

Account of her Spiritual Life for the Inquisitor of Seville

(Seville, 1576)

Saint Teresa of Avila

1. Forty years ago, this **nun** (Teresa of Avila) took the habit. From the beginning, her thoughts have been turned to the **mysteries**, the **Passion** of our Lord and to her **sins**. She has never thought about **supernatural experiences**. She rather thinks about how quickly creatures or things come to an end. She never considered desiring anything more as she felt that she did not even deserve to even think about God.

2. She spent about twenty-two years in great **dryness**, devoting time to reading good books. About **eighteen years ago** (1558), three years before it came into being, she began to discuss her **first monastery of discalced nuns** in Avila.

She began to receive **interior locutions**, **visions** and **experienced revelations**. She never saw anything with her bodily eyes. The **representation** came like a **lightning flash**. It left an **impression** on her along with many **effects**.

3. For sometime she did not dare remain alone during the day. She could **not avoid** the **experiences** which left her greatly afflicted, fearing she was being **deceived** by the devil. She began to **discuss** the matter with **spiritual persons** of the Society of Jesus. Wherever she went she sought out those most esteemed.

4. She frequently spoke with **Friar Peter of Alcantara**. He did a great deal for her.

5. For more than six years, she was **tested**, shed many **tears** and suffered much affliction. The greater the trials, the more **favors** she received. Often while in prayer, she experienced **suspension** of the **faculties** both in and out of prayer. She pleaded with

God to lead her by another path ... but in all things touching on the service of God she clearly saw improvement. There was no vainglory or pride. She rather felt embarrassed about the favors and regretted speaking of them more than about her sins. She felt the confessors laughing at her and attributing these favors to the foolish things of women.

6. About thirteen years ago (1563), the **Inquisitor**, the Bishop of Salamanca came ... She arranged to speak with him and was able to give him an **account** of everything. He told her to ... write to **Master Avila** ... for he was a man who **understood much about prayer**. He also said that she could be at peace with what he would write her. She did so.

He replied giving her much **assurance**. All who read her account said it was very helpful for **information** about **spiritual things**. They ordered her to make a copy and **write another little book** for her daughters in which she could give some **counsels**. She was prioress.

7. In spite of all of this, she still had **fears** as spiritual people could be **deceived** as well as she. She wanted to speak with very learned men ... to know if her **experiences** were in **conformity with Sacred Scripture** ... She thought that ... God would not permit so many persons to be deceived since they desired to give her light.

8. With this in mind, she began to discuss these favors with **Dominican fathers** ... All of them told her that since she did not offend God and knew she was wretched, she had **nothing to fear** ... One of the fathers she consulted the Father Master, Friar Bartolome de Medina, professor at Salamanca. She knew he had a very bad opinion of her ... She thought he better than anyone would tell her if she were being **deceived** ... She arranged to go to confession with him and gave him a long

account of everything. She also provided that he see what she had written so that he understand her life better. He **assured** her very much—more than all of them—and became her close friend.

She also made her confession to Father Master, Friar Felipe de Meneses, when she went to Valladolid for a foundation ... Having heard about these things and wanting to know if she was being deceived, he went with great charity to speak to her in Avila ... he was very **satisfied** ...

9. During so many years, subject to those fears, she had the opportunity to consult with others, especially since she went to so many places for foundations. They all **tested** her to be certain in giving her light; by this light they assured her and were **assured** themselves.

10. She was ever subject to all the holy **Catholic faith** holds. All of her prayer and the prayer in the houses she founded was and is for the **increase in the faith**. She used to say that if any of her **experiences** were to induce her to **turn against the Catholic faith** or the **law of God** ... she would see it was the devil.

11. She never did anything based on what she understood in prayer. Rather if her confessors told her to do the contrary, she did it immediately. She always informed them of everything. She never believed so decidedly that an experience was from God that, no matter how much they told her it was, she would swear to the fact ... The **effects** and great **favours** ... seemed to her to be from the good spirit. She always desired **virtues**, which she also urged on her nuns, saying the most **humble and mortified** would be the **most spiritual**.

12. What she wrote she gave to Father Master, Friar Domingo Banez in Valladolid. For it was most often with him that she

discussed these experiences. She believed he presented her work to the Holy Office in Madrid. In all of it, she **submitted** completely to the correction of the Catholic faith and of the Church.

No one has blamed her. These experiences are not in her power. The Lord does not ask the impossible.

13. Since an **account** was given to so many because of her great **fear**, ... many of her experiences were told around, which for her was a **torment** and a **cross**. This **suffering** was **not** caused by **humility** but by **fear** that these things be attributed to a **woman's** fancy.

She went to the extreme of not being judged by anyone she thought, believed that everything was from God; she feared the devil would deceive them both. She more willingly discussed her soul with anyone who was more fearful.

She was grieved though dealing with those who despised her experiences as some of them seemed to be from God. She did not want them to condemn her experiences because they saw no reason for them; but nor did she want them to act as if all were from God as she understood that there could be some deception.

So she could never have complete **assurance**. She did try as hard as she could to not offend God and always to obey. By these **two methods** she thought she could free herself even if her experiences were from the devil.

14. From the time she began to receive **supernatural experiences**, her spirit was always inclined to seek what was most **perfect**. It almost always had a desire for **suffering**. In **persecutions**, of which she had many, she found consolation and a special love for her persecutors. There was also a great desire for **poverty** and **solitude** and to **leave this exile** to see God.

Because of these **effects**, she grew **calm** since it seemed to her that a spirit leaving

these **virtues** could not be bad... This thought did not make her stop fearing ... but never did her spirit persuade her to **hide** anything, but always to **obey**.

15. She never **saw** anything with her **bodily eyes**. What she saw was so **delicate** and **intellectual** ... at times she thought she had imagined it ... Nor did she ever **hear** with her **bodily ears**—except twice; but she did not hear what was being said.

16. These **experiences** only came when there was a **need**, as once when she endured torments and fear about whether the devil was deceiving her and when her sins and other experiences were made public... While in this **state of affliction** she heard the words within: “**It is I, do not be afraid.**” Her soul was left **quiet, courageous** and **confident**. She could not understand where this blessing came from... At other times she was strengthened by a **vision**. Without this **strength**, she would not have been able to **suffer** such **great trials, contradictions, and sicknesses**... She is never without some kind of **suffering**...

17. If she thinks of a **service** she rendered the Lord or of a **favor** He granted her, she begins to think of her **sins** which torment her like a foul-smelling mud... She is not tempted to vainglory.

18. She was never persuaded concerning any **spiritual experience** unless it was **clean** and **chaste**. Above all, there was a **fear of offending God** and the **desire to do His will** always...

So determined is she to do **God’s will**, that nothing her confessors or superiors might tell her of what they think would be of service to God that she would fail to carry out, knowing that the Lord helps those resolved to **render Him service and glory**.

19. Relative to this service, she no longer thinks of herself or of her own gain.

Everything on this paper is the truth... Very habitually her spirit moves her to praise God. Even if this would cost her a lot, she would want everyone to praise God. This is the source of her desire for the good of souls. Seeing that the things of this world are like dung, and how precious the interior is, she values little the things of this world.

20. The **vision** your Reverence asked me about is one where **nothing is seen** because it is **not imaginative**. The soul however understands who it is ---where the representation is—and more clearly than if it saw the person, except that nothing is represented.

It’s as though a person were to feel that another is beside him, and because it is dark doesn’t see that person; yet knows he is there. This is however is an insufficient comparison as one in darkness knows he is there ...

Here, there is nothing of this ... yet the soul understands clearly who it is, where he is, and sometimes the meaning.

Where these visions come from, or how, the soul does not know ... While these visions last, they cannot be ignored.

When the vision is taken away, the soul is unable to imagine it as it was ... for this presence is not in its power to produce.

And so it is with all supernatural experiences.

... A person to whom God grants such a favor does not consider himself to be anything. He sees that his experience is a gift. The soul cannot add or subtract anything. This leaves the soul with more humility and more love of always serving this Lord who can do what we cannot understand no matter how much learning one may have.

May He who grants this vision be blessed forever and ever, amen.