

The Starting Point

2: 2 I began to deck myself out and to try to attract others by my appearance, taking great trouble with my hands and hair, using perfumes and all the vanities I could get -- and there were a good many of them, for I was very fastidious. There was nothing wrong with my intentions, for I should never have wanted anyone to offend God because of me. This great and excessive fastidiousness about personal appearance, together with other practices which I thought were in no way sinful, lasted for many years: I see now how wrong they must have been. I had some cousins, who were the only people allowed to enter my father's house: he was very careful about this and I wish to God that he had been careful about my cousins too. For I now see the danger of intercourse, at an age when the virtues should be beginning to grow, with persons who, though ignorant of worldly vanity, arouse a desire for the world in others. These cousins were almost exactly of my own age or a little older than I. We always went about together; they were very fond of me; and I would keep our conversation on things that amused them and listen to the stories they told about their childish escapades and crazes, which were anything but edifying. What was worse, my soul began to incline to the thing that was the cause of all its trouble.

2: 6 At first, I believe, these things did me harm. The fault, I think, was not my friend's but my own. For subsequently my own wickedness sufficed to lead me into sin, together with the servants we had, whom I found quite ready to encourage me in all kinds of wrongdoing. Perhaps, if any of them had given me good advice, I might have profited by it; but they were as much blinded by their own interests as I was by desire. And yet I never felt the inclination to do much that was wrong, for I had a natural detestation of everything immodest and preferred passing the time in good company. But, if an occasion of sin presented itself, the danger would be at hand and I should be exposing my father and brothers to it. From all this God delivered me, in such a way that, even against my own will, He seems to have contrived that I should not be lost, though this was not to come about so secretly as to prevent me from gravely damaging my reputation and arousing suspicions in my father. I could hardly have been following these vanities for three months when I was taken to a convent in the place where I lived, in which children like myself, though less depraved in their habits than I, were being educated. The reason for this was so carefully concealed that only one or two of my relatives and myself were aware of it. They had waited for an occasion to arise naturally; and now, as my sister had married, and I had no mother, I should have been alone in the house if I had not gone there, which would not have been fitting.

2: 8 For the first week I suffered a great deal, though not so much from being in a convent as from the suspicion that everyone knew about my vanity. For I had already become tired of the life I had been leading; and even when I offended God I never ceased to be sorely afraid of Him and I tried to make my confessions as soon as possible after falling into sin. At first I was very restless; but within a week, perhaps even earlier, I was much happier than I had been in my father's house. All the nuns were pleased with me; for the Lord had given me grace, wherever I was, to please people, and so I became a great favorite. Although at that time I had the greatest

possible aversion from being a nun, I was very pleased to see nuns who were so good; for in that house they were all very good -- completely blameless in their lives, devoted to their Rule and prudent in their behavior. Yet in spite of this the devil did not cease tempting me and my friends outside tried to unsettle me by sending me messages. As that was not allowed, it soon came to an end, and my soul then began to return to the good habits of my earlier childhood and I realized what a great favor God does to those whom He places in the company of good people. It seems as if His Majesty was trying and trying again to find a way of bringing me back to Himself. Blessed be Thou, Lord, Who for so long hast suffered me! Amen.

Questions to Consider:

What are the predominant personality characteristics in this adolescent?

Take an inventory of the different people surrounding Teresa and their influence on her?

What image does Teresa have of God at this time of her life?