

ST. TERESA OF JESUS: BOOK OF HER FOUNDATIONS

DOCTRINAL GUIDE

1. *Book of the Foundations*, an adventure in continual renewal

St. Teresa's *Book of her Foundations* is the account of the birth and development of a charism within a particular Church, the Spanish Church of the 16th century. It is a collection of data that continues the project begun in St. Teresa's *Life* with the description of her first foundation: St. Joseph's in Avila. This was required because a family that takes up citizenship must be able to explain its origins, while at the same time vouching for the *veracity* of God's work in the world through the life of individuals (F. Prol 2), in this case of Teresa herself.

When viewed in this light, *The Foundations* is a continuation of *The Life*. If *The Life* tells of a journey of introspection, *The Foundations* is an added external sequel. Both are vitally Teresa: "I know of a person..."; "...this person..."; "...I say to you..."; "...When I saw this..."; "...I would not wish..." and so on.

In the world of her time Teresa becomes a chronicler of how God worked his mercies in her various foundations (F Prol 3). And it is here that we notice the first of this book's peculiarities. It is not a general history but rather a family history with doctrinal, didactic and explanatory purposes. What she wishes to achieve by her account and her original intent is to give glory to this Great Lord through the observance practised in her foundations by "the style of community life and the recreation we have together" (F 13, 5). It is the incarnation of the obedience of mysticism. It is the manifestation of the fullness of freedom in the person of Teresa (Life 4, 10) and, hence, a proclamation of God's majesty. That is the real purpose of this book (F 2, 6). From this we can conclude that *The Foundations* is an invitation to walk the paths that lead to the fullness of freedom. Freedom that only be achieved in the transformation of the lover in the Loved One: "The Lord said to me: 'Daughter, obedience gives strength'" (F Prol 2). Such obedience becomes palpable in preoccupation for the work of the Loved One, in total trust in Him and in the experience of his presence. Christ is its final goal and its proclaimer. With her gifts of realism and humanism Teresa lets us know that achieving such freedom is no easy task. Just as the wandering suitors had to overcome great difficulties and trials before winning the hearts of their ladies, or as Moses, Abraham and other biblical figures had to journey courageously and contend with many obstacles before reaching the Promised Land, so *The Foundations* will be an account of sustained endeavour and *hard work*.

The Book of the Foundations is transformed into a battle field where the forces of the Evil One combat the armies of the Grand Captain - Christ in His humanity and presence in the Blessed Sacrament (F 3, 8ff; 37 etc.). The life portrayed in our text is midway on the path between earth and heaven, between the miraculous and the evil which causes so many difficulties. Every foundation, every

new monastery signals a victory over evil, every soul gained a defeat for the Evil One. Teresa the chronicler tells of the great exploits of the Lord in simple and intimate language. Her story is personal with all the authority and experience of one who has been on the battle field and been part of all the events she recounts. She moulds a fatherland, builds up a Church and creates a community. She offers advice on how to win the battles in this adventure which is being constantly renewed in her daughters and her readers.

And Teresa cannot absent herself from what she describes; her writing is part and parcel of her own self. She defends her activities and her mission before her confessors, the censors and the entire Church. In *The Foundations* the project begun in her *Life* continues. But she sees here the necessity of defending how her mystical life relates to, or is harmonious with, her personal agenda. Her chronicle becomes an introspective story, it becomes a question. Will it be the work of a saint or the work of an illuminist? Will it be due to her own efforts or be the work of God Himself? How can she justify a Discalced Carmelite Order? Teresa lays her soul bare by her actions. She seeks discernment. She seeks approval from her sisters, from the Church and from society in general. Just as the author of *El Lazarillo de Tormes* (a famous Spanish novel) defends his social position in his story, Teresa justifies herself in the reality of the Reform. Again just as *El Lazarillo de Tormes* seeks to educate and promote ethical values, *The Foundations* portrays an exemplary Christian life.

Finally, *The Foundations* is a diary of Teresa's memories. Because of this, events that made a deeper impression and left lasting memories are described much more vividly by her. Take, for example, the emotional procession in Villanueva de la Jara (F 28, 37). We have a glorious array of colours, aromas and internal sentiments. From such events Teresa would draw practical lessons for her nuns. As in the case of all her works, this book is a sharing of her intelligence, her personality, her *determined determination*, her sensitivity and her love for Christ in His humanity and His divinity, at a time when this appeared threatened. *The Foundations* is a living answer to her understanding of the signs of the times. It is a new evangelization. It is an adventure being continually renewed for anyone that empathises with its message. "Now we are beginning, and let them strive to advance always from good to better" (F 29, 32).

2. The Work and its literary genre

The original manuscript of *The Foundations* is preserved in the Escorial Library (Madrid). It is a volume of 132 pages, in a 303x210 mm format, with a supporting wrap. It is in the saint's own handwriting but, being a work written throughout her life, it shows "a certain discontinuity in the vigour of stroke and in the text itself. This is especially true towards the end of the narrative, writing of the foundation at Burgos, where there are many mistakes and material errors that show clearly how she had exhausted her energies in the whole project; the end is

foreshadowed in those pages”¹. In his description of the work Fr. Silverio of St. Teresa writes:

The Saint does not give this book any title.(1). After the Prologue she divides the book into chapters, followed by a summary of the content of each, all written in her own hand, except for chapter XII, which is in the hand of the same religious who wrote the titles of the Escorial Way of Perfection (2). Having concluded what we might call the cycle of the second phase of the Foundations with Caravaca (c. XXVII), she later wrote about the four other foundations which she made before her death - in separate notebooks, but of the same size and on the same kind of paper as the earlier ones. Instead of chapters, she headed each description with the anagram Jhs, followed by a corresponding summary, with the exception of Villanueva de la Jara, which simply reads: The foundation of Villanueva de la Jara. The original little note with Teresa’s four counsels for the good government of the Reform has been stuck on the reverse of a page (back of page 96). On the back of that same page she concludes the foundation of Caravaca in six lines, as an overflow from the preceding page, leaving the rest of the sheet blank(3). Then on the very last page of the manuscript Teresa describes the changeover of jurisdiction of St. Joseph’s in Avila from the Bishop to the Order (1577).

The manuscript of The Foundations is conserved in a perfect state. We can judge from the fingerprints on the margins that some of the chapters have been well read (4). It has been bound in the customary *Escorial* style and covered with flowery yellow tissue. A number of letters and words as well as some marginal glossary added by Fr. Gracian have been obliterated due to the gilding...Although the manuscript can be read quite well, the writing is not as uniform and neat as in other originals of Teresa. We can note less steadiness or firmness of hand, particularly in the concluding chapters. The Saint was already old and feeble when she wrote these. Her weakness and pressure of time are perhaps the reasons why we find more simple material errors in this book than in other writings of the Saint...²

With regard to the date of composition of the work, we must remember first of all that it was written on impulse and in those moments when her other engagements for the Lord allowed Teresa a little time. It was written in haste and during the final years of the Saint’s life. In her own words she tells us that she began writing it in 1573, on the 25 August to be exact, “the feast of St. Louis, king of France” (F Prol 2). She finally concluded it after the foundation of Burgos, in 1582, the year of her death.

She wrote the first 9 chapters between 25 August 1573 and February 1574, when she left Salamanca to found the convent in Segovia. She would have written the next 3 chapters either in Valladolid or on her return to St. Joseph’s, Avila, as Prioress. Chapter 14, describing the foundation of the friars’ house in Almodovar,

was written after the beginning of 1575. It is more difficult to fix a date for chapters 15-20. (St. Teresa refers to them in a letter of 24 July 1576 to Don Lorenzo de Cepeda). Chapters 21-27 were written during her confinement in Toledo, 1576-1577. Teresa herself tell us of concluding these chapters in the first colophon of her book (F 27, 23). It is 14 November 1576. This concludes the first section of the work. The four following chapters are penned as each of the relevant foundations are made: Villanueva de la Jara (1580), Palencia and Soria (1581) and Burgos (1582).

As regards the literary genre of the work (while remembering that no pure genre exists), it is particularly difficult to attempt to classify it. It is not the kind of book that can be confined to any single-track type. We might say, in general terms, that it is *a chronicle* in its historical intent, a *personal relationship* from a psychological viewpoint and a work of *didactic prose* on a pedagogical level. Teaching, chronicle and the personal appeal of the writer walk hand in hand³. Her magisterium and gift of chronicle are sourced in the experience of Teresa and in her need to share this. Her teaching and report of events are transformed into sincere and colloquial dialogue that can so easily be directed towards God in a praying monologue. This can include all christians, just as it is a direct message or question to her sisters or to all her readers. The memories of Teresa are more important than precise historical dates or literary exactness (F Prol 3; 20, 15). This allows her greater freedom in her narration of events. As opposed to a rigid chronological outline where events must succeed one another in exact objective order, *The Foundations* refers to matters in a much more general way. Its sequence is much more subjective; it concentrates on the description of details and appeals to the freshness of the memory of what occurred. What is important is the intensity that the event has engraved in the experience of the author. We might speak more, in fact, of an emotional rather than a chronological succession of events (F 28, 37). This is not to imply that the objectivity of chronological sequence is ignored. That would jeopardise the criterion of truth. The objectivity and the chronological sequence are enriched by the judgements and concrete visions of Teresa. Only events that interest her personally are recounted. She omits others that might be of interest to the civil society of her time, just as she omits descriptions of the scenery or of persons not relevant to her projects. At the end of the day it is an account of personal incidents; an account of the memories and incidents of her life. What we have is *a chronicle of memories*. It is a work wherein Teresa plays with the balance between the objective and the subjective, where she combines a strict chronological succession of events with her own scale of emotions and values, of presence and silence.

3. Structure and Guides for Reading

In an attempt to suggest a framework or to provide a helpful guide to a structured reading of the text, we immediately have the complex problem of a book written at different periods of time and with multiple contents. Depending on the criterion adopted we could suggest some different approaches.

The most obvious suggestion would be to distinguish between its historical and doctrinal contents. This, however, would be confusing and of little practical help to reading the text because very often an historical event provides the author with an opportunity to expound some doctrinal lesson or other.

Another method would be based on an analysis of each chapter of the book, taking each one independently. The result here would be similar to that above and perhaps more problematic still, given that we would lose the overall vision of the work and the perspective of the battle between God and the evil one in the midst of the world and its people. It would also create serious difficulties regarding the interplay between the pedagogical, doctrinal and historical features of the book.

Yet another possibility is based on an internal analysis of the text, taking into consideration the various dates of writing and the parallels and differences between chapters, viewed both individually and conjointly. Using this approach, Victor Garcia de la Concha and Guido Mancini propose quite similar methods that are also easy to understand. The book is divided into three parts based on the date and location of their being written. The first part written in 1573, comprises chapters I-XX, and this is further sub-divided into two more sections. The first of these sub-sections deals with the foundations of Medina del Campo, Malagon, Valladolid (with the biographies of Beatriz Ordonez and Casilda de Padilla) and Duruelo (chpts. I-XIV). Then the second commences with the foundation of Toledo – which seems to be an independent description from the earlier ones, due to the way the chapter is begun – and goes on to describe in rapid succession the foundations of Pastrana, Salamanca (with her counsels to Prioresses) and Alba de Tormes. This concludes as follows giving us the impression of a new narrative stage:-

“In the account of the dates on which these monasteries were founded I suspect that I am sometimes mistaken, although I try diligently to remember. Since these dates are not of great importance, because they can be corrected afterward, I put them down according to what I can remember; it makes little difference if there is some error” (F 20, 15).

The second part (chpts. XXI-XXVII) deals with the foundations of Segovia, Beas and Seville and includes biographies of Jerome Gracian and Catalina Godinez. These chapters were written in 1576, while she was staying in Toledo, and show certain parallels with the earlier ones. This makes us think that Teresa did have an established scheme when she was organizing her book and still had it fresh in her mind while she wrote these chapters. We should note that chapter XXVII contains the first colophon of the entire work. It would seem to be a completed project at this stage. The third part then abandons this scheme and is written at different times, coinciding with the various new foundations being made. The abundance of details in these final chapters confirms this supposition. Now she is being pressed for time and has less chance of planning these chapters. Her language is inundated with a great array of detail and with references to her fatigue and the weariness caused by the persecutions and various other difficulties cropping up in her life.

In the study methods proposed by Victor Garcia de la Concha and Guido Mancini, quite apart from these textual features, we find an underlying structure that

lends cohesion and unity to all the chapters and their contents. They would see *The Foundations* as a continuation of *The Life* and the conclusion of the first part of *The Way of Perfection*: asceticism reaches its perfection in the practice of obedience, perfect contemplation is obedience transformed into the fullness of Freedom. Prayer, detachment, love, humility and obedience are all channelled into community life and a new kind of recreation. Obedience ceases to be obedience so that it might become a manifestation of freedom of the sublime.

What we have is a spiritual odyssey beginning with the description of the foundation of St. Joseph's and being repeated more or less systematically in all of the other foundations. The corner stone is *obedience*, its nourishment is a new type of religious life that incarnates a *style of community life and recreation* and the denouement is in *each new foundation*. In *The Life* the process is centred in the interior of the soul, in *The Foundations* it is in the outer person, while in *The Way of Perfection* it is framed in counsels for the community.

We might summarise it in the following outline:-

- Exposition: (*Obedience to God*)
 - God's call to an individual
 - Personal life/relationship
- Work and Efforts: (*Asceticism of obedience: Discernment*)
 - Dialogue with oneself
 - Dialogue with others
 - Dialogue with God
 - Dialogue with adversaries
- Result: A Foundation (*Triumph of obedience*)
 - Seeking help
 - a) of God
 - b) of men
 - Purchase of the house
 - Closure of undertaking

This scheme allows us to read the work at three different levels:-

1. Historical Level: *The Foundations* provide all the necessary data to show us how the Reform developed: economy, journeys, means of transport, persons who assisted or caused difficulties, geographical distribution of the monasteries,

various vicissitudes of the journeys or the foundations themselves, outpourings of gratitude etc. We have here the chronicle of the origins of the Teresian family. The letters written by the Saint support and complement this work.

2. Comparative Level: We can deduce a doctrinal or didactic explanation from the historical data and examples.

a. The doctrinal element centres on obedience and its role in the spiritual life: The Prologue: the obedience to begin writing; ch. II: obedience and faith; ch. III: the mercies of God are rooted in obedience; ch. IV: obedience being a radical conversion towards God; ch. V: obedience and its relationship with prayer; chs. VI-VIII: obedience holds the key to discernment of supernatural and pathological states; chs. X-XII: mercy, pain and obedience; chs. XIV-XIX: poverty, free will and obedience; chs. XXIII-XXV: a biographical profile of Fr. Jerome Gracian and obedience; the final chapters which record the last foundations in Caravaca, Villanueva, Palencia and Burgos are a personification of obedience in itself. This is all accomplished, of course, with the help and support of the principal protagonist: His Majesty: “What do you fear? When have I failed you? I am the same now as I was before. Do not neglect to make these two foundations”. (F 29, 6).

b. The didactic elements come together like a continuation of *The Way of Perfection* and as a preparation towards raising the style of fraternity and recreation to perfection. She warns of the dangers of melancholy (chpt. VII), gives some advice to Prioresses (ch. XVIII), teaches about being realistic regarding living in community (chs. I-VIII; XIV-XVII; XXII-XXIII) and provides some biographical profiles that would help in the acceptance of candidates (chs. XI, XII, XXIII-XXV, XXVI-XXVIII).

The pen of the writer transmits her teaching. Teresa, mother and foundress, is leaving us her testament.

3. Mystagogical Level: We are shown the conflict between God and the Evil One which would be the underlying and fundamental objective of the entire book (F Prol. 3). But Teresa also wants to justify herself and her foundations, the result of her obedience to Fr. Ripalda and Fr. Gracian. We can view the story as a theological scene with Teresa as reader of the signs of the times. It is the mystic living out the reality of her Church (*footnote 4*) and assuming her personal responsibilities. Her *Relaciones* and *Cuentas de Consciencia* provide keys for a better understanding of this reading.

4. Contents

The contents of *The Book of the Foundations* might be formulated around three fundamental nuclei: (a) obedience as being the axis of all christian life, (b) the style of community life and recreation as a new way of living and understanding religious life and finally, (c) reading her story from a theological perspective as an answer to the questions posed by the signs of the times.

(a) **“The Lord said to me: Daughter, obedience gives strength (F Prol, 2) “What do you fear? When have I failed you? I am the same now as I was before. Do not neglect to make these two foundations” (F 29, 6).**

This binomial referring to two particularly Teresian concepts, “presence” and “relationship”, provides the framework for an understanding of Teresa’s view of obedience as an exercise of freedom lived to the full. This includes both its ‘horizontal’ dimension in relation to others and its ‘vertical’ aspect relating to God, in the former case as a means and in the latter as an end in itself. It leads to the attainment of contemplation in action and is the supreme manifestation of that kind of humility where the Son’s obedience to the Father led him to the sacrifice of the Cross. He remains with us as bread and wine, because he never tires of humiliating Himself for us (F 3, 13). Teresa’s model of obedience is Jesus himself.

Obedience is adhering to the will of God. It is not an end in itself but a means and is the quickest way of reaching union with God, the “obedience of love”, dedication (F 5, 10). Obedience is conversion, transformation; it is fulfilling the will of God. It is the personal realization of Christ being in our lives, making his presence an experience. Obedience is lived as an offering that brings contentment and happiness in God (F 6, 22).

Obedience is also an exercise of responsibility and freedom, given that it takes place in one’s own personal life. We might simply say that obedience regulates man’s relationship with God and with his neighbours. Teresa would write: “I wished more that she obey someone than receive Communion so often” (F 6, 18). For that reason, this relationship needs human mediation, what we call authority or human obedience. Such mediations are representative of God. It is here that obedience becomes a fundamental key for discernment (F 6, 12). We owe obedience to God alone, even the Church as seen as intermediary (F 5, 12). Teresa gives advice on obedience to the Prioresses, reminding them of this reality and following three criteria. The first is pedagogical: it is necessary to adapt to the needs of the subject if obedience is to produce the proper fruits of christian life, a theological improvement in virtues (F5, 11; 12, 2; 16, 3). The second has a human touch: obedience cannot be imposed by force of arms (Teresian humanism) (F 5, 3; 18, 9.11.13). Her third counsel is mystagogical, based on love. Obedience should help to build up a life of friendship with God and of fraternity between all members of the community (Letter 30 May 1581). We remember her blueprint for community as set out in *The Way of Perfection*: “in this house where there are no more than 13 – nor must there be any more – all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped” (WoP 4, 7).

Obedience, according to Teresa, regulates relationship and is strengthened by presence. The beginnings of salvation lie in obedience. Obedience is born, is nourished and dissolves into Love. It is the manifestation of our capacity to love. Only one who loves is capable of obedience and only one who obeys is capable of love. Obedience is an offering and proof of solidarity with Christ (F 18, 11).

In essence, the exhortation to obedience is her effort to animate and keep alive an iron will of fidelity to the original spirit of the Reform. Obedience had transformed Teresa herself and endorsed her work.

“I find I’m happier that they go to excess in matters of obedience because I am particularly devoted to this virtue, and so I have put down all that I could so that the nuns might possess it. But it would profit me little to do so if the Lord through His supreme mercy had not given the grace for all in general to be inclined towards this virtue. May it please His Majesty to continue to give this grace long into the future. Amen.(F 18, 13).

To assist your reading or study we can offer the following systematization of *Foundations*:

Prologue: obedience to write the book; Ch. II: obedience and faith; Ch. III: the Mercies of God, a reward for obedience; Ch. IV: obedience is transformed into radical conversion towards God; Ch. V: obedience and prayer; Chs. VI-VIII: obedience holds key to discernment of supernatural and pathological states; obedience and sacrifice produce divine joy, happiness in God; obedience without sacrifice leads to disdain for the divine and does not come from God; Chs. X-XII: mercy, pain and obedience combined; Chs. XIV-XIX: combine poverty, free will and obedience; Chs. XXIII-XXV: biographical profile of Fr. Gracian and obedience; finally the chapters describing the last foundations (Caravaca, Villanueva, Palencia and Burgos) as a personification of obedience in itself. This is all assisted, of course, by the presence and support of the principal protagonist, His Majesty. We must never forget that if obedience offers strength and transforms it is because Christ is always present and never lets us down. Obedience transformed into Freedom is perfect contemplation “because unless we give our lives entirely to the Lord so that in everything pertaining to us He might do what conforms to His will, we will never be allowed to drink from this font” (WoP 32, 9).

We might conclude by saying that Teresa is this very obedience and *The Foundations* its demonstration, so that the work begun to manifest the glory of God might “advance always from good to better” (F 29, 32).

(b) “Now we are beginning, and let them strive to advance always from good to better” (F 29, 32) “this style of both our community life and the recreation we have together” (F 13, 5).

The Foundations is a continuation of the exposition on the Teresian community and its understanding of religious life that had begun in *The Way of Perfection*. Teresa conceives religious life as radical option of faith that becomes tangible in “giving all to All” (CE 12, 19). It attains significance in being a configuration with Christ, without losing sight of life’s realities and the inevitable place of pain and suffering. It will identify religious life and Prayer. It will also identify religious life and asceticism. It is an imitation of Christ on the Cross (F 28, 43), following the example of his obedience. And as *imitation* it will always be

something new (F 13, 5), a path of liberation in the service of the Church (F 1, 6). Religious life, *this style of the sisterly way in which we live and the recreation we have together* is synonymous with a plan for the future, of an initiation, of something still to be concluded.

Obedience to God must be lived out each day as something new, always in a state of watchful hope, ready to listen to the loving word of the One who is at the centre of the community: Christ. Religious life means being in Christ, with Christ and living for Christ. Christ is the point of departure and the goal. The Eucharist, the central sacrament of the Teresian day, is celebrated and experienced in a special way. It is the powerhouse and stimulus of each and every one of her foundations and the focal point of every community.

When we unite this factor with the identification between Christ and his Church we can appreciate how religious life and prayer have such a specific purpose. It is to seek the good of souls and their salvation. It is work for the spread of the Church. This intention is clearly expressed in *Foundations* in the account of Teresa's meeting with Br. Alonso Maldonado (F 1, 6-7). Teresian religious life is an incarnation of missionary and ecclesial prayer, offered interiorly by each soul.

This way of life, however, is not without certain dangers, the greatest of these being melancholy and overripe imaginations (F 7). With characteristic realism, Teresa underlines the need for strict discernment of prospective vocations given that not everybody is called to such a way of life (f 18), nor is everybody capable of carrying the cross of interior mortification with the same dignity as Christ carried His (F 22, 5). Such discernment is also required to ensure that the purity and freshness of the initial designs be retained in their original vigour (F 4, 6-7; 27, 11-12). The biographies that Teresa shares with her readers describe the ideal candidates for the Teresian project of religious life: Catalina de Cordoba, Beatriz of the Incarnation, Casilda de Padilla, Fr. Gracian etc. We might make a resume of the following qualities as being necessary for embracing *the kind of community life and the recreation we have together*:

Humility, forgetfulness of self, "self-disdain".

A life of prayer.

Great detachment, mortification, penance.

Poverty and Trust in Providence.

Constancy and Determination.

Continuing discernment in seeking what is pleasing to God

Happiness in the Lord (Interior contentment).

Proven virtues, especially obedience and humility.

Modesty and honesty.

Purity and transparency of life.

Service to others: desire for the good of souls.

Willingness to suffer for God.

Discretion and meekness.

Love for the Blessed Virgin.

Strength in difficulties.

Patience in sickness.

Treating all others equally.

Agreeable character (sisterly life and recreation).
Communicate the experience of God to others.
Good understanding.
Gratitude.
Community living.
Radical decision to follow Christ.
Special love for the Eucharist.
Living life of ecclesial apostolic prayer.
Able to transmit experience of God by witness.

In these qualities we find all the virtues of following Christ:- evangelical radicalism; personal and community poverty; mutual love; evangelical abnegation; humility and service of the Church. (*footnote 5*).

The evangelical counsels are the foundation of religious life and are manifest both in human virtues as well as theological ones. They facilitate the achievement of freedom of the spirit (F 5, 15) and, in turn, allow the religious an entrance to the heart of the world.

The role of poverty as a witness to the presence of the Kingdom of God in the world is of paramount importance in *Foundations* (F 14, 4-5; 15, 14-15). So too is obedience as it organises communities and disposes us to configuration with Christ (F 5) and to collaborate with His grace in fulfilling our personal role in community life. Strangely perhaps, chastity is never mentioned explicitly. Without doubt, however, this virtue pervades the whole book, creating an environment where the entire work can achieve its purpose and meaning (F 4, 5; 28, 14. 43; 31, 46-47).

Religious life is a search for christian perfection showing proof of the love of God (F5, 15) of the freedom of spirit which is born from that love (F 6, 15) while setting an example of patience and humility to the world (5, 15). In synthesis, we might say that for Teresa it is a radical option of faith, an image of Christ the Saviour crucified and a projection of full freedom, all destined to be at the service of the Church. This programme is lived out in an environment of recreation, silence and personal equilibrium, never losing sight of the totality of the gift offered and the experience of its novelty:

“I see that I have lost what they have worked for and that I can in no way blame You. Nor is it in any way good for persons to complain if they see their Order in some decline; they should strive to be the kind of rock on which the edifice may again be raised, for the Lord will help towards that” (F 4 7).

(c) “it is always a suitable time for God to grant great favours to the one who truly serves Him And let them strive to discern whether there is some failure in this detachment and correct it” (F 4, 5).

The Book of the Foundations is a privileged text where we can admire *Divine Providence* at work in the world and see Saint Teresa's first-hand experience of this. Right from the Prologue (F Prol, 3) this reality appears as her objective. The Lord sees to the solution of the various problems in every foundation. He arranges to get the house in Medina del Campo (F 3, 3-4), protects the nuns from bulls (F 3, 7), convinces Teresa to found in Malaga despite its being such a small and remote place (F 9, 5) and obliges her to proceed with the final foundations (F 29, 6).

Because of all this, her book is an account of the personal salvation history of Teresa. She depicts herself in the style of the great biblical figures as the one put in charge of the people to lead them towards the land promised by God. And in the same way as the historical books of the Old Testament highlight the presence of God, here too we are presented with the drama of battle in souls and in the world between God and the Evil One. By way of example we might refer to the night spent in Salamanca where human fears are a symbol of temptation and an opportunity to show her trust in God (F19, 3-5).

At a time when the presence and the humanity of Christ were being denied, Teresa responds by affirming the vitality of Christ, her Spouse, and by reserving the Blessed Sacrament in each new foundation at the moment of taking possession. Faced with the temptation of abandoning a sinning Church, she sees herself as the indisputable daughter of that Church "*in these times when staunch friends of God are necessary*" (Life 15, 5) and courageous witnesses are always on hand to be a light for the world (F 28, 5). These are the armies of God, formed by simple and humble souls who, in their very weakness, augment God's prominence. They appear as prophetic signs, denouncing the evils of their times while they seek the Will of God.

In answer to the Reformation, Teresa will head a vigorous and concentrated missionary and evangelical campaign. She will lead it forward by participating actively in ecclesial reality, taking the side of spiritual souls, without neglecting learned ones either. She would see her ideal of life and prayer as part of the "Devotio Moderna" movement. Prayer as a pathway to sanctity would become a democratic and universal reality.

Teresa establishes a new style of life, wanting to serve the Church by infiltrating society, as a contradictory stand to what she had experienced in the convent of the Incarnation. Instead of monasteries with many nuns, she preferred ones with a few, like the college of Christ. As a response to the theme of 'honour', she unfurls the banner of evangelical equality; where rich nuns enjoyed many privileges, she opts for poor ones – as was seen in the foundation of St. Joseph's in Avila and in all her subsequent monasteries (whether they had dowries or not) -; while manual work was perceived as degrading, Teresa deliberately opts for manual labour so that her nuns could be free in their decision-making and released from the temptations and enslavement arising from wishing to always please benefactors. Finally, as her pacific answer to religious warfare, she made her foundations (Life 3, 1).

History for Teresa was the privileged stage from which to read the signs of the times and bring one's own will into conformity with God's, in an obvious eschatological projection. It is here that the reading of that history and the understanding of life calls for discernment. This is what Teresa would do, from the moment she had her vision of hell. For this reason *Foundations* is nothing other than a big question or a report presented to those who could grant ecclesiastical approval to her work.

Teresa's book is the account of a life framed between the perception of the Transcendent and the acknowledgement of being limited, an ever-present characteristic in the history of man. *The Foundations* is the experience of the Love of God lived in the eschatological tension of *now but not yet*.

5. *The Foundations* – a great epic of the familiar.

The Book of the Foundations tells us of the vicissitudes of the Reform. It does so in a descriptive, lively and detailed way. It describes each foundation individually, except for St. Joseph's which was dealt with in Teresa's *Life*.

It has particular importance because it is the story of the Reform as seen through the eyes of Teresa herself. As such it is subjective and at first-hand. It is the account of her *constant conversion*. She puts her whole life and soul into each foundation and this synthesises her journey towards salvation - salvation that was always compromised by the presence of the Evil One and the worldly obstacles he conjured up in an effort to frustrate the work of God.

From what has been said so far, we cannot doubt the "limited" dimensions of this 'history' as described in *The Foundations*. Teresa never intended it to be a social chronicle. She remains silent for the main part about the important historical and political events occurring during her lifetime. It is an intimate family history, where everyday activities take on epic proportions.