

## Mystics of the Church 10

### Two Catherines, Teresa of Avilá

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- It is difficult to connect the two Catherines with the different mystical traditions that flourished in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Catherine of Siena, it is true, tied herself to the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) through the *Mantellata*, Dominican tertiaries, but neither she nor Catherine of Genoa obtained much formal education. In fact, Catherine Benincasa of Siena did not learn to read and write until age twenty. Both women, however, deserve attention in a study of the mystics because of their profound mystical experience and holy lives. Teresa of Avilá, per contra, became a leading figure in the development of Carmelite spirituality.

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### • I. Catherine of Siena

- Suzanne Noffke, OP, has labeled Catherine of Siena (1347 [?1333]-1380) a “social mystic.” The label is probably appropriate in much the same way it would apply to Bernard of Clairvaux, for both of them combined intimate communion with God and energetic involvement in social and political affairs. Bernard, of course, wielded far greater influence in the 12<sup>th</sup> century than Catherine in the 14<sup>th</sup>, for she died at age thirty-three. Yet in her brief life she played a significant role in the return of the papacy from Avignon to Rome.

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### – A. Life

- Some scholars date Catherine’s birth much earlier, but the traditional date is 1347. From age five or six she experienced visions of her betrothal to Christ. When she reached the marriageable age of twelve, she resisted pressures of her parents, Giacomo and Lapa Benincasa, to force her into a marriage and adopted a severe ascetic lifestyle at home. At age sixteen, overcoming opposition of both parents, she joined the Dominican Third Order. For three years she devoted herself to contemplation, service of the sick and poor, and conversion of sinners. Her extraordinary sanctity attracted a large following, including many nobility. In 1374 she started her travels with a trip to Florence, where she evidently met her biographer Raymond of Capua and secured him as her confessor. In 1375 she sought to lead Pisa and Lucca away from an anti-papal alliance then gaining

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- strength. She began her letter-writing career the same year. In 1376 she journeyed to Avignon to plead with Gregory XI (1370-1378) on behalf of Florence, which was at war with the pope, and to persuade him to return the papacy to Rome. She then returned to Siena to resume her former way of life. She gathered around her a devoted group of supporters attracted by spirituality. When the Great Schism broke out on the death of Gregory, she actively supported Urban VI (1378-1389), urging prelates and cardinals to obey him. Her health impaired by her austerities, she died April 29, 1380. She was canonized in 1461. Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) named her a “Doctor of the Church” in 1970.

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- B. Writings and Influences
  - Catherine’s main literary output consisted of almost 380 letters, many of which have survived, and *The Dialogue*. As one might expect of a mystic who had limited formal education, she did not put together a theological system. According to her biographer, Raymond of Capua, she dictated *The Dialogue* while in an ecstatic trance over a short period of time. Some scholars have concluded that her thought is clearly scholastic and Thomistic; others that it is definitely *not* Thomistic; and still others that it is Augustinian. More likely, she depended on a great many sources: Augustine, John Cassian, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Ubertino, Passavinti, Cavalca, and Colombini.

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### – C. Thought

- 1. It is virtually impossible to summarize in any coherent way the content of *The Dialogue*. Yet it contains some profound insights, and I will quote selected examples beginning with her striking **understanding of God**.
  - O eternal Father! O fiery abyss of charity! O eternal beauty, O eternal wisdom, O eternal goodness, O eternal mercy! O hope and refuge of sinners! O immeasurable generosity! O eternal, infinite Good! O mad lover! And you have need of your creature? It seems so to me, for you act as if you could not live without her, in spite of the fact that you are Life itself, and everything has life from you and nothing can have life without you. Why then are you so mad? Because you have fallen in love with what you have made! You are pleased and

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- delighted over her within yourself, as if you were drunk [with desire] for her salvation. She runs away from you and you go looking for her. She strays and you draw closer to her. You clothed yourself in our humanity, and nearer than that you could not have come. (325)
- 2. **Providence** was a major concern of Catherine. Early titles of *The Dialogue* included *The Book of Providence* and *The Dialogue of Providence*.
  - I always provide, and I want you to know that what I have given humankind is supreme providence. It was with providence that I created you, and when I contemplated my creature in myself I fell in love with the beauty of my creation. (277)
  - But in no way will my providence ever fail either the perfect or the imperfect, so long as they do not become presumptuous or put their trust in themselves. (281)

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- And in my providence I give to each of you in particular the manner of life and death I choose. Hunger, thirst, loss of worldly position, nakedness, cold, heat, insults, abuse, slander—all these things I allow people to say and do to you. Not that I am the source of the malice and ill will of those who do these evil and harmful things. I only grant them their existence in time. I did not give them existence to sin against me and their neighbors, but so that they might serve me and others with loving charity. But I permit these actions either to test the virtue of patience in the soul who is their object, or to make the sinners aware of what they are doing. (382)
- This is why in my providence I allow the world to bring forth so many troubles for them, both to prove their virtue and that I may have reason to reward them for their suffering and the violence they do themselves. (290)

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- 3. Catherine frequently focused on **love of God and love of neighbor**.
  - So that selfish love which deprives your neighbors of your charity and affection is the principal foundation of all evil. (35)
  - Since love of neighbor has its source in me, the more the soul loves me, the more she loves her neighbor. (36)
  - But beyond a general love for all people she sets her eye on the specific needs of her neighbors and comes to the aid of those nearest her according to the graces I have given her for ministry. (37)
  - All I want is love. In loving me you will realize love for your neighbors, and if you love your neighbors, you will keep the law. If you are bound by this love you will do everything you can to be of service wherever you are. (38)

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- Your neighbors are the channel through which all your virtues are tested and come to birth, just as the evil give birth to all their vices through their neighbors. (38)
- So think of the soul as a tree made for love and living only by love. Indeed, without this divine love, which is true and perfect charity, death would be her fruit instead of life. (41)
- 4. She had a lot to say in criticism of the **abuses in the Church** in her day.
  - I demand purity and charity of every soul, a charity that loves me and others, and helps others in whatever way it can, serving them in prayer and loving them tenderly. But much more do I demand purity in my ministers, and that they love me and their neighbors, administering the body and blood of my only-begotten Son with burning love and hunger for the salvation of souls, for the glory and praise of my name. (212)

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- I want them to be generous, not avariciously selling the grace of my Holy Spirit to feed their own greed. (213)
- Do you know, dearest daughter—listen with grieving bitterness of heart—do you know where these have set their principle and foundation? In their own selfish self-centeredness. (231)
- Because of this wretched pride and avarice born of their sensual selfishness, they have abandoned the care of souls and give themselves over completely to guarding and caring for their temporal possessions. . . . Spiritually they do administer the sacraments of holy Church . . . but they do not feed them with sincere prayers, with hungry longing for salvation, with holy and honorable living, nor do they feed their poor subjects with temporal assistance. (232)

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- This selfishness has poisoned the whole world as well as the mystic body of holy Church and made the garden of this bride a field overgrown with putrid weeds. (234)
- Unless they change their ways they will be swept on to eternal damnation with such reproach that your tongue could never describe it. And it will be much worse for them as priest than for seculars. (262)
- 5. In the longest section entitled **The Bridge**, Catherine receives a positive response to her plea for mercy for the whole world. The bridge, of course, is God's Son. Its three stairs are: the affections that carry the soul, his consummate and indescribable love, and peace he gives in the war against sin. Virtues, symbolized by walls of stone on the bridge, assure those who cross the bridge. The key to the opening of heaven is Christ's blood. When Christ says he is

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- the Way, he speaks the truth. Those who want to get to heaven must travel *on* the bridge and not *under* it. What sends people *under* the bridge is the three principal vices: selfishness, self-conceit, and pride. They will end in hell. God, however, speaks reassuringly. "I am your unchangeable God, and I never change. I will not draw back from any creature who wants to come to me." (90) "As soon as you have emptied [the soul] of all those transitory things you loved inordinately, it is filled with air—that is, with gentle heavenly divine love that brings you to the water of grace. And once you have arrived there you pass through the gate, Christ crucified, to enjoy that living water—for now you find yourself in me, the sea of peace." (109)

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- II. Catherine of Genoa
  - Catherine of Genoa has gained notice in the modern day because of Baron Friedrich von Hügel's exhaustive study of her life and spirituality in *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genova and Her Friends* (1908).
  - A. Life
    - Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) belonged to the noble Fieschi family. At age sixteen she married Guiliano Adorno, who in ten years exhausted both his own fortune and hers. In those dire circumstances she experienced a sudden conversion. Although her relationship with her husband proved burdensome, she devoted herself unstintingly to care of the poorest of the poor in the Pammatone Hospital. Later, he too was converted and assisted her in her care for the sick. Eventually Guiliano became a Franciscan tertiary, but Catherine never joined a religious order.

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- From 1475 on she received communion almost daily, a rare practice except for priests in the late middle ages. In the last ten years of her life she experienced violent interior emotions. She died on September 15, 1510. In 1944 Pope Pius XII proclaimed her Patroness of the Hospitals in Italy.
- B. Writings
  - Catherine composed a treatise on *Purgation and Purgatory*, which reflects on the purification of the soul both in this life and after death. In *The Spiritual Dialogue* she restated her inner history. Her confessor Don Marabotto wrote a *Life* based on conversations with her. Baron von Hügel identified three literary sources of her thought: scriptures—especially Isaiah, the Psalms, and the writings of Paul and John; poems of praise of Jacopone da Todi (1228-1306); and a Christian Neoplatonism of uncertain derivation.

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- C. Thought
  - Benedict J. Groeschel, a Capuchin, has summarized Catherine's principal teachings under four headings.
  - 1. **God, the Creator of life, is pure love and the total fulfillment of the soul.** "As for paradise, God has placed no doors there. Whoever wishes to enter, does so. All-merciful God stands there with His arms open, waiting to receive us into His glory." (*Purgation and Purgatory*, Classics of Western Spirituality, 78.) "All that I have said is as nothing compared to what I feel within, the witnessed correspondence of love between God and the Soul; for when God sees the Soul pure as it was in its origins, He tugs at it with a glance, draws it and binds it to Himself with a fiery love that by itself could annihilate the immortal soul. In so acting, God so transforms the soul in Him that it knows nothing other than God; and He continues to draw it up into His fiery love until He restores it to that pure state from which it first issued." (Ibid. 78-79.)

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- 2. **The soul is confronted with a lifelong conflict between pure love and self-love.** Like other great mystical writers, she envisioned a process or journey in which an endless battle between the true and the false self rages. The struggle is primarily the work of God as Pure Love. "Every day I feel that the motes are being removed, which this Pure Love casts out. . . . But all the time God does not cease from continuing to remove them." (*Life*, 49a; cited by von Hügel, I: 267.) She was convinced that "the proper center of everyone is God Himself." She said, "my Being is God, not by simple participation but by a true transformation of my Being." (*Life*, 36b; cited by von Hügel, I: 265.) She seems to have escaped a charge of pantheism because of her obvious ethical dualism, Groeschel observed.

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- **3. In this spiritual combat the soul prevails only through the grace of Pure Love.** She is very realistic about the struggle. "This our self-will is so subtle and so deeply rooted within our own selves, and defends itself with so many reasons, that, when we cannot manage to carry it out in one way, we carry it out in another. We do our own wills under many covers (pretexts),--of charity, of necessity, of justice, of perfection." (*Life* 31c; cited by von Hügel, I: 267.) By contrast, she insisted, "Pure love loves God without any *for* (any further motive)." (*Life*, 109a; cited by von Hügel, I: 268.) A pragmatist, she believed the struggle continues beyond this life; purgatory enables the true soul ultimately to win the battle. She cannot be charged with Quietism as proponents of a doctrine of Pure Love often are. She insisted that "it is necessary that we should labor and

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- exercise ourselves, since divine grace does not give life nor render pleasing unto God except that which the soul has works; and without work on our part grace refuses to save." (*Life* 25c; cited by von Hügel, I: 265.) The one essential step the individual must take to receive the Pure Love of God is to trust God. "God let her hear interiorly: 'I do not want thee henceforward to turn thine eyes except towards Love; and here I would have thee stay and not to move, whatever happens to thee or to others, within or without'; 'he who trusts in Me, should not doubt about himself.'" (*Life*, 52c, 53c; cited by von Hügel, I: 272.) She believed that God teaches perfect trust.

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- 4. **Catherine thought that the spiritual journey continues after death.** In this life we can exercise our wills concerning what happens in the next life. We bear responsibility to yield our wills to God. "It is the will's opposition to the will of God that causes guilt; and as long as this evil will continues, so long does the guilt continue. For those, then, who have departed this life with an evil will there is no remission of guilt, because there can be no change in the will." (*Life*, 172c; cited by von Hügel, I: 282.) Nevertheless, from the beginning, God has extended mercy even to Hell, for "the sweet goodness of God sheds the rays of His mercy even into hell, since He might most justly have given to the souls there a far greater punishment than He has." "At death God exercises His justice yet not without mercy; since even in Hell the soul does not suffer as much as it deserves."

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- (*Life*, 173; cited by von Hügel, I: 283.)
- 5. Catherine's distinctive contribution, however, lies in her teaching about **purgatory**. The soul, of its own free will, undertakes purgation to achieve the purity that union with God requires. Purgatory isn't really painful because the soul there is at peace in God's will, although, paradoxically, the opposition to the will of God remaining in the soul causes terrible pain. Despite the pain, however, the soul in purgatory experiences increasing happiness. Once purified, the soul comes to rest in God. "Its being is God." (*Life*, 178b; cited by von Hügel, I: 273.) It has become 24-carat pure, like gold refined in fire. "Once stripped of all its imperfections, the soul rests in God, with no characteristics of its own, since its purification is the stripping away of the lower self in us. Our being is then God." (*Purgation and Purgatory*, 80.)

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- III. Teresa of Avilá
  - 1. In the judgment of many, mysticism reached its acme in the great Spanish mystics Teresa of Avilá and John of the Cross. Both of them, however, built on a solid foundation dating back to **Ramon Lull** (c. 1233-c. 1315), a Third Order Franciscan missionary to Muslims in North Africa. He aspired to win Islam to Christianity and to achieve a Christian-Muslim synthesis. The story of his martyrdom by Muslims is questionable. His most famous work was *The Book of the Lover and Beloved*, part of a much larger work entitled *Blanquerna*. His concept of the mystical life centered on the contemplation of the perfections of God achieved by the purification of memory, understanding, and will which would result in action for the greater glory of God. The accent on love in his writing is thoroughly Franciscan. One of the loveliest is text 97 of *The Book of the Lover and Beloved*:

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- They asked the Lover, “Where do you come from?” He answered, “From love.” “To whom do you belong?” “I belong to love.” “Who gave birth to you?” “Love.” “Where were you born?” “In love.” “Who brought you up?” “Love.” “How do you love?” “By Love.” “What is your name?” “Love.” “Where do you come from?” “From Love.” “Where are you going?” “To love.” “Where do you live?” “In love.” “Have you anything except love?” “Yes,” he answered, “I have faults, and I have sins against my Beloved.” “Is there pardon in your Beloved?” “Yes,” answered the Lover, “in my Beloved there is mercy and justice, and therefore I am lodged between fear and hope.” (Cited by Egan, 287-288.)
- The ideal Lull set forth is perfect union of the Beloved and the Lover. Although they are “distinct beings,” “they are one reality in essence.” They become one in the way water mixes with wine or heat with light.

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- 2. Influential in the development of Teresa's mysticism was **Francisco de Osuna's *The Third Alphabet***. Osuna (c. 1492-1540), an obscure author of more than 500 works, represented the Franciscan mystical tradition. Teresa's uncle, Don Pedro, gave her a copy of *The Third Alphabet* in 1537. It became her guidebook for the inner journey. Osuna believed that "friendship and communion with God are possible in this life of exile." The best way to attain that is by recollection, that is, by cleansing one's conscience, entering one's heart, resting in a loving silence, and then rising above the heart to God alone. Osuna belongs in the apophatic tradition. We must empty our minds of thoughts and let divine love fill them. However, he rejected the passivism, *dejamiento*, of Quietism.

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- 3. **Ignatius Loyola** (1491-1556), founder of the Society of Jesus, is not usually treated as a mystic, but Harvey Egan rightly included him among the Spanish mystics. In *A Pilgrim's Journey*, his autobiography, and in a *Spiritual Diary* Loyola did report mystical experiences, beginning during the year he spent at Manresa (1522-1523). Out of those experiences he worked out his *Spiritual Exercises*, published first in 1540 in connection with the sanction given the Jesuit Order by Pope Paul III. Pope Gregory XV canonized Ignatius in 1622, and Pope Pius IX declared him the patron saint of spiritual exercises and retreats. By virtue of date Ignatian mysticism would not have exerted much direct influence on Teresa and John of the Cross.

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### – A. Life

- Teresa of Avilá (1515-1582) descended from an old Spanish family. Educated by Augustinian nuns, in 1535 she chose to enter the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation at Avilá. Illness forced her to return to her family, but on recovery she returned to the monastery. She pursued a sort of casual spiritual life until a confessor encouraged her to resume mental prayer. Not until 1555, however, as she prayed before a statue of Christ scourged, did she begin to pursue a life of intense devotion. Her mystical life began soon thereafter with conversations with God, her first ecstasy, and an intellectual vision of Christ. In 1560 Peter of Alcántara (1499-1562), a Discalced Franciscan, gave valued spiritual counsel and encouragement in her effort to reform the Carmelite Order. In 1562 she founded the convent of

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- St Joseph in Avilá in the face of strong opposition. From 1567 until her death, with the assistance of John of the Cross, she founded sixteen other reformed houses devoted to observance of the primitive rule. Despite fierce opposition from anti-reform Carmelites and church authorities, she persisted. Meantime, her spiritual life deepened until, in 1572, she reached the state of “spiritual marriage.” After her last foundation at Burgos in 1582 under severe difficulties, she fell ill and died at Alba de Tormes on October 4. She was canonized in 1622. In 1970 Pope Paul VI declared her a “Doctor of the Church,” the first woman to enter such elite company.

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### – B. Writings

- 1. In 1562 Teresa completed her autobiography written under obedience to her confessor. Three years later, she wrote *The Way of Perfection* for the sisters of the newly founded convent of St. Joseph. In the midst of founding new houses she composed, under obedience to her confessors, *Foundations, The Interior Castle, Meditations on the Song of Songs*, several smaller prose writings, and poems.
- 2. Although very personal and experiential, Teresa's writings display acquaintance with Jerome's letters, *The Moral Books* of Gregory the Great, Augustine's *Confessions*, selections from the *Lives of the Fathers*, Cassian's *Conferences*, and the Pseudo-Augustine's *Soliloquies* and *Meditations*.

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- 3. From the medieval period she had read *The Life of Christ* by Ludolph of Saxony, *The Imitation of Christ*, and the *Flos Sanctorum*. Among contemporary Spanish spiritual writers she knew, the most important were Luis de Grenada, Peter of Alcántara, Francisco de Osuna, Bernardino de Laredo, Alonso de Madrid, and Bernabé de Palma. She also gained insight from theologians such as the Dominicans Pedro Ibañez and Domingo Báñez. Of special importance was her partner in reform, John of the Cross.

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### – C. Teresa’s Mystical Experience

- 1. As indicated earlier, Teresa lived a rather perfunctory spiritual life for many years. In her *Autobiography* she complained that she “suffered great trials in prayer, for the spirit was not master in me, but slave.” (Ch 7) “I spent nearly twenty years on that stormy sea,” she lamented, “often falling in this way and each time rising again, but to little purpose.” (Ch 8) Fortunately Osuna’s *Third Spiritual Alphabet* came to the rescue. With the help of this work she fashioned a simple method of prayer—picturing Christ in moments when he was alone, as in the Garden of Gethsemani. Reading Augustine’s *Confessions*, she heard the voice of Christ speak to her as it did to Augustine (Ch 9). Out of this prayer came her first mystical experience. “When picturing Christ in the way I have mentioned, and sometimes even when reading, I used unexpectedly to experience a consciousness of the presence of

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- God, of such a kind that I could not possibly doubt that He was within me or that I was wholly engulfed in Him. This was in no sense a vision: I believe it is called mystical theology. The soul is suspended in such a way that it seems to be completely outside itself. The will loves; the memory, I think, is almost lost; while the understanding, I believe, though it is not lost, does not reason—I mean that it does not work, but is amazed at the extent of all it can understand; for God wills it to realize that it understands nothing of what His Majesty represents to it.” (Ch 10; *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. by E. Allison Peers, 119.)

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- 2. In 1556, while reciting the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, she experienced **ecstasy**. “While I was reciting it, there came to me a transport so sudden that it almost carried me away: I could make no mistake about this, so clear was it. This was the first time that the Lord had granted me the favour of any kind of rapture. I heard these words: ‘I will have thee converse now, not with men, but with angels.’ This simply amazed me, for my soul was greatly moved and the words were spoken to me in the depths of the spirit. For this reason they made me afraid, though on the other hand they brought me a great deal of comfort, which remained with me after the fear caused by the strangeness of the experience had vanished.” (Ch 24; Peers, 231.)

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- 3. She also experienced fleeting **visions** of Christ. At prayer during a festival of St Peter “I saw Christ at my side—or, to put it better, I was conscious of Him, for neither with the eyes of the body nor with those of the soul did I see anything. I thought He was quite close to me and I saw that it was He Who, as I thought, was speaking to me. Being completely ignorant that visions of this kind could occur, I was at first very much afraid, and did nothing but weep, though, as soon as He addressed a single word to me to reassure me, I became quiet again, as I had been before, and was quite happy and free from fear. All the time Jesus Christ seemed to be beside me, but, as this was not an imaginary vision, I could not discern in what form: what I felt very clearly was that all the time He was at my right hand, and a witness of everything that I was doing, and that, whenever I became slightly recollected or was not greatly distracted, I

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- could not but be aware of His nearness to me.” When asked by her confessor how she knew it was Christ, she replied that she “could not help realizing that He was beside me, and that I saw and felt this clearly; . . .” (Ch 27; Peers, 248.) “One year, on Saint Paul’s Day, when I was at Mass, I saw a complete representation of this most sacred Humanity, just as in a picture of His resurrection body, in very great beauty and majesty; . . .” (Ch 28; Peers, 258.)
- 4. In the last stage of her experiences the mystery of the Trinity opened to her. November 18, 1572 she received the grace of spiritual marriage through an imaginative vision of the humanity of Christ in which He told her that from then on she should consider as her own all that belonged to Him and that He would take care of what was hers (*Interior Castle* VII.Ch 2, 1.)

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- D. Contemplative Prayer
  - In her *Autobiography* and in *The Interior Castle* Teresa used different but overlapping images to explain progression toward intimate union. In *The Interior Castle* she envisioned seven, in her *Autobiography* four stages. The first three stages, as presented in *The Interior Castle*, involve human effort and God’s grace; the other four, infused prayer, depend on God. The four stages of the *Autobiography* pick up with stages three or four of *The Interior Castle*, they don’t parallel the other stages exactly. Whichever scheme we may find most helpful, it is obvious that Teresa was a visual person whose gift for pictures helped others to grasp what she was teaching. In *The Interior Castle* she depicted the soul as a castle made entirely out of a diamond or a transparent crystal in which there are many rooms, like the

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- “many mansions” of heaven in John’s Gospel. God dwells at the center of the castle. We enter through prayer. In her *Autobiography* the soul is a Spanish garden. The more it progresses in prayer, the less human effort is needed as grace increases.
- I—**The first dwellings.** Persons on this level suffer still from worldly busyness and distractions and have trouble finding their way. Nevertheless, they pray, for prayer is the way into the castle, which is easy for the soul to find because it is within. What the soul needs is self-knowledge and humility. These grow as the soul moves onward toward the center, where God dwells.

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- II—**The second dwellings.** At this stage believers recognize the fight they must wage with the help of grace. Rooms here are set apart for those who have taken some of the first steps in the practice of prayer and are more responsive to the promptings of Christ’s grace. These come especially through such means as books, sermons, good friendships, and trials. The goal must be conformity to God’s will. “Well now, it is foolish to think that we will enter heaven without entering into ourselves, coming to know ourselves, reflecting on our misery and what we owe God, and begging Him often for mercy.” (*The Interior Castle*, Classics of Western Spirituality, 54.)

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- III—**The third dwellings.** Those who have arrived at this stage begin to long not to offend God. The most important quality is humility. “If humility is lacking, we will remain here our whole life—and with a thousand afflictions and miseries.” (63) Teresa scarcely mentions prayer in this section. She seems anxious to get on to the next stage in which she will focus on what God does.
- In her *Autobiography* Teresa may cover all three of these stages—for beginners. Prayer at this stage is like **pulling water from a well in a bucket**. It is hard work, but necessary. She prefaced her discussion with this summary statement: “The beginner must think of himself as of one setting out to make a garden in which the Lord is to take His delight, yet in soil most unfruitful and full of weeds. His Majesty uproots the weeds and will set good plants in their stead. Let us suppose that this is already done—that a

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- soul has resolved to practice prayer and has already begun to do so. We have now, by God’s help, like good gardeners, to make these plants grow, and to water them carefully, so that they may not perish, but may produce flowers which shall send forth great fragrance to give refreshment to this Lord of ours, so that He may often come into the garden to take His pleasure and have His delight among these virtues.” (*Autobiography*, Ch 11; Peers, 127.)
- IV—**The fourth dwellings.** Teresa notes that “supernatural experiences begin here” and discusses the distinction between consolations (feelings of tenderness) in prayer and spiritual delights. Consolations begin in our own human nature but have their end in God; spiritual delights begin in God but we can feel and enjoy them. If we wish to make progress here, “the important thing is not to think much but to love much; and so do that which best stirs you to love.” (*Interior Castle*, IV.1.7; Classics, 70.)

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- Elsewhere, she noted, she called spiritual delights “the prayer of quiet.” She compares different experiences to two water troughs—one filled by an aqueduct, the other by its own source, God. We can evaluate our experiences by whether they lead to worthy lives and actions. She speaks here about **prayer of recollection**, a prayer which “doesn’t come when we want it but when God wants to grant us the favor.” (*Interior Castle*, IV.3.3.) It is “a preparation for being able to listen, . . . so that the soul instead of striving to engage in discourse strives to remain attentive and aware of what the Lord is working in it.” (IV.3.4; Classics, 79.) Here “one should let the intellect go and surrender oneself into the arms of love, for His Majesty will teach the soul what it must do at that point.” (IV.3.8; Classics, 81.)

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## Two Catherines, Teresa of Avilá

- In her *Autobiography* Teresa defines the **Prayer of Quiet** as “a recollecting of the faculties within the soul, so that its fruition of that contentment may be of greater delight.” (*Autobiography*, Ch 14; Peers, 148.) “Everything that now takes place brings the greatest consolation, and so little labour is involved that, even if prayer continues for a long time, it never becomes wearisome.” (149) **Here prayer flows like water lifted by a water wheel.** “This prayer, then, is a little spark of true love for the Lord which He begins to enkindle in the soul, and His will is that it should come to understand the nature of this love with its attendant joy.” (*Autobiography*, Ch 15; Peers, 155.) “This spark is given to the soul by God as a sign or pledge that He is already choosing it for great things if it will prepare itself to receive them.” (156)

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## Two Catherines, Teresa of Avilá

- V—**The fifth dwellings.** This is the **Prayer of Union** in which the faculties become completely silent or are suspended, leaving the soul with a certainty: “God so places Himself in the interior of the soul that when it returns to itself it can in no way doubt that it was in God and God was in it.” (*Interior Castle*, V.1.8; Classics, 89.) Here she employs a new analogy, that of a silkworm. It weaves a cocoon around itself, dies, and then comes forth as a little white butterfly. “When the soul is, in this prayer, truly dead to the world, a little white butterfly comes forth. O greatness of God!” (V.2.7; Classics, 93.) God wants us to love God and love our neighbor—that is God’s will. “It seems to me that the prayer of union does not yet reach the stage of spiritual betrothal.” (V.4.4; Classics, 103.)

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## Two Catherines, Teresa of Avilá

- In her *Autobiography* Teresa describes the third stage of **prayer as water flowing from a river or a spring.** It is “quite definitely a **union of the entire soul with God**, except that His Majesty appears to be willing to give the faculties leave to understand, and have fruition of, the great things that He is now doing.” (*Autobiography*, Ch 17; Peers, 169.) She explains the state as “a sleep of the faculties, which are neither wholly lost nor yet can understand how they work” wherein “pleasure and sweetness and delight are incomparably greater than in the previous state, **for the water of grace rises to the very neck of the soul**, so that it is unable to go forward, and has no idea how to do so, yet neither can it turn back: it would fain have the fruition of exceeding great glory.” “This seems to me to be nothing less than an all but complete death to everything in the world and a fruition of God.” (*Autobiography*, Ch 16, 163.)

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## Two Catherines, Teresa of Avilá

- VI—**The sixth dwellings.** This is the longest section of *The Interior Castle* in which Teresa discusses many extraordinary mystical phenomena. The soul must summon up courage to enter into the spiritual marriage. “O God help me, what interior and exterior trials the soul suffers before entering the seventh dwelling place!” (*Interior Castle*, VI.1.1; Classics, 108.) “This severe suffering comes so that one may enter the seventh dwelling place.” (VI.1.15; Classics, 115.) God awakens the soul in various ways. These include locutions, some from outside and some from within; raptures or ecstasies or transports of various kinds; and visions. Teresa concludes on a hopeful note: “This experience is a painful one, but the soul is left with the most beneficial effects, and fear of the trials that can come its way is lost.” (VI.15.10; Classics, 170.)

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## Two Catherines, Teresa of Avilá

- Teresa had not experienced spiritual marriage when she wrote her *Autobiography* in 1562 as she had when she penned *The Interior Castle*. She **compares prayer at the fourth stage to rain falling.** “In this state of prayer to which we have now come, there is no feeling, but only rejoicing, unaccompanied by any understanding of the thing in which the soul is rejoicing. It realizes that it is rejoicing in some good thing, in which are comprised all good things at once, but it cannot comprehend this good thing.” (*Autobiography*, Ch 18; Peers, 173.) She proceeds to explain the feelings of the soul when it is in this Divine union. **What distinguishes this stage from the previous one is that “All the faculties now fail and are suspended in such a way that, as I have said, it is impossible to believe they are active.”** (179) The soul shows fruits of the consciousness of presence in good works. “Almost without knowing it, and doing nothing

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- consciously to that end, it begins to benefit its neighbours, and they become aware of this benefit because the flowers have now so powerful a fragrance as to make them desire to approach them." (*Autobiography*, Ch 19; Peers, 181.) In the *Autobiography* Teresa proceeded to distinguish rapture from union, regarding rapture as a higher experience. "It is more beneficial than union: the effects it produces are far more important and it has a great many more operations, for union gives the impression of being just the same at the beginning, in the middle and at the end, and it all happens interiorly. But the ends of these raptures are of a higher degree, and the effects they produce are both interior and exterior." (*Autobiography*, Ch 20; Peers 189.) She related some experiences of rapture.

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## Two Catherines, Teresa of Avilá

- VII—**The seventh dwelling.** God brings the soul into the seventh dwelling. Here "the union comes about in a different way: Our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul's eyes and let it see and understand, although in a strange way, something of the favor He grants it. . . . Here all three Persons communicate themselves to it, speak to it, and explain those words of the Lord in the Gospel: that He and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul that loves Him and keeps His commandments." (*The Interior Castle*, VII.1.6; Classics, 175.) She explains the difference between spiritual union and spiritual marriage. "But that which comes to pass in the union of the spiritual marriage is very different. The Lord appears in this center of the soul, not in an imaginative

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- vision but in an intellectual one, although more delicate than those mentioned, as He appeared to the apostles without entering through the door when He said to them *pax vobis*. What God communicates here to the soul in an instant is a secret so great and a favor so sublime—and the delight the soul experiences so extreme—that I don't know what to compare it to." (VII.2.3; Classics, 178.) "The spiritual betrothal is different, for the two often separate. And the union is also different because, even though it is the joining of two things into one, in the end the two can be separated and each remains by itself." (VII.2.4; Classics, 179.) The union is like two wax candles fused together to produce one flame; the spiritual marriage is like rain falling from the sky into a river, all being water that cannot be separated.