



CARMEL CLARION

Discalced Carmelite Secular Order

Washington, D.C.



Our Holy Mother, St. Teresa of Jesus

Jan.-Feb.
2004.

Volume XX
No. 1

Volume XX, No. 1

January-February 2004

CARMEL CLARION

is a Catholic newsletter published bi-monthly by the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington Province, with central office in Washington, D.C.

CARMEL CLARION

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Official Website of Washing Province OCDS

www.ocdswashprov.org

\$3.00 per issue, or \$10.00 per year. Foreign subscription:

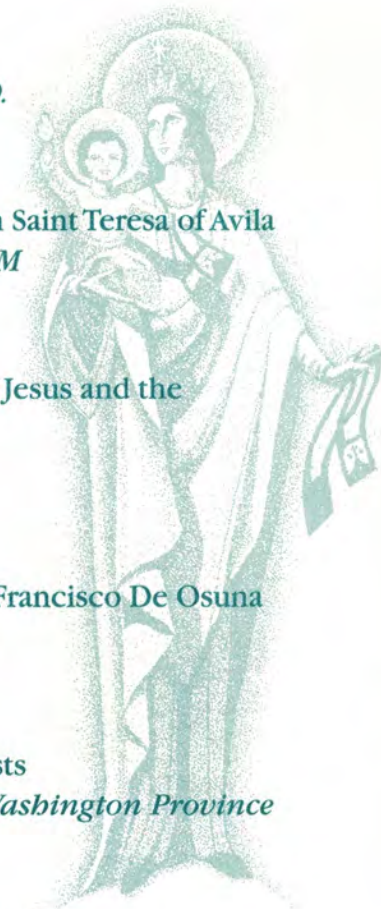
\$15.00 per year.



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In the course of each of our lives there are men and women we encounter who have an influence on our lives, either through personal contact or through their writings. The same is true for the saints. It is especially true in the life of our Holy Mother, St. Teresa of Jesus.

In this issue of the *Clarion* we are beginning a series we are calling “Friends of Teresa.” These are men and women that Teresa encountered, either through their writings or in person; people such as Francis de Osuna, Francisco Salcedo, St. Peter of Alcantara, Domingo Báñez, Ann of Jesus, Ann of St. Bartholomew and others. Some of these men and women are familiar to you, others you know of only through Teresa’s writings.

I hope that you may become better acquainted with the various sources of Teresa’s teaching through this series of profiles. We sometimes think the Holy Mother possessed great wisdom and teaching from birth. This, however, is far from the truth. She, like us, was influenced, for better or worse, by the people around her. She was a good student. She was open to new and different ideas. She valued any teaching that would bring her closer to “His Majesty.” Much of her teaching came from others, such as Francis de Osuna, or from other religious groups, such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, or Dominicans. Some of the most influential people in her life are hardly known aside from her life, like Francisco Salcedo. Some of them were saints, such as St. Peter of Alcantara and St. John of the Cross, others were of the laity, such as her brothers Lorenzo and Francisco Salcedo.

Teresa’s genius laid in her willingness to accept what was good whatever its source. Her genius and originality is found in her ability to synthesize into one coherent body of teaching what she received from others and to make it her own.

May these short biographies increase your understanding and appreciation of the woman we call our Holy Mother. ■

Fr. Regis, O.C.D.

Beginning to Pray With Saint Teresa of Avila

Margaret Dorgan, DCM



Teresa of Avila should be patron saint for everyone involved in selling. No saleswoman has ever been more enthusiastic about what she had to offer or more persuasive in showing how the payment is something anyone can afford. She points out “a great treasure” and declares, “The time will come when you will understand how trifling everything is next to so precious a reward” (*Way of Perfection*, 21:1). Her model is Jesus himself saying, “Trade till I come” (Lk. 19:14).

If Teresa were to walk into our world, she would see many similarities to her own sixteenth century existence. She lived during Spain’s Golden Age, a time of energy and expansion. Spain strutted the stage of world politics as a superstar, pouring out money, manpower, and resources to make sure its policies would prevail. The home country was drained as its government established spheres of influence in western Europe and forged colonial conquests in the Americas where Teresa’s brothers sought adventure and glory. The Protestant Reformation stopped at the borders of Spain; there the Inquisition cast its all-seeing eye everywhere. Old ways were being turned upside down, but the conservative monarch Philip II would rather look at his realm standing on his head than grapple with the realities of his age.

Not so Teresa. She knew far better than the melancholy King Philip how to come to terms with everyday problems and everyday opportunities. Born in the wind-swept city of Avila, with its towering walls baking in summer heat or snow-covered in winter, she joined a family that had bought its way into the lower nobility. Her father’s father had been Jewish, a fact she never mentions but one now established by scholars.

Teresa’s black waving hair framed a broad forehead, dark sparkling eyes under rather thick eyebrows, a small nose, a mouth of medium size with even teeth, and three very tiny moles, considered beauty marks in her day. Of middle height and inclined to roundness, she had a lively outgoing personality that invited others to draw near.

This daughter of Castile was an engaging conversationalist, as a sinner and as a saint. Convents of the time often functioned like social centers where people came to pass delightful afternoons in gossip and pleasant interchange. Teresa the nun welcomed her visitors warmly, adding a sprinkle of pious observations to the idle chatter. Later she regretted the waste of these years of spiritual mediocrity when her time could have been given to praying which she once explained as another kind of conversation—with God.

Yet she had not given up prayer entirely and afterwards wrote, “I can speak of what I have experience of. It is that in spite of any wrong a person who practices prayer does, that one must not abandon prayer since it is the means by which the situation can be remedied. To remedy it without prayer would be much more difficult” (*Life*, 8:5).

Here as in all her major writings, the reformer of Carmel is speaking directly to us. She doesn't, as some saints have done, compose a long soliloquy on God's wonders or present a third-person discourse on the objective conditions for holiness. Instead, Teresa seems to sit down with her reader, seeking out individual needs and also possible resistances to what she proposes. She sets up a You-and-I relationship and pulls us by the sleeve as if she fears we might walk away.

Her works have all the ebullience and pitfalls of lively talk. In her eagerness to convince us, she sometimes wanders from her main idea but rarely apologizes. The detours, she tells us, have their own value. Her organization is not haphazard but it is like the schema of a marketplace, not of a classroom. She offers products of eternal value whose worth she will describe in detail if only we pay attention.

“Whoever has not begun to pray, I beg for the love of the Lord not to go without so great a good. There is nothing here to fear but only something to desire” (*Life*, 8:5). For Teresa, spiritual riches are all linked to praying. “No one can truly discover any harm that prayer can do, the greatest harm being not to practice it. . . . I certainly pity those who serve the Lord at their own cost, because for those who practice prayer, the Lord himself pays the cost since through their little labor he gives them delight . . .” (*Life*, 8:8).

Many Christian mystics have written of the highest states of prayer, but few have devoted so many pages to the earliest stages. The great Carmelite teacher of contemplation not only describes in detail these first steps of the prayer journey, but she even shows us how to arouse others to want to pray. The *Way of Perfection*, though addressed to her own nuns, was in her opinion useful for anyone. In it, she says, “Regarding all the persons who speak with you, if they are disposed and there is some friendship, try to remove any fear they may have of beginning to use so great a good (as praying)” (20:3).

How we start out determines the direction we take. “Now that you might so walk along this path of prayer that you do not go astray at the beginning, let us deal a little with how this journey must begin: for the beginning is the more important part—indeed it is the most-important part for everything” (*Way*, 20:3). If we are confused about where we are going, we will find ourselves using time and energy without making progress. “It is very important for you to know that you are on the right road” (*Way*, 22:3).

For Teresa, the right road always means walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. He is there as guide at the outset, all along the

way, and at the very peak of contemplative experience. Without Christ, prayer wanders off into a wasteland.

The mysteries of his life give her the focus she needs. "This is the method I used: since I could not reflect discursively with the intellect, I strove to picture Christ within me, and it did me greater good in my opinion, to picture him in those scenes where I saw him more alone. It seemed to me that being alone and afflicted, as a person in need, he had to accept me. I had many simple thoughts like these" (*Life*, 9:4).

Yet this picturing of Jesus within herself was not by imagining him clearly and vividly. "My imagination was not of use to me, as it is to other persons who can imagine things and thus recollect themselves. I could only think about Christ as he was as man. I could never form any picture of him myself no matter how much I read about his beauty or how many images I saw of him." She makes it clear that her sense of Christ as being with

her was generalized and indistinct. "I was like one who is blind and in darkness, speaking with a person and realizing that person is with her, because she knows with certainty who is there . . . such was the case with me when I thought of our Lord" (*Life*, 9:6).

Teresa puts herself among those who cannot pray by composing beautiful thoughts or by depicting a real life interior representation of their Lord. "A book can be a help for recollecting oneself quickly. It helped me also to look at fields or water or flowers. In these things, I found a remembrance of the Creator. . . they awakened and recollect me . . . As for heavenly or sublime things, my intellect was so stupid that I could never, never imagine them . . ." (*Life*, 9:5).

Teresa tells us that "keeping Christ present is what we of ourselves can do" (*Life*, 12:4). She urges us to "speak with him, asking for our needs, complaining of our labors, being glad with him in our enjoyments and not forgetting him because of them, trying to speak to him, not through written prayers but with words that express our desires and needs" (*Life*, 12:2). If our own words seem to dry up, we can repeat very slowly a line from the Gospels or just a phrase. This repetition is for the sake of gently holding our attention when a swirl of distractions tries to pull us away from God. Whatever effort we make must be done with moderation, never with violence. We can't whip ourselves to a forced attentiveness nor make a direct frontal attack on distractions. Everything Teresa suggests to assist us is temperate and calming. "Just the raising of our eyes in remembrance of him will have its rewards" (*Way*, 23:3).

Her advice is always down-to-earth and proportioned to our limited capabilities. It points to a middle ground between extremes

Letters to the Editor

Dear Father Regis,

Just a note to tell you what a wonderful job you are doing with the Clarion. We really enjoy articles and info contained in it. Thank you so much for your hard work.

The Columbus, Ohio OCDS group.

* * *

Father, congratulations on the Clarion this month. It is beautiful and has everything we need in one place for all to read and have. There are no excuses now for not being informed. Thank you very much.

O.T., OCDS, Washington, DC

where we learn to rely on our own judgment to make a sensible choice. "Experience is a great help in all, for it teaches what is suitable for us; and God can be served in everything . . . It is very helpful not to drag the soul along, but to lead it gently for the sake of its greater advantage" (*Life*, 11:16).

Teresa doesn't minimize the difficulties of quieting our minds. "Our thoughts are so accustomed to wandering about at their own pleasure-or grief, to put it better-that the poor soul doesn't understand itself. In order to get it to love remaining at home once again, a great deal of skill is necessary. If little by little this is not accomplished, we shall never do anything" (*Way*, 26:10).

The "little by little" will differ from person to person. Some will find the slow reading of scripture or a spiritual book a successful method for gathering in their thoughts. One pray-er will want to keep the body as stationary as possible. Another will prefer prayer while walking. Teresa mentions a stroll in the country, but a perambulation through city streets can draw some people to a deeper realization of the work of redemption in the crowds of human being they pass. The test is simple: does a particular way of praying deepen awareness of God? Each one must develop personal creativity and sensitivity for what works most effectively for him or her.

The modes of prayer will change as praying simplifies and also as day-to-day demands exert their own particular pressures. In a crisis situation, motionless prayer may be impossible.

Many people who want to pray are blocked by their idea of God as a rigid, demanding taskmaster. Fear of transgressing some mysterious rule of divine etiquette keeps

Teresa tells us that "keeping Christ present is what we of ourselves can do" (Life, 12:4). She urges us to "speak with him, asking for our needs, complaining of our labors, being glad with him in our enjoyments and not forgetting him because of them, trying to speak to him, not through written prayers but with words that express our desires and needs"

them from daring to approach near. Teresa releases us from this narrow, restricted way of relating to God. "My God is not at all touchy; he doesn't bother about trifling things . . . He adjusts himself to our way of giving. In taking account of us, he is not at all petty, but generous. However great our debt may be, he finds it easy to pardon; but when there is question of his repaying us, he is so careful that you need have no fear" (*Way*, 23:3).

For some of us, our God-awareness may be like Teresa's, so centered on Jesus Christ that our praying automatically turns to him. Others may be drawn to the whole Trinity or to one of the divine persons. Attributes of God like infinity or merciful love or eternity can lead into tranquil depths where Presence holds our consciousness. A sense of Mary could be the basis for recollection. The vastness of the universe can lift us to a wonder that transfixes us in awe of its creator.

No mode of contact with God is better than any other. The unique grace of God's



personal call to me attracts like a magnet. I must find what puts me into that magnetic field where I experience the divine action pulling me most powerfully.

In whatever way we seek God, we always enter into a person-to-person encounter. This encounter transforms the way we live. To pray is not to explore our inner consciousness or to aim at a state of natural absorption. Teresa had experience of psychic phenomena that ensnared her enough to take her away from Christ. Addressing her words to him, she wrote, “Now it seems to me I was walking on no path until you brought me back, for in seeing you at my side, I saw all blessings” (*Life*, 22:6).

Any spiritual practice that of set purpose excludes Jesus Christ invites delusion, according to Teresa. “We must enter by this gate,” she tells us. “This Lord of ours is the one through whom all blessings came” (*Life*, 22:6,7).

Just as Teresa emphasizes that Christ is essential at every stage of our spiritual journey, so she also declares that other instructions for beginning prayer continue to apply as we travel forward. Long after she had experienced the favors of high mystical union, she wrote—perhaps with a sigh—“There is no stage of prayer so sublime that it isn’t necessary to return often to the beginning” (*Life* 13:15) ■

—(*Spiritual Life*, Vol. 34,1, Spring 1988)

Living Water: Teresa of Jesus and the Legacy of Carmel

Robin Maas, PhD



The bay of modern-day Haifa is bounded on the south by a promontory that is part of a mountain chain stretching twenty-five kilometers southeastward and which once served as a natural boundary between the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Phoenicia. Two miles inland, at 'ain es-Siah, a wadi that runs about a thousand meters east and west, there lies a spring called the Fountain of Elijah. A source of life for God knows how long, the Fountain of Elijah quenched the thirst of those who, for thousands of years, inhabited

the many caves with which this mountain chain is dotted

The mountain chain is, of course, the fabled Mount Carmel, apparently a site sacred to all who laid eyes on it and therefore a territory of conflicting claims on the human soul. Not only worshipers of Yahweh but devotees of Baal and Zeus were lured to this inviting locale and erected altars there. Yahwists inhabited the southeastern part of the range; Baal worshipers were entrenched on the northwestern promontory that extended into the Mediterranean.

Indeed, Mount Carmel's main claim to biblical fame lies in a particularly dramatic cosmic battle waged on its slopes. It was here that the infamous showdown occurred between a prophet of Yahweh, Elijah, and the prophets of Baal, purveyors of a seductive cult that promised its devotees that they could have it all.

Baal was a Canaanite fertility God, the original "Rain Man." Called "Rider of the Clouds," this god claimed to be ruler of the rain, hurler of lightning bolts. In short, a force to be reckoned with in a dry and thirsty land and certainly one to be placated in the midst of prolonged drought and ac-

companying famine. No water, no crops. No water, no life.

When King Ahab, inheritor of a deeply divided Northern Kingdom, married the Phoenician princess Jezebel, the Rain Man's star began to rise. Ahab and his subjects proceeded on the assumption they could have it both ways. Yahwism could be practiced and, at the same time, Baal could be placated. After all, who would be hurt? In such a dry and thirsty land, paying tribute to the Rain Man only made sense. Besides, the priests of Baal had incredible liturgies. And so it went. Only one voice was raised in objection.

On King Ahab and his swayable subjects, the prophet of Yahweh pronounced judgment: "As the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word" (I Kgs 17:1). No water, no crops. Then, after years of drought, he issued a challenge: "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (I Kgs 17:21). Decide whom you will worship for you cannot have it both ways. Let us see who really governs the heavens, who is the Ruler of Rain and who, therefore, is the true Lord and Giver of Life. No water, no life.

We all know how the duel to the death between Yahweh and Baal, between the jealous Lord of the Universe and the beguiling Rider of the Clouds, ended. The four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal put on a great spectacle, but they danced and bled in vain. Not until Yahweh's solitary prophet rebuilt his broken-down altar with twelve stones and called upon the name of the Lord did lightning (Baal's own weapon) fall from heaven. Even though it had been drenched with precious, life-giving water, the sacrifice became a holocaust

and was entirely consumed by this heavenly fire. Those who promoted the Rain Man were slaughtered by Yahweh's prophet and very soon the first sign of rain was spotted at the top of Carmel—a tiny cloud no larger than a man's hand.

The Spirit of Elijah

It is instructive to consider how legends tend to cluster around the figure of Elijah, zealous prophet of a jealous God. He alone of all the prophets is finally swept up into the heavens by the same fire that descended at his command. His mantle, scorched by the flames, falls on Elisha, a disciple in whose prophetic career we see prefigured the Israeli Messiah.

As legend had it, someday the miraculous return of Elijah would signal an end to the famine of prophecy for a parched and visionless Israel. With the coming again of Elijah there would be a final, cosmic outpouring of living water—the coming of God's own Anointed One—after which the People of God would hunger and thirst no more.

Thus Carmel became the place where the Elijah legends began, where his timeless challenge to believers was first made, where the inevitable battle with divided loyalties raged, and where the victory over compromise was finally won. Carmel was the place. Carmel was the place from which the answer to prayer could be sighted on the horizon, a tiny cloud rising from the sea from which torrents of saving water fell. A cloud which Jezebel's "Rain Man" could never ride.

Evidently the spirit of Elijah continued to haunt Carmel, for in the late twelfth century it became a place of refuge for a group of world- and heart-weary crusaders seeking to lay down their arms and engage in a different



kind of warfare: a battle waged for the prize of the human heart, fought in the solitude and silence of an interior desert where famine had long prevailed.

These men became hermits in the eremetical tradition, a rigorous and solitary style of spiritual life associated with the “desert fathers.” Tired of limping between two opinions, spiritually exhausted from the effort to placate divided loyalties, these men migrated to Elijah’s Fountain, moved into Carmel’s caves, and devoted themselves to the quest for single-hearted devotion to the God of Israel.

Alone and silent, they worked, studied, and prayed, meditating on the Law of the Lord day and night. Together they celebrated the Holy Mass in a small chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, whose spiritual influence on the sacred mountain they believed to have been prefigured in that tiny cloud from which saving waters finally flowed. They also met weekly to hold each other account-

able to the Rule of Life that had been given them by Albert, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. They lived with very little, and what little they had they held in common. And they claimed as their Inspiration (even as their founder), Elijah, that zealot for Yahweh, Israel’s prophet of the undivided heart.

Teresa and the Carmelites

This community of solitaries, this tradition of the lonely warrior for God, is the legacy of the religious order of the Carmelites. Without knowing anything much about it, it is the same tradition Dona Teresa de Ahumada elected to align herself with when, in 1536 at the age of twenty, she joined the Convent of the Incarnation in Avila. Carmel is the legacy she tried to recapture when she began her reform within the order with the founding of St. Joseph’s Monastery in Avila, home of the first discalced, or barefoot, Carmelite nuns.

The Order of Carmelites, as she first knew it in sixteenth century Spain, bore little re-

semblance to the Spartan community of hermits who once inhabited the caves of Carmel. But that was not a problem for her. In fact, she had chosen the Incarnation precisely because they were not so strict as the Augustinian nuns who had educated her in her teens, and, quite predictably for a young woman, because she already had a close friend who had preceded her there.

What had happened in the intervening centuries to temper the stringent requirements of the Carmelites so that it became the easier choice for Teresa? Within a hundred years from the time the first Carmelite hermits settled at the Fountain of Elijah, the conflict between Muslim and Christian in the Holy Land had forced the Latin hermits to return to Europe. Elijah's disciples spread out across the continent, forming new communities, not on mountain tops but this time in cities.

This drastic change in circumstance forced many disturbing accommodations. Those who had defined themselves as hermits now had to redefine themselves as members of a mendicant or "begging" order. The Holy Land hermits had become preachers, teachers, and pastors. The women's communities, formed considerably later from pious but originally independent lay communities, knew relatively little of the order's lore. The Carmelite community Teresa joined, while certainly not wealthy, nevertheless allowed her to retain her aristocratic title, a private suite of rooms, and other amenities. The nuns, who were not enclosed, were free to come and go, to entertain benefactors, to open themselves to the beckoning breezes of the winds of the world.

These were good women; some of them were holy. They lived a life, however, that

made it easy to be a mediocre nun, a mediocre Christian. For eighteen years after she entered the Incarnation, that is what Dona Teresa de Ahumada was—a woman who loved God and many other things as well. Content to be a "good enough nun," wanting, as she says, both to "practice prayer and to live for her own pleasures" (*Life*, 13.6), she lived in a kind of permanent inner storm of perplexity and restless longing. Like a sailor adrift on a salt sea, she was surrounded by water yet dying of thirst:

Here is her description of her state: I voyaged on this tempestuous sea for almost twenty years with these fallings and risings and this evil—since I fell again—and in a life so beneath perfection that I paid almost no attention to venial sins. And mortal sins, although I feared them, I did not fear them as I should have since I did not turn away from the dangers. I should say that it is one of the most painful lives, I think, that one can imagine; for neither did I enjoy God nor did I find happiness in the world. When I was experiencing the enjoyments of the world, I felt sorrow when I recalled what I owed to God. When I was with God, my attachments to the world disturbed me. This is a war so troublesome that I don't know how I was able to suffer it even a month, much less for so many years. (*Life*, 8.2)

Of course, we recognize the state she is describing, for it is the condition of almost all of us. It is condition of the "good enough Christian" who lives with a divided heart—the state of soul of one who goes "limping with two different opinions." We all want Jesus and such a Christian may manage to stay out of serious mischief, but she will be forever restless. She will never find the pearl of great peace. And therefore she will never be truly happy.

The story of Teresa's conversion is complex but, like that great sinner Augustine, whose own conversion account she read and relished, she too experienced a climactic moment of confrontation. She too had her own duel-to-the-death showdown on Carmel. Her account of this incident is brief but compelling:

Well, my soul was now tired; and, in spite of its desire, my wretched habits would not allow it rest. It happened to me that one day entering the oratory I saw a stature they had borrowed for a certain feast to be celebrated in the house. It represented the much wounded Christ and was very devotional so that beholding it I was utterly suffered for us. I felt so keenly aware of how poorly I thanked Him for those wounds that, it seems to me, my heart broke. Beseeking Him to strengthen me once and for all that I might not offend Him, I threw myself down before Him with the greatest outpouring of tears....I was very distrustful of myself and placed all my trust in God. I think I then said that I would not rise from there until He granted what I was begging Him for. (Life 9. 1-3) And the rest, as they say, is history.

Teresa had many skirmishes yet to face in her battle with spiritual mediocrity, but, after this confrontation with her own helplessness, the final outcome was never in doubt. Very soon after this critical incident, the same



small cloud appeared on her inner horizon and soon a deluge of graces began. Having completed the description of this moment of truth, she writes, "This is another, new book from here on—I mean another, new life. The life dealt with up to this point was mine." The one she lived thereafter, she said, was "the one God lived in me" (*Life*, 23.1).

"Living Water"

Teresa's own personal duel with Baalism signaled the end to her contentment with mediocrity and the beginning of one of the most determined and single-minded quests for reform in the history of the Church. Between the age of thirty-nine (1554, when her "conversion" occurred) and forty-seven (1562, when she founded St. Joseph's in Avila, the first of seventeen foundations of Discalced nuns), Teresa remained right where she was, at the convent of the Incarnation, standing under what had begun as the little cloud but which grew rapidly into a drenching rain of "living water." And like the holocaust on Elijah's altar, she was entirely consumed, unified, by the flames of a single, purified desire.

There are certain situations, Teresa tells us, where water actually feeds the flames, as when it is poured on flaming pitch. When it is Christ who gives us to drink—who comes to us in prayer—our desire is entirely satisfied even while it is increased. She explains the effect of "living water" this way:

The water of true tears, those that flow in true prayer, readily given by the King of heaven, helps the fire burn more and last longer; and the fire helps the water bring refreshment. Oh, God help me, what a beautiful and marvelous thing, that fire makes one feel cooler! Yes, and it even freezes all worldly attachments when it is joined to the living water from heaven. Heaven is the source of the tears that were mentioned, for they are given and not acquired through our own efforts. Therefore, this living water will certainly not let the heat from worldly things detain the soul—unless to allow the soul to communicate this fire to others. For by its nature this fire is not content with little; it would burn up the whole world if it could. (Way 19.5)

As she abandoned competing claims to her attention and affection and learned to fix her eyes solely on the sacred humanity of the crucified Christ, Teresa was given living water. She reports that even as a small child she carried about with her a holy card picturing Jesus conversing at the well with a woman, a woman who lived in Ahab's ancient capital of Samaria—home to a temple where Jezebel's Rider of the Clouds was once worshipped. Even as a child, she says, she thirsted for this "living water" and often begged the Lord to give it to her (*Life* 30.19).

When this Samaritan peasant woman of apparently easy virtue met the Lord she came to him with a heart scored by six different "wounds"—five husbands and a lover. She had not found what she was looking for in any of her relationships, but in her encounter with the thirsting Christ, she was offered

something that would finally satisfy her need and heal her fractured heart.

Jesus told the woman at the well "all she ever did" (Jn 4:39). He gave her, as he gives us, reason to repent, and thus the multitude of little brushfires—our passionate attachments to lesser goods that can offer no lasting satisfaction—are smothered, doused by the living water of the Divine Presence, by Truth.

This is why Teresa of Jesus—the name the saint took when she began her reform—advises all who are ready to climb Mt. Carmel for a showdown with Baal to prepare themselves for battle. We must begin, she urges us, by doing what we of ourselves can do: namely, to re-collect not only our scattered senses but, harder still, the scattered fragments of our lives, to fix our eyes on Christ and to remember our past (*Life*, 11). Like the woman of Samaria, we are to let the Lord tell us "all we ever did" and give us reason to repent, and to watch as the little cloud begins to form on the far horizon of the soul and the tears salted by truth finally come.

What we learn from the great Spanish saint is that in the early stages of the life of prayer, we must work hard at drawing this living water from a very deep well. The work is painful and slow; the cloud under which we labor grows large and dark. This effortful meditation and "remembering" is prayer that begins "in us and ends in God." As such it is fruitful. If we persist, the labor will gradually lessen and the water will start to flow more easily, until finally the by-now heavily swollen cloud bursts open and we are drenched.

This is infused or mystical prayer; prayer, she says, "that begins in God and ends in us."

Like the meal provided by ravens or the un-failing cruse of oil that sustained Elijah and the widow who offered him hospitality, the prayer that begins in God is a gift that nourishes, refreshes, and sustains when all other resources fail.

Difficult Choice

Let no one be deceived. The experiences Teresa had with infused or contemplative prayer and the changes in character she underwent as a result of this drenching in the living water that is Jesus—wonderful as they were—resulted in intense personal suffering. She was at first assailed by doubts, frequently misunderstood and ill-advised by several confessors, and increasingly resented by her Carmelite sisters. The enormous work she undertook in establishing her reform with seventeen discalced convents, all of which survive to this day, was fraught with countless obstacles, frustrations, and personal hardship.

In her role as Mother Foundress of Carmelite convents of strict observance, she resembles her spiritual ancestor, the zealot Elijah, who requires an end to all limping—all “maybes,” all “somedays,” all “not just yet.” What we must have, she tells us, is a “determined determination” (determinada determinacion)—an unswayable desire for God and God alone. The choice, which we all try to make, to be a “good enough Christian” is simply not good enough. Our misdirected and conflicting desires must be purified so that they can finally be unified into a single, all-encompassing quest. For when the eye of our heart is “single,” we will indeed worship in spirit and in truth.

Lest we be inclined to dismiss Teresa’s instructions as appropriate only for those who

aspire to the Olympian heights of spiritual accomplishment, the saint reminds us that The Lord invites all. Since He is truth itself, there is no reason to doubt.... He could have said, “Come all of you, for in the end you won’t lose anything, and to those whom I choose I will give to drink.” But since He spoke without this condition to all, I hold as certain that all those who not falter [read “limp”] on the way will drink this living water. May the Lord because of who He is, give us the grace to seek this living water as it should be sought, for He promises it. (*Way* 19.15)

So let us all forsake the lesser desires that try to ride us as Baal rode the clouds. Let us drink from the Fountain of Elijah on Carmel and drench our offering with the life-giving water of contemplative prayer. For of each and every human heart, the Lord would make a holocaust. ■

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NOTES

1. Teresa of Avila, the *Book of Her Life*, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. I, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez. O.C.D. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987), chap. 13, para. 6.

2. Teresa of Avila, the *Way of Perfection*, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez. O.C.D. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980), chap. 19, para. 5.

—(Spiritual Life, Vol. 44, 2, Summer 1998)

FRIENDS OF TERESA Francisco De Osuna

Marcelino Izquierdo

In her Life (4,7) Teresa writes about a visit to her Uncle Pedro's home, on the road from Castetellanos de la Cañada and Becedas. She says: "When I was on the way, that uncle of mine I mentioned who lived along the road gave me a book. It is called The Third Spiritual Alphabet and it endeavors to teach the prayer of recollection. I did not know how to proceed in prayer or how to be recollected, so I was very happy with this book and resolved to follow that path with all my strength. . . . taking the book for my master."

Francisco de Osuna, who wrote The Spiritual Alphabets was born in Osuna, a small town near Seville between 1492 and 1497. He was present at the surrender of Tripoli (1510), however, in what capacity is not clear. As a young man he and a companion traveled to Santiago de Compostela.

Osuna entered the Franciscans of the Friar Minor of the Regular Observance and was professed around 1513. At the time the Franciscans were divided into two branches, the Conventuals and the Observants. Both branches were affected by the reform of Cardinal Cisneros, and by 1517 the Observants were declared the main branch of the Order. The reform was known for its spirituality and rigorous asceticism. Francisco's first assignment after finishing his studies was to a retreat



house in the province of Castile known as the "Recollets." As part of their apostolate the friars shared with the laity the method of prayer called the "prayer of recollection."

Francisco studied theology at the University of Alcalá de Henares. He traveled extensively throughout Europe, returning to Spain in the spring of 1537. From this time on he dedicated himself to writing. He was also one of the great preachers of the 16th century.

Osuna was one of the most prolific and most read authors in the first half of the 16th century, to judge by his many writings and the many editions of his works in Latin and Spanish. His style is rich in vocabulary, images and symbols, usually dealing with the daily life of nature, the life of animals and plants, with which, as a good contemplative, he identified himself. He also wrote sermons, commentaries on Scripture, on the Eucharist, and the Norte de Estados, in which he described the Christian family customs of the 16th century.

Francisco wrote and published six Alphabets between the years 1527 and 1554. The last two were published posthumously. Each one was dedicated to a concrete theme, three on Christ and His passion, one on the prayer of recollection, and the other two on love and on poverty. He followed a method of

treating a theme by commenting on a phrase which began with a letter, in ascending order, of the alphabet.

His most famous work was the Third Alphabet, published in Toledo in 1527. This was his first work dealing with his experience as a master of prayer. There already existed in Spain a long tradition of prayer which the Benedictines, Dominicans and Franciscans had used as a means of reform, validating liturgical, personal, mental and vocal prayer. The method of meditative prayer most used was imported from Europe, especially from the Nordic school of the *Devotio Moderna*. It was very complicated, with strictly observed acts, which killed spontaneity and freedom of prayer. Osuna, as a reformed Franciscan, knew those methods and the endless hours dedicated to vocal prayer in his own Order. Therefore he proposed a new method, that of interiorization within oneself in order to meditate or contemplate the truth of Christian faith.

The novelty of this method was not to be found in the content of the meditation, but in the affective attitude with which the considerations were made, the use of faculties and senses recalling the interior scenes of the conscience, and in the loving dialogue which one carried on with God or Christ. That "recollection" appears to be merely a psychological method, with control of the interior and exterior senses, posture of the body, the silence and solitude; but in reality it was an exercise of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. An ascetical exercise which was able to bring one to union with God, the goal of the great mystic's life of prayer. In fact, the spirituality of "recollection" is the first Spanish mystical school. It was superceded, but not supplanted, by

the great mystics, Teresa and John of the Cross.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the method of the "prayer of recollection" was a success and was defused through the writings of St. Teresa, since there were five Spanish editions of Third Spiritual Alphabet in the 16th century, one edition in the 17th century and another six in the 20th century. However, it is certain, that being converted into a "Teresian" method because of its excellence in its ascetical phase, it has been disseminated world wide through the innumerable editions of Teresa's works, especially the *Way of Perfection*.

The essence of Teresian prayer is the loving dialogue with Christ in the interior of the heart, which comes to be the scene where the events of his life, passion, death and resurrection happen. Moreover, it is where all the rational and revealed truths are lived and all the challenges of one's personal and communal life happen in order to relive them and deal with them lovingly with Christ.

So strong was the experience that when the Saint writes as a teacher of prayer, she will recall this method as the best in the ascetical phase of the spiritual life. If we can speak of a "Teresian" method of mental prayer, there is no doubt that it is that of the "prayer of recollection" which she counsels with such conviction and enthusiasm in the *Way of Perfection*, especially in chapters 28-29. She calls it "an excellent way", with it the soul acquires "dominion" and "freedom" and it is "freed little by little from itself."

We can say that Francisco de Osuna, through his writings, set the young Carmelite novice on the right path with regard to her life of prayer. Taking his book as her "master" she began a journey which was to take her to the highest of mystical states. ■

Our First Kenyan Priests

Vocation Office, The Washington Province



After weeks of unseasonably cold and rainy weather in Nairobi, the morning of Saturday, July 19, arrived gloriously warm and sunny. Friends and family from all over Kenya and beyond had been arriving for hours, even days. By 10:00am, more than a thousand had gathered outdoors at the Parish of Our Lady Queen in Karen, near our Carmelite Community in Nairobi to celebrate a most happy and historic event. “My dear people, let us pray that the all powerful Father may pour out his blessing on these servants of his,” intoned Bishop Alfred K. Rotich as he prepared to raise John Damian Adizie, OCD one of our Nigerian Carmelite students, to the diaconate, and to ordain our first two Kenyan Carmelite priests: Thomas Ochieng’ Otang’a, OCD, and Santulino Lawrence Ekada, OCD! The joyous ceremonies continued on for many hours in true African fashion, with wonderful music, exuberant processions, exchange of gifts, and countless speeches, cheers and ululations! After the liturgy came more singing, dancing, and feasting, on into the evening.

The festive spirit even spread to the western side of Kenya on subsequent weekends, as Frs. Thomas and Santulino returned to their homes to celebrate first Masses, accompanied by many Carmelite brethren from Nairobi and other friends. On Sunday, August 26, Fr. Santulino presided before a huge crowd at Chakol Parish near Busia; this was followed by Masses on Monday in his small village of Akites and on Tuesday for family members. On August 3rd, Fr. Thomas presided at another enormous gathering, this time in his own home parish in Nyang’oma near Bondo, just a short walk from the shores of Lake Victoria; later he, too, celebrated Mass for his extended family. Both were installed as “elders” by their communities. Thomas hails from the Luo ethnic group, one of the largest in Kenya, while Santulino belongs to the Teso, a much smaller group that straddles the border between Uganda and Kenya. The first Masses, therefore, were celebrated in a sometimes bewildering mixture of Kiswahili, English and the local tongue. Such linguistic challenges, however, did nothing to dampen our spirits or the beauty of the celebrations. The Washington Province is very proud of our first Kenyan Carmelite priests, and we pray that they will be the worthy forerunners of many more to follow! ■

Prayer for Wandering Minds: Guidance from St. Teresa of Avila

Margaret Dorgan, DCM



“**T**he things of the soul must always be considered as plentiful, spacious and large The soul is capable of much more than we can imagine It is very important for any soul that practices prayer, whether little or much, not to hold itself back and stay in one corner.”¹

These words of St. Teresa of Avila, the first woman to be declared a Doctor of the Church, invite us to explore unfamiliar regions within ourselves. Our travel will take us into depths where a Divine Guest dwells and awaits us. From the start, the great reformer of Carmel urges us to look to the next step—not in a pressured way but to make sure we don't lose our momentum and decide to settle down where we are. The Lord is both with us and beyond us. Teresa is always reaching out to the More that lies ahead in God. She sees every Now as the opportunity for the More.

When she deals with interior practices, one in particular appears again and again: active recollection. She offers us this method at the commencement of our inner traveling as if it were a staff to support us and also a pointer to give direction. It is necessary at all stages of the Journey, even after the experience of passive and ecstatic prayer.

The word “active” tells us it is within our power to initiate with the help of ordinary grace, which Teresa assures us will never be lacking. The term “recollection” describes the process. “This prayer is called ‘recollection,’ because the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God.”²

The Buddhist practice of mindfulness shares some characteristics with active recollection, but there are profound differences. Both lie within the power of the

"I tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord, present within me, and that was my way of prayer . . . God didn't give me talent for discursive thought or for a profitable use of the imagination."

agent. Both are radically simple and tend to a kind of totality of consciousness through the development of a habit. The likeness is based entirely on the psychic process. In the content and focus, the two exercises differ essentially. While mindfulness is being attentive to my own dominant impression, active recollection is a form of prayer that reaches out to Another. It always contains some theological component as it establishes personal contact with the Lord. Moreover, active recollection is not only mental awareness; it necessarily involves the heart. The inward glance arouses yearning for or delight in the Beloved.

For Teresa, the method is never simply a perceptual transaction. It is always for the sake of reaching out to One whose hand is stretched out to us. In describing spiritual experience, she uses few metaphysical concepts; her psychological reflections are always charged with intense feeling and passionate commitment. Subtle changes in consciousness are described but not as if they were an interior goal. The Spanish Car-

melite is no promoter of mere psychic well-being, far less of psychic indulgence.

The word "recollection" conveys two notions: 1) the collecting of our wandering thoughts so that they are brought back to a willed focus and 2) simple remembrance. With Teresa, this remembering usually moved spontaneously to Christ. Other forms of awareness can also effectively draw us, as indwelling Father, Son, and Holy Spirit did for Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity.

Since it is something within our capacity, Teresa doesn't hesitate to insist we make the attempt. "For who can keep you from turning the eyes of your soul toward this Lord, even if you do so just for a moment if you can't do more?"³ She especially urges this way of praying for those whose minds are restless and unable to quiet themselves by thinking holy thoughts about God. She speaks out of her own inability. "I tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord, present within me, and that was my way of prayer . . . God didn't give me talent for discursive thought or for a profitable use of the imagination."⁴

At times her instruction seems almost to express envy of those who are able to advance from one thought about God to another. "I do not deny that it is a favor from the Lord if someone is able to be always meditating on His works, and it is good that one strive to do so."⁵

Without formal training in psychology, she is nevertheless a careful observer of the way the mind works and how it rests. She notes that the ability to form considerations about divine things keeps the attention fastened to its thinking or imagining. One idea develops from another; appropriate images flow easily. The mind moves with facility, its

attentiveness held by its train of thought. It is not subject to distraction. Teresa observes, "When the intellect is bound one proceeds peacefully."⁶ It may have many or few distinct ideas and imaginings but it is actively engaged in deliberations about God. These keep it focused and shielded from the onslaught of competing worldly concerns.

But Teresa speaks much more often about people whose inner world is not so tractable. She describes "minds so active that they cannot dwell on one thing but are always restless, and to such an extreme that if they want to pause to think of God, a thousand absurdities, scruples, and doubts come to mind."⁷ Later she describes such minds as "so scattered they are like wild horses no one can stop. Now they're running here, now there, always restless."⁸ She sees this condition as a matter of temperament or as allowed by God. Whatever the basis of the agitation, Teresa offers the remedy of active recollection. "Remain with so good a friend as long as you can. If you grow accustomed to having Him present at your side, and He sees that you do so with love and that you go about striving to please Him, you will not be able to get away from Him . . . you will find Him everywhere."⁹

It is precisely for people who cannot settle down to orderly reflection that the saint writes these passages. "Those of you who cannot engage in much discursive reflection with the intellect or keep your mind from distraction, get used to this practice! Get used to it! . . . I am speaking of acquiring this habit." Teresa makes it clear that she is not suggesting a meditation process. Her solution to the problem of the agitated mind has to be much more radical and simple. "I'm not asking you now that you think about Him or that you draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle re-

flections with your intellect. I'm not asking you to do anything more than look at Him."¹¹

In this turning of our inward glance to Christ, Teresa explains that we are not gazing at someone far beyond us in worth and power like a hero or potentate who would never look back at us. This inward gaze meets the look of love that Christ is always fixing on us. Our eyes see him watching us. "Your Spouse never takes His eyes off you . . . In the measure you desire Him, you will find Him. He so esteems our turning to look at Him that no diligence will be lacking on His part."¹²

In this exchange of the simple look of love, Teresa makes it clear that God adjusts to our mood. "If you are joyful, look at Him as risen If you are sad, behold Him on the way to the garden."

In this exchange of the simple look of love, Teresa makes it clear that God adjusts to our mood. "If you are joyful, look at Him as risen If you are sad, behold Him on the way to the garden."¹³

"The Lord is available to us on our terms. Speak with Him as with a father, or a brother, or a lord, or as with a spouse; sometimes in one way, at other times in another; He will teach you what you must do in order to please Him."¹⁴

The glance of recollection always reaches its object. "Turn your eyes inward.... You

will find your Master, for He will not fail you.”¹⁵ Steering our attention should be a moderate exertion, not a rigid or compulsive forcing of the mind. We never put on a straitjacket in order to pray.

At the same time, Teresa does not promise us there will be no labor. Merely to relax and let our consciousness flow is to avoid interior discipline. We can also find empty interior enjoyment by feeding on ourselves in daydreaming; in building the castles of our ambitions; in mulling over dislikes, jealousies, and grudges.

Each person must devise the strategies, simple or more complex, that work at a particular time as a reminder of God. These will change as we change. Under stress—physical, emotional or spiritual—we seek out new ways to find the Divine Presence. The pray-er who is tired or worried or tempted will have to adjust the technique of recollection to the present pressure. “Do that which best stirs you to love . . . Don’t think the matter lies in thinking of nothing else, and that if you become a little distracted all is lost. I have been very afflicted at times in the midst of this turmoil of mind.”¹⁶ Our wayward musings, once free to go wherever they wanted, are now held back.

“It is a striving so as not to look at things here below. This striving comes at the beginning; afterward, there’s no need to strive.”¹⁷

The many turnings within to find Christ



have to be undertaken at first as a kind of mental discipline. The leash of recollection calls back the roaming thoughts and holds them in tether when they want to begin roving again. This gentle directing of inner attention to the Lord makes one act of recollection build upon another and another until a habit is established. Thus a habit of wandering gives way to a habit of staying at home, as Teresa expresses it.

“If we make the effort, practice this recollection for some days and get used to it, the gain will be clearly seen.” Ultimately “this recollection will be effected without our ef-

fort." A habitual awareness of God is established within our consciousness. "When the soul does no more than give a sign that it wishes to be recollected, the senses obey it and become recollected." Then the pray-er has new interior strength to draw on. Dealing with worldly affairs is no longer the distraction it once was. "The senses go out as captives and subjects and do not cause the harm they did previously."

For what is gained, so little is demanded. Teresa tells us this inward journey has the swiftness of travel by sea instead of the laborious plodding of the land transport of her day. "It is a prayer that brings with it many blessings . . . its Divine Master comes more quickly to teach it [the soul] and give it the prayer of quiet than He would through any other method it might use."¹⁹

In active recollection Teresa offers a safe and sure process for deepening interiority. It can dispose the spirit for God's free gift of infused contemplation, the Prayer of Quiet. Then God takes over. The activity of the pray-er diminishes as more and more, the heart and eventually the mind are held in wonder.

However, the experience of passive prayer in no way marks the end of the need for the practice of active recollection. Teresa speaks of the temptation to try "to hold on to that satisfaction" of infused prayer when "we don't even dare take a breath." The attempt to force the passive experience Teresa declares "foolish, for just as there's nothing we can do to make the sun rise, there's little we can do to keep it from setting."²⁰

When in honesty we recognize that the pure sunshine of infused contemplative prayer is no longer illuminating our awareness, we use our own effort to bring some

light to our consciousness. Active recollection, the gentle inner turning to God, the nudging of our attentiveness for a moment or for much longer, is the way to start the fire within.

For these pray-ers who have tasted contemplation, "a little spark" will suffice, just enough to keep their inner gaze on the Lord. "In Him [Jesus] everything is found, in Him everything is forgotten."²¹ ■

Notes

1. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. Two, trans. By Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1980) I, ch. 2, #8, p. 291.
2. Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. Two, ch. 28, #4, p. 141.
3. *Way*, ch. 26, #3, p. 134.
4. Teresa, *The Book of Her Life*, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. One, trans. By Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, 2d ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987), ch. 4, #7, p. 67.
5. Teresa, *The Book of Her Foundations*, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. Three, trans. By Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1985) ch. 5, #2.
6. *Way*, ch. 19, #1, p. 106.
7. *Way*, ch. 17, #3, p. 99.
8. *Way*, ch. 19, #2 p. 107.
9. *Way*, ch. 26, #1, p. 133.
10. *Way*, ch. 26, #2, p. 133.
11. *Way*, ch. 26, #3, pp.133-134.
12. *Way*, ch. 26, #3, p. 134.
13. *Way*, ch. 25, #4-5, p. 134.
14. *Way*, ch. 28, #3, p. 141.
15. *Way*, ch. 29, #2, p. 145.
16. *Interior Castle IV*, ch. 1, #7-8, p. 319.
17. *Way*, ch. 28, #6, p. 142.
18. *Way*, ch. 28, #7, p. 143.
19. *Way*, ch. 28, #4, p. 141.
20. *Way*, ch. 31, #6, p. 155.
21. *Way*, ch. 9, #5, p. 75.

—(*Spiritual Life*, Vol.34, 2, Summer, 1988)

OCDS APOSTOLATE

“Helping Those Who Can’t Help Themselves”

The Community of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament located in Owensboro, Kentucky has been gathering donations for the children in Tipitapa, Nicaragua, for over five years. Thousands of dollars have been raised and donated for food and clothing after Hurricane Mitch devastated the entire country. Several Carmelite Sisters of the Divine Heart of Jesus were instrumental in the founding of our Community and have a Monastery in Tipitapa where they work tirelessly, providing for the needs of children and families.

The Sisters strive to meet the total needs of these poor children and youth. They care for body and soul by providing hot meals;



milk and soup kitchens; a clinic for the poor; shoes and clothing; child development training and basic and religious education — sometimes without electricity!

We, therefore needed a perpetual fund raiser to provide a large sum of money to purchase an electric generator, powered by gas. We chose to design the Carmelite Rosary. The “center” of the Rosary is the Carmelite, OCDS insignia, which is also available as a necklace or lapel pin. We have a four page brochure available, that describes the Carmelite products, outlines the Mission’s details and provides a short history of the Carmelite Order.

The Carmelite Rosary costs \$20.00, plus \$4.50 shipping. You can become a Co-Missionary by sending \$24.50 to OCDS Mission Fund, P. O. Box 439, Dale, Indiana 47523. If your Community would like some brochures, please ask. We are not set up for credit cards.

Our Apostolate has four goals: (1) to provide a generator for electricity and food preparation, (2) to pay the monthly fuel-bill for the generator, (3) to provide clothing and shoes for children and (4) to sponsor a Carmelite Seminary student in Kenya, Africa. The children of Tipitapa thank you for their new beginning. ■

O.C.D.S. NEWSLETTER

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