

# The Book of her Foundations

by Teresa of Avila

**Introduction** by Kieran Kavanaugh, ocd

## Opening Remarks

St. Teresa wrote her extraordinary story **The Book of Her Life** under obligation to her **confessors** and **spiritual directors** hopeful that they would come to **understand and enlighten** her about the path along which the Lord was leading her...

Her narration grew into something more than plain history and became **a witnessing to the realities of the interior life and their transforming power**. The story of Teresa's life **evolved into a story of God's mercy** ... and she became obsessed with a desire to **serve 'His Majesty'** ...

In her **Foundations** she tells that she was **tormented** when the Franciscan missionary Alonzo Maldonado came to St. Joseph's. Recently returned from Mexico, he brought to the monastery grille his tale of the **millions** who had **never heard of Jesus Christ**. In Teresa's mind there could be no fate worse ... She thought that the **greatest service** one could render the Lord was to **bring souls to Him** ...

In 1567, the prior general of the Carmelites, Giovanni Baptista Rossi ... made his visitation of the Carmelite houses in Spain ... Teresa arranged to meet with him ... to explain ... her compelling desire ... The meeting turned out to be a happy one for both ... He wanted Teresa to found other similar monasteries and provided her with the official letters she would need ... This much consoled Teresa but she felt helpless: "Here I was, a poor discalced nun, without help from anywhere—only from the Lord ...

At the time of her death seventeen of her little Carmels **for women** had been founded:

**Medina del Campo** (1567);

**Malagon and Valladolid** (1568);

**Toledo and Pastrana** (1569)

**Salamanca** (1570);

**Alba De Tormes** (1571);

**Segovia** (1574);

**Beas and Seville** (1575);

**Caravaca** (1576);

**Villanueva de la Jara and Palencia** (1580);

**Soria** (1581);

**Granada and Burgos** (1582).

**For men:**

**Durelo** (1568) and

**Pastrana** (1569)

## Origin & Composition

On **August 25, 1573 in Salamanca** ...

Teresa **began** composing the **story of her foundations**. The idea for this new book seems to have derived from the Jesuit Jeronimo Ripalda, her friend and confessor ... who urged Teresa to **enlarge upon her story** and to write as well the history of the **seven monasteries** she had already founded...and about the **first monasteries of her friars**. He insisted that **'it would be of service to our Lord,'** an irresistible argument for Teresa ... In **February 1570**, the **Lord had appeared to her pressing her to make as many foundations as she could and also to write about them** ...

Teresa was reluctant to follow the Lord's urgings that she write about her foundations.... because of the lack of quiet time for writing. In addition, she had tangled business matters, endless correspondence, persistent bad health to deal with which also contributed to her lack of enthusiasm for the project. So in the end, **only the thought of obedience** to her confessor provided her with the strength needed to begin ...

Once Teresa had completed chapter 19, her responsibility of obedience to Father Ripalda was fulfilled ...

Father Gracian entered the scene next and firmly insisted that Madre Teresa finish her story. Her objections ... only met with further encouragement and the advice to write in snatches and to do the best she could ....

In the **closing lengthy chapter**, which recounts the foundation of Burgos, with all of its troubles, **Teresa's handwriting clearly demonstrates her state of exhaustion.**

### **The Autograph** (Original Work)

The original copy or autograph of **The Foundations**, once finished, was probably left at the monastery of Alba de Tormes. Later it was given to **Luis de Leon**, the noted Augustinian friar and scholar at Salamanca, who was assigned the task of **preparing the first edition of Teresa's writings; The Foundations was omitted.**

The given excuse was lack of time. But few doubt that there were other reasons as well ... namely **Teresa had made references to people who were still alive...**

After the death of Luis de Leon, in an effort to **enrich his library, Philip II** called for **Teresa's autographs** - The Life, the Way of Perfection, On the Making the Visitation, The Foundations. They are now all in the library of King Philip II, the **Escorial**.

In 1610, two of Teresa's close friends, **Padre Gracian** and **Madre Ana de Jesus, in exile** from Spain, took upon themselves the task of getting the book into **print in Brussels** ... Teresa hadn't given the book a name, so they called it **The Book of her Foundations...** Their publications had its **deficiencies** ...

An **account of the foundation in Granada**, written by Ana de Jesus, was included. This latter foundation was made by Madre Ana and Fray John of the Cross with **Teresa's authorization** at the time of the foundation in Burgos.

**The publication was not well received in Spain.** The book had been brought out **without gaining the required permission** from authorities within the order and because the editors depended on **defective copies rather than on the original.**

Even in the original work the industrious Gracian crossed out some words, but wisely in such a way that usually they can be easily

read ... It was later that Fray Domingo Banez, Dominican, crossed out many of Gracian's comments and corrections and rewrote clearly Teresa's original words ... Not until 1880, when Don Vicente de la Fuente **published a photocopy of the original** did readers have a faithful copy. Padre Silverio in his critical edition of the works of St. Teresa was the first to offer the public a reliable text.

### **The General Content**

The Jesuit Ripalda's desire was that Teresa record the many events surrounding her foundations ...

This work is a **narrative of the happenings involved in each of the foundations** ... But Teresa **expands** her account so as to turn again to **the theme of prayer...**

**Chapters 4 through 8** constitute the longest interruption to the history of her foundations ... Teresa declares in a matter-of-fact way that most of the nuns in her foundations were experiencing perfect contemplation and several were familiar with raptures, visions, and revelations (4, 8). She also gives some **pertinent counsels to prioresses** flowing from her own observation of **what had been happening spiritually in her monasteries.**

**These counsels deal with:**

-the need...at times...to set aside contemplation for ... active works of service (**ch. 5**);

-a delightful absorption ... that is deceptive and comes from bodily weakness caused by austerities (**ch.6**);

-melancholy or emotional or mental illness (**ch.7**);

-a safe method of procedure ... for visions and revelations (**ch.8**);

...the need for discretion in government and mortification (**18, 6-13**);

-And throughout...shorter instructions and motherly exhortations concerning the spiritual life...

There are important and insightful digressions from her story, but ... **two principle concerns** weigh on Teresa's mind:

... **first**, she must be completely truthful and, **secondly**, the glory and praise must go to God ... who she comes to learn is deeply involved ... even in the minutest details ... Teresa, herself, a lover of solitude, has now entered more visibly into this historical process ... For all who must live the active life please note that **‘it is not the length of time spent in prayer that benefits one; when the time is spent as well in good works, it is a great help in preparing the soul for the enkindling of love. (5, 17)**

The Mother Foundress with her classic determination ... embraced the work God had given her. She quickly made friends wherever she thought she might find help for God’s service....

She was forced to become both an expert in money management and an attentive organizer and planner ... In a word, Teresa was **thrown into the world of people, money, and property**, and all the unwelcome conflicts that these are liable to bring forth ... especially when collective egos are threatened ...

To **find God in all things** ... even *among the pots and pans* ... was the **art she was forced to master** ...

To **ward off the devil, relentlessly plotting** to spoil the Lord’s work of establishing new communities ... Teresa’s methods were simply **prayer** and the **practice of Christian virtues** like charity, humility and obedience. In addition, she made inquiries of ... others to discern what might be for **God’s greater service** ... Once it was clear to her, ... she threw herself into the task with **determination** ... “God wants no more than our **determination** so that **He may then do everything Himself**” (28, 19) ...

The **essential point** is that through Jesus Christ Teresa feels liberated, free of worries about all interference coming from either human or demonic powers ... and she discovers that **in the end Jesus is always victorious** and never fails those who seek to serve Him (18,1; 27,11, 20).

As for the style of this book, it is that of the Mother Foundress speaking to her daughters

... When we read this book, we are, as it were, invited to a community recreation period in which Teresa entertains. Ana de Jesus, one of Teresa’s nuns, declared that in reading Teresa’s works she felt she was listening to her speak.

Partly because of our distance from sixteenth-century Spain and partly because of Teresa’s story, stranger than fiction, much of the **spirituality** beneath the surface could go unnoticed without some **historical** and **cultural** background ... To provide this background, it was necessary to expand this introduction...

### **The Order of Carmel**

Carmelites, considered the oldest of all orders, are called a special and ancient order of our Lady ... Elijah and Elisha dwelt on **Mount Carmel** ... and saintly men continued to live there in solitude, until the time of our Savior when these hermits were **converted** by the preaching of the apostles. They built a Church in honor of the Holy Virgin ... For this reason they were the first of all orders to be called the **children of the Blessed Mary of Mount Carmel**.

Later, after Teresa’s times, the order of Carmel, **without a critical sense of history or a definite founder**, got caught up in the challenge to prove its age-old traditions ... In 1725 the **Carmelite order triumphantly installed in St. Peter’s in Rome its celebrated statue of Elijah as the order’s founder** ... thus ending a thirty year literary battle with the Jesuits.

Carmelites from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century thought that **The Institution of the First Monks** was the rule given their forefathers by John, the 44th Patriarch (or Mayor) of Jerusalem. This rule was dutifully followed until the rule written by Albert of Jerusalem in the 13th century was received.

It is commonly recognized, however, that the **Institution of the First Monks** gave Carmelites their **manual of spirituality**. The unknown author describes the way toward **“prophetic perfection”** and the purpose of **the religious eremitical life**. In

eight chapters, the **eremitical-contemplative ideal** is explained:

**first**, to offer God a heart holy and pure of all stain of actual sin (through one's own efforts assisted by grace);

**second**, to taste at times, by divine gift, God's sweetness in the depths of one's heart and to experience in one's soul the power of His divine presence.

The order's devotion to our Lady grew stronger through another tradition that in 1251, a time of hardship for Carmelites, when Our Lady appeared to the prior general, **Simon Stock**, to encourage him and give him the scapular as a pledge of her protection ...

The oldest written account of this vision comes 150 years after the alleged event, too large a gap for certainty especially in light of medieval fondness for clothing a spiritual or theological belief in a story ... What is more, it now appears certain that the prior general from 1247-1256 was not Simon Stock) ... Teresa found inspiration in all these cherished Carmelite traditions of her time and speaks about ... the order as being our Lady's order and the habit as being our Lady's habit ...

The actual date of the formal beginning of the Carmelite order ... that brought the **hermits** together near the **fountain of Elijah on Mount Carmel** may never be uncovered.

.... It is assumed to be sometime around **1210** that a definite community had formed there and decided to petition **Albert, Patriarch (Mayor) of Jerusalem** to give them a formula of life, given limited approval by Pope Honorius III in 1226 ... The hermits became known as the **hermit brothers of St. Mary of Mount Carmel** ...

Owing to the precarious position of Christians in the Holy Land from 1229 onward, the hermits decided to make foundations in the West.

On **September 4, 1247**, the **Rule of St. Albert** was **mitigated** (modified) and became canonically an **official rule**. ... This was the **version of the rule that Teresa thought was the primitive** (original) **rule**. It

allowed the Carmelites to live according to the new forms of Religious life in vogue with **mendicant** (begging) orders ... Alterations made in the text of St. Albert's rule were slight but the results were extensive: houses were now being **founded in cities and towns**; community life developed; and ,external ministries were gradually introduced.

In **1432**, Pope Eugene IV made **further changes** to the rule at the request of the Carmelites who felt their **rule too strict**. They were now able to eat meat three times a week and leave their cells. These changes made **the Carmelites mendicants (beggars)**. **It is this rule that Teresa thought of as the 'mitigated rule.'**

These concessions were **not** written into the rule and were seen by some as a betrayal of the contemplative ideal.

In **1452 John Soreth, Prior General**, obtained a papal bull that authorized **women** entry into the Carmelite order as nuns. He never travelled to Spain so the nature of the life of a Carmelite nun varied from place to place.

The **Incarnation convent**, anything but luxurious, was founded in 1479 in Avila. Despite meager means, it became a **refuge for women of the nobility** ... With their special privileges, these Donas became a source of injustice, accentuated class distinction and caused jealousies.

It should be noted that Teresa herself at the Incarnation bore the title Dona, and lived in a suites of rooms, that at times she shared with her relatives.

From the prior general Rubeo's visit to the Incarnation in 1567, we learn: that there were 144 nuns but only enough food to feed the community for a third of the year; that the monastery was in debt; that the maximum number of nuns sustainable would be 60; that the unfinished church was ready to collapse; and that there were many human problems besetting the nuns.

Forced by hunger, the nuns had to go to friends and relatives for help and got permission to keep their own money. At one



time between 1560 -1565 more than 50 nuns were living outside in the homes of relatives and benefactors. Parlor visits in the monastery were encouraged to help cultivate benefactors to receive alms (money) from them. ... However, the many obstacles to a life of recollection and prayer did not discourage a large group of devoted and excellent nuns within the community ... Teresa often showed her esteem for the Incarnation, and left there with a certain reluctance to begin her new foundation. In fact, she later recruited as many as 34 nuns from the Incarnation for her new houses. Teresa was made prioress of the convent of the Incarnation in 1571 ... in hopes she could bring about some reforms and find some remedy for the community's economic troubles. She called on St. John of the Cross to come as confessor and spiritual director to assist her.

The step taken proved to be a successful one. The community under the guidance of these two leaders experienced a complete spiritual renewal and resolved a number of the convent's problems.

### **Reform in Spain**

In 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Spain, the word “**reform**” symbolized longings within the Church and its clergy for more **spiritual solutions** to problems.

The clergy had accumulated large properties for which they paid **no tax**. The way the clergy received their livelihood was the source of much abuse and disputes.

The **Black Plague** had produced a **total upheaval** in the country... When groups formed to renounce these dubious customs and privileges that had developed in the clergy, with a desire to return to the “**primitive**” spirit of their founders, they were called “**observants**.”...

Strong communities of **observants** arose among many orders such as the Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans to name a few. These groups quickly gained the respect of the people because of both their exemplary academic and moral reforms.

When in 1474 the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, initiated their reform movement, they seized upon the observant movement to bring resistant groups around. The **spirituality** of the **observants** put emphasis on **austerity, silence** and **recollection** ...

With Philip II, king of Spain between 1556-1598, Spanish reform underwent intense change. Philip feared heresy entering Spain. He sought to make the Spanish monarchy a strong fortress whose walls would resist the heresies seizing hold of Europe ... All that came from Rome was met with a great attitude of reserve.

... Spain with little confidence in what Rome could achieve ... established a council to oversee the reform of religious orders according to Spanish ideas ...

Rome saw this behavior on the part of Spain as acts of rebellion and disrespect of papal rights.

Teresa reflects the popular opinion calling the king of Spain ... “our Catholic king;” “our holy king.”

The king, Philip II, was, however, able to obtain from Pius V, his candidate, the **suppression** of the **resistant** (conventual) communities and the introduction of observant life in Spain.

Between the time of **Teresa's first foundation** in Avila and the other foundations, the Spanish authorities began to apply the work of the **Council of Trent**. It is within this **more complicated turn of events** that Madre Teresa set off on her **colorful, adventurous journeys** through Spain.

### **The Teresian Communities**

“**Whoever has not begun the practice of prayer, I beg you for the love of the Lord not to go without so great a good.**”

Teresa's convictions of **prayer's transforming powers** drew others to her. Her rooms at the Incarnation monastery were often used for spiritual conversation.

In fact, one day half in jest, Maria Ocampo, spoke of a possible reform ... She suggested **a return to a more eremitical life, the kind the holy forefathers had embraced on Mount Carmel.**

These discalced religious of which Teresa was a part comprised groups to live in **austerity and recollection.** They made themselves externally recognizable through their coarse wool habits and their bare feet. A **consistent income** to live without anxieties was Teresa's first concern but with further information, **Teresa changed her mind resolving to found her houses in poverty, without a fixed income, trusting in God's providence.**

When Teresa changed to the new discalced mode of life in 1562, she changed her name to Teresa of Jesus. It was only in this century that those outside of Spain began calling her Teresa of Avila.

Prior General Rubeo when visiting the 'contemplative' Carmelites encouraged Teresa to make as **many foundations as she had hairs on her head and provided her with all the necessary permissions.**

In a letter to her brother Lorenzo in December 1561, Teresa summed up her idea as she initially envisioned it: **"To found a monastery where there will be only fifteen nuns and no possibility for an increase in numbers. They will practice a very strict enclosure and thus never go out or be seen without veils covering their faces. Their lives will be founded on prayer and mortification."** ...

The nuns would be hidden from the gaze of the world and be able to serve God with greater surrender and freedom. Many complained though about the norms being too rigorous ... yet the practice of enclosure at the Incarnation was not a rigorous one, and Teresa often went outside the monastery. Not until exempt from the observance of the Incarnation in 1564, was Teresa free to practice enclosure in its rigorous form. Teresa's own enthusiasm for cloister rested on her **determination** to provide a contemplative environment for her nuns ...

She writes of the happiness of the nuns when able to finally set up enclosure:

**'No one but those who experience it will believe the joy that is felt ... once we are enclosed where no secular persons can enter ... There is a great consolation in finding ourselves alone.'**

Teresa points out that the **cloister is for her nuns what water is for fish ... living in the clear flowing stream of their Spouse ...**

But, in her Way of Perfection Teresa warns her nuns against extravagance in their buildings ... More often than not though, Teresa's nuns had to make do with what they could find or afford ...

Her nuns today, still continue in some of the same houses, living the contemplative life Teresa established in them. What mattered to her was not so much an elaborate building but a beautiful view and a garden full of trees and flowers that served as a place for hermitages ...

Teresa discovered that **fewer nuns meant greater harmony and quiet ... Her ideal remained a small group of good friends gathered in the Lord to live totally for Him through a contemplative life of prayer useful for His Church ...**

At the beginning, the number of nuns Teresa had in mind was 13, a symbol of Christ and His 12 apostles ... In her last years, Madre Teresa increased the limit to 20 in houses with a fixed income; in those founded in poverty, she set the limit to 13 or 14 ... As the nuns grew older, requiring care from others, adaptations had to be made in the numbers.

Inspired by the Gospel spirit, Teresa created an eremitical way of life and illuminated this contemplative mode of life with **fresh insight ... and placed emphasis on the apostolic dimension of prayer, on its relation to all those concerns for the service of Christ that lay so close to her heart ....** Teresa introduced something **new within the Church, the life of prayer as a service.**

## Austerity in the Reform Movements

Incredible types of austerity marked some of the reform movements in the Spain of Teresa's time ... According to popular notions of the time, high perfection required rigorous austerity ...

It even made its way in the court of Philip II. It was, in fact, the austerity of Teresa's friars that helped them win the favor of the king.

In houses of prayer (of recollection or eremitical life) steps were taken to ensure that the hours dedicated to mental prayer would be many and the austerities obvious such as bare feet and coarse wool habits. Teresa's nuns and friars did, however, all eventually begin wearing hemp sandals (alpargatas) ...

In its relationship to **prayer and recollection, austerity** was looked on as **an aid**. By quieting the activity of the exterior senses a person enabled a kind of **sixth sense** ... where lay spiritual powers capable of grasping realities lying beyond matter... that were particularly about the reality of God who is pure Spirit ...

Osuna, Franciscan who wrote the Third Spiritual Alphabet, taught that "closing the corporeal and exterior sense would open the soul's interior ones."

**Teresa could not help feeling a certain skepticism about these extremes** ... the Lord told her that she herself was walking on a good and safe path.

He said: "**Do you see all the penance she does? I value your obedience more.**" ... in speaking of the penances of Catalina de Cardona. Teresa .... points out that Catalina had so many penances and disciplines because she had no one to guide her.

Teresa begged the friars at Durelo for **moderation** fearing that the **whole work could be ruined through excess** ...

Teresa observed in her own communities that when **physical strength is weakened through austerities** a kind of **delightful absorption** may so overpower a nun that she will allow it to possess her for **long hours and even days** ... Such **absorption differs**

**from rapture which is short-lived and extraordinarily beneficial in its effects** ... while long periods in the other absorption is a **waste of time** ...

In the Madre's view the **balanced life of prayer, work, and solitude, provided all that was necessary for reaching the goal of the spiritual life which is conformity with the will of God**; harsh austerities are no more necessary than raptures

Teresa's often quoted passage regarding perfection: "**The highest perfection obviously does not consist in interior delights or in great raptures or in visions or in the spirit of prophecy but in having our will so much in conformity with God's will that there is nothing we know He wills that we do not want with all our desire, and in accepting the bitter as happily as we do the delightful when we know that His Majesty desires it.**" ...

The adaptability manifested in the **virtues of obedience and humility** impressed her much more as a **means of spiritual growth** than did a harsh lifestyle ...

In her love for obedience and examples she gives, Teresa can give the impression that she encourages extremes, or even apparent foolishness ... On the other hand, her enthusiasm for obedience is put in perspective when she issues warnings against indiscretion and offers a practical norm easy to grasp ...

Teresa felt that Father Gracian could promote this same balance among the friars ... She desired that her friars be good contemplative as well as good spiritual directors and preachers and that there be learned men among them.

She felt that too much **stress on austerity** would discourage desirable vocations among university students ...

**After Teresa's death** ... those **seeking to conserve her spirit fell into disfavor**. ...

Fearing that Madre Teresa's spirit would be snuffed out, Gracian put up resistance and in turn was expelled from the order. His appeals to the king went unheard ...

Among the nuns, Maria de San Jose and Ana de Jesus, Teresa's intimates, also underwent punishment within the order ... a kind of exile ... for seeking to save what their Mother Foundress had established. Gracian insisted ... that Teresa was foundress of both friars and nuns ... All in all it was just too much for these **tough austere men to admit that they had been founded by a woman**. The pervasive thinking went that since **men are stronger than women they can practice more austerities**; thus the nuns could only share in the perfection of the friars.

## The World

The term 'world' appears frequently enough in Teresa's writings, but always in a **pejorative sense** as an irreconcilable **enemy of the spiritual person** ... With this term, she refers to only a part of what is compromised in the world.

Without hesitation she proclaims openly the **essential goodness** of things and how they show forth the **splendor of the Creator**.

One of her **major themes** is the beauty and astounding capacity of the **human person** made in the **image and likeness of God** ... For Teresa the 'world' is the sum of realities that **opposes or impedes God's work**. It is almost as if the world is a person struggling against the soul for **dominion over the soul**. ... It **robs the soul of peace** and **inner serenity** ... She tends to **measure spirituality** in terms of one's **distance from the world**. ...

From **honor and money** flows the sap that keeps the world alive. In sixteenth-century Castile **honor** was the very **soul of social behavior**. Money played a pivotal role and was so tied up with money that the two could be reduced to simply **honor** ...

Honor speaks of prestige, of all that raises one above the other ... With these snobbish concerns the Spaniard became a slave to others ...

Honor was essentially an attribute of nobility, so a high value was placed on birth

and rank ... that ordinary members of society sought compensation or honor, found in the purity of blood. It was thought that it was preferable to be born of pure Christian blood than be suspicious of Moorish or Jewish ancestry.

In worldliness, Teresa beheld the eager quest for prestige and possessions which puts one in opposition to God's work. '**What friendship there would be among all if there were no self-interest about honor and money ! I think this absence of self-interest would solve all problems**' ... Things offer nothing in exchange for the sublime gifts of God's friendship. But understood in this sense, the fundamental problem of the world, is ignorance of the word of God. '**All the harm that comes to the world comes from this not knowing the truths of Scripture in clarity and truth.**'

Teresa said that she '**has always esteemed virtue more than lineage.**'

Teresa initially thought of founding her monasteries with a **fixed income** ... as then, the nuns would be free of worries about their basic needs ... In the end, Teresa opted for a mode of action contrary to what learned men advised her and followed ... the growing urge coming from within to **found her monastery in poverty, without a fixed and secure income, with entire dependence on God, she placed her first house under His providence** ...

**Teresa's desire to be poor increased .... I felt freedom in having so little esteem for temporal goods, lack of these goods brings an increase of interior good ...**

Her ideals about poverty caused her much more difficulty in **obtaining permission** to make foundations ... As her desires for poverty increased, her need to **deal with money** also seemed to increase ...

The problem for Teresa's ideal of poverty ... in **small towns** ... was that it was simply impossible to survive there without a **fixed income** ...

Teresa's confessor Banez reprimanded her resistance to founding monasteries in small



towns such as Malagon and Alba de Tormes made with a fixed income ... as it made little difference with regard to the holiness of the nuns...

She finally agreed as long as the foundations with a fixed income remain the exception ... However, she could never bring herself to found monasteries with a fixed income in **cities** where there was **wealth** ...

**In the case of monasteries founded with an income, my goal always was that they have enough to keep the nuns from dependence on relatives, or on anyone ... and that everything necessary be given to them ... and that the sick be very well cared for.**

**Happy to trust in God**, Teresa never worried about monasteries founded in poverty, but about the ones dependent on a fixed income for support .... She figured that if the established income were too small, the monastery would be doomed. In the end, seven of the monasteries were founded with an income: **Malagon, Pastrana, Alba de Tormes, Beas, Caravaca, Villanueva de la Jara, and Soria** ...

In Castile at the time, work was not a respected source of wealth ... it was counter to the current of the times and contrary to the practice in other monasteries .... Teresa, however, wanted her communities to survive with the **help of income gained through work**, in addition to **donations**.

The kind of work recommended by Teresa was the peaceful labor of spinning without pressure of deadlines ... but women's work was poorly paid ... when compared to the donations ...

Teresa makes a point of mentioning benefactors by name so that **those living now and those who are to come after, remember them in their prayers**. It was her experience that the Lord always provided for her houses ... by awakening people to come to their aid ... **"When it is known that a monastery is founded in poverty, there is nothing to fear because everyone helps. But when people think it has an income, to be without one is dangerous and the**

**monastery will be left temporarily without means"**.

**Dowries** made up another important contribution to the community's financial needs ... It was the practice of the times that a woman entering religious life was **required** to bring a dowry.

The inequality of status in Teresa's former monastery, the Incarnation, was rooted in the difference in dowries ... so Teresa shows a certain scorn for them. She exhorts her nuns never to refuse an applicant because of lack of a dowry ... **"On the contrary, I had fear about those with wealth, but the poor filled and enlarged my spirit with a happiness so great I wept for joy"**.

During the dramatic years of her activity, Teresa faced legal actions and financial worries ... Buying a house required shrewdness. We get a good picture of Teresa's shrewdness when she was looking to buy a house in Palencia. **"Finally, I went to see them ... not with the intention of buying them but only so the owner wouldn't think we had no other choice."**

Holiness did not prohibit Teresa from rejoicing over a bargain. She shares her joy in a letter over the house they bought in Seville for six thousand ducats that was really worth more than twenty thousand ... She also praises her good friend Dr. Aguiar involved in the trouble-ridden Burgos foundation, who by insisting on secrecy, was able to buy a house at a **price that was no less than a miracle** ...

In all these matters with regard to money Teresa's **persistent conviction** was that **God will never "fail those who serve Him, if they live as moderately as we do" ... in communities where "the nuns are so few and help themselves through the labor of their hands"**.

An astounding testimony to the validity of her conviction is the fact that all of her seventeen foundations are still in existence today, four centuries later; some of the communities are living in the same houses in which the foundations were made.

## On Making a Foundation

Teresa **developed her own method** of making a foundation which was always adapted to circumstances.

Before starting the journey for **foundations made in poverty**, Teresa would try to **rent a house** to serve as a **temporary dwelling** until a house suitable for a monastery could be bought. For Foundations made **with an income**, the nuns would initially live **with** the founding benefactress ...

Teresa arrived at this method through painful experience ... In her **boundless trust**, Teresa believed that once she was established in a rented house, the **Lord would provide**. Her **experience** supported her belief... **‘For the Lord Himself chooses in each place someone to help Him’**.

After the embarrassing situation in **Medina de Campo**, her first foundation after the one in Avila, Teresa decided it best to take as few nuns as possible with her ... They brought along **basic furnishings**; straw, for example ... to be sure to have a **bed** ...

Teresa would arrange the daily journey so that the little group would reach its destination in the **secret of the night** ... It seemed that nighttime entries allowed the group to prepare a room ... that Teresa referred to as a church where **Mass** could be said immediately the following morning to make the **foundation official** ...

This would not only surprise the townspeople with a **fait accompli**, but would also preclude any opposition ... especially from other begrudging religious orders ... Once the foundation established ... Teresa had to enter the arena of house searching ... Sometimes she met with no trouble, ... sometimes opposition to Madre Teresa’s buying a house came in the form of lawsuits...

... In Teresa’s reflections, she moves from her own experience of human weakness to relief in the thought that her fears came in the cause of good. **‘O Jesus! How many fears I have suffered before taking possession of these foundations! I reflect**

**on the fact that if one can feel so much fear in doing something good for the service of God, what must be the fear of those who do evil’** ...

As a compensation for the opposition from some religious orders, Teresa made a point of mentioning the **ever present assistance of the Dominicans and the Jesuits**.

It ought to be mentioned, that in many practical matters Teresa experienced extraordinary help from the Lord through **locutions**. She continued to receive them up to the end of her life.

Her custom ... was to consult a confessor ... always determined to follow his advice even if it went contrary to the locution.

As an example, ... our Lord told her to make a foundation in Madrid, but instead she went to Seville on Father Gracian’s orders.

She believed she had more certitude of doing God’s will by obeying her superior than her locution.

Troubles worsened when the opposition came from diocesan administrators. In two cases, archbishops opposed her in Seville and Burgos. Teresa concludes that the difficulties encountered at St. Joseph’s in Avila were the hardest followed by Seville (and surely Burgos as well).

Every one of her foundations except Soria amounted to a physical, psychological and spiritual trial for Teresa:

**“The Lord desired that no foundation be made without some trial in one way or another”**.

In a time when churches were being destroyed and the Blessed Sacrament taken away, a strong motivation for Teresa was the consolation she felt in seeing another church where the Blessed Sacrament could be reserved ...

When immersed in **controversy and doubt**, her one desire was always to do the **will of God** ... In all of her business matters and everything else that related to her foundations, Teresa never did or had done anything contrary to the will of God ...

This did not remove **secrecy** as often the best mode of action ...

In telling her story, she **tempers her account** of those who **opposed her** and tries to excuse them ... while expressing **gratitude to those who helped...** When time came for public inauguration of a foundation ... once the **Blessed Sacrament** was definitively housed, it was time for rejoicing in **God's triumph over the devil**; it was a moment of victory for the nuns, definitely able now to live in solitude with God.

The Mother Foundress never cared to leave a new foundation until the major obstacles were surmounted, the nuns' basic needs were provided for, and everything was in order.

... Teresa said: **'I never would, or did leave any monastery until it was in fit condition, had a spirit of recollection, and was adapted according to my wishes'**.

Teresa of Jesus never failed to carry images of Christ and His saints to her new foundation ... She found them to be a magnificent means of **awakening love** ... These images were for her like portraits of the **persons she loved**.

**Teresa's mysticism** was never **snobbish** ... Even when her rich spiritual life was in full flower ... and she was experiencing **enlightenment** within, she esteemed these simple means to love ... The mystic understands from experience divine realities ... and will often sense a stronger need to give outward expression to this understanding.

## **Travel**

In 1575, the Carmelite chapter that met in Italy ... made an attempt to **confine the expansion** of its discalced friars in Spain and maintain control ...

Teresa **was ordered to stay in one Castilian monastery** and not to leave it. She interpreted the command as a form of imprisonment ... The irony of the situation ... was that Teresa now received **blame** for doing what she had been asked to do ... There were **troubles** within the order on account of the Madre's **friars** ... After the

Council of Trent ... strict **cloister** was imposed on all nuns. The nuncio ... began to get qualms about **Teresa's travels** throughout Spain ... He confided to Gracian that he was **not pleased with her exits from the monastery** and requested a **gentle solution be found** that wouldn't **sadden 'this good and holy Mother'** ...

She however was not saddened not to leave her monastery but rather **overjoyed!** ... She had been longing to **end her days in quiet**. Travel for Teresa with her bad health had often been a torment. In those days ... there was **nothing pleasurable about traveling** ... Teresa wrote:

**'I am not recording ... the great hardships endured in traveling: the cold, the heat, the snow ... ; sometimes getting lost, being very sick and having a fever'...** and being **chilled to the bone by the cold and the heavy rains**.

The **wagons were forever getting stuck in the mud** ... and at one point all came near to being **killed when crossing a flooded bridge** ...

A number of times ... they all got **lost**. Once, the **guides**, not knowing the way, led the group along routes not made for wagons causing the **wagons to tip over**.

Finally, when they got so lost ... the **guides excused themselves** saying that they had other things to do now and **they left!** ...

Another time on a trip to Salamanca the **mule carrying the money** got lost after dark ... Teresa herself also once got lost.

"And, Oh! The **inns!**", Teresa exclaims.

They could be **without comfort, overcrowded, dirty, swarming with vermin. The clientele was often rowdy, perverse and foul-mouthed; sometimes the friars and nuns were made fun of**.

No one could be sure the inn would have **food**.

Once, in trying to think of something to **compare hell to**, she opted for a **bad inn**. The **means of travel** used by Teresa were **all those used in Spain** at the time: **donkey, mule, horse, covered wagon, coach and carriage**. The one **preferred** and usually

used by her was the **covered wagon**; it kept the **nuns hidden** ... though when necessary ... the **coach** was used ... which was a more fashionable and luxurious form of travel favored by the **wealthy**. It could be **drawn by either horses or mules**. ... This means was **offered** to Teresa when the foundation bore some relation to the **aristocracy** ... The coach was **ideal for short journeys on level and dry terrain**, but on a winter journey in snow and heavy rain, it was burdensome ...

Teresa also learned what it was to **travel by donkey in December** ... but, **normally**, when not journeying by wagon or coach, she rode the **mule** and was exposed to the heat of the **sun** or the cold winds of **winter**. Gracian left word for us of Teresa's **skill in handling a mule**.

A **pervading spirit** marked all of Teresa's journeys: she was traveling for an **ideal**. She transferred the **community life of Carmel into the covered wagon**. To this life inside the wagon she **created a system of good relationships**. The '**inside**' group had their **prioress, schedule of prayer, a water clock, a tiny bell, breviaries, holy water, a crucifix and some statues** of our Lady, St. Joseph and/or the Infant Jesus.

**Outside** there were some friends ready to lend a helping hand when needed.

Finally, there was a **chaplain** who would celebrate **Mass** in whatever little church along the way.

**Inside** the Sisters had their times for laughing and joking — they were **joyful solitaires**. **Outside** the men had to be sure they were taking the right roads, keeping the mules in line, hiring a barge to cross a river. The clergy and friars kept the **peace** among them. The **Muleteers** were usually **charmed** and **inspired** by Teresa who was **attentive to everyone's needs**. But now and again they reverted to their old selves ...

Once after a full-day's journey in **heavy rains**, with no protection and unable to find a place of lodging ... the group reached an inn at nightfall only to find nothing for lighting the lamps and no food. In addition,

the roof was so full of leaks that the water came in everywhere even on top of the beds. Teresa in an attempt to lift everyone's spirits exclaimed:

**'Come now, take heart, these are days very meritorious for gaining heaven.'**

The mule driver, soaked to the bone responded:

**"I could have also gained heaven by staying home"**.

On approaching an inn, Teresa would send someone ahead to order food and to reserve rooms. One of the rooms had to be sufficiently large to permit the **nuns to stay together** ...

On leaving the wagon, the nuns lowered their veils; and once in their rooms, they closed the door, and a nun was appointed to guard the door from intruders.

In those inns where the nuns were unable to have a room for themselves, **blankets** were brought in and hung up to allow them privacy.

## **Illnesses**

From her youth until the moment of her death, Teresa was **assailed by bodily illness**; sickness was one of the great battles of her life.

Keenly observant, she has written of these illnesses with impressive objectivity, precise description, and a great simplicity ...

Her **bad health**, though, **never interfered** substantially with her **work** or **full spiritual growth** ...

Undoubtedly, the countless trials and consequent stress that Teresa had to endure in her mystical life and in her life of service as foundress must have taken their toll and contributed to her illnesses ...

A difficulty in Teresa's case ... was her tendency to **take lightly** any need for rest and medical care ... The doctor had to tell her that her head would feel better if she did not to stay up writing letters until two in the morning !

On Christmas eve in 1577, Teresa fell down the stairs at St. Joseph's in Avila and **broke**

**her arm.** Since it didn't set properly ... the bone was **re-broken** to correct the deformity. This not only failed to remedy the matter but **made things worse.** Teresa's arm was left **useless** ... For the **rest of her life** she would **need help** with the simplest of tasks such as dressing and undressing ... Her own experience of **bodily infirmities** and **spiritual trials heightened her capacity to feel compassion** for other suffering people ... She therefore ordered that the sick be cared for with **great love, concern for their comfort, and compassion** ... and she felt that healthy nuns should **deprive themselves** rather than allow the sick to go without some **deeds of kindness** ...

One wonders how much awareness of **mental and bodily hygiene** was present in ascetical practices of sixteenth century spirituality ... Teresa was concerned for **monastic hygiene** ... She wanted her foundations in **healthy surroundings,** required good health of those entering ... and insisted on **cleanliness** especially for the sick ...

Teresa's writings abound with comments on a variety of illnesses ... and in speaking of these illnesses, she correctly employs the contemporary medical terminology.

She also demonstrates a good familiarity with the therapeutics of her day. The different remedies about which she speaks do have their basis in the sixteenth-century pharmacopoeia ... However, Teresa never tried to practice medicine on her own account but always showed a respect for the science of medicine and for doctors ...

As for mental and emotional illnesses, Teresa uses the term '**melancholy**'. Chapter 7 of the Foundations is a little treatise on melancholy. The reader is amazed at the sharpness of its observations and the extent of its understanding of the human psyche; this from one who had not even the most elemental training or reading knowledge from books on medicine ...

Teresa warns prioresses that however much they may strive to exclude from their

communities applicants who suffer from melancholy ... the illness is subtle and not always recognized until it is too late ... Teresa felt that just one person with melancholy was be enough to disrupt the quiet of an entire community ... and so **the afflicted** needed to be governed in such a way that no harm was done to the other nuns. ... The remedy Teresa proposed for the very afflicted still has its validity today, ... The condition should be cared for as a **major illness** ... The nun was to be **isolated** and treated with love, however she **had to understand** that as long as she felt free to do as she wished she could not return to the community.

**If allowed to return to community life,** the nun needed to be **occupied with duties** to avoid her imagining things.

Teresa's suggestion that such a nun not eat fish shows and awareness of the importance of diet. At the time, people probably thought that fish was less nourishing than meat.



