

Spiritual Testimonies

Introduction

Saint Teresa of Avila

The *Life* of St. Teresa covers, almost exactly, her first fifty years.

These *Spiritual Testimonies* represent a collection of other written reports about her **spiritual experiences**.

There are **six longer accounts** of the state of her soul along with numerous **shorter reports** and **fragments** in which she describes a particular **grace** or **counsel** given her by the Lord.

It would seem based ... on **testimony 24** that these **shorter accounts** were written down at our **Lord's command**.

Three of the **longer accounts** (testimonies 1-3) were composed by Teresa for her confessors **before** she finished her *Life*; the **other three** (testimonies 58, 59, 65) were written much later.

Of the **two written from Seville in 1576** (testimonies 58 & 59) for Rodrigo Alvarez, S.J., one testimony (testimony 58) is a reply to an investigation by the Inquisition.

The **final long account** (testimony 65), written in 1581, the year before Teresa's death, was addressed to a former confessor.

These **lengthier accounts** of her **spiritual state of soul** provide an often neglected **rich source** for students of the **mystical life**.

There are also some **excellent descriptions** of **mystical prayer** and, in **testimony 59**, an interesting **summary** of its **stages**.

The *Spiritual Testimonies*, written at different times during Teresa's life, have a similar theme consisting of **affirmations about Teresa's own spiritual life**. They are an important complement to the *Life*.

No consensus exists with respect to the place this collection should occupy among Teresa's writings. Some have followed a **chronological order**, thus dividing up the collection. Other editors have kept the accounts together and tried to follow a

thematic order dividing the group in to two sections: the *Relations* comprise the **longer accounts**; the other, entitled the *Favors of God* are composed of the **shorter accounts** which deal with instances of **particular graces** more than with Teresa's spiritual state.

In this translation, these writings have been kept together, given the name *Spiritual Testimonies* and arranged in **chronological order** rather than thematic. They have been compared to **X-rays of Teresa's soul** and, thematically, are indeed a **complement** to the *Book of her Life*.

The **first three Testimonies** could serve as a kind of **forward** to the *Life* and **all the others** as a sort of **epilogue** since they deal with facts and experiences that occurred **after** the book was finished.

These writings do indeed have the value of being **testimonies to Teresa's experience of God** and of His **action** within her...

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