

# I WAS BORN FOR YOU

## V Centenary of the Birth of Saint Teresa of Jesus

### Introduction

1. The title of this document comes from a poem that describes life as the gift of God's love and as an offering made to him. The life in question is that of St Teresa of Jesus, our Mother. What made her the person she became was the inherent dynamism of the truths of revelation, experienced in a personal way (cf. DV 8): the human being, created by God in God's own image, finds redemption in Jesus Christ; through him, every human being is called, and awaited; with him, we are led to our salvation; in his likeness, human life comes to fruition in obedience to the Father's plan. However, this spiritual experience of Teresa's was not only a happening affecting her; it is at the root of the calling of all of us: "the origin of our family in Carmel and the very nature of its vocation are closely bound up with the life and charism of St Teresa, especially with the mystical graces which led her to undertake the renewal of Carmel and make prayer and contemplation its total commitment [...], totally pledged to living the Gospel and keeping the 'primitive Rule'" (Const. 5).

2. We know that "our ideal finds a living expression in these two Saints [St Teresa and St John of the Cross] and is clearly portrayed in their writings. Their charism and the spiritual lifestyle they propose to us - even their intimacy with God and the experience of things divine - are not just purely personal gifts of their own, but part of the heritage and vocation of the Order" (Const. 13). In recent chapter documents the Order has emphasized the return to the sources, which is taking place in Christian faith and life today. In this 90<sup>th</sup> General Chapter we wish to return to the sources of our Teresian charism, proposing a step-by-step reading of St Teresa's works. Carried out at both a personal and a community level, this will help us to take hold afresh of who we are and what we are called to in today's Church.

3. The context for this reading of St Teresa is the lead up to the Fifth Centenary of her birth (2015). Direct contact with her writings, read in a meditative way, will enable us to share the human and spiritual adventure which she herself lived and which she holds out to us. We want to wake up again to her spirit, take hold of her wisdom, approaching her writings with a listening ear, as disciples and sons, so that our lives and our service of the Church and the world will be shaped afresh by her charism. We want to get in touch with her message as a source of hope in our human, Christian and Carmelite lives.

4. In issuing this invitation, we are conscious of the call to read the signs of the times, which are signs of God himself (cf. EN37). In today's world we see a renewed concern for spirituality and interest in the mystics, and this in turn calls for a profound, dynamic spirituality, rooted in the gospel, attentive to the mystical dimension, able to face into the insecurity and uncertainty characteristic of our times. "Is it not one of the 'signs of the times' that in today's world, despite widespread secularization, there is a *widespread demand for spirituality*, a demand which expresses itself in large part as a *renewed need for prayer*?" (NMI 33a). This 'widespread

demand for spirituality' bears a clear relation to the great Christian mystical tradition and, specifically, to the witness of the Carmelite mystics: "How can we forget here, among the many shining examples, the teachings of Saint John of the Cross and, Saint Teresa of Avila?" (ib. 33b).

5. The present document, arising from the reflections of the Discalced Carmelites at the 90<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, is addressed principally to the friars. We also wish to extend its invitation to the Discalced Carmelite Sisters and to the members of the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order. Indeed, its scope includes the whole Teresian family, aiming at strengthening our fraternal unity and so expressing in a concrete way the richness of St Teresa's charism in the Church. We know that the family, which Teresa founded, is an open family: down through the centuries, new members, new associations and institutes have enriched it. We are also very conscious of the young people who are being called to Carmel, and who are a source of new life, just as children bring new life to a family. Furthermore, we wish to extend a special, fraternal invitation to our Discalced Carmelite Sisters to join us in this spiritual pilgrimage towards the Centenary celebration. United with them, and with the whole Carmelite family, our wish is to carry forward the torch of the Teresian charism, focusing first and foremost on the value of prayer in the heart of the Church and on the apostolic power inherent in a generous gift of ourselves.

**Part One**  
**Teresa and the roots of our charism:**  
**reading her in context.**

*I. The historical, social and religious context of her life.*

6. St Teresa's social setting, sixteenth century Castile, was marked by contrasts, aristocratic dominance, and a diet of heavy etiquette, rank and title (cf. L 37.6,10). Teresa was part of that system but reacted against it, aiming her critique, in the book of her Life, at the three great pseudo-values prevalent in that society: the quest for prestige, money and pleasure (cf. L 20.25-28). Teresa grew up at the time of imperial expansion under Charles I of Spain (Charles V of Germany, 1516-1556), and her personality and activity unfolded during the reign of Philip II (1556-1598). This was the era when Castile stopped being closed in on itself and opened to a European horizon - to Italy, France and Flanders.

7. Teresa opened her heart to the problems of Europe, ravaged as it was by religious wars and threatened by the Ottoman Empire. Africa too was of heartfelt concern to her. But it was especially the immense panorama of the Americas and its problems that stirred her soul. Teresa was only seventeen when her brothers started leaving for America (the Indies, as Teresa calls them), and from then on the new world was never absent from her mind. During the last two decades of her life, what was happening in the Indies formed part of her inner world, and was crucial in her work in founding the friars. When people talk about Teresa's attitude toward the Indies, it is customary to focus on the money that reached her from there. She herself however lived the problem of America at a deeper level, and her thinking underwent a radical change. She was always getting first-hand information, but the definitive moment came in 1565 when the Franciscan missionary Alonso de Maldonado visited the Carmel of San Jose. He was a disciple and follower of Las Casas. He opposed the behavior of the conquistadors and favored the missionaries, and his discourse had a profound effect on Teresa (expressed in terms in keeping with her times). She found herself having to withdraw and spend time alone in a hermitage in the garden, and cry out to God for so many millions of souls being lost in the Indies. All of a sudden, an immense and quite new horizon had unfolded for her (cf. F 1.7; Letter to Lorenzo de Cepeda, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1570).

8. In sixteenth century Spanish society, women had little involvement in the decision-making process. The sources of learning were scarcely available to them; they were not admitted to the universities, or to other centers of study or advancement; nor were they permitted to read vernacular writings on spirituality. Teresa protested against such restrictions, which were evident too within the Church. "The world keeps us pent up and powerless to do anything of value in public for you, Lord, and we dare not speak the truths for which we weep in secret. How is it Lord that you do not hear us when our plea is a matter of justice? I will not believe it Lord, for you are goodness and justice itself, the just judge, not like the judges of this world. They are sons of Adam, and when it comes down to it, they are all men, so there is no woman whose goodness they don't hold as suspect" (WE 4.1; cf. 35.2; L 26.6). Without planning to,

she became a champion of women's culture. She had a special affinity with the vernacular writing on spirituality of the first half of the sixteenth century. When she founded the new movement in Carmel, she demanded that her nuns should be able to recite the divine office and assist in choir (cf. Cst 6). But not long afterwards an illiterate shepherdess knocked at the door of her Carmel, one Ana Garcia (Anne of St Bartholomew), and Teresa dispensed with the demand and gave her admittance. Teresa herself taught Anne to read and write. Hence Teresa's Carmel became a place where books were welcome, along with learning and people of learning, a place for poems ... and for the lyrical poetry of Fray Juan de la Cruz; and her legacy includes a list of learned Carmelites, among whom mention should be made of Maria de San Jose, Cecilia del Nacimiento, and Ana de la Trinidad (of Calahorra).

9. As for the religious context, Teresa's Castile was an almost entirely Catholic theocracy. The Jews had been expelled from Spain in 1492; descendants of converts from Judaism were routinely investigated on suspicion of continuing to practice the Jewish faith; any contact with the Protestant reformation was expunged; only very small Moslem nuclei remained. Indeed, the child Teresa was aware of the hostile land of the Moors and the possibility of dying a martyr there (cf. L 1.5), and she and her family were obliged to deal with suspicion about their purity of blood, that is, about having Jewish ancestry. Her views about the Reformation are well known, views she absorbed from the political and religious mindset of her day (cf. C 1.2).

10. Sixteenth century Spanish society was ostentatiously religious in its customs, its institutions and its sensibility. Popular piety was an all-pervasive formative influence. From her infancy, this piety filled the air Teresa breathed. It complemented the liturgical life of the convent, and Teresa was to make it her own in different ways throughout her religious life. Indeed, in a purified form, it was to form part of her mystical life. This conjunction of popular piety and mystical experience is important: Teresa experienced, day by day the `immense beauty of the face of Christ; she was deeply conscious of her communion with the Trinity; and yet in the daily practice of community living, she could scarcely do without holy water, pictures, processions, and religious songs (cf. W 34.11). In the Church and in society, the Spanish Inquisition was one of the most influential institutions, and its presence was felt in Teresa's life too. The Inquisition brought its questioning gaze to bear upon Teresa herself, on her mystical experience (cf. L 33.5), and on her first writing, the *Book of her Life*. She herself however refused to succumb to the atmosphere of fear that was taking over Castile.

11. In the age of Philip II, the "Church" meant the clergy and the hierarchy, and Teresa shared this view. The clergy were the social class closest to Teresa and had the greatest influence on religious women like her. She had contact with all the various strata of the ecclesiastical system. She esteemed the bishops whom she knew, and valued the clergy very highly. For her, a priest was no mere ecclesiastical functionary; rather, he was a standard-bearer, a Christian leader or captain; a defender of Christ's cause (cf. W 3.1-2). In the wider history of the church, Teresa belongs to the Catholic reform movement, which originated in the mid-sixteenth century. Specifically, her renewal belongs to the general effort at reform in the Castile of her day. The wider movement was epitomized by the Council of Trent, and sought to inject new life into the church, to bring fresh air into Christian life, the arts, theology, and the seminaries.

12. Teresa's mystical life, and her desire for a small contemplative community with a new style and renewed spirit, pre-dates the Council of Trent. Still, as "the holy Council" got underway, her own enterprise coincided with it. However, she should not be seen as simply one more reformer of religious life. Rather, she is the bearer of a charism and the inspirer of a way of life in the Church. Christian humanism characterized this way of life. Teresa's openness to the transcendent, to communion with Trinitarian love and to friendship with Christ - the God made man who understands our weakness - gave Teresa a most elevated view of the human person, and led her to value highly the human virtues (cf. W 4.4; 41.7; 1M 1.1ff). Hers is a *prophetic* mysticism, an experience so powerful that it gets expressed in language. Her words invite, inspire, and challenge us. They constitute her a "witness" for society and for the Church.

13. In a simple, direct way, Teresa briefly describes the Christian formation she received at home; she values it highly: "If I hadn't been such a wretch, having parents who were virtuous and who feared God should have been enough, with the Lord's help, to make me good" (L 1.2). The opening pages of the *Life* are unequivocally positive in the way they portray Teresa's family and the healthy Christian humanism that characterized it. Her father, Don Alonso, comes across as upright, moderate and truthful; a socially adept man; a keen reader; a devotee of the Holy Eucharist; outstanding in his love for the poor and his care for the sick and for his servants (cf. Ib. 2). Her mother Dona Beatriz, is similarly described: patient, circumspect, peaceful and clear-sighted, committed to inculcating devotion to Mary and other Christian virtues in her children (cf. Ib. 3). Teresa, so committed to her mission as spiritual mother in Carmel and beyond, did not neglect the spiritual life of her own family: of her father, when she was a young nun (cf. Ib. 7.13); of her brothers, when her mystical life was flourishing.

14. With this background, Teresa searched out her vocation in her late teens, entering the convent of the Incarnation when she was twenty years old. There she became aware of joining an age-old and intensely biblical spiritual tradition. This tradition was founded on the Carmelite Rule, and this is the document to which Teresa most frequently refers in her writings after the Bible itself. *The Rule* was drawn up in the first decade of the thirteenth century, and was edited and approved during the pontificate of Innocent IV (1247). It is this edited version to which Teresa refers when she speaks of the first Rule or the primitive Rule (cf. L 36.26). In the opening pages of the *Way of Perfection* she tells her nuns that her aim in founding the little monastery of San Jose was that "this Rule of our Lady and Empress should be kept with the perfection of those early days" (W 3.5). The aspects of the Rule to which she devoted most attention were evangelical *poverty* (cf. L 35), *prayer* (cf. W 4.4), the *solitude* of the cell (cf. Cst 8; W 4.9), *silence* (cf. 3M 2.13), *work*, and the example of St Paul. The traditional association of the Rule with the example of Our Lady was another key factor, which accounts for Teresa's habitual designation, 'the Rule of the Blessed Virgin' or 'the Rule of Our Lady of Mount Carmel' (cf. F 14.5; L 36.26).

15. The twenty-seven years spent at the Convent of the Incarnation saw tremendous spiritual

growth in Teresa. Her reading of St Augustine and the sight of an image of the wounded Christ were catalysts for a definitive change in her (cf. L 9.1,8). The Convent was the scene of the mystical graces of which she speaks in the *Book of her Life*, from the Christological experiences which rooted her mystical life in the reality of Christ's sacred humanity (cf. L 22), to the grace of the arrow of love (cf. L 29.13), and the charismatic graces which led to her founding a new Carmelite monastery. It was there, after nearly twenty years as a Carmelite (1554) that the life-changing event occurred that she describes in chapter 9 of her autobiography. Now it was a case, not of overcoming the struggle which had characterized the ten previous years, but of a new horizon, a new level of relationship with God, a new way of facing into daily life. She puts it like this: "Sometimes I experienced the beginnings of what I shall now describe: as I was focusing on the nearness of Christ, or sometimes even as I was reading, I would suddenly have such a sense of the presence of God that I could not doubt that He was within me or that I was entirely engulfed in Him" (L 10.1). This was nothing less than the beginning of her mystical life, a new way of praying and living, with consequences that even she could never have imagined. It was a new life, and from this the new Carmelite family arose. Among the witnesses of the intense mystical experience, which characterized this second stage of her life (1554-1582), we find John of the Cross, who was confessor at the Incarnation for a triennium (1571-1574) while Teresa was prioress. He witnessed too her work as writer and as foundress, which continued more or less up until her death.

## *II Reading Teresa fruitfully*

16. In her writings Teresa is fundamentally sharing her mystical experience. Her early writings speak of specific Christological graces (cf. L 26-27; 37.4), and of favors that gave her a new understanding of herself, or of the reality of the human soul (cf. Ib. 40.9). These experiences had their own dynamism: contemplation led her to found a Carmelite community and to become an author (cf. Ib., prologue, 2; 37.1). The decision to write her first book, *the Life* (1562 and 1565), came at the behest of her directors, who themselves were privy to her mystical experience; but the author claims too that she decided to write because interiorly moved to do so (cf. ib. 18.8; 19.3-4). The *Way* (1566) arose in response to the insistent requests of the recently founded community of San Jose. The sisters themselves knew of her mystical graces, and wished to be at one with their spiritual Mother at an experiential level. Five or six years later (1573) Teresa started to write the *Book of the Foundations*, continuing the story begun in the *Life* (32-36). Her confessor, Fr Ripalda, had ordered her to set about the work, but a mystical impulse had also urged her to do so (cf. F prologue; SR 6.2). Finally, in 1577, Teresa wrote the *Interior Castle*. Like the *Foundations*, this work leads on from the *Life*, not so much by continuing the historical narrative (L 32-36) as by developing the expression of mystical experience (ib. 22-31; 37-40). Her aim is so to complete the panorama of the inner life that it might serve as a paradigm for the spiritual journey of every Christian.

17. Rooted in the word of God and in the mysteries, which the liturgy celebrated, -Teresa became an exceptional mentor in the experience of God. She writes from experience (cf. L 18; 23; W prologue), and in order to awaken such experience in her readers: "it's hard to be sure

of what we don't know by experience" (6M 9; cf. W 28). Hence her concern not only to share knowledge with the reader, but also above all to communicate the savior of the divine, so encouraging the reader to follow the same path which she is on herself. The graced experience of God (1544-1554), of the person of Jesus Christ (1560), and of the mystery of the Trinity (1571), constitutes the axis of her entire spirituality.

18. Teresa saw in the Bible the ultimate criterion of truth and the source of her life of prayer (cf. MSS prologue 2). Access to Scripture came to her from preaching and liturgical prayer. Moreover, spiritual writings offered her a variety of texts from the Sacred books: the *Flos Sanctorum* included the Passion narratives from the four Gospels; the text of the book of Job was to be found scattered throughout the *Morales* of Gregory the Great; and the Carthusian writing *Vita Christi* collected the scriptural testimony to the life and mystery of Jesus. In her own writings, the Song of Songs, the Gospels, Saint Paul, and various biblical figures are particularly prominent. In short, Teresa became finely sensitized to the Word of God and she valued the Scriptures highly: "all the world's evils come from this: not knowing clearly the real truth of the Scriptures" (L 40.1). Her criterion for the value of a theologian's opinion is its relation to the Sacred text: "in the Holy Scriptures which they read they always find the true spiritual path" (ib. 13.18; 34.11).

19. As for Teresa's liturgical formation, this began in the Incarnation, a contemplative community which gave supreme importance to liturgical prayer and was large enough to celebrate it with due solemnity. The recitation of prayers was the convent's main work, and other activities revolved around that. It was above all her mystical experience that enabled Teresa to enter most deeply into the spirit of the liturgy, opening up to her the meaning of the Church at prayer, experienced both in the Liturgy of the Hours and particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. 6M 7.4; W 33-35). These were the pillars of her spiritual life, and it was in the context of the Eucharist that her most intense mystical graces came to her.

20. Prayer is the central theme of all Teresa's writings: prayer as a personal friendship with the Lord, with the Blessed Trinity, and as an unconditional surrender to Him. Prayer it is that opens the human person to that inner place where God is to be encountered, dwelling in the depths of the soul. "All I will say is that the door to these great blessings which the Lord has granted me is prayer. If it's shut, I can't see how he will grant them" (L 8.9; cf. 1M 1.7). It is in prayer that truths - the Truth - are revealed (cf. L 19.12; F 10.13). Saint Teresa sees prayer above all as faithfully, patiently living out our friendship with the Lord: more than once she will speak of acquiring the habit of seeking his company since he is continually accompanying us (cf. W 26-29). Prayer comes down to this: "friends being together: frequently, one to one, being with the one who we know loves us" (L 8.5). This comes out in verse form in *Born for you*: "If such be your will / bless me with prayer; / or if you prefer, with dryness[ ...]. In this, my sovereign Lord / alone will peace be found: / What is your will for me?" This is what really matters, much more than whether or not any particular contemplative experience is granted to a person. The time spent in prayer, "however feeble such prayer may be, is very precious to God" (2M 1.3).

21. Two perspectives in particular characterize the vision which Teresa imparts to her renewal of Carmel. First, she keeps in mind the ancient origins of the Order: she insists on being rooted in the earliest spiritual traditions, with the return to the primitive Rule, the focus on Mary and Elijah, and the eremitical model of the men who first dwelt on Mount Carmel (cf. Const. 9). On the other hand, her reform is contemporary and new. She wants to be fully inserted into the life of the contemporary Church. In communicating her experience to her followers, she inculcates a fresh sense of the apostolic power of contemplative life. This little college of Christ, in which all love each other and help each other (cf. W 4.7; 27.6), has a vast ecclesial and missionary scope (cf. F 1.7; W 1.2; Const. 6-7, 89, 94). This new form of life (in which the eremitical spirit serves the ecclesial purpose) issues from Teresa's intense experience of God and of Christ, which reaches out to embrace all who follow her: "As time went on, I longed more and more to be the means by which at least one soul would be blessed. I often felt like a person who has a great store of treasure, who wants to share it around with everyone, but whose hands are tied" (F 1.6).

22. Her ideal for religious life includes one more essential component, present in her *Constitutions*, namely, Teresa's humanism. She values the person highly, and that comes across in, for instance, her prescription of two hours of recreation daily, in tandem with the two hours of mental prayer (Cst 26-28). Already in the *Way* she had emphasized the human virtues: the holier you are, the more approachable your sisters should find you (cf. W 41.7; Const. 10). This humanism is clearly seen in the way she fosters communion between people and between communities; in her promotion of personal work, of selected reading, and of vocational discernment; and in her vision of authority working through love... Teresa thought through these great themes with a view to her communities of sisters. They percolated down to the Discalced friars through Saint John of the Cross, who was exposed to the nuns' sisterly style of mortification and recreation (cf. F 13.5). Hence, for the friars, Teresa and John together constitute the enduring model of the Teresian charism (cf. Const. 11-14).

## Part Two Towards a contemporary reading of Teresa's works

### *I. Looking at our situation in the light of St Teresa's experience*

23. The charism issuing from the life and writings of St Teresa has been enriched down through succeeding centuries. We have grown in our understanding of her works and of her charismatic experience, and that is reflected in the *Constitutions*, both of the friars and of the nuns and the Secular Order. Thanks to this, "our understanding of our charism today is greater, or can be greater, than perhaps at any other time in our history. Today more than ever before, those who read our saints, from all kinds of backgrounds both within and beyond the Church, are rightly asking us to share with them the spirituality of our family [...]. So we have to ask ourselves how to respond. The signs of the times in the Church and the world, along with the authentic human and religious aspirations of new generations, beg the question. We are looking for the way to fulfill, more *effectively* and with greater relevance, the mission of the Teresian Carmel in the third millennium" (Journeying with Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint John of the Cross: returning to the core, 2003.1). In other words, "we must know and understand the world in which we live, its hopes and aspirations, which are at times unfolding with dramatic urgency (cf. GS 4)" (ib. 6); and we must do this in the light of the fact that man's highest dignity consists in his vocation to union with God (cf. GS 19). As we have said, the Teresian charism emerged from profound mystical experience in prayer, and came to full fruition in the light of the religious and cultural events of the day. Teresa's response came from her life, was expressed in her writings, and was given form in her work as foundress. Her mysticism was grounded in historical reality, attentive to what was happening around her, and committed to service.

24. Teresa's own attitude asks of us too to see and discern what is happening today, in our secularized and post-modern world. The atheism and unbelief prevalent in the West is now increasingly becoming a global reality. At the same time, paradoxically, we are seeing more and more signs of a new religious awakening and of a spiritual hunger symptomatic of humanity's deepest yearnings. It is becoming clear that, if the 21st Century is to be Christian, there is a need for mysticism; the experience of faith has to be retrieved. Man himself is undergoing an identity crisis, and his attempts to define himself without reference to God are undermining his dignity and subverting the values inscribed in his very being. Human being is open; it carries a wound, a thirst for what lies above and beyond. To help us reappraise human dignity, threatened as it is by today's culture, we have Teresa's vision of the human person as the dwelling place of God, open to communion with Him, able to welcome Him at the center of the Castle. In educating people in the contemplative spirit of Teresa we are therefore helping them to discover their authentic selves.

25. Along with the fact of unbelief and the crisis of human identity, mention must be made of the injustice, poverty and exclusion in today's world. As humanity seeks how to respond, divine revelation has something to say, and Teresa's experience can help us to hear it. Any Christian

spirituality open to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot but be confronted by the reality of world poverty. The sources of Christian revelation are themselves clear about concern for the poor. Experience of God does not happen in careless isolation, immune to the sufferings of humanity. If prayer were to ignore the scourge of poverty in today's world, it would incur the Bible's most outraged condemnation. Just so, the prophets denounced ritual when it was divorced from concern for the suffering of the poor and destitute.

26. One of the signs of renewal in religious and Christian life today is a deeper rootedness in the Gospel. It is what Vatican II called a return to the sources of Christian life, where the following of Christ is the supreme norm (cf. PC 2), and the charism of the founders is recognized as the fruit of the Holy Spirit who is always active in the Church. Every charism is an experience of the Spirit, and as such it offers a fresh reading of the Gospel, a new rendering which itself can be deepened and developed by the particular gifts of those who are to participate in that charism (cf. MR .11). Christ is the Gospel in person, the center and the ultimate norm of every consecrated life, the origin and goal of every charism. The Teresian charism constitutes an original way of reading the Gospel, of contemplating Christ, and of being conformed to him in one aspect of his mystery.

27. Teresa's originality, her charism in the Church, comes from her Christ-centered mysticism (cf. L 9.1-3; 26.6; 27.2-8, etc.). This experiential knowledge of Christ brought about her configuration to him. In this sense her charism is a genuinely new offer in the spiritual life of the Church (cf. MR 12), a qualitative step forward. Her charism is new precisely as a fresh way of living the Gospel. Therein lies its success, responding as it did to the needs of her time, and, in a sense, of all times. What her writings do is lead the reader into that Gospel experience, and that accounts for their wide popularity. As Discalced Carmelites, our mission is clear: to live the Teresian charism intensely; to lead humanity, in the light of the signs of the times, into the contemplative experience which Teresa gives us; and to work to make her writings more widely available.

## *II. Some key elements in her life and teaching.*

28. The personal and Christ-centered character of Teresa's experience resonates well with the religious and Christian sensibility of our times. For Teresa, there is no substitute for the One Mediator: "I have seen quite clearly that this is the door if we want our Lord and King to reveal his secrets to us" (L 22.6). The essence of her mysticism consists in recognizing that the glorified humanity of Christ is the mainstay that sustains us, and the life that gives us life (cf. 7M 2.6). This recognition is evident from her conversion (cf. L 9.1) through to the discovery of Christ as the living book where truth is spoken and who "impresses upon us what we should read and do in such a way that it is impossible to forget it" (L 26.6).

29. If Christ is the heart of Teresa's mysticism, then prayer in faith, hope and love is what gives her charism its unique character. Such prayer is the *raison d'être* of the new Carmel and it is what her writings are designed to teach. Paul VI called attention to this in officially declaring

Teresa a Doctor of the Church: the new doctor had fulfilled her function “in her religious family, in the Church and in the world, through a message which is always relevant: the message of prayer”. Indeed, she translated her rediscovery of contemplation into concrete proposals, a practice of prayer accessible to all Christians (cf. W 19.15; 23.5), a renewed education in prayer with guidance on how to begin and how to grow. The pedagogical brilliance of her writings established the charism, at the heart of the Church, to such an extent that nowadays Christianity is inconceivable without this emphasis on communion with God; indeed, without the mystical life. Suffice to read the important text in the Catechism of the Catholic Church on mysticism as the fullness of Christian life, seen as an increasingly intimate union with Christ (cf. CCC 2014), and the texts on contemplative prayer (cf. ib. 2709-2719).

30. Teresa's charism, her mystical experience of Christ, her vision of contemplation as being at the service of the Church, receive tangible expression in what she will later call our style of mortification, sisterhood, and recreation (cf. F 13.5). Three essential factors shape her ideal of community life. First, it is the 'college of Christ' (WE 20.11), following the radical model of community in the early Church. Christ is present at the heart of the community (cf. L 32.11). He is “the Lord of the house” (W 17.7). It is He who “has brought us together here” (W 1.5; 3.1). Second, the governing criteria for community are to be a strict sense of equality and a genuine love (cf. W 4.7; 7.9), an evangelical love which is active and gratuitous, and which truly has the interests of the other at heart (W 4.11; 6-7; 5M 3.7-12). These criteria would be reflected in the emphasis on manual work (cf. Cst 28). Third, human values and virtues were to be honored: gentleness, prudence, discretion, sincerity, friendliness, and joy. Culture was to be held in regard. In short, hers was a humanism that for her time was both well defined and quite unusual. (Cf. W 41.7-8; VC 42; NMI 43.)

31. The Virgin Mary stands at the very beginning of the Teresian project (cf. L 33.14). Hence Teresa of Jesus, who early in life had experienced Mary's powerful, intercession (cf. L 1.7), proposes the most holy Virgin as Mother and Lady of the Order (cf. F 29.23; 3M 1.3). She sets her before us as the model of prayer and self-denial on the journey of faith (cf. 6M 7.13-14), a woman given over in soul and body to listening to and contemplating the word of the Lord (cf. MSS 5.2; 6.7); she who was always docile to the impulse of the Holy Spirit and who was at one with the paschal mystery of Christ in love, sorrow and joy (cf. 7M 4.5). So it is that communion with Mary penetrates all elements of our life and seals them with a Marian character: our fraternal life, the spirit of prayer and contemplation, all the expressions of the apostolate, and self-denial in the spirit of the Gospel (cf. Const. 47-52). As the evangelical model for our life, Mary encourages us to follow in her footsteps. She invites us, as the poor of Yahweh, to configure our life with that of our Lady in constant meditation on the divine Word, in faith and "in a manifold service of love" (Const. 49). Mary leads us into the mystery of Christ and of the Church; she makes us bearers, like her, of Jesus, and of the Good News of his Kingdom. Therefore, alongside the Christological, the Marian dimension is undoubtedly a fundamental key to a correct reading of Teresa's works. And with Mary we find St Joseph, the humble servant of Christ and his Mother, and the model of prayerful communion with Jesus (cf. Const. 52).

**Part Three**  
**Criteria for reading St Teresa; and a plan of action**

*I. Criteria for reading St Teresa*

32. Our first criterion comes straight from Teresa's own experience. From the time of her conversion, prayer led her into an increasingly rich encounter with the person of Christ, in whom she believed and hoped, and who was the object of her love. He it was who led her into the life of the Blessed Trinity; through Him she gave herself to the service of the Church; He stands at the heart of Teresa's apostolic, missionary understanding of prayer. Accordingly, our reading of St Teresa has to place us within Christ; it must call us to contemplate His face, and invite us to be conformed to Him, so as to proclaim His Word and bear witness to His love.

33. Second, the Word of God: the power of Sacred Scripture in Teresa's experience suggests a reading of her works through the lens of the Bible (which for her goes hand in hand with the Liturgy, 'source and summit of the spiritual life', SC 14). This would tie in with the 2008 Synod of Bishops' concerning the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church.

34. Third, Teresa's sense of the Church invites us to take to our reading of her works an awareness of the needs of the Church today. Our response, particularly in the areas of spirituality and evangelization, would be made in the light of the post-conciliar ecclesiology, represented in *Vita Consecrata*, with its triple emphasis on consecration, communion and mission.

35. Fraternal communion shines out in Teresa's works, and this is of vital concern in today's individualistic society. There is increasing need for strong signs of communion, which would proclaim universal brotherhood through a real living of poverty, chastity and obedience: "I decided to do the little that was in me, following the evangelical counsels as perfectly as I could, and seeing that these few women here did the same, trusting in the great goodness of God, who never fails to help those who decide to leave all for Him" (W 1.2; cf. VC 87).<sup>36</sup> Another criterion for a correct reading comes to us from the apostolic and missionary dimensions of Teresa's life and works. This criterion would emphasize her living out the paschal mystery, source of all evangelization; and it would be attentive to the apostolic service that the Church is asking of consecrated men and women today (as set out in part three of *Vita Consecrata*).

37. The message of St Teresa's works is relevant today and in all cultures. Finally therefore we propose a contemporary reading, with a renewed religious and cultural awareness, keeping in mind the various cultural and religious contexts in which the Order exists today. Such a contemporary reading could be guided by the reflections in the 2003 General Chapter document, *Journeying with Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint John of the Cross: returning to the core*, 60-64; 74-78.

## *II Plan of action*

38. Each year, from 15<sup>th</sup> October 2009 to 2014, we are to read one work of our Holy Mother, Teresa of Jesus. This reading will take place at both personal and community level, and be guided by reading notes prepared by a commission to be set up by the Definitory. Where possible, the community reading will be accompanied by celebrations, spirituality weeks, interdisciplinary congresses on the works, etc. Every circumscription of the Order will have a yearly meeting to look at how the project is going.

39. The order in which the works are to be read is as follows: Life (2009-2010); Way of Perfection (2010-2011); Foundations (2011-2012, coinciding with the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of St Joseph's. in Avila); Interior Castle (2012-2013); and the Spiritual Relations, Poems and Letters (2013-2014).

40. The purpose of listening to Teresa's word in this way is to strengthen our Christian life; to enable us personally and as communities to be molded by the Scriptures and the Gospel; to enrich our life of faith in communion with the Church. As present-day partners in a dialogue with St Teresa, the point of spending time with her writings like this will be to make us better Teresian Carmelites. The fruitfulness of this project should be analogous to what St Gregory the Great says about reading the Bible: Scripture grows with the one who reads it, in proportion to the faith and love of the reader. This means that our reading should be guided not so much by a concern for a systematic study, as by attention to the elements of Teresa's writing which have most impact and relevance for our lives.

41. The Definitory will form a central commission which each year will prepare reading notes and aids for group work, as well as promoting, coordinating and publicizing the various initiatives which come up around the Order.

42. There is to be a participative reading of Teresa's works, in our communities and in our various pastoral settings, so that the readership embraces not only our friars, but also the Discalced Carmelites Sisters, the members of the Secular Order, the Teresian family and lay people.

43. A web-page will be created, by which to make the Teresian corpus available. Hence the latest technology will serve to promote as widespread a contact with her works as possible.

44. Avila has great potential for welcoming pilgrims, particularly young people. The General Definitory aims to foster this, through the coordinated activity of the Priory of "La Santa" (Teresa's birthplace), the Iberian Conference of Provincials, and CITeS. This will mean a pastorally effective program, which could be extended to other places of Teresian significance, and will include pilgrimages, days of formation and of prayer, etc. In this way we will take up the challenge to make the World Youth Day, which will be celebrated in Madrid in 2011, an occasion for making Teresa and her works better known.

45. This pastoral outreach will be complemented by a more academic or cultural initiative, assisted by the study centers of the Order such as the Teresianum, with a view to organizing courses and congresses, meetings and seminars for specialists, translators and those involved in Teresian studies. From these events will emerge concrete proposals, which could be taken up by the various circumscriptions of the Order and by the centers for Spiritual Theology, etc.

46. An extraordinary Definitory will be held at least once in the next six years. Its remit will include evaluating the effectiveness of this step-by-step reading of Teresa's works.

47. We propose that the *textus receptus* of St Teresa's writings be established, along with a *modus operandi* for incorporating new discoveries, especially among the letters and other fragments which may come to light, so that there will be a consistent mode of citation both for the original Spanish and in the translations. The Definitory is to take up this task and finish it as soon as possible, in dialogue with experts and publishers.

48. The Definitory is to promote popular, economical editions of the works of St Teresa in the various languages.

## Conclusion

49. Our planned reading of the works of Teresa of Jesus has this goal: to renew our awareness of being graced with a charism in the service of the Church and of humanity today. Rooted in the experience of the living God, who has created us in his image and likeness, and has established his dwelling deep within every person, it is our desire to live out and to share the values which inspired Teresa herself: her sense of God and of the person, her spirit of prayer, her openness to what was happening in the world, her sense of ecclesial responsibility and her apostolic spirit. In short, we wish like her to glimpse the beauty of "souls in whom the Lord finds such delight" (7M 1.1), starting with a renewed awareness of the dignity of each one of us. This will lead us to a positive and hopeful vision of humanity today, and to a creative attitude in building up the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and in announcing a new heaven and a new earth. "God's greatness knows no end; so neither will his works" (ib.). He has not ceased working, and he is still the Lord of history. Therefore, in proposing the message of St Teresa afresh, the Carmelite family is simply responding to what it sees as its duty on behalf of the men and women of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, so that they too may be mystics, people who know God, who have discovered the meaning of their lives and wish to share it with their contemporaries.

