

# The Way of Perfection

*By Mother Teresa of Jesus, founder of the monasteries of  
Discalced Carmelite nuns and friars of the First Rule.*

Saint Teresa of Ávila

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# Preface

This book does not aim to present an academic study of *The Way of Perfection* by Teresa of Ávila. Rather, it is the fruit of an intimate and prolonged relationship with this work, cultivated over time through attentive readings, sustained reflection, and a deep spiritual affinity. It arises from sincere admiration for the clarity, courage, and effectiveness with which Teresa conveys her teaching, as well as for the impact her words have had on my own inner journey.

The decision to offer this contemporary English edition arises from a translation of a previously modernized Spanish version of the original 16th-century text. This approach aims to bring Teresa's wisdom closer to today's readers, regardless of their religious background or familiarity with mysticism. The edition pursues two main goals: to preserve the spiritual and practical force of the original message, and to render it in clear, accessible language that resonates with the challenges and sensibilities of modern life.

One of the aims of these commentaries is also to place Teresa's teachings in dialogue with other spiritual traditions and frameworks that have nourished my own search: transpersonal psychology, *A Course in Miracles*, Advaita Vedanta, and various forms of yoga. This is not about forcing an artificial synthesis, but rather about illuminating the richness of Teresa's text from diverse perspectives that allow contemporary readers to expand their inner resonance and discover new vital connections.

Now more than ever, in a world saturated with stimuli, marked by haste, superficiality, and disenchantment, Teresa's voice resounds as a radically countercultural proposal. Her *Way of Perfection* calls us back to what is essential: simplicity, detachment, living prayer, deep humility, and authentic fraternity. To reclaim this work not only as a historical text but as a guide for spiritual life is an act of resistance against the trivialization of the soul and a firm commitment to a more conscious and truthful existence.

The sixteenth century was a turbulent time in Europe, especially in the religious sphere. The Protestant Reformation had shaken the foundations of Western Christendom, provoking intense doctrinal debates and deep division. In response, the Catholic Church initiated a process of internal renewal known as the Counter-Reformation, whose high point was the Council of Trent (1545–1563). This council reaffirmed essential dogmas, corrected abuses, and consolidated a more structured and vigilant spirituality.

In Spain, this renewal took on a particularly orthodox character, closely monitored by the Inquisition. Yet, amid this climate, an intense spiritual life also flourished, with figures such as Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Fray Luis de Granada, and, in a singular way, Teresa of Ávila. For her, reform was not merely doctrinal or disciplinary—it was interior, lived through prayer and experience.

Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada was born in Ávila in 1515, into a noble and deeply religious family. From a young age, she showed a strong inclination toward the spiritual, though she also experienced the ups and downs of her time: a taste for worldly things, family tensions, illness, and the discovery of her vocation amid doubts and fervor. She entered the Convent of the Incarnation at the age of twenty, where she remained for decades in a large, active, and spiritually lukewarm community. It was there that she began a path of conversion that, following a decisive inner experience in 1554, would shape the course of her entire life.

From that point forward, Teresa committed herself to a life of deep prayer, increasingly intense mystical experiences, and a growing understanding of her mission: to reform the Carmelite Order and to found communities that would live the Gospel spirit authentically. The founding of the Convent of Saint Joseph in Ávila in 1562 was the first step in that reform. It was not a path free of opposition: there were resistances from ecclesiastical authorities, social criticism, and constant inquisitorial scrutiny. But Teresa persevered with determination, convinced that she was obeying a divine calling.

It was in this foundational context that Teresa wrote *The Way of Perfection*, between 1562 and 1564. She composed it at the request of her first spiritual daughters, the nuns of the Convent of Saint Joseph, who wished to receive from her a clear and vibrant guide on how to cultivate prayer, humility, detachment, and fraternal love. Though originally intended for internal use, the manuscript was copied and circulated among other communities. Its first printed edition appeared in Évora in 1583, one year after her death.

Far from being a mere monastic rule, this work is a living synthesis of experience, embodied theology, and practical wisdom. It can be read as a deeply personal response to the spiritual needs of her time, but also as a kind of “interior Counter-Reformation”: not a dogmatic defense, but a radical transformation of the soul. While the ecclesial climate fought heresy through structure, Teresa proposed to combat it from the heart.

Her insight is clear: true renewal begins in the innermost depths of the self. For this reason, instead of confronting error with doctrinal weapons, she proposes a life

centered on prayer, detachment, charity, and interiority. She founded small, poor, cloistered communities where the sisters lived as “strong friends of God.” Her proposal is as demanding as it is liberating—and, for her time, radical.

This book is part of a trilogy dedicated to the major works of Teresa of Ávila. It is preceded by *The Book of Her Life*, where she recounts her spiritual experience in autobiographical form, and *The Interior Castle*, where she describes in depth the soul’s journey toward union with God. *The Way of Perfection*, by contrast, offers the practical and communal dimension: a guide to living what has been learned in everyday life, with simplicity, perseverance, and love.

By bringing together these three works in modernized, annotated editions, unified by a consistent editorial approach, I seek to offer readers a living, coherent, and updated gateway into Teresa’s spiritual legacy. May her words continue to be a light for those who, in any era, seek to walk firmly toward the truth of their being and the loving presence of God.

# From Cloister to Heart

## *Teresa of Ávila and the Transformation of the Female Convent Ideal*

### **I. The Rise of Female Monasticism**

From the earliest centuries of Christianity, some women began to live consecrated lives, renouncing marriage and the world to offer themselves in virginity to Christ. These early forms of female ascetic life were not institutionalized: some women lived in solitude, while others gathered in small domestic groups outside of canonical structures. It was in the fourth century, with the pacification of the Empire under Constantine and the rise of Eastern monasticism, that organized female communities began to emerge, particularly following the Benedictine model.

Female monasticism was canonically recognized starting in the sixth century and gradually became increasingly associated with enclosure. The figure of the *virgo sacra*, initially free to move about, evolved into the cloistered nun, following a trajectory shaped not only by spiritual but also by cultural, theological, and social criteria. By 1298, with Pope Boniface VIII's bull *Periculoso*, enclosure became a universal norm for all nuns, institutionalizing a model of confinement that would remain virtually unchanged until the twentieth century.

During the Middle Ages, the rise of Marian devotion, the expansion of mendicant orders, and the growth of affective spirituality encouraged the founding of numerous women's convents—some genuinely centered on prayer, others more integrated into social and familial networks. In many cases, the convent became an option for younger noble daughters who did not inherit but could find in the monastery a space of economic security and a measure of relative autonomy, albeit under strict male oversight.

Throughout the sixteenth century, amid reformist and Tridentine fervor, the model of female monastic life became firmly established: perpetual enclosure, regulated liturgical life, obedience to male superiors, and a required dowry for admission. This was the historical and cultural framework Teresa of Ávila encountered upon entering religious life.

### **II. Women's Monasteries in Sixteenth-Century Spain**

In Renaissance Europe, the ideal of female monastic life appeared to be in a period of consolidation. Perpetual enclosure, reaffirmed by the Council of Trent (1545–1563), was presented as the safeguard of female consecrated life, which was to preserve the



honor of spiritual virginity within a space sealed off from the world. Unlike consecrated men, who were often active in pastoral, academic, or missionary work, religious women were confined to the cloister, where silence and obedience were the pillars of their formation.

In Castile, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, nunneries flourished in major cities such as Ávila, Salamanca, and Valladolid, many of them founded by mendicant orders like the Franciscans, Dominicans, or Carmelites. However, what was in theory a life of withdrawal and holiness had, in practice, often become a hybrid system—a mix of religious life and elite social networking. Daughters of the nobility entered convents with their dowries and often maintained within the cloister the social status they had held outside. This translated into private cells, personal attendants, privileged treatment, and a spirituality that was often superficial.

Structurally, the convent functioned as a microcosm mirroring the external society: hierarchical, ritualized, and at times more concerned with appearance and order than with inner life. Observance of the rules had become, in many places, purely external, and the original evangelical fervor had been diluted by routines, favoritism, and compromises.

This model had even taken hold in orders originally founded as reform movements, such as the Carmelites—founded in the twelfth century with an eremitical spirit but later transformed into a mendicant order adapted to urban life. In its female branch, the Carmelites maintained a mitigated observance and large, often world-influenced communities. This is the reality Teresa of Ávila encountered upon becoming a Carmelite.

### **III. A Comfortable Yet Soulless Religious Life**

It is into this context that Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada, a young noblewoman from Ávila, entered the Monastery of the Incarnation in 1535. At that time, the Carmelite community of the Incarnation was one of the largest in Castile, with over one hundred fifty nuns, many from noble or noble-adjacent families. The convent was lively, regularly visited, well-connected to local society, and endowed with certain comforts and liberties, making it a pleasant but spiritually undemanding religious life.

Teresa later acknowledged that her vocation had been sincere, but for years she lived a lukewarm form of religiosity, swayed by friendships, worldly conversations, and an external discipline that did not awaken the soul. She herself describes that period as a life “full of many imperfections,” in which she remained within permitted bounds without crossing them, yet without embodying the fire she sensed to be true.

In *The Way of Perfection*, written after she became a reformer, Teresa looks back at that form of life she knew firsthand. Without bitterness but with absolute clarity, she addresses her sisters to warn them against the traps of spiritual comfort, of appearances, and of false virtue. She speaks as one who has lived the distance between form and substance, between the rule and the spirit.

#### IV. The New Teresian Convent

Teresa's response was not to flee the system, but to radically transform it from within. Her reform was not merely a return to a stricter rule—the original Carmelite observance—but a complete reimagining of the meaning of convent life. Her proposal is clear: small communities, no dowries, no social distinctions, poor, free from all human power, centered exclusively on prayer, fraternity, and the pursuit of God.

In *The Way of Perfection*, she boldly sets out the keys to this new life: detachment from all created things, radical humility that uproots the ego, and an active charity—not merely affective or pious, but demanding and steadfast. The convent is no longer a comfortable retreat or a protected status—it becomes a place of inner training, where each nun learns to forget herself so that God may live in her.

Teresa's great audacity was not simply to demand silence or recollection, but to envision a community without power, without privilege, without unnecessary mediation. Her reform was not only monastic—it was profoundly ecclesial. In a hierarchical and masculinized Church, Teresa created a school of interior freedom for women who wished to give themselves to God without pretense.

In short, Teresa did not merely improve a structure; she embodied another. Where the convent had become a social refuge, she turned it into a laboratory of the Spirit. Where there had been privilege, she placed equality; where there had been routine, she brought purpose; and where there had been fear, she sowed trust. Her foundations were not more comfortable, but they were more authentic. And that, for Teresa, was the only path worthy of being called perfection.

# Essential Timeline of the Teresian Carmel

## *1535 – Entrance into the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation (Ávila)*

Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada enters the monastery of the Calced Carmelites of the Incarnation, where she will live for over twenty years. She witnesses the comfortable and socially stratified convent life of her time.

## *1554 – Definitive Inner Conversion*

During Lent of this year, Teresa undergoes a profound experience of spiritual transformation before an image of the wounded Christ. This marks the beginning of her active mystical life and her desire for reform.

## *1562 – First Foundation: Saint Joseph of Ávila*

Official beginning of the Carmelite reform: a small community, without dowries, focused on prayer and austerity. Teresa assumes the spiritual and organizational leadership of the community.

## *1567–1568 – Authorization to Found More Convents and Encounter with Saint John of the Cross*

The Carmelite General, Giovanni Battista Rossi (Juan Bautista Rubeo), approves Teresa's project. Shortly afterward, she meets Fray Juan de Santo Matía, the future Saint John of the Cross, with whom she initiates the reform of the male branch of Carmel.

## *1568–1575 – Expansion of the Reform*

Numerous houses are founded across Castile, despite economic, social, and ecclesiastical challenges. Teresa balances governance, writing, and travel with a life of deep prayer.

## *1571–1574 – Prioress at the Monastery of the Incarnation*

Teresa returns as prioress to her former monastery, now with a reformist perspective. She implements reform from within, with spiritual authority and without coercion.

### ***1576–1580 – Internal Conflicts within the Order***

Strong tensions arise between the Calced and Discalced Carmelites. Teresa and her followers face persecution and resistance, but remain steadfast. John of the Cross is imprisoned by the Calced Carmelites.

### ***1580 – Official Approval of the Carmelite Reform***

The Holy See approves the creation of the Province of Discalced Carmelites. The reform initiated by Teresa is institutionalized and her spiritual and organizational legacy is solidified.

### ***1582 – Final Foundation and Death***

Teresa founds the convent in Burgos (May), and shortly afterward travels ill to Alba de Tormes, where she dies on October 4, having founded 17 women's convents and inspired the reformed male branch.

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### ***1588 – First Edition of the Complete Works***

Father Luis de León publishes the *Works of Saint Teresa of Ávila* in Salamanca, including *The Book of Her Life*, *The Way of Perfection*, *The Interior Castle*, *Foundations*, along with many letters and poems. This edition canonizes her literary style and consolidates her authority as a spiritual writer.

### ***1614 – Beatification by Pope Paul V***

Teresa is officially beatified by Pope Paul V, a little over thirty years after her death. Her reputation for holiness is already widely recognized throughout Europe.

### ***1617 – Official Celebration of Her Feast Day in Spain***

Her feast is celebrated for the first time as a Blessed in the liturgical calendar of the Spanish Church.

### ***1622 – Canonization by Pope Gregory XV***

Teresa of Jesus is canonized along with Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Isidore the Farmer, and Saint Philip Neri. She is recognized as a universal saint.

### ***1627 – Proclaimed Patroness of Spain***

Teresa is declared co-patroness of Spain alongside Saint James the Apostle, although the official patronage will later rest solely with Saint James. Nonetheless, her figure remains rooted as the spiritual mother of the nation.

### ***1670–1735 – International Expansion of the Teresian Carmel***

The Discalced Carmel spreads across Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa. Teresa becomes a spiritual reference figure in France, Italy, Mexico, Peru, and the Philippines.

### ***1811–1820 – Carmelite Resistance during Suppression***

During wars and liberal reforms, many convents are suppressed, but the Discalced Carmelites resist underground. Teresa's work remains alive even in secrecy.

### ***1915 – Critical Edition of Her Works by Silverio of Saint Teresa***

A thorough and rigorous edition of the saint's writings, marking the beginning of a new phase of philological and theological studies.

### ***September 27, 1970 – Proclaimed Doctor of the Church***

Pope Paul VI declares Saint Teresa of Jesus a Doctor of the Church, the first woman ever to receive this title. Her spiritual and theological teaching is officially recognized as authoritative.

### ***1982 – Fourth Centenary of Her Death***

Numerous celebrations, conferences, and reissues of her works commemorate the 400th anniversary of her passing. Teresa's figure is rediscovered by new generations of readers.

### ***2015 – Fifth Centenary of Her Birth***

The Teresian Jubilee Year is celebrated. A multitude of academic, liturgical, and cultural activities highlight the relevance of her message. New critical editions are published and the digital presence of her works is strengthened.

# Teresa of Ávila and the Censorship of Mysticism

Mystical writing, especially when it arises from female voices, has historically lived under a double scrutiny: that of its orthodoxy and that of its legitimacy. It is not enough for it to be true—it must also be approved. It is not enough for it to be experiential—it must be doctrinal. And it is not enough for it to be luminous—it must be prudent. This double standard has produced a tradition of texts that, like *The Way of Perfection*, are written from an unstable position: that of someone who has seen and heard, yet knows she is not allowed to speak without caution.

In Golden Age Spain, where some of the deepest voices of Christian spirituality flourished, there also developed a robust ecclesiastical apparatus aimed at controlling, discerning, and, when necessary, silencing spiritual experience. It was a time when direct contact with God was suspect unless backed by hierarchy, Latin literacy, and submission. Women, laypeople, prophets, visionaries, and ecstasies were all viewed with suspicion—and not without cause: they often challenged the established order.

Within this context, treatises on mystical censorship functioned not only as instruments of doctrinal vigilance but also as tools of power. One of the most representative is the one written by Fray Anastasio de Santa Teresa in 1731, more than a century and a half after Teresa of Ávila wrote *The Way of Perfection*, but perfectly illustrative of the same impulse: to codify what is admissible, diagnose what is dubious, and dismantle what is dangerous.

Fray Anastasio writes: “Nothing is more perilous than a spiritually conceited woman, for her sweetness deceives, her constancy seduces, and her feigned humility renders her beyond reproach in the eyes of an unsuspecting confessor.”

Passages like this reveal not only distrust toward visionary phenomena, but a concrete fear of their social influence. It is not merely the experience that is censored, but its effects. Hence the author insists that confessors must act with extreme caution: “Better to mistrust ten true mystics than to approve one who is a deception of the devil.”

Mysticism thus becomes a matter of risk. And *The Way of Perfection* stands precisely on that edge: the voice of a woman who seeks to teach others how to commune with God, with no other guarantee than her inner life and the fruits of her works.

Teresa moves between institutional obedience and spiritual necessity, between rhetorical submission and blazing clarity. She knows what she can say and how she must say it—but that does not stop her from saying what she came to say.

A careful reading of the text reveals a brilliant strategy. Teresa writes with humility, but also with authority. She does not impose, but she teaches. She does not pontificate, but she guides. She does not challenge doctrinal frameworks outright, but she stretches them from within. She does so with phrases that seem simple and maternal, but which contain a depth of understanding of the human soul and of God that rivals that of the great theologians of her time.

“Do not think, my daughters, that because I am a woman I must speak less clearly on the things of God,” she says. And that clarity, unboastful though it is, is her boldest act.

Unlike the censors, Teresa does not speak from suspicion, but from love. While Fray Anastasio distrusts states of consoling prayer, Teresa recognizes and welcomes them, though she also warns of their dangers. Her discernment is not doctrinal but experiential. Not detached, but engaged. Her authority does not come from title or habit, but from having persevered in intimacy with God beyond consolation or trial. For that reason, she can teach others to do the same.

Contemporary studies of these censorship treatises, such as the work of Juan Ibáñez Castro, help us understand that their aim was not only to regulate religious experience, but also to preserve a certain social and epistemological order. Mysticism posed a breach in that order. Its experiences were not transmittable through scholastic methods, nor was its wisdom reducible to logic. Mysticism spoke of a non-derived knowledge, of an unmediated experience. And that—in any era—makes people uncomfortable.

*The Way of Perfection* does not seek to provoke, yet it provokes. Not because it is rebellious, but because it is free. Not because it is heretical, but because it is real. This edition aims to reclaim that freedom—not only by offering a language that is closer and more comprehensible, but also by inviting a reading that sees in Teresa not a pious woman offering advice, but a master of the interior life writing in a world that neither expected nor desired someone like her to do so.

Today, as then, there are still discourses that police the spiritual, that codify what is permitted, that diagnose what is excessive. In the face of these, Teresa’s words still carry power—not because they enforce doctrine, but because they open a door. A real path, on which anyone—man or woman, learned or simple—may begin to walk, with no other credential than a sincere desire to reach God.

### Bibliographical Note

This article engages with the academic study by Juan Ibáñez Castro, “*La 'Censura Mística': una perspectiva de la tratadística visionaria a través de la obra de fray Anastasio de Santa Teresa (1731)*,” published in *HIPOGRIFO. Revista de literatura y cultura del Siglo de Oro*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2018), pp. 617–638. The author analyzes the *Censura Mystica* as a representative example of the censorial and normative genre which, through theological rhetoric, seeks to control visionary phenomena and safeguard orthodoxy via authoritative discourse. His study sheds light on the disciplinary function of these treatises and allows for a deeper rereading of mystical works written from the margins of such authority, as is the case with *The Way of Perfection*.



# Writing from the Soul

Few figures in world literature achieve what Teresa of Jesus accomplishes in her writings: the union, in a single gesture, of soul-baring transparency and literary density. In the context of the so-called Golden Age, a time marked by brilliant oratory, exalted mysticism, and the flourishing of picaresque novels, Teresa bursts forth with a voice that, far from conforming to the canon, subverts it from within. Her writing does not seek to dazzle—yet it dazzles; it does not aim to innovate—yet it inaugurates a unique way of expressing the ineffable.

This modernized edition of *The Way of Perfection* opens with this reflection because we want to invite the reader not only to understand the work, but to listen to the voice that sustains it. A voice that is neither merely devotional nor didactic, but profoundly literary in the best sense of the word: alive, embodied, creative, and unpredictable.

Teresa's originality cannot be reduced to her condition as a saint or mystic. Though inspired by spiritual experience, her writing is animated by a keen narrative consciousness. This is evident in her constant use of the *narratee*—that implicit figure to whom she addresses, questions, corrects, or consoles. In *The Way of Perfection*, this narratee is primarily the community of nuns in the reformed convent, but at times it is also the external reader, the confessor, or even God Himself. This plurality of interlocutors creates a dialogical structure that gives the text its vitality.

It is this ability to sustain attention, to alternate tones—from firmness to tenderness, from irony to supplication—that makes Teresa an extraordinary writer. Spirituality here is neither lifeless matter nor abstract teaching, but something that is thought through, questioned, refined, and communicated with the breath of one who has lived it. And this breath is literary, because it transforms experience into effective language, into text with rhythm, cadence, and physical presence.

Teresa's writing is not secondary to her mystical experience; it is part of it. She does not write because she has lived something important—she writes in order to fully live it. Her mystical process culminates in the act of writing, in that passionate effort to express what cannot be contained in language but insists on being said. This is why her style is often fragmented, full of digressions, corrections, exclamations, and hyperboles: not due to carelessness, but as testimony. Language resists her, yet she wrestles with it—with humility and boldness.

As we read *The Way of Perfection* today, in this version adapted to contemporary Spanish, it is important not to overlook the literary dimension of the work. It is not enough to interpret its theological concepts or spiritual counsels. We must also attend to its silences, its pauses, its unexpected turns of phrase. Every line of Teresa's is, in a way, a scene: something happens between her and the reader. Something intimate, powerful, often transformative.

This text was not written to be read at a distance. It was born to enter into communion. And it is that communion—between author and reader, between soul and word—that this book seeks to recover. For reading Teresa is, ultimately, a form of prayer. And also—let us say it plainly—a form of literature in its purest state.

### **Bibliographical Note**

This prologue is freely inspired by ideas developed by Crisanto Pérez Esain in his article "Santa Teresa y la Literatura del llamado Siglo de Oro," published in *Cuadernos Literarios*, 2015.

# The Way of Perfection



Saint Teresa of Ávila



# INTRODUCTION

This book contains admonitions and counsel that Teresa of Ávila addresses to her religious sisters and spiritual daughters in the monasteries which, with the help of our Lord and of the glorious Virgin Mother of God, our Lady, she has founded according to the Primitive Rule of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. It is directed especially to the sisters of the Monastery of Saint Joseph in Ávila, which was the first she founded and where she served as prioress at the time of writing these words.

In all that I say in this book, I submit myself to the teachings of the Holy Roman Church, and if in anything I deviate from them, it is out of ignorance. Therefore, I ask, for the love of our Lord, that the theologians who review it examine it thoroughly and correct any error, as well as the many other faults that will no doubt be found in various parts.

If there is anything of value in what is written, may it be for the glory and honor of God and in service of His most holy Mother, our Patroness and Lady, under whose habit I have the blessing to live, though I am most unworthy to wear it.<sup>I</sup>

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<sup>I</sup> This brief introductory text holds a spiritual, historical, and symbolic richness that deserves careful unpacking. It is not merely a standard opening formula, but a declaration of intent and context that reveals much about the author, her time, and the profound purpose of the work.

From the very first sentence, Teresa addresses her “religious sisters and spiritual daughters.” This double expression is not merely affectionate; it precisely delineates the scope and tone of the work: it is not an abstract theological treatise, but a text born of the living relationship between a spiritual mother and her daughters. Teresa does not write from a chair of authority, but from a place of emotional involvement, direct responsibility, and practical love.

The fact that she specifically addresses the book to the sisters of the Monastery of Saint Joseph in Ávila—the first she founded—underscores that foundational and experiential bond. Saint Joseph is not merely a house; it is the seed of a reform that

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seeks to restore Carmel to its original fervor, according to the Primitive Rule—more austere, contemplative, and stripped of worldly excess. It is significant that Teresa writes from the position of prioress, which implies authority lived from within, not imposed from above: she speaks as one who leads, but also as one who lives and is transformed with the community.

This prologue, then, introduces us to a work inspired by lived experience, not theoretical speculation. In this sense, it resembles the teachings of great yogis in the Indian tradition, such as Ramana Maharshi or Nisargadatta, whose words emerge not from academic scholarship, but from direct experience of spiritual transformation.

Teresa explicitly declares her submission to the doctrine of the Roman Church, emphasizing that any possible error would be the result of ignorance. This declaration holds theological value, but it is also a political and prudential act. We are in the sixteenth century, at the height of the Spanish Inquisition. A woman who claims to have received extraordinary illuminations, visions, and mystical favors—and who also teaches, writes, and reforms—runs the risk of being accused of heresy, delusion, or spiritual pride.

This formula of submission is therefore not simply an act of formal obedience: it is a strategic move that allows her to proceed with confidence in a setting that closely monitors any deviation. But it is also a sincere testimony of her trust in the Church as her frame of reference. Teresa is not a rebellious or anti-ecclesial mystic; her reform is a reform from within, not against the system, but for its purification.

From a contemporary perspective, one might say that Teresa embodies a profound form of feminine spiritual intelligence: she knows how to navigate with clarity and discernment in a world of male power, without betraying her experience or inner voice. Her stance could be compared to the notion of *shakti* in Hinduism—the active, transformative force of the Spirit, which does not impose itself violently, but transforms from within through presence, clarity, and love.

The final part of the prologue reflects an essential attitude of the spiritual path: the renunciation of personal merit. Teresa states that if there is anything good in what is written, may it be for the glory of God and of His Mother. She presents herself as unworthy even to wear the Carmelite habit. This gesture of humility is not rhetorical flourish but the sincere expression of a consciousness that has transcended egoic self-assertion. It closely aligns with the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*, where Krishna advises acting with devotion, without claiming the fruits of action.

From a contemporary psychological perspective (for instance, in the line of transpersonal psychology), this attitude reveals a consciousness no longer identified with the surface self, but one that has been permeated by the transpersonal. Teresa sees herself as a channel, an instrument, not an author in the modern sense. That is why the book is, at once, teaching and prayer, counsel and offering.

## PROLOGUE

1. The sisters of this Monastery of Saint Joseph know that I have received permission from Father Presentado Fray Domingo Báñez, of the Order of the glorious Saint Dominic and currently my confessor, to write some things about prayer. It seems I might be able to say something of value, since I have been in contact with many spiritual and holy people. They have urged me so persistently to speak on this subject that I have decided to obey them. I believe the great love they have for me will make them receive with kindness the little and poorly expressed things I may write, more than books well composed by those who truly know what they are saying. I trust in their prayers, and perhaps, through them, the Lord will help me say something useful and suited to the way of life we lead in this house. If I do not do it well, Father Presentado, who must review it first, will correct it or burn it, and I will lose nothing for having obeyed these servants of God. This will show clearly how little I can do on my own when His Majesty does not assist me.

2. I intend to propose some remedies for those small temptations that the devil places before us and that, because they are so slight, often go unnoticed. I will also include other matters that the Lord may grant me to understand or that come to mind. Since I do not yet know what I will say, I cannot organize it well, and I believe it is best not to try, for it is already unsettling enough that I am undertaking this task. May the Lord place His hands upon all I do, so that it may conform to His holy will. That has always been my desire, although my works—like myself—are so imperfect.

3. I know that I am not lacking in love or in the desire to help in whatever way I can, so that the souls of my sisters may grow in the service of the Lord. This love, combined with my experience of various monasteries and the years I have lived, might help me offer more useful insights in small matters than theologians can. They, being

occupied with more important affairs and being strong men, often pay little attention to details that may seem insignificant. Yet for us, who are more fragile, anything can harm us, for the devil has many tricks to deceive those who live so enclosed, and he uses new weapons to attack us. I, being so wretched, have not defended myself well, and for that reason I wish for my sisters to learn from my experiences. I will say nothing that I have not experienced myself or seen in others.

4. A few days ago, I was ordered to write an account of my life, where I also spoke of prayer.<sup>I</sup> It is possible that my confessor will not wish for you to see it, and so I will include here some of what I wrote there, along with other things that seem necessary. May the Lord place His hand upon this, as I have begged Him to do, and direct all for His greater glory. Amen.<sup>II</sup>

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<sup>I</sup> This “account of my life” is the *Book of Her Life* that Teresa wrote between 1562 and 1565, during a pivotal period in her life. She composed the book at the request of her confessors and under obedience, particularly to Father Pedro Ibáñez and Father García de Toledo. The purpose was to recount her spiritual experience, her journey in prayer, and the mystical graces she had received, so that confessors and theologians could discern whether they were genuine and from God.

She began writing the text in Ávila, likely in 1562, shortly after founding the Monastery of Saint Joseph, her first Carmelite reform. This initial version of the manuscript reflects her desire to explain herself to her confessors. Later, in 1565, she revised and expanded the text. The final version, which is the one we know today, contains not only her spiritual autobiography but also a more structured teaching on prayer, with emphasis on the degrees of mental and mystical prayer.

The *Book of Her Life* was submitted to her confessors and placed under the supervision of the Inquisition in 1575, when a review of the text was requested due to its mystical content. Despite this, the work became one of the most influential in Christian spirituality and an essential reference on contemplative prayer.

<sup>II</sup> The Prologue of *The Way of Perfection* is a masterful example of how Teresa of Ávila succeeds in asserting her spiritual voice within the constraints that society and the Church of her time imposed on women. What might appear to be a simple introductory note, written in a tone of humility and obedience, is in fact a strategically crafted text that legitimizes her right to speak about prayer, mystical experience, and spiritual life.



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From the outset, Teresa places herself under the protection of a male authority figure—Dominican Friar Domingo Báñez, her confessor at the time—and makes clear that she has his permission to write. This gesture is not merely formal; it responds to the need to protect herself within an ecclesiastical environment that, particularly in the case of women, viewed any unauthorized spiritual discourse with suspicion. Presenting her work as an act of obedience—not only to her sisters, who request it, but also to her religious superiors—is her way of entering the space of authorship from a socially acceptable position, without arousing alarm.

Yet this obedience is, at the same time, a platform from which a different kind of authority emerges. Teresa does not present herself as a theologian or as a Doctor of the Church, but as someone who has deeply lived what she writes. She emphasizes that her counsel arises from experience—from what she has undergone in her own inner journey and from what she has observed in others with spiritual lives. It is this practical, embodied knowledge that she claims as useful and necessary, especially for cloistered nuns who, by their condition, are exposed to temptations and difficulties that men might neither see nor understand.

One of the most finely wrought aspects of the prologue is the way Teresa anticipates and disarms any criticism. She says she does not know what she is going to write, that she will probably do it poorly, that she is imperfect, that it would be better not to try at all... and yet she writes. And she writes knowing that what she says can help—not because of scholarly merit, but because of the life behind each word. Her apparent clumsiness is part of the act: she does not claim authority through mastery of theological language, but through love, humility, and the desire to serve. In this way, she transforms her status as an “ignorant woman”—as she calls herself—into a place of revelation: what matters is not the form, but the truth she embodies.

It is especially telling that she insists any errors in her writing will be corrected or even destroyed by those in authority. In her historical context, this is far more than a polite formality—it is a safeguard. One must not forget that women’s spiritual writings were carefully scrutinized, and many women—no matter how devout—were denounced, censored, or condemned. Teresa knows that every word she writes must pass through the filter of educated men, and she accepts this not as resignation but as a strategy that allows her message to circulate. Deep down, she knows that her testimony possesses a power that can break through even under such conditions.

Throughout the prologue, one also senses the weight of the spiritual motherhood Teresa exercises over her sisters. She does not write for an abstract audience, but for a specific group of women whom she loves, guides, and accompanies. It is in this affective bond that her voice finds its strength: the love they have for her will make them welcome even what is poorly said. That trust in relationship, more than in rhetorical form, allows her to write freely—not with the pretense of crafting a perfect work, but as a sincere and intimate help for those who seek to serve God more fully.

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Finally, when she mentions having been ordered to write the story of her life—a reference to *The Book of Her Life*—and that perhaps her sisters will not be allowed to read it, we sense a mix of resignation and determination. As if she knows that her path as an author will always be mediated by others, but also as if she accepts that, despite those mediations, something of her will get through. That is why she repeats here some of the teachings from that work, expanding them with what she deems useful, in the hope that God will arrange all things for His glory.

In sum, the Prologue is not merely the prelude to a treatise on prayer: it is an act of courage and wisdom, in which Teresa, fully aware of the limitations of her time, skillfully finds a way to speak with clarity, with depth, and with a true authority that does not come from office, study, or gender, but from her interior experience, her desire to serve, and a freedom that—though closely watched—refuses to be silenced.

# CHAPTER 1

*She explains the reason that led her to found this monastery with such austerity.*

1. When this monastery was being founded (for reasons I have already mentioned in this book, along with some great favors from the Lord that showed how much He would be served here), it was not my intention to impose such strict external austerity or to do without income. On the contrary, I thought there would be sufficient resources so that nothing essential would be lacking. In the end, since I am weak and wretched, even though my intentions were good, I was also seeking my own comfort.<sup>I</sup>

2. Around that time, I became aware of the terrible harm being suffered in France and of the devastation caused by the Lutherans. I saw how that accursed sect continued to grow, and this caused me immense sorrow.<sup>II</sup> I wept before the Lord and begged Him to bring remedy to such great evil, as though I were someone who could do something or who mattered. It seemed to me I would give a thousand lives if only to save a single soul from among the many being lost there. Seeing myself as a woman, lowly and incapable of serving the Lord as I wished, I felt a burning desire—as I still do—that since He has so many enemies and so few friends, at least those who are His friends might truly be such. I then resolved to do the little that was within my power: to follow the evangelical counsels with all the perfection possible, and to ensure that the sisters of this house would do the same.

I placed my trust in the infinite goodness of God, who never abandons those who resolve to give up everything for Him. I thought that if they became, by His grace, what I imagined in my desires, their virtues would make up for my failings and we might please the Lord. All devoted to constant prayer for the defenders of the Church, for preachers and theologians, we could help, in whatever small way, this Lord of mine, so cruelly mistreated by His enemies. He has done

them so much good, and now it seems they would put Him on the cross again and not even leave Him a place to lay His head.

3. O my Redeemer! I cannot think of this without my heart breaking. What has become of today's Christians? How can it be that those who owe You the most are the ones who cause You the greatest suffering? You, who have bestowed so many blessings upon them, who have chosen them as Your friends, who have communicated Yourself to them through the sacraments—are the torments You endured for them not enough?

4. Truly, my Lord, it is no great thing for someone to withdraw from the world today. If You, who have done so much for them, are held in such little esteem, what can we expect? Do we deserve better treatment than You? Have we done greater works than Yours, that we should be repaid with friendship? What is this, Lord? What are we waiting for, we who, by Your mercy, are free from this pestilence? Those who already belong to the devil have rightly earned their punishment, and with their pleasures have purchased eternal fire. Let them have it! Still, it breaks my heart to see so many souls lost. But more than lamenting the evil already done, I would rather prevent more souls from being lost each day.

5. O my sisters in Christ, help me beg the Lord, for this is why He has brought you together here. This is your purpose, your calling, and this is where your desires, your tears, and your prayers should be directed. No, my sisters, do not concern yourselves with the affairs of the world. At times I laugh, and at others I am grieved, when people come to ask us to pray for rents, money, and other material goods. Some of them, rather than asking for such things, should pray that God take them all away. They ask with good intention and devotion, but I am convinced that in these matters God does not listen to me. The world is in flames; they are trying to crucify Christ again with a thousand false testimonies. They seek to destroy His Church, and are we to waste time asking Him for things that, were He to grant them,

might mean one soul less in heaven? No, my sisters, this is not the time to speak to God of such trivial matters.

6. It is true that, were it not for our human weakness, which takes comfort in being supported in everything (and indeed, it would be good to have some resources), I would be glad if everyone understood that these are not the things we ought to beseech God for with such fervor.<sup>III</sup>

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<sup>I</sup> Saint Teresa of Ávila, driven by her longing to return to the original purity and austerity of the Carmelite Order, founded the Convent of Saint Joseph in Ávila on August 24, 1562. This convent, known as “Saint Joseph of Ávila,” was the first of the Discalced Carmelite Reform initiated by the saint. Teresa recounts in detail all the events surrounding this foundation in *The Book of Her Life*.

The foundation of Saint Joseph marked the beginning of a series of establishments that Teresa would undertake in her effort to reform the Carmelite Order, promoting a life of prayer, poverty, and strict enclosure.

Today, the Convent of Saint Joseph houses a Teresian museum that preserves relics of the saint, offering visitors an intimate connection to the life and work of this illustrious Spanish reformer and mystic.

<sup>II</sup> This deeply emotional passage must be read both in its historical context and from a critical perspective that allows us to appreciate the complexity of Teresa of Ávila’s figure. Her reaction to the growth of Protestantism—harshly termed “that accursed sect”—reflects the spiritual sensitivity of a woman deeply wounded by the divisions tearing Christendom apart, but also the cultural and theological limitations of her time.

In the mid-sixteenth century, Europe was undergoing a profound religious crisis. The Protestant Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther in 1517, was not merely a doctrinal schism but a justified response to numerous abuses within the Catholic Church: clerical corruption, the sale of indulgences, the poor formation of many priests, and the excessive temporal power of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Alongside Luther, other reformers such as Calvin and Zwingli called for a return to the Gospel and a more interior spirituality based on faith, grace, and the authority of Scripture. The movement was also fueled by the cultural advances of the Renaissance, the invention of the printing press, and an increasingly critical awareness among the faithful.

Within that context, it is unsurprising that Teresa, deeply rooted in Spanish Catholicism and a witness to the Church’s response in the form of the Counter-Reformation, would see the spread of Protestantism as a painful threat. Her language, emotionally charged, reflects the sincere concern of a woman who loves Christ and His Church, and who suffers at the sight of its unity shattered and of many souls—according to her

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vision—straying from the path of salvation. The harshness of her words, however, should not be read through a modern lens of intolerance, but as an expression of religious zeal common to both sides of the conflict.

Yet the most significant aspect of this passage is not its condemnation of Protestantism, but the response Teresa chooses to give to that crisis. She does not engage in theological debate or public polemics. Her mode of reform is interior, silent, and radical. Rather than confronting heretics in controversy, she founds a small convent where the Gospel is lived in purity, constant prayer, and true detachment. It is her way of contributing to the renewal of the Church—not with words against others, but with acts for God.

In this sense, Teresa is also a reformer, though in a different register. While Luther nails his theses to a church door, Teresa opens the doors of a new convent. While some reformers challenge the Pope's authority, she questions the lukewarmness of Christians who fail to live what they profess. Her critique is directed above all to the soul and the authenticity of the spiritual life. Though faithful to ecclesiastical teaching, her reformist spirit is equally bold: she proposes a life of deep, active prayer; a women's community free from the corruption of power and money; and a spirituality grounded in the direct experience of God.

Thus, this passage is revealing not so much for its denunciation of Protestantism—which is understandable in its context—but for how it marks the beginning of her own reform project. Faced with a divided Church and a world in perceived ruin, Teresa does not retreat into complaint or nostalgia: she founds, acts, prays, and reforms from within, convinced that one soul wholly given to God is more powerful than a thousand speeches. In that, even unwittingly, she places herself among the great reformers of history.

**III** This first chapter of *The Way of Perfection* is without doubt one of the most passionate and prophetic texts Teresa ever wrote. Here her mystical convictions resound with unusual force, alongside her lucid and sorrowful reading of the historical moment she inhabits. The tone is not merely exhortative, but nearly apocalyptic: there is urgency, lament, spiritual combat.

The immediate cause for the austere foundation of the monastery is not, as one might think, a purely personal ascetic vocation or an idealized embrace of poverty. It is the outcome of an inner process torn by compassion for the spiritual devastation she perceives around her. Teresa reacts not only to the need for internal Carmelite reform, but to what she sees as a spiritual conflagration across Europe: the rise of Protestantism (which she names without reservation as a “damned sect”), the division of the Church, and above all, the tepidity of Christians themselves—those most blessed, yet those who grieve the Redeemer the most.

This focus reveals something essential: for Teresa, prayer is not evasion but commitment. Her withdrawal, her enclosure, her radical poverty are not a flight from the

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world, but a way of interceding for it more effectively. The monastery is a spiritual stronghold. And prayer—if it is authentic—is a way of battling evil with the weapons of God: humility, love, detachment, and constant praise. In this sense, Teresa anticipates, without knowing it, a spirituality akin to that of other great mystical and ethical reformers—those who understood that to change the world, one must first be radically transformed from within.

The inner strength of this chapter arises from a deep conviction: that there can be no ecclesial or cultural reform without souls who truly love God. Teresa is not naïve: she knows her resources are scarce, that the women in her community are fragile, and that she herself is weak. But she also knows that when a person gives herself wholly to the love of God, her littleness can become a channel of infinite strength. That is why her hope rests not in structures or grand strategies, but in the hidden power of a few consecrated women who, living in total dependence on God, can sustain through their prayer the preachers and theologians who fight on the Church's external front. It is, at heart, a deeply ecclesial vision: she does not assume a clerical role, but takes her place in the contemplative life as the inner force of the Church—like a heart that beats in secret but sustains the life of the whole body.

It is also worth noting how she articulates her grief for the world with her renunciation of material comfort. There is in her words a sharp critique—tinged with irony—of those who come to nuns asking them to pray for financial gains or material improvements. Teresa perceives, with remarkable clarity, that many such petitions are not only misplaced, but actually divert prayer from its highest aim. She therefore urges her sisters not to waste their time or their petitions on lesser things, because far greater fires need extinguishing: apostasy, division, the loss of souls. This distinction between what is urgent and what is incidental is a call to spiritual clarity: not everything asked of God is good to ask, nor is everything desired worthy of prayer.

The harshness of her language in this chapter is unusual even for her. She speaks of the world as “on fire,” accuses the enemies of Christ of wanting to crucify Him anew, and is deeply pained by the ingratitude of Christians. In that cry, in that indignation, there is a form of radical love, of identification with the Crucified—not merely as one who contemplates, but as one who suffers with Him and for Him, the betrayal of those who ought to love Him most. This burning compassion, which leads to concrete action (the austere foundation), connects with the highest traditions of Christian mysticism and prophetic service. It is the voice of a soul who, having encountered God, can no longer live as though the world did not matter, nor pray as though prayer were a private refuge.

Finally, it is striking that Teresa does not begin by justifying the monastery's poverty with lofty spiritual arguments, but by confessing her own weakness. This initial honesty—admitting that she thought of her own comfort—stands in sharp contrast to the fervor that overtakes her when she feels called to something greater by God. This inner transformation—from seeking comfort to total surrender—is the intimate arc

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that sustains the entire chapter and, in itself, offers a profound teaching: that the way of perfection always begins with a deep conversion, a turning point that is not theoretical or abstract, but existential, radical, and committed. And this turning point, as she herself shows, is possible even in those who know themselves to be poor, incapable, and wretched. For it is not about what one can do, but what God can do when He finds a willing heart.



## CHAPTER 2

*On how they should not worry about bodily needs, and on the value and benefit found in poverty.*

1. Do not think, my sisters, that because you do not seek to please the world, you will lack food. I assure you, you will not. Do not try to support yourselves through human means, for if you do, you will die of hunger—and rightly so. Keep your eyes fixed on your Spouse, for He will sustain you. If He is pleased, even the least devout will provide for you—this you have already seen for yourselves. And if it should come to pass that you die of hunger, blessed be the nuns of Saint Joseph! Do not forget this, for the love of the Lord. If you have given up possessions, then also give up concern for your sustenance, for otherwise, all is lost. Those whom the Lord calls to have income, let them have it, for that is their calling. But we, sisters, have not been called to such a life, and it would be nonsense for us to pursue it.

2. To worry about others' wealth is like dwelling on the comforts others enjoy. Moreover, your concern will not change anyone's mind or inspire more generosity. Leave that care to the One who truly moves hearts—the Lord, who is master of all wealth and of those who possess it. We have come here at His command, and His word is true: heaven and earth would sooner pass away than His promise fail. Let us not fail Him, and have no fear that anything will be lacking. And if something should be lacking, it will be for a greater good, just as the saints lacked even life itself when martyred—and with that loss, their glory increased. What a beautiful exchange it would be to die soon and then enjoy eternity!

3. Know, sisters, that this is very important. Even if I were to die, I leave it written here. And while I live, I will remind you of it, for I have seen by experience the great gain there is in poverty. The less I have, the less I worry. The Lord knows that I am more distressed when something is in excess than when something is lacking. Perhaps this is because I have always seen how the Lord provides for us

immediately. It would be deceitful to the world if we made ourselves outwardly poor but were not poor in heart. I would feel guilty, for it would be like begging while being rich. May God forbid it. Where there is too much concern over what we receive, we will soon fall into the habit of asking for what is not even needed—perhaps even from those who need it more. And although those who give lose nothing but gain much, we would lose greatly. May God preserve us from this, my daughters. If such a thing were ever to happen, I would prefer that we had a fixed income.

4. I beg you, for the love of God, never to occupy your thoughts with concerns about alms. And if any young sister notices this happening, let her pray to His Majesty and, with humility, inform the prioress, helping her see that she is mistaken. This is a very serious matter, because little by little, true poverty is lost. I trust in the Lord that this will not happen and that He will not abandon His servants. If nothing else, what you have asked me to write may serve as a warning.

5. Believe me, my daughters, the Lord has made me understand something of the riches contained in holy poverty—for your benefit. Those who experience it will understand, though perhaps not as fully as I do, for I was not poor in spirit—even though I professed to be—but rather mad in spirit. Poverty is a treasure that contains within itself all the treasures of the world. It is a great nobility. To have poverty of heart is to hold power over all things, for one who assigns them no value, masters them. What do I care for what kings and lords possess, if I do not desire their riches nor seek to please them at the cost of displeasing God? What do their honors matter to me, if I know that a poor person finds true honor in being truly poor?

6. I believe that money and honor often go hand in hand. One who seeks honor rarely despises money, and one who despises money cares little for honor. This must be well understood. It seems to me that worldly honor always carries with it some concern for wealth or possessions. Rarely is a poor person considered honorable; rather,

even if truly honorable, the world holds them in low regard. But true poverty brings with it such great honor that it becomes unbearable to others. Poverty embraced solely for the love of God needs to please no one but Him. And I assure you, one who has no need of anyone has many friends. I have seen this myself.<sup>I</sup>

7. Since so much has already been written about this virtue, I do not dare go into depth. I would not want to lessen its dignity with my words. I have only shared what I have seen and lived, and I confess that until now I did not understand it well. But now that it has been said, I ask you for the love of the Lord: if we cannot live out exterior poverty as our holy fathers did at the beginning of the Order, let us at least preserve it within. Life is very short, and the reward is immense. Even if there were no other reward than fulfilling what the Lord counseled us, it would already be enough to imitate Him in some small way.

8. These must be the banners we bear: to desire to uphold poverty in everything—in the house, in clothing, in words, and above all, in thought. As long as you do this, do not fear that this Order will fall, for the Lord will be with us. As Saint Clare used to say, the great walls of a monastery are poverty and humility.<sup>II</sup> She sought to enclose her convents with such walls. I assure you that if poverty is truly observed, everything else will be far more secure than with rich and sumptuous buildings. For the love of God and by His precious blood I beg you: keep this, for if you do not, all will collapse.

9. It would be a great disgrace, my daughters, if what belongs to the poor were used to build grand houses. May God forbid it. Let everything be small and humble. We must resemble our King, who had no house but a stable in Bethlehem where He was born, and a cross where He died. Those were indeed places with little comfort. Those who build great buildings may have good intentions, but thirteen poor women like us can manage in any little corner. If, due to the need for enclosure, some land is required to aid in prayer and devotion, with a few hermitages for retreat, that is acceptable. But large

and sumptuous houses—may God keep us from them. Always remember that all this will fall on the Day of Judgment. And who knows if that day is near?

10. A house of thirteen poor women should make no noise when it falls, for true poverty must not make noise. We are called to be humble and silent people, so that others may feel compassion for us. Moreover, how much joy they will feel if they know their alms have saved them from hell! It is possible, for we are bound to pray continually for the souls of those who feed us. Though everything comes from God, He wants us to thank the people through whom He provides. Do not neglect this.

11. I do not know what I was saying, for I have digressed. I believe the Lord has willed it, for I never intended to write what I have just told you. May His Majesty always keep us in His hand and never allow us to stray from this path. Amen.<sup>III</sup>

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<sup>I</sup> This sentence contains a profound spiritual paradox: the one who needs no one, paradoxically, draws many. Saint Teresa is not speaking here of egoic self-sufficiency, but of an interior detachment that arises from a complete relationship with God. The truly free person, who does not seek to fill emotional voids through others, ceases to be a burden and becomes a luminous, trustworthy, and attractive presence. That inner freedom gives rise to a kind of universal friendship, because one who neither demands nor depends is available to love unconditionally. Teresa speaks with the authority of experience: “I have seen it myself.”

<sup>II</sup> Saint Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) was an Italian religious and the founder of the Order of Poor Clares, the female branch of the Franciscans. Inspired by the life and teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi, Clare renounced her social position and wealth to devote herself entirely to a life of prayer, poverty, and service to God. She is remembered for her profound humility, spiritual fervor, and love for evangelical poverty.

<sup>III</sup> This chapter is one of the most beautiful and impassioned expressions of the Gospel ideal of poverty, which Teresa of Ávila elevates to a true form of spiritual nobility. Here we do not find a pitiful view of poverty nor a romantic exaltation of suffering, but a mystical, strategic, and deeply Christological understanding of detachment—one that is rooted in the Beatitudes and the early monastic tradition alike.

The context in which Teresa speaks these words must not be overlooked: we are in the heart of the sixteenth century, in a Catholic Spain that is closing ranks against

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reformist dissent while enjoying the height of imperial expansion. In this proud and triumphant Spain, Teresa raises the banner of thirteen poor women in a convent that has renounced even fixed incomes—and she does so not out of ignorance or necessity, but as a conscious and radical act of reform. Against the power of money and the influence of patrons, she proposes a life grounded in absolute trust in God. This decision is not only spiritual, but also political: it challenges the dominant logic of economic power as the foundation of stability and authority, and it questions from within the models of convent foundation that depended on noble patronage.

In this text, Teresa anticipates a principle that authors like Simone Weil would later develop: that true spiritual freedom is attained only when one renounces the desire to possess and the fear of lacking. Her affirmation that “to have poverty of heart is to have power over all things” is not rhetorical. Poverty here is not a lack, but a form of inner mastery: one who expects nothing from the world needs nothing. And one who seeks to please no one but God enjoys a secret and powerful dignity that the world cannot understand.

Yet Teresa does not naively idealize poverty. She is lucid and practical. She knows that constant worry over survival corrodes the soul and that true poverty can only be lived through radical trust in Providence. That is why she insists that concern for alms breaks the vow of poverty from within—it introduces anxiety and worldliness where serene trust should reign. Her critique clearly targets the danger of a “pretended” poverty, maintained only in appearance while the heart is full of desires, fears, and human schemes. In this sense, her proposal is as demanding as it is liberating: better to have income than to live begging without true surrender.

This passage also reveals her pedagogical genius: she does not theorize about poverty, she translates it into images, examples, and very concrete admonitions about clothing, houses, and thoughts. In citing Saint Clare and contrasting grand buildings with humble convents, she draws upon the whole Franciscan mendicant tradition, yet adapts it with grace to the reality of Carmelite enclosure. She does not seek a shocking or ostentatious poverty, but a silent one, discreet, one that makes no noise even when it collapses. Hers is a “secret” poverty, like the works of the Spirit.

The tone of this chapter moves between tenderness and firmness. She admits that she came to understand the value of poverty only through experience—almost against her will—and that admission humanizes her. Her final paragraph, in which she confesses she had not intended to write any of this, reveals the charismatic and spontaneous dimension that defines both her style and her life: she writes under an inspiration she recognizes as coming from the Lord, and her deepest desire is that He keep her daughters always within that vision.

This chapter not only lays out a spiritual doctrine of poverty, it also unfolds a true theology of detachment that still challenges today’s reader. It is not enough to renounce wealth; it must also be uprooted from one’s thoughts. Only then can an indestructible house be built, whose invisible walls are humility and poverty.

## CHAPTER 3

*Teresa continues urging her sisters to devote themselves to praying that God give favor to those defending the Church. The chapter concludes with an impassioned exclamation.*

1. Returning to the main reason the Lord gathered us in this house, and because I desire with all my heart that we be something to please His Majesty, I say: seeing such great evils—evils which human strength cannot extinguish, this wildfire of heretics spreading so widely—I believe we must act as when, in wartime, enemies have devastated the land and a king retreats to a fortified city. Then it is fitting to fortify that city, for from there one can sometimes strike at the enemy and achieve victory. Often, a few chosen men accomplish more than a large army of cowards. And although the battle might not be fully won, at least they will not be conquered; without traitors, hunger alone may force surrender—but here there is no hunger strong enough to defeat us. We may die, but we shall never be vanquished.

2. Why do I tell you this? So that you understand, my sisters, that what we must ask of God is that in this small fortress of good Christians none be lost, none abandon to the enemy. We should also pray for the captains of this city—that is, the preachers and theologians—so that the Lord makes them spiritually strong. Most belong to religious orders and must advance greatly in perfection and vocation—it is very necessary. I have told you: it is the ecclesiastical arm that must sustain us, not the secular. Since we cannot act directly for our King, let us be such that our prayers support those servants of God who, with great effort, have acquired knowledge and a good life to serve the Lord.

3. You may think I exaggerate in saying we must help those better than us. I will explain: you do not yet grasp how much you owe the Lord for bringing you here, away from worldly affairs, opportunities, and distractions. This is a great mercy. Those I mention do not enjoy

this privilege—nor would it be fitting that they did, especially now. They are the ones who must strengthen the weak and encourage the small. What would soldiers be without their captains? These have to live in the world, deal with people, go to courts, and sometimes adapt externally. My daughters, do you think it is easy to live in the world and yet remain interiorly separated from it, as if angels rather than humans?

4. If that is not so, they do not deserve the name of captains—may the Lord protect them from ever leaving their cells, for they would do more harm than good. It is not the time to tolerate imperfections in those who must teach. If they are not inwardly fortified—understanding what it means to have all earthly things underfoot, to live detached from the temporal and attached to the eternal—then, though they may try to conceal it, the world will notice. Be sure of this: the world will forgive them not one single fault, though it may overlook many virtues—and may not even recognize them as such. More still, what is truly virtue may often be judged as weakness or convenience.

So do not underestimate how much God must aid those who enter this great battle—it must be something great indeed.

5. For these two intentions, I ask that we strive to be worthy to receive God's favor:

First: that many among the learned and religious, of whom there are many, possess the necessary qualities I have described. And that the Lord prepare others who are not yet ready, for one perfect person does more work than many imperfect ones.

Second: that once placed in battle, the Lord uphold them by His hand so they may withstand worldly perils and resist siren calls. If we achieve this with God's help, though enclosed, we will fight for Him. I will consider well-spent all my efforts establishing this small refuge, where I aimed to uphold the Rule of Our Lady and Empress with the same perfection as at its beginning.

6. Do not think it futile to be persistent in this petition. Some believe failing to pray sufficiently for one's own soul is a grave matter—but what greater prayer exists than this? If you worry about purgatory, know also that this prayer will diminish your suffering. And if some remains unpaid, let it be. What does it matter if I remain in purgatory until the final judgment, if by my prayer even one soul is saved? How much more if many souls are redeemed and the Lord is honored! Do not focus on temporary pains when these prayers serve a greater service, one that suffered so much for us. Always seek what is most perfect.

So, for love of the Lord, I ask you to petition His Majesty on this matter. Although I am miserable, I request it—for His glory and for the good of His Church.

7. You may think it audacious that I can contribute to this, but I trust, my Lord, in these your servants gathered here—because I see they seek nothing but to please you. For you they have relinquished all they had and would give more to serve you better. Are you, my Creator, ungrateful, that I should believe you will not answer their pleas? You, Lord, who while on earth did not despise women, but showed them compassion. If we asked you for honor, wealth, or worldly things, do not hear us; but if we ask for the honor of Your Son, why would you not hear us?

8. O Eternal Father! Look upon these countless scourges, injuries, and grievous torments. How can your loving heart bear that what Your Son endured with such ardor and love for You—so as to please You supremely (for it was by Your command He loved us)—now be so lightly regarded? These heretics scorn the Most Holy Sacrament! They strip it of its dwellings, destroy churches, and act as though nothing more remains to be done to please You.

But all is accomplished! Has it been insufficient, Eternal Father, that while He lived on earth He had no place to rest His head and spent His life in suffering? Was it not enough that He fully paid for Adam's sin? And now—having left these homes to receive His



friends, knowing we need such divine nourishment to strengthen our weakness on the journey—would they also take it away?

My Lord, no more! Must this loving Lamb—who already gave so much—continue to pay each time we sin? Forbid it, O Sovereign Judge. Soften Your justice and look not upon our sins, but upon the redemption Your Son purchased, the merits of His sacrifice, those of His glorious Mother, and of the many saints and martyrs who have died for You.

9. Oh Lord, how great is my sorrow—and how reckless I am to make this plea in everyone’s name! How poor an intercessor I am, my daughters—will my audacity provoke your righteous anger further? And rightfully so. But Lord, You are merciful, and I plead that You have pity on this wretched sinner—worm of the earth—who dares speak to You thus. Look upon my longings and tears as I implore You, and forgive my faults. For Your sake, have compassion on the many souls that are perishing, and aid Your Church. Permit no further harm to Christendom, Lord. Bring light to these surrounding darknesses.

10. And you, my own sisters, I ask—love of the Lord—to commend this poor sinner to His Majesty, and to supplicate Him to grant me humility. It is your duty to ask. I need not stress your prayers on behalf of kings, prelates, or our bishop—I see you already pray earnestly for them, which fills me with confidence.

But remember that when future sisters arrive, they must be taught: “a holy prelate makes his subjects holy.” This is so important that your prayers before the Lord must always include it. If your prayers, desires, disciplines, and fasts are not offered for this cause, know that you are failing the very purpose for which the Lord brought you here.<sup>I</sup>

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<sup>I</sup> This chapter powerfully and profoundly develops one of Teresa of Ávila’s most potent and prophetic intuitions: that of a small group of souls radically dedicated to

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prayer who, from the silence of the cloister, become a spiritual stronghold of the Church in times of crisis. Here, Teresa reveals herself as a true strategist of the spirit, interpreting the ecclesial drama of her time in military terms—the enemy is advancing, the Church is under siege—yet she proposes an unexpected response: the battle is not to be fought with weapons or words, but with holiness, prayer, and inner fidelity.

The historical context is decisive. We are in the midst of the Counter-Reformation, at a time when Protestantism has fractured Europe, challenging not only doctrines but also the authority, sacraments, and very structure of the Church. Teresa perceives this drama with apocalyptic clarity: it is not merely a theological dispute, but an existential threat to the mystical body of Christ. Her indignation at what she calls the “fire of heretics” cannot be read from a contemporary perspective without acknowledging that anguished awareness of a Church besieged on all fronts and corroded from within. She does not understand reform as a schism, but as a spiritual illness that demands a response of great magnitude.

In the face of this threat, Teresa proposes neither doctrinal reform nor institutional offense, but a radical reconfiguration of spiritual life. And she does so through a logic deeply Ignatian: as in the *Spiritual Exercises*, she imagines a battlefield with two camps—Christ’s and the world’s—and each soul must choose its side. The Carmelite convent, founded “for this very purpose,” thus becomes a mystical fortress, an interior castle from which the true war is waged: the war of the spirit.

At this point, Teresa introduces a magnificent image: that of the captains of the Christian army—its theologians and preachers—who must be upheld in prayer so they can remain pure amidst the world. Here her psychological acuity shines with particular brilliance. She does not idealize the religious nor presume sanctity based on vocation; rather, she portrays them as exposed men, demanded to live at a spiritual height they often do not attain. She asks of them not only learning and eloquence, but coherence, detachment, true holiness. And she denounces with courage the hypocrisy of those who preach without living what they teach, warning that their flaws, far from going unnoticed, discredit the Gospel. With this judgment—what we might today call prophetic—Teresa anticipates one of the great concerns of the contemporary world: the incoherence of pastors as scandal and obstacle to faith.

Yet Teresa does not stop at criticism. Her proposal is constructive: to offer a hidden life brimming with spiritual power. The Carmelite nuns, from within their enclosure, uphold the Body of Christ through prayer. Her insistence that this is the convent’s primary purpose turns cloistered life into an active and committed form of ecclesial presence. In a world where there is no longer room for half-measures, Teresa demands perfection. And with her usual grave humor, she affirms that even purgatory would be bearable if, in exchange, a soul were saved. This vision of suffering offered in love, far from any morbidity, fits within the oblationary logic of the most genuine Christianity.

In the final paragraphs, the text reaches an almost biblical tone. Teresa becomes a passionate intercessor, speaking to God like Moses or Jeremiah, pleading through

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tears for the good of the Church. She does not speak in her own name, but in the name of all, and even while acknowledging herself a sinner, she does not cease to implore. This balance of indignation, tenderness, unworthiness, and boldness constitutes one of the most moving features of her spirituality: a radical humility that nonetheless dares to intercede with fervor, for it does not rely on itself, but on the love of God.

Lastly, her pedagogy resurfaces as she reminds us that prayer for pastors and for the Church is not optional, but the very reason they were gathered together. Teresa thus places herself as both heir to and reformer of a monastic tradition that, since the early centuries, understood contemplative life as an active form of ecclesial charity. Her reform, then, is not merely a return to the original Rule, but a courageous reinterpretation of the cloistered vocation in times of crisis: less ornamentation, more prayer; fewer grand convents, more burning hearts.

This chapter is not merely an exhortation but a spiritual manifesto: the reform of the Church begins with the holiness of its members, especially those who pray with purity of intention, knowing that all that is essential is decided in secret. That is Teresa's true revolution.

## CHAPTER 4

*Wherein the observance of the Rule and three essential aspects of spiritual life are encouraged. The first of these—love of neighbor and the harm caused by particular friendships—is explained.*

1. You have already seen, my daughters, the great mission we have undertaken. What kind of people must we be so that, in the eyes of God and the world, we do not appear reckless? Clearly, we must make great efforts, and having lofty thoughts will help our deeds to be lofty as well. That is why, if we devote ourselves with great diligence to fulfilling our Rule and Constitutions, I trust in the Lord that He will hear our prayers. I am not asking anything new of you, my daughters, but simply that we be faithful to our vocation, fulfilling that to which we have committed ourselves. Of course, there is a great difference between fulfilling it out of mere duty and doing so with true dedication.

2. Our original Rule commands us to pray without ceasing. If we strive to fulfill this with the utmost care—which is the most important thing—we will naturally observe the fasts, disciplines, and silence that our Order prescribes. You already know that for prayer to be genuine, it must be accompanied by these practices, for comfort and prayer cannot coexist.

3. Regarding this matter of prayer, about which you have asked me to speak, I will share a few things. But in return, I ask that you put into practice what is said here and that you read it often, with an open and willing heart.

Before speaking about what interior prayer is, I want to address some fundamental matters for those who wish to advance along this path. They are so essential that, even if someone does not become highly contemplative, these virtues will help her progress greatly in the service of the Lord. However, if they are lacking, it is impossible

to attain true contemplation. And if anyone believes she has reached it without possessing them, she is gravely mistaken.

May the Lord help and inspire me to say what is fitting, and may it all be for His glory. Amen.

4. Do not think, dear friends and sisters, that I am going to demand too much of you. It is enough to follow what our holy Fathers handed down and practiced, for it was by this path that they came to be called saints. There is no need to seek other ways or learn from other sources.

I will focus on explaining three essential things, which are included in our Constitutions, because it is vital to understand how much our peace depends on them—both inward and outward—the peace that the Lord so earnestly commanded us to seek.

The first is mutual love; the second, detachment from all created things; and the third, true humility. Although I mention humility last, it is the foremost of them all and encompasses the rest.

5. Regarding the first—loving one another deeply—its importance is immense, because true love makes everything bearable among those who love each other from the heart, and something would have to be very serious to cause true discord. If this commandment were kept as it should be throughout the world, I am convinced it would be a great aid to fulfilling all the others. Yet we rarely keep it perfectly.

It may seem that among us there could be no excess of love, and yet, even this can lead to many evils and imperfections. Not everyone understands this, except those who have seen it firsthand. In this area, the devil finds space for his entanglements, and in consciences that are not very sensitive, such faults often go unnoticed and may even appear to be virtues. But those who seek perfection perceive them clearly, because little by little, such disordered affection weakens the will, preventing it from giving itself fully to the love of God.

6. I believe this problem is even more prevalent among women than men, and the harm it causes in the community is quite evident.

From it arise things like loving some more than others, being more affected by offenses committed against our friends, wanting to have something special to give them, finding time to talk with them—and often not to speak of God, but simply to express how much we love them or say other frivolous things. These particular friendships rarely have as their aim to help each other love the Lord more. Rather, I believe that in many cases the devil instigates them to sow discord within communities.

When such friendships are truly founded on the service of the Lord, this becomes immediately apparent. In those cases, the will is not driven by a disordered passion but by a genuine desire to help one another overcome passions and grow in the love of God.

7. Would that there were many such holy friendships in large convents! But here in this house, where we are no more than thirteen and never shall be, we must all be friends, all love one another, cherish and help one another. For the love of the Lord, I implore you to guard yourselves against particular friendships, no matter how holy they may appear. Even among siblings, they can be poisonous, and here I see no benefit in them whatsoever. If they involve relatives, it is worse still—a true pestilence! Believe me, sisters, though it may seem extreme, in this lies true perfection and great peace. In this way, we will avoid many occasions of sin, especially for those who are not yet spiritually strong.

If we feel our will leaning more toward one sister than another—which is natural, as our hearts are often drawn more to what has lesser value if it possesses greater natural charm—we must strive to restrain ourselves so that this inclination does not dominate us. Let us love the virtues and the good that lie within each one, and always be careful not to place undue importance on what is external.

8. Let us not allow, my sisters, our will to become enslaved to anyone but Him who bought it with His precious blood. Be very careful, because without realizing it, we may find ourselves so bound to someone that we are no longer our own. Oh, God help us! The

foolishness that springs from such attachments is endless. And because they are so subtle and seemingly harmless, only those who have witnessed them can truly understand and believe it. There is no need to go into details here, only to note that such behavior is harmful in anyone, but if it occurs in the prioress, it becomes a true poison for the whole community.

9. To avoid particular friendships, it is essential to be very careful from the beginning, before they are allowed to take root. It is better to correct them with love and prudence than with harshness. One effective way to prevent them is not to spend more time together than necessary, nor to speak outside the designated times, as we currently practice. The custom we follow, as prescribed by our Rule, of each one remaining in her cell, is of great benefit. In our house of Saint Joseph, we should avoid having a workroom, for although this custom is quite laudable in other places, here it is easier to maintain silence if each one is alone. Becoming accustomed to solitude is a very beneficial habit for prayer, and since prayer is the foundation of our house, we must learn to love all that helps us attain this goal.

10. Regarding mutual love, it may seem unnecessary to insist too much on it. How could anyone be so insensitive that, living together, constantly sharing without distractions from outsiders, and believing that God loves us and that we love Him, would not be moved to love her sisters? Moreover, virtue itself always inspires love and esteem, and I trust in God that it will not be lacking in this house. Therefore, I believe it is not necessary to dwell too much on this point.

11. What matters is understanding what this love should be like and what virtuous love consists of—the kind I wish to see here. It is also essential to know whether we truly possess it. This virtue is immense, as our Lord left it as the principal commandment and entrusted it with great insistence to His apostles. I would like to say something about it, though with my limited words. If you find a clearer explanation in other books, do not limit yourselves to what I say, for perhaps I do not express myself as I should.

12. There are two kinds of love I wish to speak about. One is purely spiritual, where neither sensuality nor the inclinations of our nature intervene, and it remains clean and pure. The other is also spiritual, but accompanied by sensuality and our weaknesses, as often occurs with the love of relatives or friends. The latter may appear lawful and not evil, but we have already spoken somewhat of it before.

13. Of the purely spiritual love, free from any disordered passion, I want to speak now, for when passion is mixed in, everything loses its order and virtue. Interacting with virtuous people—especially confessors—can be of great benefit if done with prudence and moderation. However, if you detect in any confessor signs of vanity or disordered intentions, you must regard it with caution.

In such cases, it is never wise to engage in long conversations with him, even if they concern good matters. It is best to limit oneself to a brief confession and conclude it promptly. If possible, the most appropriate course is to inform the prioress, telling her that your soul does not feel at peace with that confessor, and to ask that he be replaced, always striving to do this without harming his reputation.

14. In situations like this, or in other complicated cases where the devil might entangle things and you are unsure how to proceed, the most prudent course is to turn to a learned and trustworthy person. If necessary, speak freely, explain what is happening, and ask for counsel. Ideally, you should confess to that person and follow his guidance.

At times, even when action is necessary, if it is not taken with good advice, serious errors may result. How many problems occur in the world precisely for lack of guidance in delicate matters, especially when decisions may harm others! It is not an option to overlook these things, because the devil never begins to meddle with mild intentions—if not stopped early, his goal is to cause greater harm.

Therefore, speaking to another confessor will always be the wisest course, whenever possible. I trust in the Lord that, in such cases, this will be achievable for the greater good and peace of the soul.



15. This is a matter of utmost importance, for it can become a real danger—a veritable hell that harms the entire community. Do not allow the problem to grow; you must confront it from the outset, using all possible means and always acting with a clear conscience. However, I trust in the Lord that He will not permit those dedicated to prayer to be drawn toward anyone who is not a true servant of God.

This is very true, because a confessor who does not understand the language of prayer or enjoy speaking of God cannot be sincerely loved, as he will not be kindred in spirit. And if he were, in a house such as ours, where opportunities for interaction are so few, he will either be too foolish to recognize the harm he could cause, or wise enough to avoid any situation that might disturb both himself and the handmaids of God.

16. Since I have begun speaking on this subject, I will continue a bit further, because the harm the devil can cause in matters such as this is immense. At first, it is often difficult to perceive, and by the time it is recognized, it may already be too late. If the confessor harbors even a trace of vanity in his heart, all will be tainted. The nuns will see the perfection they sought gradually crumble, without even understanding where the fault began. May God, for His own sake, deliver us from such dangers.

Such a situation would be enough to disturb the entire community, for the sisters' consciences would tell them one thing, while the confessor tells them another. And if they are required to remain with a single confessor, they will find themselves in grave inner conflict, not knowing what to do or how to regain peace. The saddest part is that the one who should bring them calm would instead become the source of their distress.

I imagine there must be great afflictions caused by this in some places, and I cannot help but feel deep sorrow at the thought. For this reason, do not be surprised if I insist so strongly on warning you of this danger and on urging you to cut it off at its root before it can spread and cause greater harm.<sup>1</sup>

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**I** This chapter, both luminous and severe, touches the very heart of community life and the spiritual path: love. But not just any love—it speaks of a love that transcends form, that goes beyond emotional inclinations, spontaneous sympathies, or the bonds the world calls “special.” Saint Teresa, with her customary insight, does not denounce affection, but rather its confusion; she does not repress tenderness, but purifies it.

The love proposed here is not born of shared personalities or attraction to physical or psychological traits. It is not the ego’s love, which selects and excludes, delights in what is similar, and seeks to see itself reflected in the other like a mirror. On the contrary, it is a love that is blind to form yet sensitive to essence. It is not concerned with what pleases the senses or the mind, but with what resonates with Truth. It is a love that sees with the eyes of the spirit, that loves the other not *for* something, but *in* something: in their being, in their divine root, in their deepest reality.

This is a transpersonal love, for it does not rely on the ego’s games. One loves the other as one loves God, as one loves oneself in one’s truest dimension. For this reason, it is a love that does not waver, falter, or betray: because it is not grounded in the perishable, but in the eternal. It is a love that demands nothing, makes no calculations, and does not confine itself to exclusivity. It only gives. And in giving, it expands—it becomes purer, stronger, more real. It does not diminish when shared; rather, it multiplies, because it is the very expression of Being.

Here we encounter an even deeper truth: this love is not an effect but a cause. It does not love because it finds something lovable, but in loving, it calls forth loveliness. It does not arise from circumstances; it transforms them. It does not respond to beauty or goodness; it awakens and reveals them. It is a creative love, like that of God at the beginning of time, when He said “let there be,” and there was. Thus, the soul that loves from this place does not wait for reasons to love—it plants them. It does not ask what the other deserves; it sees in them, from the outset, the spark of the same divine fire.

This love precedes all judgment, and therefore it liberates. It does not depend on the past, on personality, or on deeds; it is offered before all that, like the sun that shines upon both the just and the unjust. Hence its healing power, its ability to unite what once seemed divided, to perceive unity where the world sees fragments. It is Love, Truth, and Power in one and the same substance.

Saint Teresa, though not using these exact terms, powerfully points to this same truth: that “particular friendships”—however virtuous they may appear—almost always arise from our fallen nature, from attachment, fear, or a need disguised as affection. In contrast, true love, the love that sustains the life of prayer and the peace of the convent, is that which knows no favoritism, embraces all equally, and values virtue over appearance, substance over gesture.

This love cannot be improvised. It must be cultivated through inner vigilance, through silence and solitude. That is why the cell is not a prison, but a temple; why

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the care taken to prevent disordered emotional attachments is not coldness, but fidelity to what is Real. When the will becomes enslaved to another creature, it loses its divine orientation. But when it becomes free to love all without clinging to any, then it begins to reflect the Love that knows neither limits nor conditions.

To love as God loves: this is the path Teresa invites us to follow. Not a love of feelings, but of truth; not a love that delights in itself, but that gives of itself. Not a love that responds to what is, but one that brings it into being. For true love—like the Being from which it springs—has no opposite. It simply is.

## CHAPTER 5

*Continues regarding confessors. It emphasizes the importance of their being well-educated.*

1. May the Lord not allow any sister in this house to suffer the hardship I have mentioned, for love of His Majesty: the torment of finding both soul and body in great distress, especially when the superior has a close relationship with the confessor and neither dares to correct the other. This can lead to the temptation of concealing grave sins out of fear of disrupting a false sense of peace. O my God, how much harm the devil can cause through such situations, and how dearly we may pay for this misguided sense of honor! You think that by avoiding a change of confessor, you preserve the monastery's reputation or good name, but the devil takes advantage of this to ensnare souls, as he cannot do so by other means. If you ask for a different confessor, you fear it may disturb the order of the house or even bring dishonor upon it, even if the new confessor is a saint.

2. For this reason, I beg, for the love of the Lord, that whoever is in charge should always, with the support of the bishop or the provincial, ensure that, in addition to the regular confessors, all the sisters may, from time to time, consult and share their souls with well-educated individuals, especially if the confessors lack sufficient formation, though they may be devout. Knowledge is essential to enlighten consciences. There are people who possess both holiness and wisdom, and the more the Lord grants you in prayer, the more necessary it becomes for your actions and spiritual practices to be well-grounded.

3. You know that the first foundation of the spiritual life is a sound conscience, and that you must strive to avoid even venial sins and always follow the more perfect path. One might think any confessor understands this, but it is not always the case. I myself discussed matters of conscience with a confessor who had studied theology, and by downplaying certain issues, he caused me harm, though