

The main lines (or axes) of Teresian Spirituality

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89th ODC General Chapter, Avila, 28.04.03

[translated & edited by James Rodgers]

Teresian spirituality here means the life which comes down to us from Saint Teresa and which we share with her. To put it another way, it is a current of life within the evangelical bosom of the Church and within Carmel, its historical point of departure being the person of the saint. This current reaches us after four centuries; we live it out and develop it within the Church while looking to the Carmel of tomorrow. This vital current is, of course, grounded on some experiences that are incarnated to a greater or lesser degree in the great personalities of yesterday and today; it is built on the mindset and teachings of the saints; and it is nourished through constant 'breathings' of renewal such as are essential to every living organism and vital movement.

The starting point of this spirituality is Teresa's profound religious experience. As a religious group within the Church, we spring from her religious experience and that of John of the Cross. Here we will focus on just **her** experience, which she describes and witnesses to personally in her book, *Life*. There she recounts, in the first place, her personal history-of-salvation, her vocation, struggle, conversion, complete "catharsis"-of-heart [= 'metanoiea', *ed.*], a process which afterwards peaked in a grace given to her in the first instance, then to the little band of pioneers she brought together at the Carmel of St. Joseph. This grace continued to increase all the while in her own life.

She pointedly testified to this at the beginning of the chapters which tell of the foundation of the above Carmel, well aware that the personal gift she had been given had been 'translated' into a kind of group

grace. *Life* 32,11 signals not only the actual birth of our group but also the moment she was given her foundress charism as pure grace surpassing human possibilities. This charism came from on high as a prophetic inflow, a "command" of the Lord, repeated many times, often authenticated by Our Lady (*Life* 32,12). It came, too, with the promise of "great things" (*Foundations* 5,8), at the time when she had it in mind to set up the first group of discalced friars. This command embraced John of the Cross at that point, once she had discovered him and persuaded him to join her, which led on to her coaching him on the style of life she initiated in her Carmels and rooting him in it. These texts show a continuity between this mystical experience in her personal life and the initial grace he received first for the group of discalced nuns, then for John of the Cross and his fellow discalced friars.

The two poles of her fundamental religious experience

Clearly any profound religious experience has, implicitly or explicitly, a **theological** component, ie an experience of the mystery of God, especially of Christ (and, by extension, of his holy Mother and his Mystical Body, the Church). At the same time it is not a true experience of God if it does not also contain a new experience of humanity, ie, if it hasn't got a **human** component ("the style of fraternity which exists between us"). This is the case with Teresa's experience.

A) New experience of the divine

1. Her experience of God

(This is of interest only in so far as it characterises the experience of our holy foundress handed down to us.)

For any mystic, including one as realistic as Teresa, the mystery of God is a fascinating abyss of attraction. God is

“pure fascination” for such a one, as St. Augustine has said. For Teresa, recently converted, her first profound experience lies “in so vivid a sentiment of the divine presence as not to permit in any way a doubt that God is in me and I in Him” (*Life* 10,1).

The new idea (or image) of God which arose from such an experience was the decisive element; it freed her from the God of the theology and catechesis of her time. A short but revealing passage in the first pages of *Life* (4,10) confirms this.

It does not appear that she got this image of God (ie as the infinite Being of Goodness, Magnificence and Mercy, the One very deeply interested in the same things as she) from the theology or pastoral catechesis of her time. This freed her from dependency on them. Instead this idea derived directly from her own experience of the mystery of God and of the divine presence in human life.

The gift of this image was linked to two culminating moments in her later life history. The first such moment occurred when in awe she discovered God in her own interior. This was when she became aware that He was not within her most intimate depths through a kind of ‘surrogate’ called sanctifying grace. Rather, she realised that **He Himself in Person** was involved in her life. She stated this, in wonder, as an incisive fact occurring in her own salvation-history. “It seemed that God was standing very close to me. Since, to start with, I didn’t know that He was present in everything, this struck me as very strange. Yet I used to see Him so clearly as not to be able to believe otherwise. [...] ...He said to me that He, God, was really present. Then He explained how he communicated with my soul. Because of this I was very consoled” (*Life* 18,1). “God and the soul are like sponge and water: Just as when a sponge is placed in water and drinks it in, so it seems to me that my soul is filled with that divinity” (*Rel.* 18, 1 and 40).

There was a second such moment. It was not a brief one; instead it lasted throughout her years as foundress. In this phase it came home to her how God intervened actively and really, not only in human life and affairs in general but also in her own foundational work in particular. If we did not keep this in mind, the *Book of Foundations* (an account precisely of the history of our religious family) would make no sense to us. Another striking feature was her experience of God and His mystery as not merely hidden in the silence of her depths but as explosive and clamorous. It went beyond the confines of the private and secret to become prophetic, ie a public witness. Her writings testified not only to the existence of God but also to His mysterious assistance and activity in the texture of human history. He is a secret protagonist in human life.

Certainly her testimonial experience occurred in a world and in a cultural context essentially theocratic, very different and distant from the situation today. Now we find ourselves steeped in self-sufficient humanism; we not only tend not to believe in God but even to exclude the divine from human affairs, both in world literature and in the building up of history.

However, it is exactly here that her witness-type experience puts its mark on today’s spirituality, leaving a typically theological imprint on it. She urges us to interpret and live a life that has a **theological** dimension. She challenges us christians and carmelites of the twenty-first century simply and directly about the deep meaning of our lives. Does our existence include God or not? Do we witness to Him by words that are more or less sterile or instead by our religious **experience**?

To witness to the presence of God, starting from the kind of experience that marks out our saints, (Teresa, John of the Cross, Therese, Edith),--- is this not, perhaps, also of interest and relevance to **our** existence

as a religious group marked by her charism?

2. Her experience of Christ

Her religious experience was a **christian** one. She experienced God **in Christ** or, in other words, in his Humanity. This experience was nurtured by a constant return to the historical Christ of the Gospel (now the Christ in Glory) but also by ongoing christological **practices**. Fortunately the neo-evangelical events in her life were not isolated and unconnected phenomena but ones that formed a continuous lifelong thread. Her mystical experience of EI became the history and biography of her life. At the level of her own experience, the historical and the mystical did not just intersect but merge. In the last phase of her life, taken up by her travels as foundress, she could not recount the little affairs of the foundations without mentioning at the same time Christ's presence, his interventions and even his words, such as, "Wait and you will see", "The Lord said to me", "Now persevere", "I Am", "I am He".

In fact there was, in her life, a precise moment of entry into the orbit or mystery of Jesus Christ. It was the moment which both she and John of the Cross indicated by the word 'now', the 'now' which had become the defining thing in their lives. It was the "I **now** live outside myself". It is the 'now' in John of the Cross's exclamation, "**Now** I no longer live in myself!". He used the word again in another poem, "I am **now** all offered and given", a line he penned after gaining new courage from Christ's words to him: "Have no fear that anyone can separate you from Me".

My aim here is not to trace the **process** of the saint's christological experience. It is to discover the Jesus of the Gospel, the Christ whom Teresa handed on to us sharers of her charism. For her, Jesus was "the living Book", the interior Master, the Words of God, the Lord, the model of life.

He was "the truth", the beauty ("the supreme beauty / seeing Christ I remained impressed by his beauty"). He was the gospel "I Am", who takes away our fears and gives definitive security. He was not just the living water but its very **font**. He was **Love**, the **Spouse**, the **Friend** ("true friend who never deludes").

Perhaps in other christian schools or currents of spirituality one can single out the facets of the mystery of Christ that inspire: eg., Jesus "the poor man" or "the Priest, or "the Crucified" or "the Preacher"..... For Teresa, however, it was the mystery of **his humanity itself**. It was not just his historical humanity of the Gospel but his **paschal** humanity, which overshadowed not only her own person and life but that of every christian. This made it possible for her to meet him in the vital texture of her own existence. From this came the fact that it was normal, indeed almost inevitable, for her to deal with Him in her own prayer life as a **friend**. In fact she described prayer as an authentic rapport of friendship. She was certain that to pray was a to respond to his love for us. This response, importantly, had to engender an attitude of love which would shape in turn, the motivations and activities of the contemplative's apostolate.

For her, christian life was chiefly to **make actual one's personal relationship with Christ**. It meant developing this relational process in the furnace of being configured to Him. This process lasted all through life and culminated in identification with the Servant of Yahweh, which led to dedication to the service of others. She proposed this explicitly in the final chapter of the *Seven Mansions*. "Do you know what it means to be truly spiritual [=to be true Carmelites]? It is when they become the **slaves** of God and are branded with his sign, which is the sign of the Cross, in token that they have given Him their freedom. Then He can sell them as slaves to the whole world, as He himself was sold; and if He does this He will be doing them no wrong but showing them no slight favour" (*Interior Castle* VII, 4.8).

Some lines earlier occurs the phrase which condenses in simple words the christological spirituality which her aim was to pass on to us: **“Fix your gaze on the Crucified, and everything will become easy for you”**. Because of this, it pleased her greatly to say: “Let my **eyes see** You, my good Jesus”. Thus she would repeat with great insistence the advice: **“look at Him closely”**. To the beginner she would say: “see that you **look at Him**”; and to readers of the Way, **“Look at Him! I do not ask anything of you other than to look at Him!”**. She insisted, contrary to certain currents of her time, that **even at the heights of the mystical life, contemplation was unthinkable without reference to the Humanity of the Lord**. So it is unthinkable, too, for us Carmelites to put her spirituality into practice today without feeling ourselves marked by the experience which she and John of the Cross had of the **humanity** of the Lord.

3. From her marian experience to our carmelite spirituality

To her theological and christological experience we need to add, by extension, her first-hand awareness of the Mother of God.

We noted above that this christological experience was one not only of the Jesus the Gospel but also of the paschal Jesus of her personal existence and of her spiritual practice in her ‘here and now’. It is the same as regards her experience of Our Lady. That is, it involved both the Mary of the Gospels, who heard the word and fulfilled it, and also the Mary present in the saint’s personal life and in that of each of her disciples. That is to say, it was an experience linked particularly to her vocation as carmelite and to her charism as foundress.

For the saint, there was something clear and characteristic: she was very aware of herself and her sons and daughters being carmelite towards Mary because all

belonged to a family consecrated to the Virgin . We are the family of the Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel. We wear the habit of the Virgin. We follow her rule. We live in her houses. Teresa expressed this awareness of belonging to Mary in her life as carmelite thus: **“From this stock do we come!”**

In this international meeting of ours let me underline the semantic force of her **audacity**, given the historical and cultural context of her life. She defined us not just as a religious Order but as a stock whose ancestors were the biblical prophets and whose genealogical origin was the Virgin Mary, “our Mother”, “our Lady and Patron”. A text from the fifth mansion of the *Interior Castle*(V,1,2) where, incidentally, she was speaking of the carmelite contemplative and mystical vocation bears this out. “This was our origin. We are the progeny of those holy fathers of Mount Carmel who in great solitude and in complete disregard of the world seek this joy, this precious treasure, this precious jewel of which we speak...” This idea she repeated after her account of the official foundation of the discalced friars in the capital, Alcala, as she drew near to death. On this occasion she wrote expressly to us, her Carmelite brothers: “Always keep your eyes fixed on the stock of those holy prophets from whom we descend” (*Foundations* 29, 33).

I began by noting that there was also a Marian aspect in the profound religious experience of the saint. This is not the occasion to lose ourselves in the evocation of the ‘rosary’ of her experiences regarding the mystery of Mary. However, I would note that the “mariophany” which is more relevant and impressive is what she referred to by extension, linking it to her mission as our founder: It was present at the origins of the new family of Carmel. This can be read about it in *Life*, chap. 33.

I will make just two points here, even though they are very well known to all. The first is to be found, surprisingly, in the first pages written by Teresa for the little group of pioneers at St. Joseph’s, at the stage

when she had to take up a position against the misogyny surrounding them. She wrote her famous “defence of women”, basing it on the feminine nature they shared with the Virgin. It was addressed to Jesus. It included an appeal against the judges of the land, “who are all male”, “Lord of my soul, you did not despise women as you travelled through the world. On the contrary, you always treated them very mercifully, finding them so much more loving and full of faith than men, from the moment when you chose from among them your most holy Mother, whose merits we benefit from and whose habit we wear (*Way of Perfection*, E). You are well aware that, notwithstanding the heightened marian and carmelite interest of this passage, the censor (not a Carmelite) excluded it from the *Way of Perfection*. The second point: perhaps the most specific marian-carmelite passage is to be found in the *Interior Castle* (III 1,3). The reader will see that it inculcates the sense of our being sons and daughters of Mary.

I have already said that the saint’s christological experience culminated in her teaching about our configuration to Jesus. Her marian line of thought runs parallel to this: the Virgin Mary is “mother, lady and patroness”; but the focus lies in “becoming like her”, as the *Way of Perfection* (13, 3) notes.

Her strong ecclesial sense

Her sense of the Church is imprinted on the charism which she hands down to us. Her experience of the people of God, **caused her sorrow** but was at the same time **filial**.

(a) Litany of **what caused her sorrow** in her relationship with the Church:

- * in her condition as *woman*, lacking culture and learning;
- * in her *cloistered* state, marginalised and an object of suspicion because of her mystical life;

- * as *reader*, deprived for the best part of her life from her little collection of spiritual books because of a decree of the Inquisition (“This displeases me very much” (*Life* 26. 5);

- * in her mission as *foundress*, denounced for going against decisions of the Council of Trent and against Saint Paul injunctions about “the seclusion of women”;

- * in her *mystic* experience, subject to the nastiness and humiliation of criticism, and forced to appear before the Inquisition of Seville;

- * as *writer*, humiliated by the sequestration of the “Book of the *Life*”, which she valued so highly as to say it was “my soul”, yet which could not be got back again.

(b) Her **filial sense**, on the other hand, was shown by her positive attitude of loving dedication to “holy Mother Church, Catholic and Roman”. She was filial in submitting both her mystical life absolutely “to what the Church holds” and her mystic charism to the hierarchy. For the Church, or for a truth of the Church, she was ready to give her life. In her hyperbolic way of speaking, she wrote: “I am completely ready to face a thousand deaths rather than offend against the slightest ceremony of the Church or go against a truth of sacred scripture” (*Life* 33, 5). She attested this in the context of preparing to set up St. Joseph’s, when she was already tied-in to her double charism of mystic and foundress.

Also symptomatic of her filial sense is the first page of the *Way of Perfection*, where she exclaimed: “The whole world is in flames [...] and we, what must **we** do? There is no doubt about her attention to the “great necessities of the Church”, to the signs of the times (cf. “the evils of France” = Europe), to the rupture of Christian unity, to the immense horizons of the Americas as yet not christianised, to the catastrophic consequences of the war, etc. These were determining elements of the sense of the Church which she passed on to us.

The rupture of the unity of the Church in her time became, in fact, one of her motives for founding St. Joseph's. The horizons of the Americas were part of her reason for expanding Carmel beyond the walls of Avila to Duruelo and also figured in the formulation of her concept of the ideal missionary.

Influenced by a teresian mystical and historical sense of the Church, we need to keep up our motivation for our mission service today, our surge of filial love for "Mother Church", our solidarity with her evangelical presence and action, and our empathy with her humiliations and sufferings. Is it not perhaps true that Teresa's global and almost 'martyr'-like experience should orientate our own ecclesial sense, as we face the present and the future of the Church in a cultural and epochal context very different from hers?

B) New experience of the human

I pointed out at the start that any profound religious experience, while it implies an experience of the mystery of God, carries with it a new experience of what it is to be human. It is just as with the prophets of the Bible, Moses, Elijah, even Jesus himself: there was attention and obedience to the Father and, at the same time, attention to and service of the poor.

In the case of Teresa, these two poles clearly existed in both her experience and her teaching. We can, although incompletely, label them as **mysticism** and **humanism**. Both projected themselves on to the spirituality that we share with her. However, the mystical-theological determined the humanistic. In fact, theology and christology are the determinants for anthropologists and sociologists studying the religious life which she proposes.

It is symptomatic that, when she proposed to found Duruelo, she took with her John of the Cross, not so much to plant theology in him (he was already a master in that discipline!) as to enable him to learn "our way of life, intending that he might be able to transfer [to Duruelo] all our practices both as to mortification and cordiality in our relations with each other and as to the way we spend our recreation time together" (*Foundations* 15, 3). Henceforth John of the Cross, pioneer and master, entered her school.

From this moment on, even though she had founded only three Carmels and had not as yet got a house for the discalced friars, she was aware of having inaugurated a new *style* of religious life. Already she also had a positive interest in transmitting this style to her friars.

In defining this new *style* she might have given pride of place to the strictly **contemplative**, setting down a "style of **praying**, fraternity and recreation". Thanks to John of the Cross, at least at that moment, she instead defined it on a basis of **humanistic** "fraternity and recreation", adding another element peculiar to her humanism, ie, a **thirst for culture**. Faithful to Teresa, I will now talk briefly about just these three elements of her style.

1. Her style of fraternity

It was to instil her concept of fraternity that she had already begun to write the *Way of Perfection*. The first of the three virtues which she put forward in that book was love for one another. "Here, where we neither are nor ought to be more than thirteen in number, the sisters should love each other equally, be friends to all, and help their neighbour" (*Way* 4, 7). This was a clear return to the gospel counsel of **mutual love as primary norm of the code of religious life in community**.

To make possible such a regime of friendship, she drastically reduced the number of candidates from the 180 of the

monastery of the Incarnation to the 13 of St. Joseph,s. As she went from convent to convent, she suppressed the title of “dona” and the social difference between noble names and those of commoners. “All should be equal” (*Way*, 27.6). “Cleaning duties should begin with the mother prioress” (*Constitutions* 7,1). “Let the prioress seek to be loved” (ditto II, 29). When she met John of the Cross, Sister Anna had not yet entered; Teresa had not initially yielded to the temptation which the women religious of the military order called ‘las freilas’ had succumbed to. However, she was afterwards obliged to adopt the latter’s approach with the entry of young women who were “excellent but illiterate”, whom she would often coach in reading and writing.

Most worthy, perhaps, in this new style of fraternity was the development of **dialogue as** a feature of group communication. A good indicator of this was, among other things, dialogue by letter. This opened up the ‘reach’ of fraternization from being merely **within** community to **between** communities. Proof of this lies in the contrast between the low level of communication in the first period of Teresa’s Carmelite life (ie, her 27 years at the Incarnation convent when there was no trace of epistolary dialogue between the Incarnation community and those at Piedrahita and Fontiveros, three very large communities in the compact triangle of the diocese of Avila) and its far higher level after the rise of the new lifestyle. We must bear in mind that this occurred in relation to cloistured nuns very focussed on contemplation!

Teresa had created a stable communication net, (something very difficult to set up in that era), between the Carmels of Castille and those of La Mancha and Andalusia. She herself seemed to be the head of this net (or ‘communications agency’, as we would now say). Exchange of letters, notices, gifts, news items, folk-songs for feasts, economic help, etc.-- all these interactions

must have created an authentic sense of fraternity and family spirit. “For this we all wear the same habit, to help each other through exchange. What belongs to one community belongs to all; and that monastery gives much which gives all it can”, she wrote to the Valladolid community when she needed 200 ducats to further the cause of the discalced reform with Rome (cf. her letter of 31 May 1579 in *Epistolario*, no. 325, OCD ed., Rome, 1982).

Clearly we Carmelites need much more ,in the present era, in terms of quality and quantity of means of communication than was the case in Teresa’s day. However, her advice in this matter remains valid and challenging. What is important is not a single episode but the **spirit** – the animating style.

2. Her style of recreation

What did Teresa mean when she spoke to John of the Cross about a style of recreation within religious life? Was it something she wanted to introduce as a characteristic of carmelite life, and so was proposing to him expressly in view of Duruelo?

I don’t think that, in this precise circumstance, it could be considered a matter of countering the attraction of the young John of the Cross to the Carthusians.

Nor do I believe it might refer – even if this was also the case – to her having introduced two hours of daily recreation morning and evening into the St. Joseph’s constitutions , to be put side by side with the two hours of prayer, also morning and evening. These two hours of relaxation and communication clearly served to highlight her counsel about fraternity, “and to give us a little light relief so as to be able afterwards to observe the Rule in all its rigour”, as she explained in *Foundations* (13, 5). We note in passing that these two

hours of recreation were, in the event, retained in the Duruelo *Constitutions*, following Teresa's lead. However, more important than the detail of the two hours was the fact that what the saint had introduced, and now underlined, was the **festive** aspect of her concept of religious life. Perhaps this was meant as a corrective to a certain ongoing medieval stiffness?

Teresa was an apostle of **joy in religious life**. She didn't want gloomy saints, even during prayer time. She said this in no uncertain terms to her 'group of pioneers' at the end of the *Way of Perfection* (41,7): "Try then, sisters, as far as you can and when you can do so without offending God, always to be affable. Treat people in such a way as to lead them to love to talk to you, to want to imitate your lifestyle and way of speaking, and not to draw back in fear in the face of virtue. For religious, this is very important: the more saintly you are the more you ought to be affable to the sisters and never avoid them, however annoying and impertinent their conversation. If you wish to win their love and to be good to them, you must be gentle. Force yourselves to be very affable and agreeable, and try to please those you deal with, especially our sisters" (*Way of Perfection* 21,7).

For Teresa, religious life was a 'festa'. She celebrated it as such, without weakening its character of consecration but rather accentuating it. The best proof of this is to be found in two series of festive poems. The first were the verses that celebrate the interior festa with the Spouse (the theological vector). The second were those which celebrated the community festa, sometimes linked to the liturgy (especially that of Christmas), at other times to Clothings or Professions or to moments of group good-humour or sheer joviality (the humanist vector). Here are some lines of a song composed by Teresa for the cousin of the future Grand Inquisitor, Quiraga, to mark her Taking the Habit:

"Who has brought you away up here, oh maiden,

from the horrible valley full of brambles and mud?"

God, merciful and strong, did,
And my own good fortune".

3. Her thirst for culture: "Culture is a great thing."

The need for culture is the last but far from least element in Teresa's new style. We detect this need very often in her writing. "Science is always a great thing because it instructs and enlightens us who know so little" (*Life* 13,16). "I have always loved to have learned confessors...[...].The truly learned have never cheated me" (*Life* 5,3). "Science, when linked to humility, is of the greatest advantage" (*Life* 12,4.) "Reading good books comforts me" (*Life* 3 7). "Bound by the truths of sacred scripture, we are doing what we ought...from foolish devotions may God deliver us" (*Life* 13,16). Etc. Literature, learned men, and good books....these are always exponents of culture.

In a period of cultural and religious intensity, Teresa was fortunate enough to live halfway between two great universities of the time, Salamanca and Alcala. It is said that, although she and her nuns didn't frequent the university lecture-halls, she did her best to bring the university to her Carmelites in the person of some great Dominican and Jesuit theologians. She was an admirer of Father Banez and Father Granada (cf. *Letters* no. 83, Spanish ed.). She advised her nuns to "inform themselves always about who has good instruction to give"; and then for their benefit she inserted a list of readings in the constitutions, perhaps for the first time, at the same time asking that the prioress should provide some good books for her house "because such nutriment as so necessary for the soul as eating is for the body" (*Constitutions* 2,7).

For us discolored friars the simple list of facts given below will suffice:

- Teresa was delighted at the discovery of a young man from the University of Salamanca, John of the Cross, and his companion, Father Antonio, Master of Theology.
- Among her reasons for highlighting Gracian as the true model for her disalced friars, she cited his humanist culture, noting that he had ' a Master's degree from Alcala, and that he was "a man of much learning".
- It is interesting that, from the beginning, disalced friars were found in the two university centres of Alcala and Salamanca, perhaps to attract vocations from among the cultured youth there.
- Among the first disalced friars, a good number were university men: Heredia, Agostine dei Re, John of Jesus Roca, Ambrose Mariano, Angelo of Saint Gabriel, besides John of the Cross and Gracian.

But what is more interesting, as a key to teresianism, is the phenomenon of Teresa herself in relation to culture. Here was a woman culturally marginalised, exhausted by work, always short of time (either through illness or because of long periods spent in prayer) yet able to write a whole series of books precisely while she was founding Carmels. Enough to note the number of her handwritten pages that have come down to us. Not counting her letters, this amounts to more than 1500! For the sixteenth century that is a record.

Something else marks out her writings. Although strictly religious in content, they are of great value even in the artistic, literary and psychological fields. Add to this her merit as precursor (perhaps provoker!) of a whole cultural and literary tradition within Carmel, a tradition that began with the writings of

John of the Cross and continued in the first generation of her Carmels with writers like Maria of St. Joseph, the two Annes, Cecily of the Nativity, etc., ending up in our own times with Teresa of the Andes and Edith Stein.

The most determining fact for us is that she and John of the Cross handed down to our Carmel a 'baggage' that is cultural and not just spiritual. It affects us as a group and feeds the current of spirituality that continues to flow in the Church and makes us responsible for an internal inculturation which has serious implications in our service at Church level as well.

I feel that, in these times of the encyclical *Tertio Millenio Ineunte*, this cultural dimension of our teresian spirituality will grow and gain weight. This requires renewed attention for various reasons. I will cite here only the most evident:

- a) In recent times the primordial patrimony of our saints of the 16th century is swollen by that of great spiritual figures from the 19th and 20th centuries, with a double actualization of "new doctrine" and "new models" that are carmelite;
- b) With the title of "Doctor of the Church" given to our three saints – Teresa, John of the Cross and Therese of Lisieux -- the Church as a whole is beginning to see the validity and actuality of Carmel in her struggles and sufferings worldwide. It is enough to cite the content of the encyclical mentioned earlier. Here are H. U .von Balthasar's words on this topic (in his introduction to a work, *Elizabeth of the Trinity*). "In modern times no religious Order seems to have

received such great graces of a missionary character as Carmel. These graces are clearly a warning and a counter-balance to the contemporary currents in the world and the Church". In pages 21-22 of the original French edition, which he revised, he added the following: "Side by side with Therese of Lisieux and Charles de Foucauld, other great people of prayer are presented to us, eg. Elizabeth of the Trinity...Edith Stein. Among these, the Carmelite women are bearers of a double message, namely, one directed to Carmel itself, the other to the whole Church through Carmel".

- c) The actual implanting of Carmel in nations and new cultures is accompanied (and at times preceded) by the translation and penetration of the most representative writings of our spiritual mini-culture. This spreads the gospel in milieus not yet explored, in an almost worldwide ray of expansion second only to the spread of translations of the Bible and the documents of the second Vatican Council.

This pentecostal expansion affects us today. We cannot remain indifferent to it if we understand teresianism to be not just the life of our "little group" but also a spiritual current greater than ourselves, which commits us to service of the Church as a whole. We bear it in mind that modern means of diffusion and communication (press, cinema, television and internet) have revolutionised the range of possibilities and services available. This calls for serious preparations on our part, including the establishment of a relevant technical program.

I finish with a paraphrase of the parable of the tree and its fruits. The fact that the tree is good does not depend on the wall that surrounds it nor the verdant foliage that adorns it, even though the wall protects it from predators and the foliage gives it freshness and beauty. The tree is sound only if it has *healthy roots* which transmit the sap which is vital for its well-being and can provide fruit for the gardener. This is the case with Carmel. It is healthy not because of its structures, even though these are necessary, nor on account of the foliage which fills it with freshness and beauty. Its health is due to its roots, which feed it with vital sap, so that it produces new fruit which can be offered to the Divine Gardener each summer for the good of the Church and for mankind as a whole.

Appendix

Father John Sullivan ODC, redactor for the Anglo-Irish OCD province at the 89th General Chapter of the Order, has put the following summary of Father Alvarez's talk on the website:

www.ocd.pcn.net/capitolo/index.htm

"Fr. Alvarez..... reminded us that Teresa did not speak of God as a subject "learned" through theology or catechism but as "experienced" in history: as kindly, patient, generous, interested in Teresa's affairs, and as life-giving.

“From her experience of God, a new perception of humanity and of commitment to religious consecration arose in Teresa. This was founded on the practice of human virtues like fraternity, kindness, sympathy, industriousness, love for culture and formation, etc. etc.”