

The Interior Castle

Introduction

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In the **Way of Perfection**, Teresa assures her readers that ...the **Our Father** leads to the **fount of living waters**. She then refers them to her *Life*... where she describes what the soul **feels** when it drinks this living water, how **God satisfies** and takes away the **thirst** for earthly things.

Some ten or so years later, after...she had increased the number of ... Carmels to twelve... she was speaking, on May 28, 1577... on what was contained in her *Life*. But this time the result was the command to write another book since the *Life*... was in the ... hands of the Inquisition.

The scene... took place at the Carmel in **Toledo. Fr. Gratian**, her confessor...left us his account of the event: “What happened with regard to the book of the **Dwelling Places** is that while I was superior and speaking with her once in Toledo of many things concerning her spirit, she said to me: “Oh, how well this point was described in the book about my life which is in the Inquisition!” I answered: “Since we cannot have it, recall what you can and other things and write another book, but put down the doctrine in a general way without naming the one to whom the things you mention there happened.” And thus I **ordered her to write this book of the Dwelling Place.**”

Now sixty-two years old, Teresa had for five years been aware of the depth of spiritual life she describes as the **ultimate stage of**

the mystical journey. She had ... an experiential grasp of so much more than what she had written ... in her *Life*... Towards the outset of the Interior Castle she admits: “And although in other things I’ve written, the Lord has given me some understanding, I know there were certain things I had not understood as I have come to understand them now, especially certain more difficult things.

“Business Matters and Poor Health”

If from the viewpoint of her own more evolved **experience and understanding**, the **command** to undertake the task seemed **well advised**. From the standpoint of her **physical sufferings and the external problems and trials**... being heaped upon her at this time, the mere thought of writing a new book was **painful** to her. The prologue begins in **complaint** ... “I have been experiencing now for three months,” she wearily reports, “such great noise and weakness in my head that I’ve found it a hardship even to write concerning necessary business matters.”

In addition to this miserable health, the year was a ... discouraging one; what she had struggled for ... over the previous fifteen years could be suppressed by the new authorities. Her work had been the center of conflict ... between Madrid and Rome... In 1576 Fr. Jeronimo Tostado arrived in Spain ... with the responsibility...of making sure that the houses opened in Andalusia, against the will of the general, be abandoned. The “contemplative,” or “primitive,” fathers were forbidden to form a province... separate from the province of

Castile. Mother Teresa was not to leave her monastery. The unpleasant rumor was that Tostado had come to quash Teresa's work. But the papal nuncio in Spain, Nicolas Ormaneto, who favored Teresa... advised Tostado to postpone his visit to Andalusia ... and to pass instead on to Portugal. In a letter dated September 7, 1576, Teresa wrote to Maria de San Jose: "But, as God has delivered us from Tostado, I hope His Majesty will help us in everything..." In June of 1577, Ormaneto died, and without the nuncio's favor Teresa's followers now **felt lost**... Ormaneto's successor, Felipe Segá, whose referenced Teresa as a "**restless gadabout**" ... immediately set out with his new authority to discard the plans of reform sponsored by Ormaneto.

About this time, there appeared a pamphlet denouncing Teresa and accusing Gratian with a number of crimes... raising faint suspicions. Again in October of 1577, Teresa was elected **prioress** of the Incarnation; she felt nothing but **aversion** toward taking up again such a responsibility... Tostado... gave orders to annul the valid election. The nuns persisting to vote for Teresa in a second election were excommunicated ... Teresa protested the injustice...

It was while **in the midst** of all these unpleasant and disturbing events that Teresa was engaged in **writing her sublime book on prayer, *Interior Castle***. The work was begun, on the feast of the Holy Trinity, June 2, 1577. Within little more than a month, she had proceeded as far as the fifth dwelling place... Teresa departed for Avila in mid-July. Already in chapter two of the fourth dwelling place she alluded to the

inconvenience of interruptions: "God Help me with what I have undertaken! I've already forgotten what I was dealing with, for business matters and poor health have forced me to set this work aside just when I was at my best; and since I have a poor memory everything will come out confused because I can't go back to read it over." Nothing more was done on the work until the beginning of November, as she asserts at the outset of chapter four of the fifth dwelling place:

"About five months have passed since I began, and because my head is in no condition to read over what I've written, everything will have to continue without order, and perhaps some things will be said twice."

She **completed** the remaining large section, more than half the work by **November 29**, within less than a month. Thus, the actual time spent on this **spiritual masterpiece** was a mere two months.

Inspiration

...Teresa held firmly to her belief that "**obedience** usually lessens the difficulty of things that seem impossible." She prayed when beginning; "May He, in whose mercy I trust and who has helped me in other more difficult things so as to favor me, do this work for me..." By the time she had reached the epilogue, her mood was entirely changed: "... Now that I am finished I admit the work has brought me much happiness..."

... In one instance, she wrote: "If what I have said up to now about this prayer is worthwhile, I know clearly that I'm not the

one who has said it.” When she turns to the topic of mystical prayer she prays: “In order to speak of the fourth dwelling places I really need to entrust myself ... to the Holy Spirit and beg Him to speak for me...” Among those who actually saw Teresa writing this book...the following **testimony** was given: “When Mother Teresa of Jesus wrote the book called the Dwelling Places, she was in Toledo, and this witness saw ... that it was after Communion ... that she wrote ... and when she wrote she did so very rapidly and with such great beauty in her countenance ..., and that she was so absorbed ... that even if some noise was made, it did not hinder her... this witness understood that ... **she was in prayer.**”

The Image of a Castle

The Interior Castle has come to be regarded as Teresa’s best synthesis. In it the spiritual doctrine is presented through ... seven dwelling places ... the **first three** ... speak of what is achievable through human efforts and the ordinary help of grace. The **remaining four groups** deal with the passive, or **mystical**, elements of the spiritual life. Teresa refers to the whole series of ... degrees of infused or mystical prayer as “**supernatural prayer.**” She refers only to those pure forms of contemplation found in the fifth, sixth, and seventh dwelling places as “**perfect contemplation.**”

How did Teresa come to use the castle as a symbol for the interior life? What she reveals leaves room for interpretation: “Today while beseeching our Lord to speak for me... there came to mind ... that we

consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of a very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places.” ...

Teresa told one of her early biographers on the eve of Trinity Sunday, 1577, that God showed her in a flash the whole book. There was “a most beautiful crystal globe like a castle in which she saw seven dwelling places, and in the seventh, which was in the center, the King of Glory dwelt in the greatest splendor. From there He beatified and illumined all those dwelling places to the outer wall... Outside the castle all was darkness, with toads, vipers, and other poisonous vermin... Suddenly the **crystal** was covered with **darkness** and was left as ugly as coal and with an unbearable stench, and the poisonous creatures outside the wall were able to get into the castle. Such was the state of a soul in sin...

... Teresa compared the Divinity to a very **clear diamond** in which everything is visible including sin with all its ugliness... The important point must be made that the Interior Castle is principally the fruit of her own experience, and though Teresa makes the effort to hide her identity...her talent for concealing her identity is quite poor.

See the **Synthesis**, a separate handout

The Autograph

The **Interior Castle** was **not revised** ... although the manuscript does contain the marks of censors ...

Teresa gave the new book to Gratian to guard, for the book of her *Life* was still at the **Inquisition**. Gratian brought the work to **Seville in 1580** and entrusted it for safekeeping to Maria de San Jose.

Sometime between 1582 and 1585, while he was still provincial, Gratian gave the work as a **gift** to Don Pedro Cerezo Pardo, a generous benefactor of the Discalced Carmelites.

Between 1586 and 1588 the **autograph** was in the hands of **Fray Luis de Leon** who was preparing the **first edition of Teresa's works**; and it was then **returned** to Don Pedro Cerezo.

In 1618, **Don Pedro's daughter** made her profession of vows in the monastery of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Seville. She brought the **autograph of the Interior Castle** with her where it has remained ever since, with one exception.

In 1961, it was brought to **Rome** for repair, and in the following year, beautifully restored, the **spiritual masterpiece** was returned to the Carmelites in Seville.

The **red-bound book**, referred to by its author as a **jewel**, is now set like a **ruby** in a **reliquary** that has **walls** like those of Avila and in the **shape of a castle surrounding and protecting it.** **AMEN**