

Foundations: Chapters 20–21

Reading guidelines

1. Who is the Founder?

If we limit ourselves to Teresa's account, the Carmel of Alba happened at the insistence of the administrator of the Duke of Alba and at that of his wife: '*I received an urgent request from the administrator for the Duke of Alba and his wife that a monastery be founded in the town of Alba*' (F. 20,1), which foundation Teresa made, in spite of her initial opposition to doing so because the place was small and it would be necessary to found with an income.

On the other hand, the Carmel of Segovia came about by command of the Lord: '*One day while I was there in prayer, our Lord told me to go to Segovia and make a foundation*' (F. 21,1).

2. Portrait of two noble ladies

In both chapters the figures of the two foundresses, Dona Teresa de Layz and Dona Ana de Jimena, stand out in relief, though in very different ways. The good and delicate Dona Ana, future Carmelite and Prioress of Segovia, barely occupies a couple of paragraphs (F. 21, 3 and 4), while Teresa de Layz takes possession of chapter 20 in such a way that the story of the foundation isn't resumed until we are reaching paragraph number 13.

The wife of the administrator Velazquez, who takes second place in the narrative, represents the typical meddling benefactor, giving the Saint a good deal of trouble, not only during the time of the foundation: '*We underwent much difficulty in trying to come to an agreement*' (F. 20,13) but also afterwards (See letters to Fr. Jeronimo Gracian, Palencia, mid-February 1581 and to Dona Teresa de Layz, 6th August 1582) and even up to Teresa's last illness and the burial of her mortal remains.

3. Historical Notes on the XVIth century: Foundation of Alba de Tormes.

- The problem of honour: a noblewoman, so ashamed of her poverty to the point of not asking for help; the husband - of wealthy origins, a 'judeoconverso', who 'purified' his lineage by means of marriage.
- The social situation of XVIth century woman: the birth of a daughter was a family tragedy.
- Founding a convent was another way of ennobling oneself.
- Teresa's subtle irony, not untouched by pain, in the face of these things (F. 20, 2 and 3).
- The presence of the 'marvellous': the presence everywhere of the demon in daily life and also the presence of the Saints. (F. 20, 4,7 and 8)
- Again the problem of income and the Council of Trent (no. 1 and 13)

4. Landscapes with figures: Foundation of Segovia.

- Religious, clerics, knights, ladies, zealous and distrustful Vicars General all file through this apparently simple but delightful chapter. It was a foundation in which Teresa said she had little trouble but which found her coping with illness and with great interior sufferings. (F. 21,4)
- The personalities and issues:
 - The apostolic commissary**, Pedro Fernandez, who gave the permission to found in spite of the fact that, as Teresa records, he *'did not want me to make any more foundations'* (no. 1), she being at that time Prioress of the Incarnation and temporarily resident in Salamanca.
 - The Jimena Family**: Dona Ana and her daughter, and Andres de Jimena: *'a gentleman who was looking for a house for us'* (no. 5) and his Carmelite sister, Isabel de Jesus, that young girl whose singing occasioned the Mother Foundress to go into an ecstasy.
 - St. John of the Cross and Julian of Avila**, ill-treated by the irate Vicar General, who wanted to take Fr. John away under arrest and who did take away the Blessed Sacrament from the unfortunate nuns.
 - Antonio Gaytan**, the gentleman from Alba, whose admirable biographical sketch Teresa wrote in numbers 6 and 7.
 - The licentiate Herrera** and that *'cousin of the Bishop'*, Juan de Orozco y Cobarruvias de Leiva, who *'did all he could for us'*.
- The **lawsuits**, protagonists of so many foundations, initiated by both religious (Mercedarians and Franciscans) and by the ecclesiastical Chapter. (Nos. 8 and 9)
- And, as almost always, the **payment of money** smoothing everything out (no. 10).

For reflection

1. Poverty and freedom:

Teresa of Jesus was impassioned for that liberty which is *'the holy freedom of spirit'* (WP 10,1) and was for that reason the enemy of all slavish dependencies whether on honour or on those benefactors with whom *'if they give the body some comfort, the spirit pays well for it.'* (WP 9,1) In this context read chapter 2 of the 'Way of Perfection' and compare it with chapter 20 of the Foundations.

What enslaving dependencies can you perceive in your life?

'Your eyes on your Spouse'. To what extent may you be fixing your gaze elsewhere?

In your own situation, who are you setting out to please – God or others? (WP 2,5). Look again at F. 21,7.

2. Women in XVIth Century (F. 20, 2ff.):

Review the situation of women within your own cultural and ecclesial context. Do persons so disparaged, because of social class, race or culture, exist today in your own surroundings? Perhaps they can be found in your own parish or group or community...? 3

3. '*This seemed impossible to me.*' (F. 21,1)

Think about some concrete situation in your personal or family life or amongst your associates, which it seems impossible to go through, although you know that precisely in that situation the will of God exists. What action did Teresa take; and what action are you taking? '*Faith and the love of pleasing God make possible what to natural reason is not possible*' (F. 2,4).

4. '*...that those who come after would be inspired to carry on in the tradition of such a good beginning*' (F. 20,15).

What is the reading of the *Foundations*' giving to you?

5. Pray with Teresa:

'O powerful love of God, how different are your effects from those of the world's love! This latter love doesn't want company since company would seem to oblige it to give up what it possesses. In the case of the love of my God, the more lovers that love knows there are, the more it increases; and so its joys are tempered by seeing that not all enjoy that good...So the soul looks for ways to find company, and willingly sets aside its joy when it thinks it can be of some help that others might strive to enjoy it...O my Jesus, how great is the love You bear the children of the earth, for the greatest service one can render You is to leave You for their sake and their benefit – and then You are possessed more completely.' (Exclamations 2; Kavanaugh-Rodriguez: Soliloquies 2)