons as I could, and the Lord gave understanding. But all of this proved to be of little avail. Since there were very holy persons in this place — and compared to them I yet among the very severe trials I suffered in my life, this was one of the most severe.

Let us recall that the state of certitude is a subjective affection, a psychological state produced in man's conscience when he knows that he is in possession of truth. The state of certitude is produced by God when He manifests Himself to her in a vision. It is unmistakable that what she saw came from God. There is no possibility of error that her inner experiences of God are exclusively from Him and from no other person or cause. This

¹⁷⁶ *Life* 28, 18.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 12

is the way that God manifests Himself to the seer. This vision comes in another unexplainable, more delicate way. But it is so certain and leaves much certitude; even much more than the other vision.¹⁷⁸ There is, aside from the manifestation of the object of that vision, the illumination of the intellect by which the seer knows that it is God who manifests himself in the vision. The experience of God, then, implies two things: first, the communication that God establishes with the soul, and second, the certitude that this experience is produced by God and no other created thing has anything to do with it. (This is so because certitude is a property of truth and God is Truth itself, as the Saint realized in her intellectual vision. And in her *Life* she underscores the certainty these visions cause in the soul:¹⁷⁹

In the case of this vision, I would; for without being seen, it is impressed with such clear knowledge that I don't think it can be doubted. The Lord desires to be so engraved upon the intellect that his vision can no more be doubted than can what is seen; and even less, because when we see we sometimes suspect we may have fancied what we saw. In this vision even though a suspicion may at first arise, there is on the other hand such great certitude that the doubt has no force.

However, this interior certainty, this knowledge that it was God who manifested Himself to her was doubted by her confessors, devout persons, and many of those whom she consulted about her experiences. The external testimony did not coincide with the internal experience. The external testimony went to the point of attributing those experiences to her fancy or to her enemy, the devil. It was from the devil, they would say.

Then, the confessor asked me, "Who said it was Jesus Christ?" "He told me many times," I answered. But before He told me He impressed upon my intellect that it was He, and before doing this latter He told me He was present — but I didn't see Him.¹⁸⁰

Since the confessor cannot witness this vision — nor perhaps, can it be explained by the one whom God grants the favor — he fears rightly so.

¹⁷⁸ *Interior Castle*, VI Dwelling Place, 8, 3.

¹⁷⁹ *Life* 27, 5.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

This created in her soul a tremendous tension, even to the point that she was afraid to pray. "She was terrified, for sometimes she didn't dare remain alone during the day. Since she couldn't avoid the experiences no matter how much she tried, she went about terrified, afflicted, fearing lest she be deceived by the devil."¹⁸¹

The inner testimony as well as the external one accepted the fact of the experience. Her visions were psychologically true and not a fabrication she made to her confessors. They believed her, and she would never lie.

After the vision passed away, it also happened to me and this was at once that I thought I had imagined it; thinking I had deceived my confessor, I was bothered about having told it to him. This was another cause of tears, and I went and explained it to him. He asked me whether it just seemed to me that I have deceived him or whether I had not lied, nor had I intended to; nor for anything in the world would I say one thing for another. He well knew this, and so he tried to calm me. I felt so sorry for having gone to him with these things, for I don't know how the devil got me and tormented myself with the thought that I had made the vision.¹⁸²

The fact was not questioned. What was questioned was the origin: Were those visions natural or supernatural? If they were supernatural, who produced them — God or the evil spirit.

The genesis of the doubt is her lack of knowledge of the mystical phenomena she experienced. The experience came first, and then followed the knowledge that it was possible. The first time she experienced the intellectual or imaginative visions she was left confused and wondering how it was possible. The wonder made her go to her confessors, or to those whom she knew could help her. Her expressions were clear, as well as the effect that this lack of knowledge had on her, namely the eagerness to resolve her wonder and to be instructed on what was happening to her.¹⁸³

"In spite of all this, she was not without fears at times and it seemed to her that spiritual people could be

¹⁸¹ *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 58, 3.

¹⁸² *Life* 27, 5.

¹⁸³ *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 58, 7.

deceived as well as she. She wanted to speak with every learned men, even though they might not be given to prayer for she only wanted to know whether all her experiences were in conformity with the Sacred Scripture."¹⁸⁴

And she continues:

During so many years in which she was subject to those fears, she had the opportunity to consult with others, especially since she went to so many foundations. They all tested her because they all wanted to be certain in giving her light; this light they assured her and were assured themselves.

She was looking for an explanation of how it was possible for a man to see God not through the eyes of the body but through the eyes of the soul. But the confessor was apprehensive, and his questions produced in her soul a state of doubt and uneasiness. This situation worsened when the confessor could not solve at once her inner situation and asked her for further explanations, suggesting that it could be the devil disguised as a good angel.

This was not tempered by the reassuring words of the Lord when she turned to prayer. For while she was in the presence of God, her spirit was at peace, but the monument she left that state, she became more and more confused, for it seemed to her that her new vision was a new way, a new trick on the part of the devil to mislead her. Here is how Saint Teresa manifests and recalls her experience.¹⁸⁵

Since I saw that my fear was increasing — because the prayer was increasing — it seemed to me there was in the prayer either some great good or some terrible evil. I understood well that I was already experiencing something supernatural because sometimes I was unable to resist; to have it whenever I wanted was out of the question.

Her struggle reached unbearable proportions when her confessor instructed her to make faces at the image of Christ who appeared to her. Her sense of obedience forced her to do it. She could not bring herself to disobey her confessor, but deep

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁸⁵ *Life* 23, 5

inside she rebelled against this command. She accomplished it only after she asked God for forgiveness.¹⁸⁶

Making such derisive gestures at the vision of the Lord caused me the greatest pain. When I saw Him present, I couldn't have believed it was the devil even if they cut me in pieces; thus it was a kind of severe penance for me. So that I would not be forever blessing myself, I held the cross in my hand. I did this almost all the time; I don't make the fig gestures so continually, because it grieved me deeply to do so. I recalled the injuries the Jews caused Him and begged Him to pardon me since I was doing it in order to obey the one who stood in His place . . . and not to blame me, since they were the ministers that He has placed in His Church. He told me not to worry and that I did well in obeying, but that he would make the truth known.

Her psychological self was torn between her subjective conviction that it was wrong to make grimaces to the Lord, and the self conviction that the superior and especially the confessors should be obeyed as representatives of God, for to obey one's superiors is to obey God. She was encouraged by Christ Himself to obey, no matter how repugnant it was for her: "I prefer obedience to sacrifices" it seemed Christ was telling her.

To understand the tearing effect of the doubt in Saint Teresa regarding the nature of her vision, it must be noted that her doubt touched the fundamental option of her life. The vision came to her as a natural development of her life of prayer, something she had put aside for several years, and revived in her life by Fr. Vicente Barron.¹⁸⁷ Prayer was her way of life and this way of life sprang with visions of God, of Christ, of those persons for whom she had given up everything she had. But if these visions did not come from God, then all her life, her conversion would have been meaningless. Then, the road she took was not the road to God but to hell, but this she resolved to avoid with all her might.

Bañez supported Teresa's opinion that she should not make grimaces at the image of Christ even if it was from the devil,

¹⁸⁶ O. cit. 29, 6

¹⁸⁷ O. cit. 7, 17.

since what she venerated was the person of Christ represented in that image. Who caused it or how it was done did not matter, for she was not paying homage to the one who caused it but to Christ who was represented in the vision. However, the doubts of whether her spiritual life was from God or from the devil continued for a long time, up to the moment when she needed the peace of mind to dedicate herself to her mission of reforming the order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.¹⁸⁸

Saint Teresa never gave much attention to what people said, but when she began to experience in her life these phenomena, and when her confessors began to ask other persons about their opinion regarding the nature of her experiences, it became such an object of gossip in the small city of Avila that it affected her, especially because almost unanimously she was being condemned as a person deceived by the devil. It is true however that the more people doubted her, the more God revealed Himself to her, the more Christ reassured her: "Don't be afraid, it is I." These were sweet words that calmed her while in prayer, after which she would again experience her calvary.

4. *Why did God permit this doubt?* In any sincere analysis of her suffering one wonders why God permitted her to experience God so intimately yet when the reality of God was questioned the certainty disappeared and she was confronted with doubts. She gives some insight in these words.¹⁸⁹

Let us point out that Saint Teresa was certain that the vision came from God and not from the devil. According to her there was no doubt about this whatsoever at the time of the vision. This is a sign that all spiritual authors attributed her visions to the supernatural level.¹⁹⁰ The seer does know what he has seen and that it came from God. But what is clear in the mind of the seer because he knows by personal experience, does not mean that those to whom he reveals it will have the same certitude about the nature of his vision. This is because the seer's experience is interior and vital, and cannot be communicated to others exactly as he experienced it but it has to be expressed in words or signs.

¹⁸⁸ *Cuentas de Conciencia*, Spanish Edition, Rel. 62.

¹⁸⁹ *Life* 30, 14.

¹⁹⁰ Pascal Parente, 1. cit.

Since in these matters there is no way of verification on the part of the listener, then he may not be convinced by the account. This was what happened to the confessors of Saint Teresa. They could not co-experience the vision she saw. They had to rely merely on what she told them, but after all who can express in words, the inefability of the imaginative or intellectual vision. Also, those were difficult times, times of fear of being misled, so that time and again they had to test her to be sure that her spirit was from God.

Visions and manifestations of God were part of her inner life. Her spiritual life, her mysticism demanded that God appeared to the soul and manifested Himself in the different stages of her development. It is true that she admits that it is a grace from God, but life of prayer naturally ends in the visions of God. But even these visions had to be purified, had to undergo "the dark night of the spirit," moments of doubt, of anguish, of longing for God, for looking for certainty until God finally was pleased with her submission and humility.

V. *The Role of Visions in the Mystical Development of Saint Teresa.*

Teresa's character shines out when the visions she enjoyed are taken into consideration, and how these visions related her to God. Teresa was a woman, and she sought God as a woman seeks a man to lean on, to find her fulfillment in him. She was a strong woman, and yet her femininity permeates all her life. Her life of prayer must be understood from her point of view of a woman from the sensitivity of a woman, from the desire that a woman has to be possessed, from the drive that a woman experiences to surrender herself in the arms of the lover. Saint Teresa lived her life with the intensity of her femininity and her womanhood. This explains the advice she gives to her nuns:

Either we are brides of so great a king or we are not. If we are, what honorable woman is there who *does* not share in the dishonors done to her spouse even though she does not will them? In fact, both spouses share the honor and dishonor. Now, then, to enjoy a part in his

kingdom and want no part in his dishonors and trials is nonsense.¹⁹¹

The so-called conversions of Saint Teresa, were steps she took at different stages of her life towards her total surrender, the total self-giving to Jesus Christ. She did not live for herself but totally for Jesus. That she belonged to Jesus was expressed by her decision to change her name from "de Cepeda y Ahumada" to Teresa de Jesús. She detached herself from her earthly family and claimed no other nobility than that which was given to her by God, thus from Dña. Teresa de Ahumada, she became Teresa de Jesús.¹⁹² Teresa's surrender went to the point of her getting lost in God just like water that is absorbed and lost in the sponge. "It seems to me there came the thought of how sponge absorbes and is saturated with water; so I thought, was my divinity and in a certain way rejoicing within itself and possessing the three Persons."¹⁹³

As Teresa emptied her soul of herself and of all earthly considerations, God was taking possession of her soul and manifesting Himself to her. There is an intimate relationship between the surrender of Teresa to God, and the giving of God to Teresa, a relationship which is manifested in her life of prayer. "I gave you My Son, and the Holy Spirit, and this Blessed Virgin. — What can you give Me?"¹⁹⁴

On these two points rests the role of the visions in the mystical life of Saint Teresa. Because she was a woman, she was intuitive rather than discursive, because she gave herself to God, God gave Himself to her to be possessed by her through knowledge.

Some have the impression that intuitions are mere hunches, or impressions which sprung in the mind of persons that may be true or not, since intuitions are insights perception of what the things are without the discursive and mediate knowledge which is the normal way of knowing in man. Both, intuitive and discursive knowledge belong to the intellectual knowledge possessed by man with certainty. Both intuitive and discursive knowledge can be perfect knowledge if the quiddity of the thing and its attributes are known not only in themselves but also by their cause. The

¹⁹¹ *Way of Perfection*, 13, 2, cf. also *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 31.

¹⁹² Cf. o. cit. 27, 5-6 and 36, 10.

¹⁹³ *Spiritual Testimonies*, Rel. 14.

¹⁹⁴ O. cit. Rel. 21, 2

difference between intuitive knowledge and discursive knowledge lies in the way truth is apprehended, which is due to the imperfection of man. In discursive knowledge, or rational way of knowing, man moves from one known truth to the knowledge of other truths, since the evidence of the new known depends on the evidence of the first one. For this reason, discursive knowledge is mediate, which mediation is caused by the weakness of the intellect that cannot grasp in one act the whole truth. In intuitive knowledge, on the other hand, the intellect perceives at once the whole truth, without any mediation of any other truth. The things manifests itself in its totality and the intellect immediately and in one act apprehends the whole thing.¹⁹⁵ These two ways of knowing are present in man, though discursive knowledge predominates in man while intuitive knowledge is a predominant experience of a woman.

The character of Saint Teresa was of an intuitive nature. "God didn't give me talent for discursive thought."¹⁹⁶ She manifests how difficult it was for her to meditate for a long time, since meditation required discursive thinking in order to stir up reasons that will move the affective part to acts of love, sorrow, compassion, etc.¹⁹⁷ Because of her difficulty in meditation she used to read from a book, since the reading would take the place of the discursive thinking and in that way she could move herself and her affectivity to acts of love and charity. "But most of the time I spent reading good books, which was my whole recreation" and a little farther she clarifies herself. "I never dared to begin prayer without a book."¹⁹⁸ Her struggle with concentration during this period is something that she acknowledges though there were times when suddenly she would be awed by a mystery or passage she was reading and she would find herself engaged in deep contemplation of that truth.

Her intuitive nature is reflected in the advice she gave to her nuns, when she would find difficulty with the discursive meditation.¹⁹⁹ She advised them to put in front of them an image of our Lord, according to the mystery they wanted to meditate on. By looking at the image, the mystery will be recalled including all

¹⁹⁵ Aquinas, Thomas, *Trinity*, q. 6, a. 1.

¹⁹⁶ Teresa de Jesus, *Life* 4, 7.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 7 and 9.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Way of Perfection 26, 1-3.

other circumstances surrounding the event. In this way the soul will begin to feel as if it were with Christ in that mystery. Through that method of meditation by looking at the image of our Lord and of our Lady, her mind arrived at the contemplation of the mystery.²⁰⁰ Psychologically speaking, it happens this way: the corporeal eyes see the external object, the statue which represents Christ, or some other person; then the imagination, upon receiving the impression of the image, and with the aid of the cogitative, forms the phantasm not only in the cognitive aspect but also as to its convenience to the person; the intellect is moved to act by the presence of the phantasm in the imagination. This act of the intellect does not limit itself to the thing present in the phantasm but also includes all other notes and things which belong or are related to that mystery and the intellect is informed by an intentional species which comprehends all these notes. When the intellect has in front of it all those things, and when strengthened by faith and wisdom, it is capable of gazing at the whole mystery in the totality of its extension even if the comprehension of it is not perfect. The intellect does not need to move from one truth to another, but rather rests in the contemplation of the whole truth, as it is present in the mind.

Saint Teresa's affectivity follows the cognitive part.²⁰¹ She understands that the visions she experiences are means and ways by which God moves her to love Him more and more. In the ways Saint Teresa describes her mystical life, the visions, though free gifts of God, are a natural consequence of her life of prayer, her intimate relation with God.²⁰² The mystical journey of Saint Teresa is a way in which a deepening knowledge of the beloved moves the will to love and to surrender more intensively to Him. As Saint Teresa passed from one mansion to another in her interior castle, she discovered her Lord and God in a different way, in a manner which added perfection to the previous one until the King of kings appeared in His Majesty and splendor.

However, the opening of the doors of the mansions does not depend on the soul, but on the King who abides in the inner center of the mansions.²⁰³ The role of the soul is to let it be, to let God

²⁰⁰ Cf. *Ibid*

²⁰¹ Cf. Life 27 and 28; *Interior Castle* VI and VII Dwelling Place.

²⁰² Cf. *Ibid*

²⁰³ *Interior Castle*, Epilogue, 2

bring her where He wants to. For no matter how much the soul longs for God, it depends on the will of God when He will bring her into the cellar and allows her to taste the wine of the vision of God. Once the grace is granted, the affective part is lost in affections of love, in moans of sweet pain of love so intense that if it were not for the grace of God, the soul would separate from the body, for the impulses are so strong that the whole body seems to break apart.²⁰⁴

The visions in the life of Saint Teresa, then have a very peculiar aspect and reason for being. They are not in fulfillment of a particular mission as in the case of the apparitions of Fatima or Lourdes, which are messages of God to mankind, or a prophetic revelation of something to be done in the Church, as the revelations of Saint Maria de Alacoque regarding the devotion to the sacred Heart. Neither are they the prophetic insights of what is in the innermost recesses of human heart to bring the pope from Avignon to Rome as in the case of Saint Catherine of Siena, nor are they a confirmation of some apostolic work as the apparitions to Saint Teresa regarding the reformation of the order of Carmel. The visions, specially the visions of God, are a mystical revelation of God to the soul so that it may surrender totally to Him, the communication of God with the soul may become more open, their union more and more intimate, until they finally reach the perfect union in heaven.

This union happened in Alba de Tormes. Avila was the last thing God asked Saint Teresa to surrender. The soul of Avila was the spring-board to her mystical road, yet at the end of her life, God asked her for it. She had to reach God in abandonment of all things; she had to see her creator stripped of all human things and consideration; she had to be like the Son of God Who was buried outside Jerusalem in a borrowed tomb. Avila the center of her activities, the land of silence, the land of hope, the land of peace... Avila waits with her family for the return of Saint Teresa. But Avila will never, never be the shrine of her incorrupted body, for God, the God of Teresa, asked Teresa to surrender her Avila, so that He, her God will be the total possessor of her being. If you go Avila, don't look for Teresa in her birthplace: La Santa, or in the choir of the Encar-

²⁰⁴ Spiritual Testimonies, Rel. 59, 7-14.

nation, or among her nuns in Las Madres . . . Go to the Cuatro Postes and there contemplate on the city, the same view that led Teresa from the outside of the castle to the citadel — the cathedral — where the Kings of Kings — is waiting for you. There, La Maestra, the Teacher, our Lady of Charity, will teach you as she taught Teresa the sure way to God. Don't look for Teresa with your corporeal eyes, you have to see her in Avila with the eyes of the soul.

“True, you will not be able to enter all the dwelling places through your own efforts, even though these efforts may seem to you great, unless the Lord of the castle Himself bring you there. Hence, I advise you to use no force if you meet with any resistance for you will thereby anger Him in such a way that He will never allow you to enter there.”

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