

# **'I Was Born For You' (‘Para Vos Nací’)**

**‘I am Yours. I was born for you. What do you want of me?’**

## **V CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF SAINT TERESA OF JESUS - 2015**

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**'I Was Born For You'**

**(‘Para Vos Nací’)**  
**‘I am Yours and born for you, what do you want of me?’**

**A proposal for the preparation of the celebration of the  
V CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF SAINT TERESA OF JESUS - 2015**

*Introduction: Motivating Teresian Studies*

1. *Returning to the sources of our teresian charism*

a. Within the movement of a *return to the sources*, the fruit of our christian faith and experience, and which the Order has tried to stress in the last chapter documents, we wish to return in this general chapter (2009) to the *sources of our teresian charism*: it is the best way to prepare ourselves for the celebration of the 5<sup>th</sup> Centenary of Saint Teresa of Jesus’ birth (2015), through a programmed *study* - personal and community - of her writings, which will help us to have a *renewed understanding of our identity and mission in today’s Church*.

b. This does not mean having a lectures or courses on teresian spirituality, but rather to encounter a way or a pedagogy that will bring us to discover the experience of the mystery that infused Teresa’s entire message. A message that was centered on the mystery of Christ, the Church and the human person. Teresa, guided by the Holy Spirit, encountered God in history.

c. The title, ‘I was born for you’, attempts to express this profound aspiration. It evokes, above all, her birth five hundred years ago, her I - Thou relationship with God. The title refers to the presence of God, to prayer, to the universal destiny of creation: everything is born for God. The title is also an expression of the vocation of all carmelites, of all who are consecrated to God and of all human beings. Finally, it expresses the most generous love for one’s neighbour: *I am your loving servant*. We are all called, in our vocation to evangelical and teresian fraternity, to love and serve one another. In short the title represents an invitation to enter into the human and spiritual adventure experienced by Teresa of Jesus. To this end, we want *to revive her spirit within ourselves, to let the wisdom of her writings penetrate us and in this way give our lives a new impulse, in conformity with our teresian charism at the service of the church and world*.

d. We should study Teresa’s writings not simply from a doctrinal point of view, even though this is also necessary, but above all from a practical and existential point of view, this is *wisdom*. We are not only interested in studying her charism but also her *impact* on our life and mission. We should immerse ourselves ever more deeply and existentially in the sources of our life, in order to promote ourselves with greater force in the Church and in the social, cultural and religious milieux in which we live today.

## 2. To have a listening attitude in view of the signs of the times

a. Our first concern is once more to get closer to Teresa's *life and writings*. Our attitude in doing this should be to *listen*, to be her disciples and children. In this way we shall welcome her words and allow ourselves to be guided by her spirit. It is a spirit that resounds in new historical contexts, inviting us to recreate her message in them, to be attentive to the 'signs of the times', to those events where the work of the Spirit is clearly visible, 'The Spirit blows where it wills...leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder its activity in every time and place.' (*Redemptoris Missio*, 29).

b. For this reason we also aim to focus on discerning the 'signs of the times.' These are 'signs of God' (EN §37) in which we can perceive a call to spirituality and a renewed interest in mysticism. We hear of a '*spiritual need*' as one of the signs of the times. It is a need that seeks a dynamic and profound spirituality, one that is rooted in scripture and with a mystical dimension, that is able to challenge the insecurities and uncertainties of our modern world. A spirituality that is able to do this in spite of the process of secularization, which John Paul II discerned in his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, 'Is it not one of the 'signs of the times' that in today's world, despite widespread secularization, there is a *widespread demand for spirituality*, a demand which expresses itself in large part as a *renewed need for prayer?*' (§33a). The Pope speaks of this 'widespread demand for spirituality' in modern times. He links it to the great mystical tradition in which the witness of our Carmelite mystics is outstanding: 'How can we forget here, among the many shining examples, the teachings of Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila?' (ib., §33 b).

## 3. To whom her writings are addressed

a. The document, though addressed to the Teresian Carmel (Discalced Carmelite Friars, Nuns and Secular Order), is open to the *entire Teresian family*, reconfirming the bonds that unite us as brothers and sisters. Only by reaffirming our unity can we incarnate and express the richness of our charism in the Church. We cannot forget that the family founded by Saint Teresa is one that is open, that has been enriched throughout its history by new members, new associations and new institutes. Nor can we forget the young vocations to Carmel, source of our Carmelite family's regeneration. At the same time we would like to call to mind the unwavering fidelity to our teresian charism, so often lived quietly and humbly, by our sisters and brothers since the second Vatican Council.

b. In a spirit of fraternity we would particularly like to invite our Discalced Carmelite Sisters to join with us on this spiritual pilgrimage, a five year period of preparation for the Centenary. Together with them and with all the Carmelite family we wish to carry *the torch of the Teresian charism*, focusing on the fundamental apostolic values of our generous self-giving and of prayer in the heart of the Church.

## 4. Development

The document is written in two parts, which correspond to the two stages of the teresian studies.

- The first is a general presentation of our charism, gleaned from the life and writings of Teresa of Jesus, within her historical, socio-cultural and religious milieu.
- The second part, which starts from today's cultural and religious milieu, offers insights to a better understand of her writings and at the same time outlines some practical suggestions.

PART ONE  
**The teresian roots of our charism: her life and writings**

*I. The historical, socio-cultural and religious milieux of her life*

We need to give a brief description of these settings because they offer us many insights to the understanding of our Saint. We refer only to those aspects which have repercussions in her writings.

*5. Her social milieu*

a. Avila, the cradle of Teresa of Jesus, like 16<sup>th</sup> century Castile, was a continuation of mediaeval spanish society, in which upper classes dominated, where convention, titles and formalities abounded. Teresa was inevitably caught up in this society. In the *Book of her life* she criticized the three main pseudo-values of the society: the cult of *honour*, the desire for *money* and the search for *pleasure* (Life 20).

b. Her valuable insight to the dominant upper classes was drawn from her experience at the palace of Dona Luisa de la Cerda in Toledo, 'I derived a very beneficial insight, and I told her about it... I realized how little should be our esteem for the status of nobility... I totally abhorred any desire to become a lady of the nobility... This is a kind of subservience that makes calling such persons "lords" one of the world's lies, for it doesn't seem to me they are anything but slaves to a thousand things' (Life 34.4).

c. A counter balance to this was her concern for the poor, an attitude which she never lost, as reflected in one of her earliest writings: 'In the matter of poverty, I think God has bestowed on me a great favour...It seems to me I have much more compassion for the poor than I used to...(Spirit. Test. 2:3 &4)

*6. Her political, religious and cultural milieux*

a. Teresa was born and formed in a period of imperial expansion by Charles V (1516-1556), and developed her activity and personality during the reign of Philip II (1556-1598). However she worked with the attitude that had formed her in the imperial period, when Castile stopped being a quiet, insular region and looked beyond itself towards the European horizons of Italy, France and Flanders (WP 1.2). Teresa was also deeply concerned for Africa and for the Turks. She showed a special care and concern for the vast panorama of [Latin] America and its problems. When Fr. Maldonado revealed to her the depth of the problem of the 'conquistadores' in America, she adopted a clear approach, from a human, christian and missionary point of view (Letter 24.13, Lorenzo de Cepeda, January 17, 1570).

b. Regarding her religious environment, we should highlight the presence of the three religious faiths: christian, muslim and jewish, which in mediaeval spanish society lived together in relative harmony. However, during Teresa's time, after the expulsion of the muslims and jews at the end of the previous century, great tensions arose between christians and muslims (moors). From her childhood Teresa alluded to the hostile 'land of the moors' and to possible martyrdom there (L 1.4). However, much more tense and dramatic was the judeo-christian tension following the expulsion of the jews at the end of the previous century.

c. From a cultural point of view, and in the midst of the renaissance period, Teresa contributed to the expansion of cultural boundaries. She learned to read and write; a schooling that was reserved to a small minority. 'The majority of people who were

illiterate [halfway through the 16th century] amounted to 80% or 85% of the population' (Manuel Fernandez). The printing press contributed greatly to this cultural change, coming as it did from central Europe (15th cent.). As a result many spiritual books were printed and dispersed. Some came into the possession of St. Teresa and other humble people, especially women who now engaged in reading. The most popular religious books were: *Flos Sanctorum*, *Vita Christi*, books on prayer ('the hours', 'daily prayers', 'meditations'...), the practice of *recollection* ..., the works of Osuna, Laredo, Palma, Granada...

## 7. Confronting the marginalization of women

a. 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish society was infected with misogyny; women were undervalued and excluded from public life, as well as being kept in a permanent state of immaturity. It was difficult for a woman to have access to cultural resources. They were not admitted to the universities, nor were other centres of learning or human development open to them, nor again were they allowed to read spiritual books in Spanish. Teresa protested repeatedly in the *Way of Perfection* against these prohibitions: 'They cannot take books from you, and, if you are studious and humble, you need nothing more' (WP 21 Codex Escorial). 'The judges in the world, who, being, after all men and sons of Adam, refuse to consider any woman's virtue as above suspicion.' (WP 3 Codex Escorial).

b. Teresa became a promoter of the movement for female culture without actually realizing it. She has become well known as a woman who was avid for knowledge. She did not belong to a select group of '*puellae doctae*.' However, she was linked with Spanish spiritual literature in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In founding the new Carmel, she required her nuns to *be able to recite the divine office* [in Latin!] *and to help in the choir* (Const. 6.1). She did not accept illiterate women. However, later when a little illiterate shepherdess, Anne Garcia, from Almendral, called at the door of her Carmel, she changed her mind and admitted her. She was to become Anne of St. Bartholomew. Teresa herself taught Anne to read and write.

c. The new Carmel was to be book-friendly. It encouraged study, poetry and the songs of John of the Cross. It also encouraged scholars to visit. After Teresa, to the end of the century and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there followed in Carmel a long line of literary Carmelite nuns; among the most outstanding were Mary of St. Joseph, Cecilia of the Nativity and Anne of the Trinity.

## 8. Her ecclesial milieu and popular devotion

a. The Church in Teresa's day was clerical and hierarchical. It was something she and her contemporaries accepted. The clergy were the social group closest to Teresa. They were also the most influential in her religious life and she greatly valued them. Teresa was in contact with the various strata among the ecclesial hierarchy. She held the bishops she knew in high esteem. For her a priest was not someone who simply fulfils an office but rather the standard-bearer, a kind of captain of Christians. The priest was a 'defender' of the cause of Christ: 'What would the Church be without them!' (WP 3.3).

b. Spanish society during its golden era was ostentatiously religious in its structures, customs and feelings, with the result that popular devotion became a reality in one's general education. Such popular piety was present on all levels. As a child Teresa breathed it in with the air in her family home. Later she experienced it in different ways throughout her religious life, in contrast to conventual liturgy. In the end she incorporated it, now very purified, into her mystical life. The most important factor is the connection between popular piety and her mystical experience: Teresa

experienced on a daily basis the 'great beauty of the face of Christ'. She lived the theopathy of the Trinity etc., and yet, in her daily life of prayer in community, she still found holy pictures, holy water, processions and sung verses to be almost indispensable (WP 34.11).

### 9. Her attitude towards the Inquisition

In the Spanish Church and society of that century the Inquisition was one of the most powerful institutions. It also played a very important role in Teresa's life. The interventions of the Inquisition greatly questioned her person and her mystical graces (Life 33.5). We see this in the first of her books, the *Book of her Life*. Nevertheless, she did not succumb to the atmosphere of fear created by the Inquisition which had spread throughout Castile. Her attitude was clearly evident in the primitive text of the *Constitutions*, when in making a list of books for her small Carmelite libraries she included those of Luis de Granada, even though he had recently been included on the *Index* of prohibited books.

### 10. Teresa's place in the counter-reformation movement

a. In the history of the Church Teresa, as well as St. Ignatius and St. John of the Cross, entered the counter-reformation movement which started midway through the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The reform was led in a special way by the Council of Trent. The 'counter-reformation' was a movement that arose in the Church when it became aware of the great fissure in the Church's unity in the West. The counter-reformation was not only a reaction to the 'reform' initiated by Luther, it was also a new spirit that breathed life into the lives of Christians, as well as the arts, theology and seminaries. The principle exponents of the reform were the saints, and in the Church itself. The counter-reformation was just as much concerned about how to live the Christian faith, as it was about those who were separated from the Rome.

b. In general terms, Teresa's mystical life as well as her work as a foundress coincided with the celebration and enactment of the Council of Trent, often known as '*the holy Council*.' However, Teresa was not so much a reformer of religious life as the upholder of a charism. She inspired a style of life in the Church, characterized by a strong humanistic element; i.e., a fraternal and contemplative life at the service of the Kingdom.

c. Her Christian humanism sees the human person as someone essentially open to transcendental values. All her symbols (the *castle*, the *garden* of the soul, the *cocoon-caterpillar*, the *two fountains*...) show men and women as destined for transcendence and, in the depths of their being; they are also open to a relationship with God. Equally, her '*mysticism*' is prophetic; it speaks of God, of Christ, of the soul, not from theoretical ideas but from experience. Teresa is, in short, a witness to God, who is present in the world and in the history of humankind. Christian humanism and mysticism are the most significant components Teresa brought to the counter-reformation, led by the Council.

d. At the same time she never lost her firm commitment to the Church, not only for its ecclesial *mystery* but also for its terrestrial structure and life. '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 Scripture' (Life 33.5).

### 11. Her view of the American continent

a. Teresa was about 17 when her brothers began to depart for South America (*the*

*Indies*, in Teresa's words). From that time she never stopped focusing her attention on the american continent. She was anxious to know what was happening there until the day she died. It is interesting to see how she integrated her anxiety into her mystical life. During the last two decades [of her life] Latin America had a great influence on her thinking and became one of the reasons why she decided to expand her work as a foundress to the friars.

b. When one speaks of St. Teresa and her attitude towards Latin America the subject of the money she received usually comes up. She felt very deeply about the problems in the Americas, which in fact caused her to make a radical change. She always received first hand information. One day in 1565 the Franciscan missionary, Alonso de Maldonado visited St. Joseph's Carmel. He brought with him news that was to be decisive for Teresa. He was a disciple and follower of Fr. Bartholomew Las Casas who, being in favour of the missionaries, was opposed to the venture of the conquistadors. Teresa remained profoundly shaken by what she heard about all the lost souls, and could only retire alone to a hermitage in the garden and call on God for *so many millions of souls which are being lost*. Suddenly an immense new world had opened up to her (F. 1).

### 12. Her family environment: the Cepeda-Ahumada home

a. In Teresa's day the home was 'a place where all helped with domestic duties, including the lighting of the fire' (Covarrubias). This material fire, so necessary in cold places such as Avila, was at the same time a focal point for human warmth and kindness, uniting and reuniting the members of her family. It was around the fire that Teresa learnt how to relate intimately with others. Here, in this space, her family cultivated and promoted christian spiritual values. Teresa always promoted the importance of family. She was assiduous to fulfill her mission as a 'mother of spiritual people', for her carmelite sisters as well as for laity. As a simple 'nun' she was enthused by the spiritual life of her father. Later, as a 'mystic', she would be enthused by the spiritual life of her brothers and sisters.

b. The sketch Teresa drew of her family in the first pages of the *Book of her Life* is clearly positive, well described and full of balanced christian humanism. The sketch of don Alonso is one of an upright man, who loved the truth, was not prone to excess, comfortable with other people, an avid reader, devoted to the Eucharist, *very charitable to the poor and kind to the sick and to the servants*. The sketch of his wife Beatrice is very similar. She was also long suffering, modest, *very gentle and of great understanding*, who cultivated a childlike marian piety as well as other christian virtues. Teresa repeatedly recalled her mother's concern for the poor, she *gave alms when she could*. In Teresa's eyes her family was good, humanistic and christian.

### 13. Teresa's new home: The Carmelites of the Incarnation

a. Teresa experienced the call to Carmel between the ages of 18 and 20. At 20 she left the family home and joined the carmelite nuns at the Incarnation. At this time the carmelite nuns were considered the 'second Order of Carmelites.' Founded in France the previous century by the then superior general, blessed John Soreth, they spread throughout Spain during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Teresa's time there were two such convents founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: those of Ecija and Avila.

b. Decisive episodes: a) Teresa had a friend, Juana Juarez, who was a nun at the Incarnation; b) She read fervently the *Letters* of St. Jerome, which spoke deeply to her; c) she felt keenly the loss of her favourite brother, Rodrigo, when he decided to go to South America, leaving Teresa the right to his own inheritance; d) However, it was

undoubtedly the *Letters* of St. Jerome that had the greatest impact : 'I was engaged in this battle within myself for three months' (Life 3.6).

c. '*For without my desiring it, God forced me to overcome my repugnance*' (Life 3.4). The 'three months' of struggle culminated in the decision to tell her father, don Alonso, who was openly opposed: first, because of the love he had for his daughter, and later because of the family situation. However, given Teresa's character, her decision was irrevocable. There was no haste, after 'the three months' there followed more than a year of waiting. She continued to speak to her friend in the Incarnation. Within the family she shared her plan with the eldest of her brothers, Anthony, whom she convinced to do the same: 'I persuaded one of my brothers to become a friar, telling him about the vanity of the world' (Life 4.1). Even then Teresa possessed extraordinary powers of persuasion. Very early in the morning on All Souls day in 1535, Teresa and her brother fled from their home. When they arrived at the convent of the Incarnation Teresa entered the enclosure door, which needed all the courage she had, as she said 'I had to force myself.' Her call to Carmel had not been all sweetness and light but, on the contrary, a battle.

d. *Why she became a Carmelite*. It is probably the most defective aspect of the whole process of her vocation. Teresa made a fundamental decision to be a Carmelite nun because she had a friend at the Incarnation and because, as she said, 'I liked this convent very much' (Life 4.1), and once she had decided for religious life she said, 'I was determined to go where I thought I could serve God more, or where my father desired.' (Life 4.1). In Teresa's soul there were other mixed motives, including the fear of hell. However, she had a love of Christ, she had also a realistic expectation of the difficulties in religious life, she *being so spoilt at home*. Her option for religious life came from deep within herself. Her specifically Carmelite vocation had uncertain psychological motivations. However, it was well supported by a clearly theological motivation: 'Oh, God help me! What means His Majesty was employing to prepare me for the state in which He desired to make use of me! For without my desiring it, He forced me to overcome my repugnance' (Life 3.4).

#### 14. Her immersion into Carmel

a. When Teresa entered the Incarnation and began her Carmelite formation she was aware of entering a spiritual tradition that was centuries old. It is true that the Carmelite nuns had only been in existence for about one hundred years and the Order itself three and a half centuries, but its oral tradition went back more than two thousand years, inspired as it was by the prophets of the Old Testament and by the Carmelite Rule.

b. The *Carmelite Rule* was, after the bible, the text most quoted by the Saint. The Rule was written in the first decade of the 13th century and later amended and approved by Pope Innocent IV (1247). It was this final version that Teresa called the *First or Primitive Rule* (cf Life 36.26), which she believed was lived 'without relaxation.'

c. In the first pages of the *Way of Perfection*, Teresa spoke about the foundation of St. Joseph's, 'this little corner, where I have also sought that this Rule of our Lady and Empress be observed with the perfection with which it was observed when initiated' (*Way* 3:5).

d. The most notable aspects proposed by the Rule were: *evangelical poverty* (*Life* 35), *prayer* ('that we pray without ceasing..., it is the most important aspect of the Rule', WP 4.2), the *solitude* of one's cell (*Const.* 8; WP 4.9), *silence* (Int C 3.2, 13), *work* and the example of St. Paul, with the traditional connection of the Rule with the model of the Virgin Mary, which was the reason why Teresa normally called it *the Rule of the Virgin*

*Mary, or the Rule of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel...* (F. 14.5; Life 36.26; WP title; 3.5...; Conc. Prol.1).

### 15. *The decisive event of her conversion*

a. During her 27 years at the Incarnation Teresa experienced days of acute pain: her illness shortly after profession, the three months away in Becedas, the four days of paroxysm in August 1539 when 'the grave was kept open for a day and a half in my convent', the three months of paralysis, followed by three painful years of recuperation in the convent's infirmary, 'when I began to go about on hands and knees I praised God...' (Life 6:1-3).

b. However, much more significant for her spiritual growth were the events in her life; reading St. Augustine, and the vision of a badly wounded Christ turned Teresa definitively towards religious life. In the Incarnation she experienced mystical graces which she referred to in the *Book of her Life*; her christological experiences, to the blessing with the arrow [Transverberation], and the spiritual graces that inspired her to found a new Carmel.

c. It was at the Incarnation in Avila that the decisive event occurred which would change the course of her life. It was 1554 and she had spent almost 20 years of her life in Carmel. She referred to this event in chapter 9 of her autobiography. It consisted, not in her overcoming her on-going ten year long battle with her trials, but in the expansion of her horizon towards a new way of relating to God and to facing up to everyday life.

d. This decisive happening represents a new horizon in Teresa's spiritual life, which she described in this way: 'I sometimes experienced, as I said, although very briefly, the beginning of what I will now speak about. It used to happen, when I represented Christ within me in order to place myself in His presence, or even while reading, that a feeling of the presence of God would come upon me unexpectedly so that I could in no way doubt He was within me or I totally immersed in Him.' (Life 10.1). It was quite simply the beginning of her mystical life; the 'beginning' of a new way of praying and living, of unforeseeable consequences for herself. It was her experience of a new life that would give birth to a new Carmel. This then is how the second stage of her life began (1554-1582), characterized by strong mystical experiences (Sp. Test.35), which were witnessed by John of the Cross when he was confessor at the Incarnation, during the 1571-1574 triennium, and while Teresa was prioress. This stage was also characterized by intense activity, in which John of the Cross was also involved.

## *II. Keys to understanding St. Teresa's writings*

Teresa of Jesus' life was marked by the decisive experience which we just described. She was also enriched by her experience at the Incarnation, where she lived 27 years. She spent the rest of her days, 20 years, in the Carmel she founded (1562-1582). This stage of her life, the most fertile, coincided with her work as a writer and foundress. We shall first of all put together some insights that will help us to understand better her writings.

### 16. *The account of her mystical experience*

a. The works of Teresa of Jesus were fundamentally linked to her mystical experiences. These experiences became the basis of her first attempts at writing: special christological graces (Life 26.5; 27.2; 37.4) and anthropological graces that allowed her to have a new understanding of herself and the landscape of her soul (Life 40.9). Typical of this contemplative panorama was its dynamic character, that urged

her from her contemplative experience to found a Carmel and to write (cf. *Life*, prologue 2; 37.1).

b. She was told by her advisers, who were very involved in her mystical experiences, to write the first book (1562 & 1565). At the same time she tells us herself that she was moved by one of her interior impulses. The *Way of Perfection* (1566 and 1567) described the reason for her first book when it tells us that she was urgently requested to do so by the group [of carmelite nuns] recently established in St. Joseph's. They were aware of her mystical graces and, in a certain sense, wanted to share in them.

c. Five or six years later (1573) she undertook to write the *Book of Foundations*. It was a continuation of the account she had begun in the *Life* 32-36. She was asked to write it by her confessor, Fr. Ripalda, but at the same time a mystical experience impelled her to write.(Prol. 2).

d. By the end of 1577 she had composed the *Interior Castle*. The same year she wrote the *Foundations* which was also connected to the book of her *Life*, not so much by what she wrote (ch. 32-36) but by her mystical experiences (ch. 22-31; 37-40). She wrote the *Interior Castle* to complete the panorama of her interior experiences, so that they would serve as a paradigm for the process of the entire spiritual life of a christian.

e. In all her books the central theme is prayer, which should be open to mystical experiences as such. Fidelity to prayer should normally lead to specific contemplative experiences. These experiences lead us to the divine spring which makes us overflow with goodness and gratitude. At such times we will experience, as a kind of direct action, the gentle and enlightening presence of God in the most intimate part of our soul.

f. In her books we not only find the different spiritual currents then present in Spain but also the ideas of professors from the universities of Salamanca and Alcala. For this reason Teresa's mystical life was not lost in an abstract or transcendental world, but rather incarnated in the spirituality and theology of her time. So much so that St. Teresa's literary personality and spiritual status cannot be understood without being reference to the cultural elements of her day.

g. However, her books go beyond the cultural concepts and structures of her time and come down to us today in all their freshness. This is because they are a snap-shot of the gospels as she experienced them in the course of her own lifetime. Her books brought together the perennial nuclei of christian doctrine that had been formed during her life. Her books continue to appeal to christians even today, when the historical context in which she lived has passed and the doctrine that was then codified has been superseded. Her books should be read from a modern point of view and from within our own culture. However, for this reason we should be sensitive to hermeneutics, in order to grasp the meaning that is perennially valid in all contexts and in all times.

## 17. Her biblical roots

a. Teresa accepted the bible as the supreme criterion of truth. Apart from learning about the bible from preaching, liturgical prayer etc., she was fortunate to read, among other spiritual writings, the text of the bible in three sacred books: a) *Flos Sanctorum*, that offered her the entire text of the Passion according to the four evangelists. b) The biblical text of the *Book of Job* scattered throughout the *Morales* of Saint Gregory. c) The biblical texts that referred to the history and the mystery of Jesus, in the commentary on the life of Christ (*Vita Christi*) by Cartujano.

b. It is also important to note how often Teresa used the bible in her writings: the

Song of Songs, the Gospels, St Paul, biblical figures... From all of this we can deduce that Teresa had come to a deep biblical mindset. Teresa accepted the bible as the highest criterion of truth, for all the harm that comes to the world comes from its not knowing the truths of Scripture in clarity and truth (Life 40:1). She appreciated the knowledge of theologians as long as what they taught derived from the sacred text, 'In sacred scripture which they study, they always find the truth of the good spirit' (Life 13:18). She said of herself, 'for some truth of sacred scripture I would be willing to die a thousand deaths' (Life 33:5).

#### 18. Her liturgical and eucharistic experience

a. Teresa's real liturgical initiation took place in the Incarnation. There she became a member of a contemplative community that gave the utmost importance to liturgical prayer. The large number of nuns helped to make the liturgy solemn. Liturgical recitation was the principal occupation around which the other more ordinary tasks revolved. She developed a spirit for the liturgy above all from her mystical experience. It was this experience, the true mystagogy, which helped her to penetrate the mystery of the church's prayer, in both the liturgy of the hours and, above all, in the great mystery of the eucharistic celebration (cf. Int C 6; 7.4).

b. Her entire spiritual life revolved around the recitation of the *divine office* and the daily *eucharist*. Once she entered the mystical realm the eucharist became her life long support. She received the most sublime graces at the time of communion. The eucharistic grace she received one Palm Sunday was very special. Another special moment was when she experienced mystical marriage after receiving communion from St John of the Cross. However, in her writings the text which best describes the depth of her eucharistic piety is the improvised [eucharistic] canon with which she ends the *Way of Perfection*, when she commented on the '*panem nostrum*' (WP, chs. 33-35).

#### 19. Her mystagogical experience

a. Because Teresa's faith was rooted in the bible, in the Word of God and in the mysteries celebrated in the liturgy, it was transformed by an extraordinary mystagogical experience. As a result she insisted on an apprenticeship for a life of union with God, emphasizing the presence of God, who surrounds and penetrates our whole lives. She spoke frequently of 'being accustomed' to searching for the company of Him who accompanies us always (WP ch.26-29). For this reason prayer for Teresa was 'nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.' (Life 8.5).

b. Teresa wrote from experience (Life 18.8; 23.3; WP prol.3). At the same time she wanted to draw forth an experience in her readers: 'one cannot be sure about what one has not experienced' (IC 6.9,4). With her quill in hand she spoke of one experience after another, her own as well as those of her readers. She was convinced that her readers could not understand much of what she taught unless they had had their own proper experience, 'it is very important not only to believe these truths but to strive to understand them by experience.' (WP 28.1). Therefore she was not only interested in explaining things and making them known but, above all, she wanted to 'entice' and provoke empathy in her readers. Teresa did not write in order to inform but rather to draw forth the experience of her readers, she wanted them to empathize with her.

c. The following are the central experiences around which Teresa's spirituality revolved:

the grace that gave her an experienced God of God (1544-1554), the experience of the person of Jesus Christ (1560) and the experience of the mystery of the Trinity (1571):

#### 20. The shift of her own experience in Carmel

Teresa's charism as a foundress cannot be confined just to herself or to her writings, neither can it be reduced to the foundation of a number of Carmels and the consequent leadership she exercised over them. Much more important and decisive is the spirit she passed on to them; her ideology, the goals and the kind of lifestyle she wanted. From the beginning of her new Carmel Teresa stressed a two-fold principle:

a. On the one hand, a **looking back** to the original Carmel, (Far from cutting herself off from the Incarnation or from her carmelite roots she kept in contact with her original community); she really wanted to be in touch with the old spiritual carmelite tradition, returning to the primitive Rule and the two-fold models of the Blessed Virgin and the prophet Elijah. She also valued the eremitical life of the ancient hermits who lived on the biblical mountain (*we are descended from this caste*) etc. She prevailed with this attitude of wanting to connect with our origins. (This retrospection took place in many other religious reform movements of Teresa's day. Her looking back was like the humanism of the renaissance artists who saw the classical greco-roman period as the ideal).

b. On the other hand, she stressed the importance of **updating and renewing**; she clearly wanted to be a part of the church of her day. At the same time she wanted her followers to learn from her own religious and spiritual experiences. Her teaching was novel. She taught that the goal of contemplative life was apostolic and ecclesial. Much as she wanted to be rooted in the past, she wanted even more to be inserted into the contemporary church and society. She stressed, above all, the idea of serving the Church. The first way to serve the church was *to be such good [Carmelites]...that...our prayers are valuable*. She was convinced that *as enclosed nuns, we are fighting*, closely together with *the captains who defend the church*: learned men, preachers and priests (cf. the entire text of WP 3.1 and F 1).

c. However, what was especially significant in this second principle [update and renew] was the pressure within Teresa herself, from her *experience of God and of Christ*. It was a pressure which spread from Teresa and affected her followers. All her activity as a foundress developed during the period of her intense mystical experiences, so much so that, with her experiences of Christ and the needs of the Church, Teresa's soul was like a fully charged dynamo. Such experiences must be transfused into Carmel's veins, as an ideal and as a way of life. It is this dynamic experience that has been passed down in her writings. If no reference were made to Teresa's life, to her experiences, her story of salvation, her written works and to her work as a foundress, then her ideal and the charism of her Carmel, would be unintelligible (cf. the brief passage in *Foundations* 1:6 which refers to the intense way she lived her new ideal in St. Joseph's carmel).

## 21. *The mystical and humanistic components of teresianism*

a. One of the components of her ideal, taken up in her Constitutions, can be described as 'teresian humanism in religious life': i.e., a great respect for the person, normally two hours of recreation a day (almost parallel with the two hours of mental prayer: In the *Way of Perfection* she stressed the human virtues: *the more you are saints the more you communicate with your sisters*), communication between individuals and communities, the principle of personal work, selected reading to nourish the soul, discernment of vocations, the exercise of authority with love...

b. Teresa thought through and drew up these principle ideas for her nun's, which she then transferred to the Discalced friars, first through St John of the Cross and later through Gracian whom she proposed as a model. Teresa suggested to John of the Cross, an expert in prayer and contemplation, *a style of humanity and recreation* that

would be applicable in a group (humanism). John incarnated the teresian ideal among the Discalced friars, so that the Discalced friars should also read and evaluate the teresian charism in the person and the lifestyle of St John of the Cross.

## 22. *The apostolic and missionary value of teresian mysticism*

Teresa of Jesus had a special experience of the Church of her time, its mystery and its needs. The experience also led her to a singular proposal to serve the Church: the apostolic value of the contemplative ideal. John Paul II summed this up very well on the occasion of the closure of the 4<sup>th</sup> centenary of Teresa's death, 'The axis of Teresa's life as a projection of her love for Christ and his desire for the salvation of all peoples, was *the Church*. Teresa of Jesus 'had a sense of the Church', she experienced 'a passion for the Church' as a member of the Mystical Body. The sad events in the Church of her day were like festering wounds that stirred up waves of fidelity and service. She felt the divisions between christians very deeply, it was as if her heart were torn. She responded in an effective way, with a renewal movement to preserve the resplendent face of *holy Church*. The horizons of her love and her prayer expanded when she became aware of the missionary growth of the *catholic Church*' (Avila, Nov. 1 1982).

b. Apostolic service in the Church through prayer and a contemplative life was the corner stone in her *Way of Perfection* (1.2) and her work as a foundress (F 1.7). Our *Constitutions* takes up this apostolic ideal with these words: 'Our Holy Mother St. Teresa's deep experience of the mystery of the Church, coupled with her ardent zeal for the glory of God, led her to give a definitely apostolic incentive to our whole Carmelite life of prayer and self denial.' (Const. 89).

c. Likewise, the missionary ideal of the teresian Carmel arose from her singular experience of the Church; 'Our holy Mother St. Teresa passed on to the Order the ardent missionary zeal that burned within her heart, and it was her wish that her friars should also undertake missionary activity.' (Const. 94).

## 23. *Teresa's writings*

Teresa's experience, briefly described here within the actual historical context in which she lived, was reflected in her writings(cf. n° 1). These writings will be expounded in a more detailed way, by the use of study-texts, during the course of the next sexennium; therefore, we shall not go into detail here.

## PART TWO

### Reading her writings today

#### 24. *Introduction: Drawing close to our cultural and religious contexts*

a. The teresian charism, which arose from her life and writings, has been growing and enriched throughout the centuries. This growth and enrichment of her charism is thanks to a better understanding of her works and her charismatic experience. Teresa's charism has been taken up by our *Constitutions*, as much by the friars as by the nuns, as well as the secular Order (2003).

b. The first chapter of our *Constitutions*, in fact, synthesizes the essential elements of our charism. The formula of words are the fruit of a renewed awareness since the Second Vatican Council. Thanks to this renewed awareness , 'We have a knowledge

of our charism, possibly unrivaled in our history. Today, more than ever, our saints and the spirituality identifying our family are in demand both within the Church and outside it by a great variety of readers, who legitimately request that we share this wealth with them... [...] At least, we must ask ourselves how can we reply, from our charism, to the demands of the signs of the times in the Church and the world, how can we reply to the great and legitimate human and religious aspirations of the next generations, so that they can fulfil in an efficacious manner and bring into effect, the mission of the teresian Carmel in the third millennium.' (Journeying with St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. Setting our from essentials, 2003, n° 1).

c. The document makes a special point of the importance of knowing the signs of the times, so as to make our charism relevant today, 'If we are capable of analyzing the signs of the times and places, we can discover in them the seed that can help us see in part something of what might happen in future. What, from this point of view, is the situation of Carmel, the friars, nuns and laity? To reply requires an analysis of the situation of the world, the Church and the family of Carmel. This evaluation will establish us in fidelity to the essential lines of the charism of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross as expressed in our *Constitutions*, so that in this manner we can face up to the challenges of our age. It is the Spirit who impels us towards the future so that we can continue doing great things.' (cf. VC 110)' (*ditto* § 4). In other words, 'we must be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live (cf. GS 4)' (*ditto* § 6).

d. In order to understand the actual world in which we live the document of the 2003 general chapter underlined 'some fundamental characteristics of today's world, which are present, in one way or another, with the normal differences that are found in the different social, cultural and ecclesial contexts':

- a situation of exile and of hope. It is like a spiritual experience, that puts us on a path of discovery and enquiry. If we are to face up to these new challenges then we need to have a deep spirituality;
- a world in a state of flux and permanent transformation: the phenomena of secularization, liberation, globalization and new ethics,
- a new situation in the Church and in consecrated life, characterized by the 'transition from a monocentric, religious, cultural and theological attitude to a multicentered one in these same fields; a move from unity as uniformity to unity in diversity' (cf. *ditto* §§6-16).

e. (I) Starting then from these plans we would like to describe briefly today's cultural and religious contexts, in order to study Teresa's writings and her mystical experience from a modern perspective. (II) Emphasize certain criteria for a programme of teresian studies in the next sexennium. (III) Make some practical suggestions.

### *I. - Keys to understanding Teresa's writings today*

25. *In view of the cultural and ecclesial events of our age: an historical study of the teresian charism.*

a. Even though the teresian charism was forged out of a particular strong mystical experience it only grew to full maturity in the light of the cultural and religious events of her age, as described in the first part [of this paper]. Teresa tried to react to these events using her own experience, which she described in her books and, by her work as a foundress. Hers was a mysticism incarnated in historical events. A mysticism that was aware of what was happening in the world and, at the same time, committed to

serve, a 'mysticism of service' as it has been called.

b. Her attitude, which should be ours too, demands that we be aware of the world we live in, and discern what is happening in it. It is a world characterized by secularization and postmodernity, by atheism and agnosticism (there is a crisis of faith in the western world). However, it is paradoxical, that in such a context we see many signs of a new religious awakening and a searching for spirituality. Such optimistic signs are a reaction by the human person to their deepest anxieties. There is a need for mysticism, for a rediscovery of an experience of faith, so that the 21<sup>st</sup> century can continue to be christian.

c. At the same time, if the situation in the modern world is creating a crisis of identity for men and women, who act contrary to their dignity and the transcendental values written in their innermost being, leaving themselves vulnerable, like an open wound. They are wounded by the passion for Transcendence. Teresian spirituality is anthropologically centered on the human person in whom God dwells. It is open to communion with Him (GS 19) and is able to welcome Him in the most interior part of the *Castle*. Teresian spirituality also helps us become aware of our dignity threatened by our modern culture. Therefore, to teach men and women about St. Teresa's contemplative attitude is, at the same time, to help them discover their true identity.

d. Together with this crisis of humanity and the phenomenon of disbelief, we may also speak about injustice, poverty and exclusion in parts of the world. If from the perspective of the first world, the most important phenomena are secularization, disbelief and postmodernity, from the perspective of the third and fourth worlds the most important phenomenon is poverty. It is a poverty that can only be explained by such factors as marginalization and exclusion. The poverty in our world should also be seen from the perspective of God's revelation. God is calling out to human beings to respond to such poverty and Teresa's experience can enlighten us.

- In fact, poverty as much as disbelief are theophanic and theological entities. In such entities God reveals Himself to men and women of our time. We can recognize Him, from a theological perspective, in the midst of poverty and disbelief; a perspective that our spirituality cannot ignore. The scandal of poverty is one of the reasons why we suffer today from the hiddenness of God. For this reason christian spirituality in confronting the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can only do so by confronting the phenomenon of poverty. A concern for the poor is clearly present in the sources of our christian revelation. An experience of God cannot be fulfilled in isolation, or in indifference or in a lack of concern for the suffering of humankind. According to the bible contemplation that does not take into account the suffering in our society is detestable, as is, according to the prophets, the worship of God that ignores those who are suffering and helpless.
- Religious life, centered on the search of the *unum necessarium*, lived in the way of discipleship, which in Teresa of Jesus acquired specific nuances (Life 32.9; 1.2), finds in the poor an important criterion for verifying its authenticity. In this sense the experience of God, in teresian mysticism, is achieved as much in spiritual joy and serenity as in the capacity to assume and share the sufferings of the poor. At the same time we should be actively committed to the establishment of a 'kingdom of justice, love and peace.' Religious life is nothing other than the experience of the paschal mystery, of death and resurrection, in the midst of life.

e. In keeping with this concern for justice, it would be helpful to look at the analysis of the signs of the times made at the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, which met to mark 20 years since Vatican II (1985): 'The signs of the times today are slightly different from those at the time of the Council, as people's concerns and anxieties have grown. In our world of today hunger, oppression, injustice and war have increased everywhere, as has torture, terrorism and other forms of violence. This should make us reflect from a new and deeper theological viewpoint, one that will interpret such signs in the light of the Gospel.' (II D, 1). In the light of the new situation, we should put the accent not so much in a theology of creation and incarnation but in a theology of the Cross and redemption.

## 26. *Existential-evangelical and mystical-experiential roots: A renewed study of the Scriptures.*

a. One of the signs of renewal in religious life and Christianity today is its existential rootedness in scripture; it is what Vatican II called 'a constant return to the sources of the whole of the Christian life' and the following of Christ as the 'supreme norm' of evangelical life (PC 2), according to the 'charism of the founders', as the 'fruit of the Holy Spirit who always acts in the Church' (ET 11). All such charisms, as an 'experience of the Spirit', represent a new way of looking at the Gospel and a new kind of spirituality which make religious institutes distinct. These charisms are open to the times so that they can be 'deepened and constantly developed' by the particular gifts of those who share in the charism [of the founders]. (Mutuae Relationes 11).

b. Christ is the Gospel personified, the centre and supreme norm of the whole of consecrated life, the origin and end of all charisms. The teresian charism represents an original way of reading the Gospel, of contemplating the mystery of Christ and of becoming like Him in some aspect of his mystery. Teresa's originality, her charism in the Church, came to her precisely by her becoming like Christ, by her knowing him through experience and from her mystical and christocentric experiences, as testified in the book of her *Life* (9.1-3; 26.6; 27.2-8).

c. In this sense, hers is an 'authentic charism' and 'of real originality in the spiritual life of the Church' (MR 12). Her originality and the success of her charism, seen as a qualitative advance in Christian spirituality, are clearly explained by her proposal of a new way of living the Gospel, which responded to the concerns of her day and, in a certain sense, to the needs of all times. The genesis of her work, though rooted in the ancient carmelite tradition, appears to be very closely bound to the evolution of her spiritual journey. Her work was inspired by the gospels at the deepest spiritual level, as well as by the eremitical-contemplative ideal of Carmel. In this way she created a new and foundational work: the Teresian Carmel.

d. This is the significance of her charism as an 'experience of the Spirit'. Her spiritual experience is the soul and engine of the new Carmel, the powerful force that spread her charism to other countries in Europe (Italy, France, Flanders...). Her spiritual experience was also the basis of her profound missionary instinct (Africa, Persia, New World...). It also explains the wide diffusion of her writings which are an initiation into the christian experience. From her charism comes the carmelite commitment today: to live intensely the teresian charism, to initiate contemporary men and women into a teresian contemplative experience, in the light of the signs of the times and, to strive to spread her writings. And to do all this inspired by Teresa's own fundamental conviction that without experience there cannot be true knowledge. Experience is the key to all understanding, even to the knowledge of God. God Himself is the subject of experience insofar as He is known through faith which is the unique means for union with Him (M 1.1.4), as the reality of God is experienced rather than known (*theopathic* state).

## 27. A personal and christocentric mysticism: a mystagogical study

a. In harmony with modern religious sensitivity and the experience of christian faith, Teresa's experience is eminently personal and christocentric, in contrast to other mystical experiences of a metaphysico-neoplatonic inspiration. Teresa's experience comes from the irreplaceable mediation of Jesus Christ, 'I have definitely seen that we must enter by this gate if we desire His sovereign Majesty to show us great secrets.' (Life 22.6). What is essential in teresian mysticism is a *crisopatía*, a perception of the glorified humanity of Christ as the sustenance that sustains us and the life that gives life (M 7.2.6). It is with this understanding that the Catechism of the Church defines spiritual progress as an ever more intimate union with Christ (§ 2014).

b. Teresa's experience has, furthermore, characteristics that are very similar to the experiences of St. Paul. The fundamental element is her conversion, which has close analogies to St. Paul's (1 Cor 15.8; 9.1; Gal 1:15-16; Phil 3:7, 12), when she contemplated a statue representing 'the wounded Christ' (Life 9.1). Her first theological experience of immersion or 'absorption' in God, as a mystery. This experience that happened to her occurred shortly afterwards (Life 10.1; 18:15). In the midst of hostile circumstances, before the Inquisition (in 1559), Teresa experienced the humanity of Christ as a 'living book', where 'I saw truths' and 'blessed be such a book that leaves what must be read and done so impressed that you cannot forget!' (Life 26.5). This experience determined the new direction of her spiritual journey (Life 27:2-3, 5; M 6 6.8:2-3).

c. Her mystical experience also brought her to understand sacred scripture in another way, in a kind of symbiosis or connaturality between her own experience and biblical revelation, between what St. Paul called the 'wisdom of the mature' (1 Cor 2:6) and the ultimate meaning of Scripture, which is the mystical knowledge of Christ as the Truth of God (Life 40:1-4, M 7. 1:7; 2:8).

## 28. *The contemplative ideal in the service of the Church: a biblical study*

a. If Christ is the basis and content of teresian mysticism, the theological experience of prayer is the most specific characteristic of the teresian charism, which explains why there is a new Carmel and the magisterial function of her writings. Pope Paul VI recalled in the official declaration of her doctorate concerning St. Teresa that 'she raised [prayer] to the heights in her religious family, in the Church and in the world, by means of her perennially relevant message: i.e., the message of prayer.'

b. Her rediscovery of contemplation carries with it concrete proposals and practices that are accessible to all classes of christians (WP 19:15: 23:5), the establishment of a new pedagogy, as well as suggestions for methods of initiation and ways to develop them. Thanks to the pedagogy of her writings the teresian charism of contemplation is to be seen in the heart of the Church, to the point where today we cannot think of fulfilling our christian lives without an experience, including mystical experience, of this theological dimension,. In this context we must read the important text of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on mysticism, as the fullness of the christian life (§ 2014), and on the pedagogy of contemplation (§§ 2709-2719).

c. The exemplary value of Teresa's contemplative experience is rooted in the following aspects: its biblical dimension, that though prayer penetrates to the very heart of the Gospel (Life 9:4: 10:1: WP 37:1); its theological dynamism, which surrounded Teresa's entire life, personal as well as communitarian, through the same dynamic of love (WP 4.7: F 5.2:15-16; M 4.1:7), its apostolic value as well as its evangelizing dimension within the Church (WP 1.2:5).

## 29. *In a new form of fraternal life: a study from the viewpoint of community*

a. The teresian charism, her mystical experience of Christ, the contemplative ideal at the service of the Church, are visibly incarnated in what Teresa will present later as 'our community life and recreation' (F 13:5); an ideal of community life made up of the following three factors:

- A community that is above all a 'college of Christ' (WP Escorial 20.11), that conforms to the radical model of the primitive Church. Christ is present in the midst of the community (Life 32.11). He is 'the Lord of the house' (WP 17.7), who 'brings us here' (WP 1:5; 3:1).

- A community in which everyone is equal and all are loved sincerely (WP 4:7: 7:9), where all are governed by an evangelical style of practical love, which is freely given and selfless (WP 4:11; 6:7; M 5.3:7-12), with manual work as the norm (*Const.* 28).

- A humanistic community, including special aspects that were unusual for her time: culture, human virtues, gentleness, prudence and discretion; as well as simplicity, affability and joyfulness: 'the holier the sisters are the more sociable they will be with their sisters' (WP 41:7-8).

b. We might stress here the great similarity between this style of fraternal life and the one affirmed in *Vita consecrata* on 'fraternal life in love' (VC 42) as well as the document *Novo Millennio Ineunte* on the spirituality of communion (NMI 43).

c. By the study we propose to make of our holy Mother's writings we want to try and recreate the teresian community ('our style of community life'), with the features that characterized it. To do this it would help to study her writings in community and in communion with the entire Order, when her words will have a special resonance.

## 30. *Under the protection of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel: a marian study*

a. The carmelite Order had from its very foundation a clear marian dimension (Life 33.14). For this reason Teresa of Jesus, who experienced early on in her life the intercessory power of the Blessed Virgin (Life 1:7), proposed the Virgin Mary as Mother, Lady and Patroness of the Order (F 29:23; M 3.1:3). Mary is also to be a model of prayer and sacrifice in our journey of faith (M 6.7:13-14). As a woman Mary was devoted in both soul and body to listening to and contemplating the Word of the Lord (CAD 5:2; 6:7). Mary was always docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and associated through love, suffering and joy with Christ's paschal mystery (M 7.4:5; Sp. Test.14:6). Consequently, our communion with Mary penetrates and stamps with a marian seal all the elements of our life: fraternal communion, the spirit of prayer and contemplation, all forms of our apostolate as well as evangelical selflessness.

b. The biblical figure of the Blessed Virgin, besides being a model for our way of life, draws us to follow her closely. It invites us, like the true 'poor of Yahweh', to 'form our lives like our Lady in a continual meditation on the divine Word in faith and spend ourselves in a manifold service of love.' It is with Mary's help that we penetrate the mystery of Christ and the Church and are made bearers, like her, of Jesus and of the Good News of His Kingdom. For this reason the marian dimension is, without doubt, together with the christocentric dimension, one of the fundamental keys to our understanding of St. Teresa.

c. Together with Mary there is St. Joseph. He was a humble servant of Christ and of his Mother, a living example of prayerful union with Jesus, 'Led by St. Teresa, we lovingly venerate him as the spouse of the Virgin Mary, as the humble servant of Christ and his Mother, as a master and model of prayerful union with Christ and as provident protector of the Order' (*Const.* 52.).

### 31. *Dialoguing with culture: an inculturated and globalized study*

a. Teresa of Jesus lived immersed in a 16<sup>th</sup> century culture and world. At the same time her attention was focused on new horizons. She was also aware of the great events of her age. The rapid expansion of Carmel within Europe brought about not only the phenomenon of expansion in the Order but at the same time the phenomenon of inculturation. The same can be said of Carmel's missionary expansion and its implantation in different parts of the world. Equally, we see the phenomenon of the Order's expansion in Teresa's writings as something profoundly cultural and religious.

b. For these reasons it can be said that Teresa began a movement that was not only religious but also cultural. Her movement consisted of a set of values that created a particular style of life, which was destined to be incarnated in many different cultures. It was a style of life that was influenced by her contemplative experience. It was also rooted in history. She knew how to hand it on to her successors and these, subsequently, knew how to incarnate it in different cultures, thereby enriching the Order with new values.

c. This is the challenge for Carmel today. A Carmel that has inherited a rich cultural and religious patrimony. However, Carmel today cannot simply preserve its past but must know how to direct itself towards the future. It must do this in a world that has become both multicultural and globalized. In order to do this we should:

- renew our fidelity to the values of the teresian Carmel;
- renew *the way we live*, which will take into account the cultural movements of our time (renewed communities);
- renew our *pastoral activity* so as to consider serving the Church as specialists in the field of spirituality (retreats, houses of prayer and centres of spirituality);
- renew our *cultural activity* in order to promote teresian studies and the diffusion of Teresa of Jesus' writings (Teresianum, Cites, Congresses, Reviews and O.C.D. Publications).

d. These proposed activities, in preparation for St. Teresa's centenary, compliment each other. They should also be developed together so that they really do bear fruit in today's Church and world. At the same time, there should be some kind of coordination with the Generalate (Secretary General for Culture), so that the aforementioned activities are not left abandoned, but rather appear as one big religious-cultural project. We should all want an image of Carmel that we would be happy to incarnate and promote in the areas in which we live, as well as in our globalized world.

### *II.- Criteria for a programme of teresian studies*

We believe that rather than suggesting a programme or schedule of studies it would be more useful to offer here some **criteria** for the next sexennium, which the relevant commission could bear in mind when drawing up guidelines for each year:

32. *A pastoral approach:* We could take as a basic guide the programme made up by the document *Novo Millennio Ineunte* for the third millenium: starting with Christ (the centre of our Christian faith), contemplate Christ's face (prayer), become like Christ (discipleship), listen to and announce the Word (evangelization), witness to love (mission).

33. *An experiential, mystagogical and profetic approach:* Another criterion in our study could be to follow the spiritual path taken by Teresa, as an initiation to her experience: her conversion, her experience of Christ, her way of prayer, her theological understanding, her Trinitarian experience, her service to the Church and her missionary spirit. The advantage of this approach is that it both initiates us into Teresa's own spiritual path and at the same time, we announce prophetically the mystery of God's presence in human history.

34. *A biblical and liturgical approach:* Bearing in mind the power of the Word of God and Sacred Scripture in Teresa's experience and at the same time the rediscovery of the value of the 'Word of God in the christian life and mission of the Church' (2008 Synod of Bishops), we could suggest studying her from a biblical perspective. We could reflect on the *lectio divina* or *lectio spiritualis*. It would be an opportunity to study Sacred Scripture on a regular basis (DV 25), and we would recuperate the purpose of *lectio divina*, which is to help us discover God's will in the events of life, as the Council exhorted us to do (PO 18). Teresa's experience of the Word goes hand in hand with the Liturgy, the 'source and summit of the spiritual life' (SC 14).

35. *A christocentric and biblical approach:* We could programme our studies from the starting point of two categories: 1. the centrality of Christ in Teresa's experience and 2. The influence of the bible on her life; taking as our guide her following of Christ (VC 18), the evangelical counsels (VC 20-22) and the suggestion made by Pope Benedict XVI of spiritual reading, in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*.

36. *An ecclesial approach:* From Teresa's singular experience of the Church, we can suggest another approach to the understanding of her works, which would take into account the needs of the Church today and our response. This response can be in the fields of spirituality and evangelization, and from the perspective of the following three elements of postconciliar ecclesiology: *consecration, communion and mission*.

37. *A community approach:* The works of Teresa of Jesus describe a style of community life that is particularly important in our modern society, characterized by individualism. Consequently, the signs of communion in our communities need to be stronger; signs that proclaim a universal fraternity. In this context we can follow the second part of *Vita Consecrata*: '*Signum fraternitatis*.'

38. *An apostolic and missionary approach:* Another key to this study is the apostolic and missionary dimensions that penetrated the Saint's life and works, which emphasize her experience of the paschal mystery, the source of all evangelization and apostolic service. The Church today is asking religious for help with its pastoral apostolate. This refers to the third part of *Vita Consecrata*: '*Servitium caritatis*.'

39. *An approach through inculturation:* The Saint's writings contain a message that is relevant for our time and for all cultures. However, we need to read them with modern eyes, with a new religious and cultural understanding. At the same time we need to bear in mind the different cultural and religious situations in which the Order finds itself. The goal of this study should be to expound the document of the 2003 General Chapter: *Journeying with St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross: setting out from essentials* (num. 60-64; 74-78).

### *III. Some practical suggestions*

40. A project that should be practical, shared and can be reviewed.

a. A specific method should be established to assess if the outlined study programme is working, i.e., if it is achieving its objectives. To do this we need to review and reassess our plans, in a way that is both sound and realistic. There ought to be practical plans for improving both the quality

(authenticity) of our lives and the quality (efficiency) of our service.

b. The study of the document should be *performativa, empatica and nutricia* for our lives; i.e., it should serve to deepen and assimilate, in a way that is both spiritual and practical (effectively and transformatively) the essential themes and aspects of teresian experience and doctrine.

c. Underline either the *biblical passages or the christian doctrine* which St. Teresa experienced, renewed and expressed in her writings. For this reason the study of her works should be done together with other interdisciplinary studies and be more pedagogical in character.

d. Another relevant factor here *are the human, ecclesial and social challenges* we face in our daily lives, which Teresa's doctrinal experience in some way or other should help us to face up to.

e. In this way, what is more pressing in our modern society should take precedence [in our teresian studies]. When we consider our world, where social disenchantment predominates, teresian spirituality can be particularly important for many reasons; for its evangelical humanism, its audacity to hope, its freedom, humour and the authenticity of the life it proposes.

f. This study programme should be *open* to all, including the *laity*. Our planning should be based on the concept of collaboration; i.e., rather than planning everything ourselves. Set up a group of responsible lay people. Likewise, to involve our affiliated Institutes, plan a series of lectures with them throughout the sexennium.

g. Publicize this initiative using all possible *means* of communication. Endeavour to spread the message and get as many people as possible involved. Make a CD or create a webpage in english.

h. Set up an *Aula Teresiana* in order to study together her writings.

i. Develop a *cultural programme* that will complement the academic programme. The former would be particularly important for the Order and for the promotion of the teresian charism in the Church today.

#### 41. A creative celebration of the Centenary

a. The celebration of the centenary requires *creativity*, an openness to new and broader studies. It also requires us to search for connections between Teresa's doctrine, the bible and the pastoral apostolate. The celebration should also strive, by all means, to ensure that what Teresa left us will speak to people today. Therefore, it should be communicated and made known using all the different and complementary languages; artistic, musical, cinematographic, literary and the language of television.

b. Today there is no field of expression in *our modern culture* that does not have space for Saint Teresa. Even in the world of different traditions and religious creeds, or in the world of agnostics, atheists and those who are apathetic there is a warm welcome for the figure and the writings of our Foundress. There are vast open areas, not yet exhausted, that are ready for a broader and specialized contribution on the part of the Order.

#### 42. The General Definitory's task as coordinator

a. We understand that the principle animator of the 5<sup>th</sup> Centenary is the General Definitory of the Order. It is to nominate a central commission whose main task will be *to prepare annually and in good time suggestions or aids to animate the centenary, as well as to promote, coordinate and make known to others*, the initiatives taking place in the different regions.

b. In a similar way, the Definitory should do whatever necessary logistically to ensure that **Avila** [Spain] will be able to welcome *pilgrims* with a variety of events to complement and enhance the merely geographic and hagiographic aspects of their pilgrimage. So that their visit to the places of St Teresa will seal, imprint and enrich mystical experience both in the Order and in the Church. At the same time the centre of the Order will specially endeavour to coordinate and collaborate with the Castile Province in order to fully promote our new **college in Avila (Cites)** so that it will serve as a reference point for all those involved in the organization of this celebration. In this way the Definitory should stress the *raison d'être* of the college, which is to help deepen the teresian doctrine for different cultures and levels within the carmelite family.

#### 43. *Some initiatives to be taken during the Centenary*

Although the celebration of the 5<sup>th</sup> centenary of Saint Teresa's birth is an important, historic and especially significant landmark, the dynamic presence of Saint Teresa should not consist only in extraordinary events.

- a. One desirable fruit of this celebration would be to ensure that in all the regions of the Order permanent centres for the study and spread of Teresa's doctrine are developed: create an *Aula Teresiana*.
- b. That the Centre of the Order, in coordination with the new college in Avila (Cites) and all our regions, commits itself to *organizing a programme of teresian studies and more specialized courses*.
- c. That in **Avila**, the teresian place par excellence, there will be a *permanent centre to welcome and to work with groups of young people*, especially in the summer. This centre will bring together the young people's knowledge of the geography of the teresian places with an existential knowledge of her spirit.
- d. That periodically a specialist *meeting or seminar* be organized in which teresian experts and scholars will take part. These meetings and seminars will be to deepen our knowledge of Teresa's message and to make new proposals to the Order, to the faculties and centres of theological spirituality. These proposals should also be made to our coordinators and formators in pastoral spirituality and for all those interested in Saint Teresa.
- e. That at least once in the next six years an *Extraordinary Definitory* will be celebrated in Avila with a marked accent on formation and whose basic theme will be some aspect of Teresa's doctrine.
- f. That experts and editors will agree to a 'textus receptus' [a standard text] of Saint Teresa's writings and fix a 'modus operandi' to incorporate new discoveries, especially concerning her letters and other fragments which might be found, etc.

### **Conclusion**

#### *44. Our prophetic mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

Set as we are in the experience of the living God who, having created us in His image and likeness, has reserved a place in the interior of each person to place his mansion, we propose as a teresian family to be a prophetic sign of God's presence in the world today and to awaken people's consciences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so that they will experience in the deepest part of their being true happiness and the authentic meaning of life.

#### *45. Our awareness and our spiritual contribution*

This prophetic role is why we need a new *spiritual consciousness*, with the programme of studies on Teresa of Jesus' works and, at the same time an awareness of our *spiritual contribution* in the Church. We should be imbued with the teresian values of a profound sense of God and the human person, a spirit of prayer and an openness to the events of our day. We should also have a sense of ecclesial responsibility and an apostolic spirit.

In sum, with Teresa we want to show the beauty of 'souls in whom the Lord delights so much', beginning with a renewed awareness of the dignity of each person. In this way we shall have a positive and optimistic attitude towards men and women of our age. At the same time our attitude will be creative, as much in the building up of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ as in the proclamation of a new heaven and a new earth.'

'The greatness of God is without limits, His works are too' (M7:1.1). God, being the Lord of history, has not stopped working. For this reason, our teresian charism should be the great contribution that Carmel feels itself duty bound to offer men and women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; so that they will also be mystical, will have an experience of God, and will find the meaning of their lives and will want to share this with the men and women of this generation.

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#### PRAYER TO SAINT TERESA OF AVILA

Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus!  
You who put yourself totally at the service of love:  
Teach us to walk along the path of interior prayer  
with determination and fidelity  
With our attention focused on Our Lord,  
one God in a Trinity of Persons  
who is always present  
in the most intimate part of our being.  
Strengthen in us the foundation  
Of true humility,  
Of a renewed detachment,  
Of fraternal and unconditional love,  
In the school of Mary, our Mother.

Share with us your ardent and  
apostolic love for the Church,  
that Jesus will become our joy,  
Our hope and our life-force,  
an inexhaustible source  
of the deepest intimacy.  
Bless our great Carmelite family,  
Teach us to pray with you  
with all our hearts:

'I am Yours Lord, I was born for you, what do you want of me?' Amen

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The preparatory commission for Teresa's 5<sup>th</sup> Centenary:

Thomas Alvarez  
Conrad de Meester  
Joseph Pozzobon  
Romulus Cuartas  
Emilio Martinez  
John Anthony Marcos  
Ciro Garcia