

**TANGAZA COLLEGE**

**THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

**HUMANITY OF CHRIST**

**IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. TERESA OF AVILA:  
RELEVANCE FOR TODAY**

**By**

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**NAIROBI**

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is specially dedicated to two people, who were very instrumental  
to my call to religious life:


Dr. (Mrs.) Beatrice Adenike Oloko and Br. Felix Okoro

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

My gratitude goes to my moderator, Rev. Dr. Muakasa Elie, CP, whose support and encouragement has stimulated my interest in the field of Spirituality. I am also very much indebted to the members of my community (both students and formators), here in Nairobi. They have been a great source of strength and support; they have all, in one way or the other, contributed immensely to my spiritual journey, as I seek to discern the voice of God in my life each day.

## STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that the this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed 

DANIEL IDIAHI-IMOLEH EHIGIE, OCD

Date Feb. 2, 2001

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed 

REV. DR. MUAKASA ELIE, CP

Date 3. 5. 2001

## INTRODUCTION

St. Teresa of Avila, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Carmelite mystic and Doctor of the Church, taught that prayer is “nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.”<sup>1</sup> This became the foundation of her spirituality. For Teresa, the relationship with God did not lie in the abstract or sublime realm. It had to be real. Thus, “the abstract distant God was gradually ‘concretized’ for her in Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, the humanity of Christ plays a central role in the spirituality of St. Teresa of Avila. The humanity of Christ is by no means restricted to the spirituality of the religious family of St. Teresa, the Discalced Carmelites. It does hold a message for all Christians, and in a special way for the African.

The aim of this essay is to shed some light on the role of the humanity of Christ in the spirituality of St. Teresa of Avila, underscore its importance in the spiritual life of Christians, and then present some applications within the African socio-cultural milieu. It is worthy of note that several theologians have done a lot of work in the area of contextualizing Christology in different African cultures. I shall draw on some of their materials in this area.

I have chosen to focus my reflections on Africa as a whole, and not any particular culture for some reasons. Firstly, no previous work has been done in relating any aspect of Carmelite Spirituality to any of the local

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<sup>1</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, “The Book of Her Life” in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Vol. I, Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Trans., Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1987, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Eamon R. Carroll, “The Saving Role of The Human Christ for St. Teresa” in Carmelite Studies, Vol. 3, John Sullivan, OCD, ed., Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1984, p. 135.

cultures in Nigeria (my country of origin). An in-depth research in this area is certainly beyond the scope of this work. It is true that presently in Africa, most of the countries are going through lots of socio-economic problems that have continued to take their toll on the people unabated. Several of the problems are common to most African countries: ethnic conflicts, wars, poverty, starvation, unemployment, political instability, low per capita income, etc. Thus, the choice of Africa as the context is intended to give a panoramic picture of what obtains in the different countries.

**PLAN OF WORK:** The essay is divided into four chapters, followed by a general conclusion:

**CHAPTER 1: ST. TERESA OF AVILA AND THE TERESIAN SPIRITUALITY-**

**ST. TERESA: LIFE HISTORY:** This will highlight the life, especially certain key moments of her life that help depict her spiritual development. This mode of presentation is important because Teresa did not have the opportunity of formal education. Her teaching flowed from real life experience.

**SPIRITUALITY OF ST. TERESA (TERESIAN SPIRITUALITY):** Teresa brought something unique to bear on the existing Carmelite Spirituality through her reform. The fruit of this is the Teresian Spirituality which is characteristic of the Carmelites of the reform - the Discalced Carmelites.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY - 1<sup>ST</sup> TO 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY -**

**HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT:** This will be an excursion into history in order to portray how the humanity of Christ gradually unfolded in the spirituality of Christians down the centuries (up till the time of St. Teresa).

**MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS CURRENTS ROOTED IN THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST:** The focus here will be on the different religious movements that arose during the High Middle Ages as a result of their devotion to the humanity of Christ. The intention here is to establish the historical context within which Teresa's spiritual life evolved.

## **CHAPTER 3: ST. TERESA AND THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST -**

**TERESA'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE:** This will present Teresa's interior life as the humanity of Christ gradually began to occupy a central place in her spiritual growth.

**TERESA'S DOCTRINE:** Much later in Teresa's life, she looked back on her experience, and presented to her nuns (of the reform and by extension the friars too) her thoughts on the interior life. This essay will attempt to present this teaching which has at its core, the humanity of Christ.

## **CHAPTER 4: PRESENT DAY APPLICATIONS -**

This chapter will present applications for the present day African society from two perspectives – the individual and the society respectively. The individual perspective will dwell on the way the spirituality of St. Teresa of Avila can help individual persons to face

the day-to-day experiences of life. In the treatment of the social perspective, focus will be on the challenge of the teachings of St. Teresa of Avila on the humanity of Christ, to the contemporary African society.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ST. TERESA OF AVILA AND THE TERESIAN SPIRITUALITY

St. Teresa of Avila founded her spiritual doctrine on prayer, and gives paramount importance to the humanity of Christ. Without the opportunity of formal education in theology, most of what she taught came from her own real life experience. This chapter presents the life history of Teresa, depicting key moments in her spiritual development, in an attempt to capture the origin of her doctrine on the humanity of Christ.

#### 1.1 TERESA - LIFE HISTORY

**1.1.1 EARLY CHILDHOOD:** A scion of the Avila silk merchant, Don Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda, Teresa de Ahumada y Cepeda was born on March 28, 1515 in Avila to a family of twelve children. According to biographers, the young Teresa “loved popular chivalric novels and saints’ lives.” Her love of reading was considered quite unusual for women in the Spanish society of her day.<sup>1</sup> Her early childhood desires betray traits of undaunting spirit. Along with her brother, Rodrigo, Teresa attempted to set off “for the land of the Moors to have her head cut off for Christ.”<sup>2</sup> She was only seven years old. When this attempt failed, she felt that there had to be another way of realizing her pious desires. According to Teresa,

“When I saw it was impossible to go where I would be killed for God, we made plans to be hermits. In a garden that we had in our house, we tried as we could to make hermitages piling up

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Jodi Bilinkoff, The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, p. 111.

<sup>1</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, “The Book of Her Life” in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila. Volume One. Trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987, p. 16.

some little stones which afterward would quickly fall down again. And so in nothing could we find a remedy for our desire.”<sup>3</sup>

Teresa entered her teens as an attractive, vivacious outgoing girl. Before long, the adolescent Teresa got involved in a relationship with one of her relatives that caused her father so much worry.<sup>4</sup> Don Alonso then decided to send his daughter to a boarding school for girls run by Augustinian nuns.<sup>5</sup> Life in the convent school made an appreciable impact on Teresa. She recalls, “my soul began to return to the good habits of early childhood,”<sup>6</sup> and adds, “I began to recite many vocal prayers and to seek that all commend me to God so that He might show me the state in which I was to serve Him.”<sup>7</sup> She eventually decided to become a Carmelite nun.

**1.1.2 THE CARMELITE NUN:** Teresa entered the Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila on November 2, 1535 when she was twenty years of age, and made her religious profession on November 3, 1537.<sup>8</sup> She became ill during her early years as a young professed nun, and had to seek medical attention outside the monastery.<sup>9</sup> While recuperating at her uncle’s, she read The Third Spiritual Alphabet, a spiritual book by the sixteenth century Franciscan, Francisco de Osuna. This book made a deep impression on Teresa. According to her, the book taught her how to be recollected in prayer. She writes, “I was very happy with this book, I began to take time

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> This took place in 1531 when Teresa was sixteen years of age.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> Jodi Bilinkoff, op. cit., p.112.

<sup>9</sup> Mary J. Luti notes that Teresa’s health broke down dramatically in the Fall of 1538. Cf.- Mary J. Luti, Teresa of Avila’s Way, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991, p. 40.

out for solitude, to confess frequently, and to follow that path, taking the book for my master.”<sup>10</sup>

When Teresa returned to the monastery, she gradually slipped into a lackadaisical way of life, spending most of her time on pastimes and vanities.<sup>11</sup> This took its toll on her spiritual life. In this regard, she laments, “I began to lose joy in virtuous things and my taste for them. I saw very clearly, my Lord, that these were failing me because I was failing you.”<sup>12</sup> Thus Teresa “voyaged on this tempestuous sea for almost twenty years with these fallings and risings.”<sup>13</sup> A considerable change however took place in her in 1554. On two different occasions, she had some religious experiences that had so much profound and lasting effect on her that some biographers describe them as ‘conversion.’<sup>14</sup> On one occasion, Teresa beheld the statue of the wounded Christ placed in the community oratory and became very distressed. On another occasion, she read the Confessions of St. Augustine, and was deeply touched by Book VIII, Chapter 12.<sup>15</sup> According to her, she felt within herself so much sorrow and weariness that she began to shun occasions of sin, and returned to cultivate a true love of God.

In her prayer, something was also taking place. Teresa, realizing that she could hardly “reflect discursively with the intellect,”<sup>16</sup> turned to the use of icons. She describes her way of praying thus,

“I strove to represent Christ within me ... to represent Him in

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> Mary J. Luti, Teresa of Avila's Way, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991, p.44.

<sup>15</sup> The passage Teresa read was on Augustine's conversion experience, when he heard a voice in the garden.

<sup>16</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

those scenes where I saw Him more alone ... I strove to be His companion there ... I remained with Him as long as my thoughts allowed me to, for there were many distractions that tormented me."<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Christ began to take the center stage in Teresa's prayer life, more specifically, the humanity of Christ. According to Teresa, she "could only think of Christ as He was as man."<sup>18</sup> With time, "unusual mystical phenomena, such as intellectual visions of Christ, began to punctuate her periods of devotion, causing her confessors and counsellors no small concern."<sup>19</sup> In sixteenth century Spain, these experiences were highly suspect.<sup>20</sup> As a result, Teresa went through a lot of agony and often found herself in dilemma. While there was "her own strong inclination to believe that the phenomena were of God,"<sup>21</sup> some of her confessors felt that she was under the influence of the devil.<sup>22</sup> Teresa's Jesuit spiritual directors, her own growing capacity for spiritual discernment, coupled with her unwavering trust in Divine Providence, all served to restore her interior life to a freer and more fruitful course.<sup>23</sup>

**1.1.3 THE REFORM AND TERESA'S TWILIGHT YEARS:** In 1561 Teresa had a vision of hell which resulted in some excruciating pains within her.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> Mary J. Luti, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> There was an air of spiritual fervor blowing across Spain during the sixteenth century with a longing for deep spirituality characterized by "a call to interior life; the practice of mental prayer; and strong leanings toward higher levels of the mystical life." This saw the rise of all sorts of spiritual movements. While some were genuine, some others turned out to be phonies. Cf. - St. Teresa of Avila, op. cit., pp. 21-33.

<sup>21</sup> Mary J. Luti, *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> In Chapters 23-26 of "The Book of Her Life," Teresa sheds more light on some of her spiritual directors that were sceptical about these extraordinary experiences.

<sup>23</sup> Mary J. Luti, *ibid.*

The experience was so frightful that six years later as she wrote her autobiography, she was still filled with trepidation and the memory fresh in her mind.<sup>24</sup> This experience sowed in her ideas that set the ball rolling for the reform of the nuns. Teresa thus describes her situation, "I was thinking about what I could do for God and I thought the first thing was to follow the call to religious life by keeping my rule as perfectly as I could."<sup>25</sup> With this frame of mind, it dawned on her that in the Monastery of the Incarnation, the (Carmelite) Rule "was not kept in its prime rigor," because of the bull, *Romani Pontificis* of Eugene IV dated February 15, 1432 that mitigated fasting and abstinence.<sup>26</sup> Teresa eventually founded the first monastery of the reform, St. Joseph, on August 24, 1562. In 1567 she sought and got from the Prior General of the Order permission to explore the possibility of founding more houses under the reform. Rowan Williams notes that from 1567 to 1582, Teresa "established fourteen houses, from Burgos in the north to Seville in the south."<sup>27</sup> The reform was later extended to the friars and this eventually gave birth to a separate Religious Order, the Discalced Carmelites.<sup>28</sup> Teresa died in Alba de Tormes on October 4, 1582 on her return from establishing the foundation at Burgos.

## **1.2 THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. TERESA (TERESIAN SPIRITUALITY)**

**1.2.1 THE EARLY TRADITIONS:** The Teresian spirituality is founded on the eremitic traditions of the hermits that lived near the fountain of Elijah in

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<sup>24</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>27</sup> Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> The Carmelites that embraced the reform of Teresa came to be known as the Discalced Carmelites (or Teresian Carmelites - OCD), as distinct from the existing order, Carmelites of The Ancient Observance (O.Carm.).

the wadi 'ain es-Siâh on Mount Carmel in Palestine.<sup>29</sup> These hermits devoted their lives to prayer. John Welch attempts a vivid description of their way of life,

“The men lived at slight distances from one another spending their time in reflection and prayer. They read scripture and carried its lines in their hearts. They fasted, abstained from meat, and worked in silence. They gathered regularly: daily for mass, weekly for discussions. They lived a life of poverty, and what they owned they owned together.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, their lifestyle was essentially contemplative. There are however some indications that the hermits did engage in some pastoral activities, which would not have been considered incongruent with the eremitical life.<sup>31</sup>

**1.2.2 THE REFORM TRADITION:** As the Order sailed through the turbulent waters of the Middle Ages, it drifted away from the original vision of the hermits of Mount Carmel. This was nothing but a manifestation of the cycle of reform and decay that plagued Medieval Christendom. By the sixteenth century, the call of Teresa through the reform was basically to recapture the original spirit of the Order. Although she pursued this goal of renewal with an unflagging zeal, she did bring some originality to bear on the spirituality of the Order. Hence Paul-Marie of the Cross observes that Teresa was as much traditional as she was original.<sup>32</sup> The following are the

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<sup>29</sup> Joachim Smet, O.Carm., The Carmelites: A History of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Vol. 1, Darien: Carmelite Spiritual Center, 1988, p. 5. Although history only took note of these hermits in the twelfth century, their existence most probably predates the twelfth century.

<sup>30</sup> John Welch, O.Carm., The Carmelite Way: An Ancient Path for Today's Pilgrim, Leominster: Gracewing, 1996, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Paul-Marie of the Cross, OCD, Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition, trans., Kathryn Sullivan, RSCJ, rev. & ed., Steven Payne, OCD, Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1997, p. 39.

hallmarks of the spirituality of St. Teresa - Prayer, Eremitical life, and Apostolate.

**1.2.3 PRAYER:** Prayer lies at the heart of Carmelite Spirituality. Carmelites are called, first and foremost, to a life of intimacy with God, in which they turn unreservedly toward him with an attentive presence. The Carmelite Rule captures this aptly when it summons all members of the Order to ponder ceaselessly, the law of the Lord in silence and solitude.<sup>33</sup> During the reform, using the experience she had in her own spiritual journey, Teresa provided new insights into the existing understanding of the Carmelite's call to prayer. She remarks, prayer "taking time frequently to alone with Him who we know loves us," and also "an intimate sharing between friends."<sup>34</sup> Thus for Teresa, prayer is essentially contemplative and is rooted in a friendly intimate encounter with God that permeates the entire daily activities of the individual.<sup>35</sup> Thus a commitment to the practice of prayer is, for the Teresian Carmelite, the "high point of personal and community life and the supreme value which gives hierarchy and order to all the other aspects of life."<sup>36</sup>

**1.2.4 EREMITICAL LIFE:** The eremitical dimension of the Teresian charism serves to place the spirituality of St. Teresa in continuity with the existing Carmelite heritage from the hermits of Mount Carmel. The nature of

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<sup>33</sup> Chapter VII, Rule of St. Albert. (The Carmelite Rule is also known as the Rule of St. Albert).

<sup>34</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>35</sup> Even if prayer is vocal, it cannot be separated from contemplative prayer. If vocal prayer is to be recited well, it has to be done with "an understanding of whom we are speaking to." Cf. - St. Teresa of Avila, "The Way of Perfection" in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume Two, trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> The Teresian Charism, Document on on-going formation, Rome: Secretariat Generalis Pro Monialibus OCD, 1994, p. 33.

the eremitical life (of these early Carmelites) must have been influenced by the eremitism of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>37</sup> The uniqueness of this period that sets it apart from earlier periods (in terms of eremitical life), is the "influence of the ideal of apostolic life."<sup>38</sup> Thus, the hermits were not indifferent to the life of the people in their immediate vicinity.<sup>39</sup> Joachim Smet observes that "the hermit did not scruple to leave his solitude for a variety of reasons, if he felt the salvation of his neighbor required it."<sup>40</sup>

During the reform, Teresa chose to follow the unmitigated Rule of St. Albert. All Carmelites are thus summoned to embrace a life of solitude, silence, manual work, fasting, abstinence, penance, and poverty. Silence and solitude in the Carmelite tradition, are seen as veritable means by which one is able to develop "the all-embracing and overwhelming sense of God's presence - which so often goes unheeded because of complex and attractive noises."<sup>41</sup> It thus breeds a disposition of receptivity and openness necessary for prayer. Fasting, abstinence, manual work, penance, and poverty are all ascetical practices that prepare the individual for 'spiritual warfare' which is aimed at taming the various inclinations that tend to build a wall around the self.<sup>42</sup> The self is thus rid of its inordinate desires as it journeys along the path of union with God. Thus, the eremitic elements in the Teresian spirituality, provide a conducive seedbed for the sowing and

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<sup>37</sup> This was a period when Western Christendom witnessed a resurgence of eremitical life. Cf. - André Vauchez, The Spirituality of the Medieval West: The Eighth to the Twelfth Century, Trans., Colette Friedlander, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1989, p. 91.

<sup>38</sup> André Vauchez, The Spirituality of the Medieval West: The Eighth to the Twelfth Century, Trans., Colette Friedlander, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1989, p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> Joachim Smet, O.Carm., op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Redemptus Maria Valabek, O.Carm., "The Spirituality of the Rule" in Albert's Way: The First North American Congress on the Carmelite Rule, Michael Mulhall, O.Carm., ed., Rome: Institutum Carmelitanum, 1989, p. 163.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

nurturing of a genuine and fruitful prayer life.<sup>43</sup>

**1.2.5 APOSTOLATE:** Carmelite spirituality has an apostolic orientation that can be traced back to the Old Testament prophet, Elijah, the spiritual father of Carmelites. Elijah embodies a good blend of the active and contemplative dimensions of Carmelite Spirituality. Paul-Marie of the Cross opined that if Elijah pronounced the sentence upon which the contemplative spirit is based, “the Lord lives before whom I stand,” he also proclaimed, “I am consumed with zeal for the Lord of hosts.”<sup>44</sup> Apostolate for Carmelites, is the fruit of “a direct and intimate experience of God.”<sup>45</sup> A thriving contemplative life forms a prelude of some sort for the active apostolate. Hence Paul-Marie of the Cross declares, “Carmelite Spirituality is not contemplative and apostolic. It is apostolic because it is contemplative.”<sup>46</sup> Teresa sheds more light on the apostolic nature of Carmelite spirituality when she situates it within the spiritual journey. As the individual makes progress in the interior life, there is an inner transformation from a self centered disposition laden with attachments, to a selfless and open heart overflowing with true love. It is in this state (represented by the latter scenario) that the individual filled with zeal for the Lord (1 Kgs. 19.14), reaches out to serve. Teresa notes that the reason for prayer is “the birth always of good works, good works.”<sup>47</sup> She then adds, “let us desire and be occupied in prayer not for the sake of our enjoyment but so to have this

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<sup>43</sup> The Teresian Charism, Document on on-going formation, Rome: Secretariatus Generalis Pro Monialibus OCD, 1994, p. 53.

<sup>44</sup> Paul-Marie of the Cross, OCD, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>47</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, “The Interior Castle” in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume Two, trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980, p. 447.

strength to serve.”<sup>48</sup>

In the light of the foregoing, it can be surmised therefore that Teresa drew largely from her own spiritual journey to set out her teachings on the interior life. This lived experience was followed by several years of reflection and consultation with her spiritual directors and theologians, before articulating them into a body of doctrine on prayer.<sup>49</sup> These find expression in her writings on the spiritual life.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEVOTION TO THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST BEFORE ST. TERESA OF AVILA

The pride of place given to the humanity of Christ in the spirituality of St. Teresa did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it had as its context the ambience of the prevailing spirituality in the Medieval West that gave "a new emphasis to the humanity of Christ."<sup>50</sup> This chapter will attempt trace the developments of the devotion to the humanity of Christ in the Christian West. It will be an excursus into history in order to portray the gradual unfolding of the humanity of Christ in (Western) Christian spirituality before the time of Teresa. Efforts will also be made to shed some light on the major religious currents that arose during the High Middle Ages, rooted in the humanity of Christ.

#### 2.1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The historical development of the devotion to the humanity of Christ will be discussed under four periods namely - Early Traces (First to Fifth Century), Monastic Foundation (Sixth to Tenth Century), Emergence (Eleventh to Twelfth Century), and Influence Spreads (Thirteenth to Sixteenth Century).

**2.1.1 EARLY TRACES (FIRST TO FIFTH CENTURY):** Right at the outset, Christian spirituality tended to focus more on the Risen Lord than the Jesus of history.<sup>51</sup> The impact of the Resurrection and the Pentecost experience of the apostles (Acts 2.14-36, 3.12-26) coupled with the extensive ministry of

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<sup>50</sup> Ewert Cousins, "The Humanity and Passion of Christ" in Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation, Jill Raitt, ed., London: SCM Press, 1989, p. 375.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Paul, served to sustain this emphasis on the Risen Christ. According to Paul, “even if we did once know Christ in the flesh, that is not how we know him now” (2 Cor. 5.16).

With the advent of the Patristic Fathers, a subtle shift gradually took place. The humanity of Christ began to feature in their writings. This was a turbulent time for the fledgling Christian Faith in the face of very formidable challenges. In their attempt to bring the Christian message to bear on their different situations (persecution, dissension within the community, etc.), they began to turn towards the humanity of Christ laying more stress on his Passion. Herein lies the early traces which as yet was not a major strand in the spirituality of this period.

Clement of Rome in the first century of Christianity, wrote to encourage the Corinthians when the (Christian) community was going through some crisis. He enjoined them to carefully keep the words of Christ in their hearts and to continue to have the sufferings of Christ before their eyes.<sup>52</sup> During the persecution in the second century, Ignatius of Antioch identified his plight with the Passion of Christ as he was being taken prisoner under guard from Antioch to Rome, where he was eventually martyred. He remarks, “He who died for us is all that I seek; he who rose again for us is my whole desire. Leave me to imitate the passion of my God.”<sup>53</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, preached against the gnostics in the third century, and stoutly asserted the humanity of Christ. According to him, “For in no other way could we have learned the things of God, unless our Master, existing as the word, had become man.”<sup>54</sup> During the latter part of this

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<sup>52</sup> Johannes Quasten & Joseph C. Plump (Ed.), The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, Ancient Christian Writers, No. 1, Trans., James A. Kleist, SJ, Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1946, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Ewert Cousins, op. cit., p. 377.

<sup>54</sup> Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, (Ed.), “Irenaeus Against Heresies,” Book V, Chapter 1 in The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr & Irenaeus, Vol. I, Grand Rapids: W.M.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989, p. 526.

period, the humanity of Christ became one of the main theological issues of controversy that dominated the first three Ecumenical Councils.

**2.1.2 MONASTIC FOUNDATIONS (SIXTH TO TENTH CENTURY):** The age-old tradition of the use of scripture in monastic spirituality provided the basis for the development of the devotion to the humanity of Christ in the monasteries. Before the flourishing of monasticism in the West, sacred scripture played a valuable role in the lives of the Desert Fathers. This “was almost always seen in very practical terms, relating to the help it provided in the discovery of salvation and self-knowledge.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, the words of scripture were seen as a sure and permanent guide for the monk.<sup>56</sup>

This tradition was inherited in the West by the Benedictine monks with the practice of sacred reading - *Lectio Divina*.<sup>57</sup> According to Kevin Irwin, this is a “holy reading of the scriptures (almost always) or of the Fathers of the Church or other spiritual writing” which requires prayerful reflection on the text leading to communion with God in prayer.<sup>58</sup> In spite of the different sources available to the monks for their sacred reading, they did “meditate at length on those passages which present the historical events of Christ’s life.”<sup>59</sup> With time, the practice “directed attention ever more sharply to the concrete details” of the events in the life of Christ.<sup>60</sup> This engendered in them a desire to imitate Christ in his virtues, especially in

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<sup>55</sup> Douglas Burton-Christe, The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 108.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> C.H. Lawrence, Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages, New York: Longman, 1989, p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, “Lectio Divina” in The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, Michael Downey, ed., Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993, p. 596.

<sup>59</sup> Ewert Cousins, op. cit., p. 377.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

poverty and humility, and a willingness to suffer with Christ in his passion.<sup>61</sup>

### **2.1.3 PERIOD OF EMERGENCE (ELEVENTH TO TWELFTH CENTURY):**

The eleventh and twelfth century witnessed the tide of Gregorian reform sweeping across Western Christendom. This brought about a renewed spiritual fervor. Within the ranks of the clergy, “the councils, bishops and the spiritual writers recommended the study of the word of God,” and also emphasized the necessity of prayer.<sup>62</sup>

In the monasteries, a renewal of life was also taking place. “Prayer took over the monk’s whole life,” and it was such that arose from “the depths of a soul sanctified by the mysteries of Christ.”<sup>63</sup> Gradually, masses were celebrated in honor of Christ’s humanity.<sup>64</sup> These formed a prelude of some sort to the remarkable leap that took place in the development of the devotion to the humanity of Christ. In this regard, Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) are considered as landmarks in the eleventh and twelfth century respectively.

**ANSELM OF CANTERBURY:** Anselm’s major contribution to the development of the devotion finds expression in his “Prayers.”<sup>65</sup> He dwells extensively on the loving meditation of Christ and our redemption and “gives a place to the heart’s affection while striving to maintain a balance between doctrine and devotion.”<sup>66</sup> In this regard, Jean Leclercq argues that Anselm

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Dom Jean Leclercq, “From St. Gregory to St. Bernard: From the Sixth to the Twelfth Century” in A History of Christian Spirituality: The Spirituality of the Middle Ages, Vol. II, Trans., The Benedictines of Holme Eden Abbey, Carlisle, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1986, p. 98.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 108.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ewert Cousins, op. cit., p. 377.

<sup>66</sup> Dom Jean Leclercq, op. cit., p. 165.

“may be said to be at the beginning of a development whose results were seen in St. Bernard.”<sup>67</sup> With the aim of drawing the individual into events in the life of Christ, Anselm raises a series of rhetorical questions for pondering. This approach is vividly manifested in his ‘Prayer to Christ’ -

“Why, O my soul, were you not there to be pierced by the sword of bitter sorrow when you could not bear to see the nails violate the hands and feet of your Creator? Why did you not see with honor the blood that poured out of the side of your Redeemer? Why were you not drunk with bitter tears when they gave him bitter gall to drink?”<sup>68</sup>

Thus for Anselm, the prayers meditated upon in this manner provides a means for one to be present to the event, not in historical actuality but in the imagination.<sup>69</sup> This will go a long way in making the spiritual power of the events present.<sup>70</sup> Ewert Cousins thus remarks that the efforts of Anselm has produced an essential element that “would become the ultimate stance of the meditation on the life of Christ: one becomes a participant in the whole scenario (created in the imagination).”<sup>71</sup>

**BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX:** Bernard of Clairvaux is often touted as a major force in the evolving devotion to the humanity of Christ in the twelfth century. In his sermon, ‘On the Song of Songs,’ he develops the notion of the “Carnal love of Christ.”<sup>72</sup> According to Bernard, “the love of the heart is, in a

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Benedicla Ward, “Anselm of Canterbury and His Influence” in Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century, Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, & Jean Leclercq, ed., London: SCM Press, 1989, p. 198.

<sup>69</sup> Ewert Cousins, op. cit., p. 378.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

certain sense, carnal because our hearts are attracted most toward the humanity of Christ and the things he did or commanded while in the flesh.<sup>73</sup> Thus, through the devotion, God first draws people “to the salutary love of his own humanity,” and then gradually raises them to a spiritual love.<sup>74</sup> Bernard taught that a kind of sweetness is given that “seizes the whole heart, and draws it completely from the love of all flesh and every sensual pleasure.”<sup>75</sup> He then declares, rather unequivocally, “to love with the whole heart means to put the love of his sacred humanity before everything that tempts us, from within or without.”<sup>76</sup> Bernard therefore counsels on the need to ground the interior life in the life of Christ. He remarks,

“The soul at prayer should have before it a sacred image of the God-man, in his birth or infancy or as he was teaching, or dying, or rising, or ascending. Whatever form it takes this image must bind the soul with the love of virtue and expel carnal vices, eliminate temptations and quiet desires.”<sup>77</sup>

Thus, in Bernard’s exposition on ‘Carnal love of Christ,’ the devotion is a means by which human love is made more perfect.<sup>78</sup> John Sommerfeldt attempts to justify the role that affections play in Bernard’s teaching on the humanity of Christ. He says that “love is the perfection of the will. But the perfection of the will involves perfection of the affective soul, the feelings, in carnal love.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, “Song of Songs I” in The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux, Volume Two, Trans., Kilian Walsh, OCSO, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971, p. 152.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>78</sup> John R. Sommerfeldt, The Spiritual Teaching of Bernard of Clairvaux, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991, p. 100.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>73</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, “Song of Songs I” in The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux, Volume Two, Trans., Kilian Walsh, OCSO, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971, p. 152.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>78</sup> John R. Sommerfeldt, The Spiritual Teaching of Bernard of Clairvaux, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991, p. 100.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

#### 2.1.4 THE INFLUENCE SPREADS (THIRTEENTH TO SIXTEENTH CENTURY):

Christian spirituality did vary greatly (in time and space) within this period, and this had its attendant effects on the way the devotion was expressed. In the thirteenth century, the “passionate straining toward the pure ideal of the gospel” took a new dimension with the coming of the Mendicant Orders (especially the Dominicans and the Franciscans).<sup>80</sup> From them came the answer to the “longings in the depths of the Christian soul” - Poverty and the active life (preaching).<sup>81</sup> By the fourteenth century, the “spiritual centre of Christendom shifted towards the German countries and England particularly towards Germany.”<sup>82</sup> This shift brought about a change from the external expression associated with the Franciscan poverty to an interior condition although the former was not excluded.<sup>83</sup> Thus, new trends in spirituality began to emerge. The emphasis now tilted in the direction of “methodical and systematic meditation, and affective devotion to Christ in his mysteries.”<sup>84</sup>

The fifteenth century was a difficult period for Christianity. The aftermath of the Black Death, the exhausting effect of the Hundred Years' War (between France and England), the 'Babylonian Captivity' of the papacy, all left their footprints on the landscape of the (fifteenth) century. François Vandenbroucke observes that “the old Christendom was crumbling away, the medieval theocracy had decayed, and a new humanism was beginning to

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<sup>80</sup> Dom François Vandenbroucke, “New Milieux, New Problems: From the Twelfth Century to the Sixteenth Century” in *A History of Christian Spirituality: The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*. Vol. II, Trans., The Benedictines of Holme Eden Abbey, Carlisle, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1986, p. 283.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457.

appear.”<sup>85</sup> In the midst of this scenario, the old spiritual and intellectual tradition slowly yielded to a new spirituality “which laid stress on the subjective and psychological aspects of the Christian life.”<sup>86</sup> This state of affairs continued well into the sixteenth century, during which the Iberian peninsula caught the attention of Christian Europe. François Vandenbroucke notes that during the sixteenth century, “European spirituality looked towards Spain, where Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross shone with unparalleled brilliance.”<sup>87</sup> In the sixteenth century Spanish spirituality, prayer became a psychological technique that “systematized necessary preliminary dispositions, the progressive development, of meditation leading to conversion and interior prayer, and finally the stages of contemplation.”<sup>88</sup>

Some of the different forms of expression which the devotion to the humanity of Christ took, will now be addressed under the contributions made by some notable persons during this period - Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), Henry Suso (1292-1366), Ludolph of Saxony (1300-1370), and Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). Each of them represent the different ways in which the devotion was expressed within the context of the prevailing spirituality of their place and time.

**FRANCIS OF ASSISI:** Francis had an experience of God that made an indelible impression on him, which changed the course of events for the rest of his life. The fruit of this is his devotion to the humanity of Christ. St. Bonaventure recounts in the ‘Life of St. Francis’ how Francis had a vision of

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 483.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 484.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 532.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 541.

Jesus fastened to the Cross. According to Bonaventure, "Francis's soul melted at the sight, and the memory of Christ's passion was so impressed on the innermost recesses of his heart,"<sup>89</sup> that he was moved with tears and sighs whenever Christ's crucifixion came to his mind. From this time onwards, Francis willingly donned the garb of poverty, embroidered with the virtue of humility and a "feeling of intimate devotion."<sup>90</sup> In all these, Francis sought to completely unite himself with Jesus crucified. Thus the devotion to the humanity of Christ, in Francis, was given a new perspective. According to Ewert Cousins, "Francis was the first and foremost intent on imitating Christ in poverty and on creating a lifestyle based as he believed, on the essence of the gospel."<sup>91</sup> He therefore spent the rest of his life, preaching the poverty of Jesus of the gospels in word and deed.

**HENRY SUSO:** Scholars of Christian spirituality often list Henry Suso along with Meister Eckhart, and John Tauler in the Mysticism that developed in Germany during the fourteenth century. Suso, a Dominican priest, devoted most of his life to preaching and spiritual direction.<sup>92</sup> François Vandenbroucke describes Suso as very austere, with his works betraying "a personal evolution in which his inner life became more and more closely united with the cross of Christ"<sup>93</sup>

Suso taught that the humanity of Christ is a doorway of some sort in the journey along the path of contemplation. In his 'Little Book of Eternal Wisdom,' which is written in the form of a dialogue between Eternal Wisdom

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<sup>89</sup> Richard Payne (Ed.), Bonaventure: The soul's Journey to God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis, The Classic of Western Spirituality, Trans. Ewert Cousins, New York: Paulist Press, 1978, p. 189.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ewert Cousins, op. cit., p. 381.

<sup>92</sup> Dom François Vandenbroucke, op. cit., p. 391.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

and the Servant, Eternal Wisdom responds to the inquiry of the Servant at the outset of the latter's spiritual journey -

“No one can reach the heights of the divinity or unusual sweetness, without first being drawn through the bitterness I experienced as man. The higher one climbs without sharing the path of my humanity, the deeper one falls. My humanity is the path one takes; my suffering is the gate through which one must pass who will come to where you are seeking.”<sup>94</sup>

Thus for Suso, the humanity of Christ is a veritable means for attaining union with God. Hence Eternal Wisdom exclaims, “how can a person better know the mysteries of God than in the humanity he assumed?”<sup>95</sup> One must therefore seek the suffering Christ (of the gospels) in order to make progress in the interior life.

**LUDOLPH OF SAXONY:** The Carthusians of the fourteenth century made some important contributions to the spirituality of their day. They sought to propagate what scholars describe as “practical mysticism.”<sup>96</sup> One remarkable Carthusian amongst the notable spiritual writers during this period is Ludolph of Saxony. He is widely known for his work, ‘Life of Christ’ which has influenced several other spiritual writers. Although not exactly an account of the life of Christ, François Vandenbroucke notes that it is made up of meditations that bring together “the teachings of the Bible, theology, and the liturgy on the person and life of Jesus.”<sup>97</sup> The aim of the ‘Life of

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<sup>94</sup> Frank Tobin, (Ed.), Henry Suso: The Exemplar with two German Sermons, The Classic of Western Spirituality, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989, p. 214.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>96</sup> George Ganss, SJ (Ed.), Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works, The Classic of Western Spirituality, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991, p. 21.

<sup>97</sup> Dom François Vandenbroucke, *ibid.*, p. 458.

Christ,' according to Ludolph, is to "open to interior souls an easy access to the Gospels; it explained what prayer is, and taught that the imitation of Christ is the source of all perfection."<sup>98</sup> Thus, the Christian should endeavor to acquire familiarity with Christ "by pondering his most holy life with all the devotion he can muster."<sup>99</sup> When Ludolph invites the Christian to meditate on the various scenes in the life of Christ as presented by the gospels, he explores the affectivity and imagination. He writes,

"With all the affection of your heart, slowly, diligently, and with relish, make yourself present to what is being narrated, just as if you are actually there, and heard him with your own ears, and saw him with your own eyes."<sup>100</sup>

From the perspective of Ludolph therefore, meditating on the life of Christ helps the person to cultivate true love and inspires one in the way of virtues.

**IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA:** Ignatius was deeply influenced by Ludolph's 'Life of Christ.'<sup>101</sup> 'The Spiritual Exercises,' his best known work, betrays a deep devotion to Christ with a lot of emphasis on Christ's humanity. Thus, "Ignatius guides persons in progressive simplification of their prayer through a sacramental deepening of meditation upon, and contemplation of Christ's life, death, and resurrection."<sup>102</sup> Ignatius therefore helps to visualize "the persons of the gospel scenes and imaginatively reconstruct their probable words and deeds, and thus to penetrate more deeply the wonders of God."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> George Ganss, SJ (Ed.), op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>101</sup> The text was made available in Spain in the sixteenth century because the Spanish translation was done at the request of Ferdinand and Isabella.

<sup>102</sup> Harvey Egan, SJ, "Affirmative Way" in The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, Michael Downey, ed., Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993, p. 16.

<sup>103</sup> George Ganss, SJ (Ed.), op. cit., p. 59.

The 'Spiritual Exercises' spans a period of four weeks with meditation on the person of Christ. It is divided into four parts as follows - first week is devoted to the consideration and contemplation of sins; second week takes up the life of Christ up to, and including Palm Sunday; the third focuses on the Passion of Christ; the fourth dwells on the Resurrection and Ascension.<sup>104</sup> Ignatius therefore gives fullest expression to the devotion to the humanity of Christ these exercises. Using his keen sense of imagination, he tries to help the individual to become a participant in the historical events.

## **2.2. MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS CURRENTS ROOTED IN THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST**

The Medieval period is quite unique in the history of Christian spirituality with its focus on the humanity of Christ. According to Ewert Cousins, this manifests "a more basic structure of religious consciousness that permeated the entire religious life of Western Europe in the latter part of the Middle Ages."<sup>105</sup> The fruit of this disposition of mind will be seen at two levels - Popular Devotions and Movements. A general overview of Popular Devotions will be given below, with special reference to the contributions made by St. Francis of Assisi and St. Bonaventure in the devotion to the Nativity and Passion of Christ. With regard to Movements, the fourteenth century movement, the *Devotio Moderna*, will be used as a case in point.

### **2.2.1 POPULAR DEVOTIONS**

Religious devotions are "practices of piety directed to some particular

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>105</sup> Ewert Cousins, op. cit., p. 383.

object.” The object of devotion could be a divine mystery, person, an attribute or a created reality that is related to God.<sup>106</sup> Scholars distinguish between the subjective and objective aspects of devotions. The subjective element is constituted by the various acts and attitudes of mind and will, the special affective complex that make up the response to the object of devotion. While the objective aspect is the object of devotion which could be a religious truth or value upon which the devotion is centered.<sup>107</sup> It is in this light that the various practices of piety that had the humanity of Christ as the object of devotion can be seen. Thus, the medieval landscape was suffused with many and varied devotional practices in unprecedented profusion.<sup>108</sup> There were pilgrimages to the Holy Land in order to evoke memories of some of the historical events in the life of Jesus: visit the site of his birth, trace the route of his passion, see the place of his crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>109</sup> Other forms of popular devotions include - devotion to the name of Jesus, ‘maternity’ of Jesus,<sup>110</sup> our Savior’s birth and passion, and the Way of the Cross.<sup>111</sup>

The spread of the devotion to the Nativity and Passion of Christ was greatly enhanced by the Franciscans. Thus, the life of radical poverty embraced by Francis did go a long way to draw attention “to the poverty of Christ’s birth and death” which gradually became the main focus in the devotion to the humanity of Christ.<sup>112</sup> Many scholars often trace the origin of

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<sup>106</sup> P.F. Mulhern, “Religious Devotions” in New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, William J. McDonald, ed., Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1967, p. 833.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, “Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotions” in Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation, Jill Raitt, ed., London: SCM Press, 1989, p. 75.

<sup>109</sup> Ewert Cousins, op. cit., p. 384.

<sup>110</sup> Dom François Vandenbroucke, op. cit., p. 244.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 494.

<sup>112</sup> Ewert Cousins, op. cit., p. 382.

the devotion to the Infant Jesus in the Crib to St. Francis. In 1223, he created a Crib for the Midnight Mass at Christmas.<sup>113</sup> The aim according to Francis, is to “recall to memory the little child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs.”<sup>114</sup> St Bonaventure, on a similar note, dwells on the event of the birth of Jesus in his work, ‘Tree of Life.’ In it, he knits together “a technique of meditation for entering into the event of Christ’s birth.”<sup>115</sup> He develops a verse from the infancy narrative in the Gospel of Luke (Lk. 2.14) in such a way as to help the individual to form a mental picture of the setting in Bethlehem, and thus elicit some response: “ In your mind, keep the shepherd’s watch, marvel at the assembling host of angels, join in the heavenly melody, singing with your voice and heart: Glory to God in the highest and on earth to men of goodwill.”<sup>116</sup>

On the Passion of Christ, Bonaventure adopts a similar approach inviting the individual to meditate on the suffering of Jesus. In this vein, Bonaventure writes, “Sweet Jesus, who will be so hardened as not to groan and cry out in spirit when he hears with his bodily ear or considers with his mind those horrible shouts: Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!”<sup>117</sup>

### **2.2.2 DEVOTIO MODERNA**

The fourteenth century produced a renewal movement that has influenced a great number of spiritual writers in the late Middle Ages.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>116</sup> Richard Payne (Ed.), op. cit., p.129.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>118</sup> Dom François Vandenbroucke, op. cit., p. 447.

Gerard Groote (1340-1384) founded the *Devotio Moderna*<sup>119</sup> in Deventer, Netherlands in 1374 after a conversion experience. He had a brief sojourn with the Carthusians but left after three years to devote his time to preaching.<sup>120</sup> He preached against the gross abuses of the clergy and monks and tried to inculcate a spirit of renewal rooted in the devotion to the humanity of Christ. The influence of the movement soon spread beyond the Netherlands and Low Countries to other parts of Western Christendom. It engendered the spirit of revival in several Religious Orders and continued to penetrate Christian spirituality up till the dawn of the sixteenth century.<sup>121</sup> The laity, according to François Vandenbroucke, was thoroughly imbued with the influence of the *Devotio Moderna*.<sup>122</sup>

Their spirituality is characterized by “an individual and affective identification with particular moments in Christ’s life, chiefly his passion.”<sup>123</sup> This is true to the tradition of affective piety and devotion to the person of Jesus associated with St. Bernard of Clairvaux , St. Francis of Assisi, etc. Underscoring the central place occupied by the devotion to the humanity of Christ, Groote remarks, “the cross of Christ should ever be raised before us in meditation; his passion, his contumely, derision, injury, and sorrow should ever move our affections.”<sup>124</sup> In one of the devotional exercises on the passion of Christ, he counsels,

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<sup>119</sup> He formed communities of brothers and sisters. While the sisters were lay, majority of the brothers were priests or candidates for the priesthood. There were lay brothers among them but these were quite few. They held property in common, and practiced monastic ideals of poverty, chastity, and obedience without taking solemn vows. Cf. Otto Gründler, “Devotio Moderna” in Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation, Jill Raitt, ed., London: SCM Press, 1989, p.177.

<sup>120</sup> Otto Gründler, “Devotio Moderna” in Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation, Jill Raitt, ed., London: SCM Press, 1989, p.176.

<sup>121</sup> Dom François Vandenbroucke, op. cit., p. 506.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> John Farina (Ed.), Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings, The Classic of Western Spirituality, Trans., John van Engen, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988, p. 25.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

“Consider the prayer he uttered in agony and his resignation of himself into the hands of his heavenly father even to bitter death and also that bloody sweat he sweat in fear of the death he was about to suffer. Now throw yourself to the ground and with the loud voice of your heart and folded hands cry out and say, ‘O grieving Lord, how shall I repay you for all you have given me. I will accept the cup of salvation’ (Ps. 115.12, 116.12-13).”<sup>125</sup>

The widespread influence of the *Devotio Moderna* was further strengthened by several spiritual writings that emerged from the adherents of the movement. One of the most remarkable of these is the Imitation of Christ. Attributed to Thomas À Kempis (1380-1471), scholars describe the Imitation of Christ as “one of the best-known classics of devotional literature.”<sup>126</sup> Thomas so imbibed the spirituality of the movement that “he is considered as the most complete and outstanding representative of *Devotio Moderna*.”<sup>127</sup> In the Imitation of Christ, he betrays an overriding theme that best captures late medieval piety: “an affective devotion and contemplation of Christ’s humanity, as means of attaining to that of his divinity and to union with God.”<sup>128</sup>

In this chapter, I have tried to portray the gradual evolution of the devotion to the humanity of Christ, which to a large extent, was influenced by the prevailing spirituality of the different historical periods covered. The change in focus of Christian spirituality from the Risen Christ to the

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>126</sup> W. Jappe Alberts, “Imitation of Christ” in New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 7, William J. McDonald, ed., Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1967, p. 375.

<sup>127</sup> P. Mulhern, “Thomas À Kempis” in New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 14, William J. McDonald, ed., Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1967, p. 121.

<sup>128</sup> Dom François Vandenbroucke, op. cit., p. 437.

(historical) Jesus of the Gospels brought about a subtle development in prayer: prayer increasingly took the form of techniques of meditation on various events in the life of Christ, and regarded this as a stepping-stone to contemplation. This approach was strongly expressed in the sixteenth century by the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. All these set the stage for Teresa's spiritual development that would later place a good deal of stress on the humanity of Christ.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ST. TERESA OF AVILA AND THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

The sixteenth century Spanish terrain came under a strong air of spiritual fervor, producing in its wake several spiritual movements. In the region of Castile (where Avila is located), “spiritual movements espousing various forms of mental prayer began gaining large numbers of adherents.”<sup>129</sup> Teresa’s spiritual development took place within this setting. This chapter will attempt to shed some light on Teresa’s spiritual journey with emphasis on how the humanity of Christ gradually occupied an important place in her life. This will be followed by a treatment of her doctrine on prayer, with the aim of showing the centrality of the humanity of Christ in the interior life.

#### 3.1 TERESA’S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

There are three important periods in the life of Teresa, that represent different phases of growth in her spiritual development. Teresa’s personal experience of the humanity of Christ will be addressed under each of these phases namely, spiritual awakening, experiencing the divine presence, and a new sense of direction.

**3.1.1 SPIRITUAL AWAKENING:** Teresa writes in her autobiography that before she became acquainted with ‘The Third Spiritual Alphabet’ of Francisco de Osuna, she neither knew how to proceed in prayer nor how to be recollected.<sup>130</sup> Thus, the book gradually awakened her to the reality of God’s self-communication in her life, and then set her feet firmly on the spiritual pathway.

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<sup>129</sup> J. Mary Luti, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>130</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

Osuna taught that there are three kinds of prayer, “which corresponds to the three states of those who practice it: beginners, proficient, and those who are greatly experienced in prayer.”<sup>131</sup> The first kind is vocal prayer, such as the recitation of the ‘Our Father.’ The second kind of prayer is meditative and reflective. It is a prayer of the heart that dwells on “holy and devout thoughts, whether of the passion of the Lord, or of the Church.”<sup>132</sup> Hence it is necessary on the part of the one praying, “to commit to memory devout stories and mysteries of the Lord, all of which are to be like wood to fuel the fire on the Lord’s altar.”<sup>133</sup>

The third kind of prayer, according to Osuna, is the spiritual or mental prayer, in which “the soul is lifted more purely and affectionately to God on the wings of desire and pious affection strengthened by love.”<sup>134</sup> The soul thus becomes silent and recollected in God rather than engage itself in a complex argumentation because the more recollected and fervent the soul is, the more entirely it will be received by God.<sup>135</sup> Teresa made efforts to follow the teachings of Osuna on prayer. She often turned her attention to the mysteries of Christ. She describes her efforts this way,

“I tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord, present within me, and that was my way of prayer. If I reflected upon some phrase of His Passion, I represented Him to

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<sup>131</sup> Francisco de Osuna: The Third Spiritual Alphabet, The Classics of Western Spirituality, Trans., Mary E. Giles, Richard J. Payne, ed., Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1981, p. 337. Osuna taught that these three forms of prayer also correspond to the different temperaments found in people. “Sometimes a person is more ready for one kind of prayer than another, and at times he is helped more quickly than he expected, but then again he may fall so low as to have to start again from the beginning.” Cf. p. 352.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* Recollection, according to Osuna, describes the withdrawal of attention from that which is not of God in order to concentrate solely on the Lord God. Cf. p. 387.

myself interiorly."<sup>136</sup>

She often felt so much aglow with spiritual fervor that she remarks, "I was left with some effects so great that it seems I trampled the world underfoot."<sup>137</sup>

This initial phase in Teresa's spiritual life however, had its attendant problems. She found discursive meditation difficult. According to her, "my imagination is so dull that I never succeeded even to think about and represent in my mind - as hard as I tried - the humanity of the Lord."<sup>138</sup> The way out of this snag was reading, because one can get from books various ideas that can help launch the mind on to discursive reflection.<sup>139</sup> Hence she notes that reading is very "helpful for recollection and serves as a necessary substitute - even though little may be read - for anyone who is unable to practice mental prayer."<sup>140</sup> Thus, with the aid of a book, Teresa was able to proceed in the prayer of recollection.

**3.1.2 EXPERIENCING THE DIVINE PRESENCE:** The experience Teresa had before the statue of the wounded Christ in the community oratory during Lent in 1554, enkindled in her a deep awareness of the divine presence. According to Mary Luti, it was one of several episodes that "seemed to signal the fruition of a twenty-year period of uneven but steady conversion and spiritual maturation."<sup>141</sup>

The statue of the wounded Christ evoked in Teresa the feelings of distress, which she describes thus, "I felt so keenly aware of how poorly I

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> J. Mary Luti, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

thanked Him for those wounds that it seems to me, my heart broke. I threw myself down before Him with the greatest outpouring of tears."<sup>142</sup> Consequently in prayer, Teresa sought to be a participant in the historical scenes in the life of Jesus that she was able to represent in her mind. She was particularly fond of the scene of the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk. 14.32-42).<sup>143</sup> In this regard, Teresa remarks, "it seemed to me that being alone and afflicted as a person in need, He had to accept me."<sup>144</sup> Teresa underscored her conviction of the presence of Jesus in prayer when she attempts to describe her experience of the divine presence. Thus she writes,

"When I represented Christ within me in order to place myself in His presence, or even while reading, a feeling of the presence of God would come upon me unexpectedly so that I could in no way doubt He was within me or I totally immersed in Him. This did not occur after the manner of a vision."<sup>145</sup>

Teresa adds that this experience (of the divine presence) brought about in her a kindling of love in the will.<sup>146</sup>

**3.1.3 A NEW SENSE OF DIRECTION:** Teresa continued to trudge along on her spiritual journey. She faced two difficult challenges that made her seek the assistance of spiritual directors who helped her to resolve the problems. Their efforts gave her a new sense of direction in which the humanity of Christ will play a vital role in her spiritual life.

The first challenge came with a teaching on prayer that she read from

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<sup>142</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

some books.<sup>147</sup> Teresa writes, “they give strong advice to rid oneself of all corporeal images and to approach contemplation of the Divinity.”<sup>148</sup> These corporeal images, including the humanity of Christ are obstacles or impediments to the most perfect contemplation.<sup>149</sup> She was however encouraged by her spiritual director to continue with her manner of praying (in which she tries to represent Christ in her mind).<sup>150</sup> In the light of this clarification Teresa declares, “God desires that if we are going to please Him and receive His great favors, we must do so through the most sacred humanity of Christ.”<sup>151</sup>

The second incident arose because of Teresa’s fear of being deceived by the devil. She was already experiencing some mystical phenomena in prayer and was quite certain that these experiences are from God. The fact of the prevailing social situation in Spain with the Inquisition (during the sixteenth century) made her have second thoughts. According to Teresa, because some “women had fallen into serious illusions and deceptions caused by the devil, I began to be afraid.”<sup>152</sup> It took the counsels of Diego de Centina, to allay her fears.<sup>153</sup> He then turned her attention to the humanity of Christ. Teresa recalls, “he told me that I should devote prayer each day to a phase of the Passion, that I should benefit from this prayer and dwell only

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191. Teresa did not state in her autobiography the specific book being referred to here.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* Similar counsels can be found in The Third Spiritual Alphabet of Francisco de Osuna. According to Osuna, those wishing to proceed to pure contemplation would profit “by leaving creation and the Sacred Humanity so as to ascend even higher and commune even more deeply with purely spiritual things.” Cf. Francisco de Osuna: The Third Spiritual Alphabet, p. 42.

<sup>150</sup> Teresa did not state clearly how she was helped, neither was her spiritual director named.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Diego de Centina was the first Jesuit confessor/spiritual director of Teresa. He was Teresa’s director during the summer of 1555 after which he was transferred. Cf. *St. Teresa of Avila*, op. cit., p. 478, endnote 15.

on the humanity."<sup>154</sup> She found so much help and consolation in Centina's counsels that she remarks, "I started again to love the most sacred humanity. Prayer began to take shape as an edifice that now had a foundation."<sup>155</sup>

### **3.2 TERESA'S DOCTRINE ON PRAYER AND THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST**

Teresa's doctrine on prayer will be presented under the stages of the spiritual journey that she identifies in her work, 'The Interior Castle.' Considered by many scholars as her most matured work, Teresa pictures the soul as a "castle made out of diamond of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places."<sup>156</sup> God dwells in the center of this castle. She portrays the spiritual life as a traverse through the many dwelling places in the castle, to the center (where God is). The gate of entry to this journey is prayer. It is the door that leads to the mystery of God, and the means of communing with God.<sup>157</sup> Teresa thus, presents the spiritual journey in seven stages,<sup>158</sup> each of which can be seen in terms of types that allows for a great multiplicity of variations.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>156</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, "The Interior Castle" in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume Two, Trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980, p. 268.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>158</sup> Teresa does not refer in any of her writings, to the way she came about the use of the number, seven. An attempt by her former confessor, Diego de Yepes, to account for the origin of both the image of the castle and the choice of the number (seven) raises more questions than answers. According to Yepes, Teresa told him that she had a vision in 1577 of a castle-like crystal globe with seven dwelling places and the King of Glory dwelling in the center. However, in her autobiography, which she wrote in the 1560s, Teresa describes an imaginative vision she had of the presence of Christ in the soul. She notes that the soul appeared like a diamond or a brightly polished mirror with Christ occupying its center. It is quite difficult to reconcile both accounts, Yepes' and Teresa's. This thus leaves the origin very vague. Cf. St. Teresa of Avila, *ibid.*, p. 269; St. Teresa of Avila, "The Book of Her Life" in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume One, Trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987, p. 356, 358.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

There is a tendency sometimes, to conceive of the interior life in form of a systematically laid out straight path on which an individual makes a (spiritual) journey from one stage to another. Unfortunately, however, the reality is different. The entire journey is under the guidance of God: the soul is roused by God at the beginning, God sustains the soul during the journey, and then the journey terminates in God. Bearing in mind that God enters into a unique relationship with each individual, he thus leads souls by different paths.<sup>160</sup> In some individuals, the spiritual journey could take the form of linear progression. For some others, it could be circuitous. Hence, it is possible for some persons to skip some mansions and proceed to union with God. Thus Teresa counsels, “you mustn’t think of these dwelling places in such a way that each one would follow in file after the other; but turn your eyes toward the center, where the King stays.”<sup>161</sup>

**3.2.1 FIRST MANSION:**<sup>162</sup> In the journey through this mansion, Teresa stresses the importance of making the room of self-knowledge the first port of call.<sup>163</sup> This is quite necessary at the outset of the spiritual journey because of the need to be in touch with the true self: weak, imperfect, and

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<sup>160</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, “The Way of Perfection” in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume Two, Trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980, p. 60.

<sup>161</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, “The Interior Castle” in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume Two, Trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980, p. 291.

<sup>162</sup> Teresa’s treatment of the first mansion, gives an impression that she went ahead rather quickly to underscore self-knowledge to which she accords primary importance (in the first mansion). There is virtually no mention of God’s initiative at the start of the Christian journey (or perhaps she took it for granted). A clearer picture is only revealed when one takes cognizance of her other works, ‘The Book of Her Life’ and ‘The Way of Perfection’ where she also deals with the spiritual journey. In ‘The Book of Her Life,’ she employs the image of water: four ways of applying irrigation water to a garden, corresponding to four degrees (stages) of prayer. Teresa gives an indication of God’s initiative at the outset of the spiritual journey this way, “Beginners must realize that in order to give delight to the Lord they are starting to cultivate a garden on very barren soil, full of abominable weeds. His Majesty pulls up the weeds and plants good seed. All of this is already done by the time a soul is determined to practice prayer.” Cf. St. Teresa of Avila, “The Book of Her Life” in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume One, Trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987, p. 113.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

contingent. We can only know this if we turn to God. In this vein, Teresa counsels, "By gazing at His grandeur, we get in touch with our own lowliness, by looking at His purity, we shall see our own filth; by pondering His humility, we shall see how far we are from being humble."<sup>164</sup> A good approach therefore is not an "endless poking into ourselves, trying to turn over the stone to see what reptiles lurk beneath, but by looking constantly at Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>165</sup> This is even more imperative because Jesus is the perfect image of the unseen God and in him all perfection dwells (Col. 1.15, 18). In this regard, Teresa declares rather emphatically, "we should set our eyes on Christ."<sup>166</sup>

**3.2.2 SECOND MANSION:** This stage is characterized by an experience of conflicts within the human person. The mind is torn between turning toward God in love and continuing with a life of vanities, pleasures and pastimes. According to Teresa, individuals in this mansion desire to make progress in the interior life "but still don't have the determination to remain in this second stage without turning back for they don't avoid the occasion of sin."<sup>167</sup> Teresa prescribes, among other things, that these persons should strive with lots of determination not to fall prey to the attractions of the life of pleasures and vanities; they need to draw near to those who have advanced (in the spiritual journey) to the rooms nearer the center of the castle. It is also important that they bring their will in conformity with God's

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ruth Burrows, Interior Castle Explored: St. Teresa's Teaching on the Life of Deep Union with God, London: Sheed & Ward, 1989, p. 19.

<sup>166</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, op. cit., p. 293.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

will because this is the overall aim of any person beginning prayer.<sup>168</sup> A helpful antidote is to meditate upon, and draw strength from Christ in his Passion. Thus, there is need to “embrace the cross along with the suffering Lord. Resignation is not enough; there must be a generous, willed welcome to hardships and dryness in prayer.”<sup>169</sup>

**3.2.3 THIRD MANSION:** The third mansion when taken at face value, appears to be the dwelling place of perfection. Those in this stage long not to offend God, spend their time well in good works, are fond of doing penance, and set aside periods for recollection.<sup>170</sup> Thus they present a picture of a well-ordered life. The major problem here however is that this nicely ordered lifestyle is only a facade to mask a warped mind-set that breeds pride, self-seeking, and attachments among several other things. These shortcomings are so subtle that they are masqueraded as virtues. Hence the persons who have reached the third mansion are enjoined by Teresa to walk the way of humility. She remarks, “humility is the ointment for our wounds because if we indeed have humility, the surgeon, who is our Lord, will come to heal us.”<sup>171</sup> I believe that the greatest example of humility can be found in the earthly existence of Jesus. He (Jesus) is humility personified, and this is aptly conveyed by the Christological hymn in Paul’s epistle to the Philippians (Phil. 2.3-11).

**3.2.4 FOURTH MANSION:** This stage marks the beginning of supernatural

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 300. Teresa encourages persons in this second mansion not to lose courage or stop striving if they fall. She says, “let them trust in the mercy of God and not at all in themselves, and they will see how His Majesty brings them from the dwelling places of one state to those of another (Cf. P. 302).

<sup>169</sup> Thomas Dubay, SM, Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel - on Prayer. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989, p. 84.

<sup>170</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

experiences such as infused contemplation, spiritual delights, and consolations.<sup>172</sup> The individual is gradually led by God from discursive meditation characteristic of the first three stages, to a more passive and receptive form of praying: passive recollection and the prayer of quiet.

Passive recollection involves a gentle drawing inward that is not acquired through human efforts but experienced only “when God wants to grant us the favor.”<sup>173</sup> It prepares the individual to listen “so that the soul strives to remain attentive and aware of what the Lord is working in it.”<sup>174</sup> In the prayer of quiet, the will is so absorbed in God that it experiences a deep rest in God while the intellect and memory become distracted.<sup>175</sup> Teresa advises persons in situations such as this, not to panic. Rather “one should let the intellect go, and surrender oneself into the arms of love.”<sup>176</sup> These experiences often result in some internal turmoil because God is gently leading persons in this mansion on to new horizons on the spiritual journey, different from what they are used to. Teresa thus encourages them to love God without any self-interest, avoid seeking spiritual delights, and cultivate the virtue of humility.<sup>177</sup> All these can be achieved by imitating Christ. Ruth Burrows puts this in proper perspective thus, “the way of being of the becoming self is that of Jesus; his vision, his values, his fortitude and constancy.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316-317, 323.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 328.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>178</sup> Ruth Burrows, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

**3.2.5 FIFTH MANSION:** The fifth mansion is the first of the three states of union. Here there is a simple union, while in the sixth and seventh mansions there is spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage respectively. Teresa employs a nuptial symbolism specifically in the fifth, sixth, and seventh mansions, respectively, to underscore the intimacy (with all its attendant affections) inherent in union with God. She attempts to make clear the nature of the interior life in this mansion by adopting the image of the three stages of growth of a butterfly: silkworm (larva), pupa, and adult. As a worm, it feeds on the surrounding vegetation. At full-grown size, it begins to spin silk to make the cocoon within which the pupa stage will take place. The fat and ugly silkworm “then dies, and a little white butterfly, which is very pretty, comes forth from the cocoon.”<sup>179</sup>

The interior life in the fifth mansion is described as a hidden life in Christ: “You have died, and now the life you live is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3.3-4). According to Teresa, the silk cocoon spun by the fat ugly worm is Christ in which one dies to disordered desires, in order to emerge with a new life in Christ. This new life (in Christ) is a prelude to union with God.

**3.2.6 SIXTH MANSION:** This is the mansion where spiritual betrothal takes place. Mystical experiences such as raptures, ecstasy, locutions, visions, are all common features during this phase of the spiritual journey. The soul during spiritual betrothal, is wounded by God with love that leaves it with a deep yearning that can only be filled when it is united with its Spouse.<sup>180</sup> Teresa describes this wound of love as a spark that is felt in “the very deep and intimate part of the soul, where this sudden flash of lightning reduces

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>180</sup> Philip Boyce, OCD, “The Marvels of Divine Union in the Last Mansions” in *Within You He Dwells: Rediscovering St. Teresa’s Interior Castle*, Philip Boyce, OCD, ed., Oxford: Teresian Press, 1984, p. 55.

to dust everything it finds in this earthly nature of ours."<sup>181</sup> God thus leads the individuals through a (painful) period of purification in preparation for divine union.

Teresa's counsel to the persons in this stage of the spiritual journey is to turn to the humanity of Christ. Although these persons have advanced beyond discursive meditation, they can still represent the mysteries in the life of Christ to the intellect.<sup>182</sup> They should be able to dwell on these mysteries with their minds because these (actions) are living sparks that will enkindle the soul in its love for God.<sup>183</sup> Teresa further adds that as human beings journeying through life with its numerous trials, "we need to look at Christ our model, how He suffered, so as to bear these trials with perfection."<sup>184</sup>

**3.2.7 SEVENTH MANSION:** A person in this phase of the spiritual journey manifests a total transformation that can be described as a new creation. "The Lord joins the soul to Himself" in spiritual marriage; a "union that takes place in the very interior center of the soul, where God Himself is."<sup>185</sup> This new life is characterized by self-transcendence, interior peace, and the desires of the souls are no longer for consolations or spiritual delights, since the Lord Himself is with these souls. There is also a great detachment and disposition to serve.<sup>186</sup> Thus in the seventh mansion, there is an uncoiling from our self-centered embryonic state to what we are meant to be: the

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<sup>181</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *op. cit.*, p. 422.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 401.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 433.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 440.

children of God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1.5).<sup>187</sup> It is only when we are fully transformed in Christ that we become truly human and go about our daily lives as true images of God.

In this chapter, the centrality of the humanity of Christ in the interior life of Teresa as well as her spiritual doctrine was presented in two parts. The first part dealt with Teresa's personal experience with the various teachings on the interior life that she learned from the prevailing spirituality of her day. She had to grapple with some difficulties in prayer as she tried to apply these teachings in her prayer life. An attempt to resolve these problems (with the help of spiritual directors) led to a deeper understanding of the relationship between God and human beings. While she did not dismiss the existing approaches to contemplation, her experience served to underscore the centrality of the humanity of Christ in the interior life.

The second part addressed Teresa's doctrine on prayer, based on the image of a castle with many dwelling places depicting the interior life. A journey into the center of the castle represents the spiritual journey that ultimately terminates in God. The major emphasis that resonated throughout this (second) part is the importance of the humanity of Christ and its role in resolving challenges associated with the different phases of spiritual development.

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<sup>187</sup> Ruth Burrows, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENT-DAY APPLICATION

Teresa's counsels on the centrality of the humanity of Christ in the interior life, though written for the sixteenth century Spanish audience, are still valid for the present day. These (Teresa's teachings) are also very much applicable to the real life situation in the contemporary African society.<sup>188</sup> In this chapter, Teresa's teachings on the humanity of Christ will be brought to bear on the present day African society. This application will be made at two levels: the individual and society.

#### 4.1 THE AFRICAN SETTING

The human person does not exist in isolation. Rather, there is a relational aspect to human nature. In other words, "humanity by its very nature stands completely in need of life in society."<sup>189</sup> Thus, the human person goes through life constantly spinning a web of relations, in and through which one realizes oneself.<sup>190</sup> This is precisely why "human beings have to be understood in two dimensions: social, economic and political dimension, and psycho-cultural and religious dimension. Both of which are intrinsically linked."<sup>191</sup> This holistic approach to the human person yields a clearer picture of the dynamics involved in the relationship between the

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<sup>188</sup> In this work the terms, "African Society," "African Church," "The Church in Africa," and "The Church," are all employed in the generic sense. "African Society" is used to portray the various societies, whether rural or urban, in the different parts of Africa. "African Church," "The Church in Africa," and "The Church" respectively represent the various Catholic Churches all over Africa that are in communion with the Holy See.

<sup>189</sup> "Pastoral Constitution of The Church in the Modern World," *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 25, in Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations, Austin Flannery, OP, ed., Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996, p. 190.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> Muakasa Elie, CP, "Christian Presuppositions of African Spirituality," *Classnotes in Spiritual Theology*, Tangaza College, Nairobi, 1997, p. 64.

human person and his or her social environment. For the African, this holistic approach helps to situate the person within the concrete situation in which Africans live.<sup>192</sup> Thus, the application of the humanity of Christ in the spirituality of St. Teresa of Avila will be made within the context of the prevailing African socio-cultural environment.<sup>193</sup>

Africa is plagued by a myriad of intractable socio-economic problems that has continuously had a debilitating effect on its peoples. While the situation may vary across the continent, there are however some similarities that permit a generalization of some sort. It is in this sense that one can speak of an 'African situation.' The Synod Fathers, at the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops in 1994, attempted a description of the situation in Africa that still typifies today's African society. According to the Synod Fathers,

"In almost all our nations, there is abject poverty, tragic mismanagement of available resources, political instability and social disorientation. The results stare us in the face: misery, wars, despair. In a world controlled by rich and powerful nations, Africa has practically become an irrelevant appendix, often forgotten and neglected."<sup>194</sup>

In the light of this deplorable situation, Bakole wa Ilunga remarks that "the vast majority of the people find it increasingly difficult to satisfy even their basic needs."<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> The importance of this approach will become more obvious when one takes cognizance of the fact that "we authentically confess and live our faith in Jesus only as members of a particular community. Every community has its own identity, its difficulties, its hope and expectations." Cf. Muakasa Elic, CP, *ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>194</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995, p. 32.

<sup>195</sup> Bakole wa Ilunga, Paths of Liberation: A Third World Spirituality, Trans., Matthew J. O'Connell, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984, p. 18.

## 4.2 APPLICATION AT THE LEVEL OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The aim at this level is to apply Teresa's teachings on the humanity of Christ in such a way that it can help individual persons to cope with the trying times. Two areas will be addressed - Christ as a beacon of hope and the call to self-transcendence.

**4.2.1 CHRIST THE BEACON OF HOPE:** In Teresa's presentation of the spiritual journey, one can surmise that there are several challenges with which the wayfarer has to contend as he or she seeks union with God. These include: the temptation to slip back to the old ways, evading the painful experiences of the purgation associated with the journey, a false sense of self-sufficiency, etc. Hence, Teresa counsels on the need to always have recourse to the humanity of Christ as one makes the spiritual journey. According to her, "it is an important thing that while we are living and are human we have human support."<sup>196</sup> This can best be found when one strives to keep the humanity of Christ always present.<sup>197</sup>

In the African Christian, the challenges of the interior life has an added dimension: the temptation to evade the pains of the economic crunch by earning one's livelihood through foul means, and the tendency to gradually sink into the waters of despair.<sup>198</sup> Thus, the effect of the socio-economic factor is such that cannot be discountenanced in the life of the African Christian. I believe that one way out for the African on the spiritual journey, is to look up to the life of Jesus as a beacon of hope. On this note, Teresa observes,

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<sup>196</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, "The Book of Her Life" in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Volume One, Kieran kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987, p. 195.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Scholars generally opine that the poor are not only economically, socially, and politically deprived, but also helpless. Hence they are discouraged from striving to better their lot. Therefore, pessimism about the future is rife. Consequently, "the alienating effects of the culture of poverty breed social problems such as crime and delinquency, and contribute to widely-shared feelings of unrest, turbulence and aggression against the established social system and its values." Cf. Leonard Bloom & Joseph G. Ottong, *Changing Africa: An Introduction to Sociology*, London: The Macmillan Press, 1992, pp. 257-258.

“When one is in the midst of business matters, and in times of persecutions and trials, when one can’t maintain so much quietude, and in times of dryness, Christ is a very good friend because we behold Him as man and see Him with weakness and trials - He is company for us.”<sup>199</sup>

From the earthly life of Jesus, one can draw strength that will help to build a positive disposition of mind. This (new disposition of mind) will serve to give a new meaning to human suffering and help the individual to strive on in faith, hope, and love.<sup>200</sup> Coupled with this, the African Christian should make efforts not to shy away from the cross because it is part and parcel of the Christian life. Teresa counsels that in treading the path of prayer, one must be willing to embrace the cross of Christ.<sup>201</sup> This is also true of daily life experiences. The African Christian should endeavor to live by this counsel (of Teresa) in all its ramifications because the cross lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It is the greatest act of self-giving that any human being can manifest (Jn. 15.12-13); above all, it is the revelation of the love of the Father (Jn. 3.16). The situation of the African who looks up to Christ in hope can be put in proper perspective in the words of Alister McGrath. He writes,

“Faith takes a step which experience forbids: it looks at the crucifixion from the standpoint of the resurrection. It sees evil as defeated, whereas it remains a reality in experience. It sees human sufferings as the point at which God draws closest to

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>200</sup> In Teresa’s teachings, there is a similar counsel to look up to Christ in hope. According to Teresa, “life is long, and there are in it many trials, and we need to look at Christ our model, how He suffered them, and also at His apostles and saints, so as to bear these trials with perfection.” Cf. St. Teresa of Avila, “The Interior Castle” in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume Two, Trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980, p. 403.

<sup>201</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, “The Interior Castle” in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume Two, Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980, p. 301.

man, whereas we experience him as absent. It sees death swallowed up in victory, whereas death is experienced as victor. In all these things, faith views reality from the standpoint of the resurrection - and recognises the same pattern of divine activity and presence."<sup>202</sup>

It is worthy note that two extremes must be avoided as the African Christian copes with the difficult times: seeking suffering for its own sake and passive acceptance of suffering (resigning to fate). Rather, a habit of constantly looking up to Christ engenders a Christian optimism that is at its best "when daily labor, hardwork, the difficulties of life, weakness, partial failure and contradiction assume new meaning in Christ, our hope, who died for us."<sup>203</sup>

**4.2.2 A CALL TO SELF-TRANSCENDENCE:** Much ink has been spilled in an attempt to account for the present (deplorable) state of affairs in Africa. Many a time, we are wont to point accusing fingers at the West, citing such factors as neocolonialism, Imperialism, exploitation, etc., as means by which the Africa is being marginalized. The blame is laid on the leaders for mismanaging their national economies. They are often labeled as stooges of Western powers. Thus, there is a tendency for people to speak of the situation as something 'out there,' for which they bear no responsibility; looking elsewhere for causes.<sup>204</sup> While we can expend a lot of time and effort to gather evidence in order to hold the West responsible for our situation in Africa today, I believe that we are not totally free of blame. Bakole wa Ilunga declares that in the last analysis, it "is the heart of the human person which

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<sup>202</sup> Alister McGrath, The Enigma of the Cross, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987, p. 152.

<sup>203</sup> Bernard Häring, C.Ss.R., Hope is the Remedy, New York: Doubleday, 1972, p. 24.

<sup>204</sup> Bakole wa Ilunga, op. cit., p. 7, 8.

is always ready to do what is wrong<sup>205</sup> that lies at the root of the African situation. Thus, it is the disordered appetites of the human person that yearns to possess, enjoy and dominate.<sup>206</sup> This rather warped mindset “is what makes us vulnerable to domination by foreigners and prevents us from controlling our destiny.”<sup>207</sup>

In Teresa's presentation of her doctrine on prayer, the traverse through the mansions can also be seen as a journey toward wholeness. At the outset, one is able to come to knowledge of the true self, only when one looks at Christ.<sup>208</sup> What is revealed at this stage of the spiritual journey, is the extent to which the image of God in the human being has been disfigured by inordinate desires and vaulting ambitions. The seventh mansion represents a stage of complete transformation of the individual; the motivations are no longer selfish but rooted in humility, love and desire for the common good, amongst other virtues.<sup>209</sup> This is a transformation in Christ.<sup>210</sup> The African Christian, who turns to the humanity of Christ, will find in it an invitation to transcend self-centered tendencies. It entails a complete change of attitude and commitment to growth. A mindset that is refashioned after the model of Christ is one that will seek the common good and restore hope to the hearts of all those on the brink of despair. This transformation of consciousness will in turn set the stage for the building of an African society where responsibility and public accountability will reign in the hearts of all.

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446-449.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434. Cf. Jn. 17.23; 1 Cor. 6.17.

### 4.3 APPLICATION AT THE LEVEL OF THE SOCIETY

At the level of society, an application of the humanity of Christ is set to challenge the (unjust) structures of society. It is aimed at helping to alleviate the lot of the poor and marginalized group in the society. This application will try to use an image from the African cultural milieu that can make the message of Teresa more relevant to the African society.

**4.3.1 UNJUST SOCIAL STRUCTURES:** The sixteenth century Spain where Teresa lived operated an institutionalized caste system. Lineage, wealth, ethnicity, rank, and religion all became indexes by which the society was stratified into different social classes. Out of these yardsticks (of social stratification), ancestry or lineage stood out as the single most important determinant of one's place in the society. Ancestry took on a paramount importance in the wake of the society's obsession with 'purity of blood,' (*Limpieza de sangre*).<sup>211</sup> There was yet another obsession with purity (though closely related to the purity of blood): 'purity of faith.'<sup>212</sup> 'Purity of blood' during the time of Teresa, meant an absence of converts from Judaism (*conversos*) or Islam (*moriscos*) in one's family history. The slightest trace of a Jewish or Moorish blood in one's ancestry renders such a person worthless in the social hierarchy.<sup>213</sup> Whoever is associated with converts from Judaism or Islam is also deemed to have contacted their worthlessness.<sup>214</sup>

Teresa responded to this situation in her reform. She denounced all forms of discrimination in the convents of the reformed Carmel, and enjoined the nuns to embrace the poverty and lowliness of Christ. She writes, "let us in some manner resemble our King, who had no house but

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<sup>211</sup> Rowan Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>212</sup> J.H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716*, London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 220.

<sup>213</sup> Rowan Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

the stable in Bethlehem where He was born and the cross where He died."<sup>215</sup> She cautioned against cliques and factions in the monastery, and tried to foster an egalitarian lifestyle. According to Teresa, in the monasteries of the reform (Discalced Carmelite monasteries), "all must be friends, all must be held dear, all must be helped, all must be equal."<sup>216</sup> Teresa's efforts can be interpreted as an attempt to assert the dignity of the human person by applying the yardstick of poverty across the board. This indeed has relevance for the African situation. Human dignity has been completely trampled underfoot by the elites who in full awareness have betrayed the people; most economies in Africa are hardly in service of the essential needs of the populace. Rather, they are set aside for the satisfaction of the needs of the ruling minority.<sup>217</sup>

It should be borne in mind that the life and ministry of the historical Jesus, "were dedicated to the promotion of awareness of the dignity of the human person as a child of God."<sup>218</sup> Hence, Teresa's teaching on the humanity of Christ will serve to challenge these unjust structures of exploitation and marginalization in the African society. Laurenti Magesa declares that the theological justification for this struggle (for justice, human rights, human dignity, and the just distribution of Africa's and the world's resources) is "the humanity of God in Jesus or, in other words, the incarnation of God in the midst of all humanity, and very concretely in every person."<sup>219</sup> In Africa today, the situation is so pathetic that the Church needs

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<sup>215</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, "The Way of Perfection" in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume Two, Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980, p. 46.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55, 139.

<sup>217</sup> Jean-Marc Ela, African Cry, Trans., Robert R. Barr, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986, p. 63.

<sup>218</sup> Laurenti Magesa, "Christ The Liberator and Africa Today" in Faces of Jesus in Africa, Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S., ed., Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991, p. 158.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

to go beyond the issuance of Pastoral letters condemning injustice, and take concrete steps to advance the cause of justice. There is need therefore, to overhaul the various organs of the Church saddled with the responsibility of promoting justice and peace. Hence, efforts should be made to support the Small Christian Communities (the Church at the grassroots). In the Small Christian Communities, the Christians meditate regularly on the words of scripture, and bring it to bear on real-life situations in their various neighborhoods.<sup>220</sup> According to Fritz Lobinger, the members of the Small Christian Communities try to link prayer life and action together. He writes, "they are concerned about the needs of people, because God is concerned. They feel strongly about injustices, because God does. Their action is a participation in God's life."<sup>221</sup>

**4.3.2 JESUS IN THE AFRICAN MILIEU:** Culture, according to scholars, embraces everything that contributes to human survival. This includes physical and sociological factors such as religious institutions, ritual observances, way of behaving, way of doing things, etc.<sup>222</sup> While some aspects of culture have gradually undergone change over time under the impact of Western values, spread of Christianity, Islam, and other religions, there is a part that has largely remain untouched.<sup>223</sup> In this vein, John Mbiti observes that an "acceptance of Christianity or Islam in Africa means that Africans come out of African religion but they don't take off their traditional religiosity."<sup>224</sup> He adds,

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<sup>220</sup> Fritz Lobinger, Small Christian Communities, Training for Community Ministries Series, Lumko Institute, no. 19P, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992, p. 7.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>222</sup> Eric O. Ayisi, An Introduction to the Study of African Culture, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992, p. 2.

<sup>223</sup> Perhaps this can be referred to as the "Africaness" or the "African Identity" that is found in African peoples.

<sup>224</sup> Laurenti Magesa, African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997, p. 6.

“If there are any changes during this process, they are generally on the surface, affecting the material side of life, and only beginning to reach deeper levels of thinking pattern, language content, mental images, emotions, beliefs and response in situations of need. Traditional concepts still form the essential background of many African peoples.”<sup>225</sup>

It is in this regard that various elements (images, symbols, etc.) from the African cultural setup compatible with Christian values, should be considered in disseminating the message of the gospel in Africa. Hence, an attempt will now be made to use the image of the Ancestor, quite common in the cultures of many African peoples, to convey the centrality of the humanity of Christ in the spirituality of Teresa.

In the African worldview, the deceased members of the community who have lived exemplary lives, are believed to have joined the ranks of ancestors. The ancestors are seen as being in continuity with their descendants on earth; they “are perceived in the same way as the living elders of the society as far as the experience of kinship and communion is concerned.”<sup>226</sup> Although not physically present, the ancestors play a very significant role in the life of the community. They are intermediaries between the living and the Supreme Being, and promote peace and harmony. In this sense they enhance the life of the community.<sup>227</sup> The ancestors visit calamities on the community when there is a breach of the moral codes. This reminds the living of the consequences of their actions.

Teresa repeatedly enjoined the wayfarer to draw support from Jesus

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p. 78. Cf. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology” in *African Theology en route*, Kofi Appiah-Kubi & Sergio Torres, ed., Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 111.

<sup>227</sup> François Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother” in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S., ed., Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991, p. 120.

because he also journeyed through his earthly life in the midst of difficulties and bore these without bitterness or despair. To the African Christian, Jesus can thus be seen as the Ancestor in faith *par excellence*. Jesus walked the path of pains, suffering, rejection, he was often misunderstood, and eventually laid down his life for his friends (Jn. 15.13). In all the unpleasant experiences he encountered, he was unwavering in his commitment to sowing the seeds of universal love, teaching virtues, and alleviating the lot of the poor and marginalized. Bénézet Bujo in this vein calls Jesus the Proto-Ancestor, "the unique ancestor, the source of life and model of ancestorship."<sup>228</sup> Jesus is thus the Ancestor *par excellence*, "because he fulfils all the criteria required by African tradition to be counted among the Ancestors and he goes even beyond the criteria of selection."<sup>229</sup> As the Proto-Ancestor, he (Jesus) is not just content to give life to all, but continues to journey with each one in order to lead everyone through all life's hazards.<sup>230</sup> The application of the ancestral relationship to Christ should therefore be able to elicit from the African Christians commitment and perseverance in following the footsteps of Jesus.

It is worthy of note that by virtue of the Incarnation, Christ unites himself with every human person in all the ramifications of the human condition. Christ became a member of the human family in order to be united with each individual as we all journey toward union with God.<sup>231</sup> Hence, Christ not only comes to liberate the African from fear and anguish, but also brings salvation to all peoples. The Proto-Ancestor for the African

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<sup>228</sup> Charles Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today" in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S., ed., Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991, p. 11.

<sup>229</sup> Masumbuko Mununguri, *The Closeness of the God of Our Ancestors*, Trans., Fergus Garrett, FMS, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998, p. 72.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Christian also proclaims universal salvation to all.<sup>232</sup> In this vein, Masumbuko Mununguri remarks, "Christ is indeed the Proto-Ancestor, the ancestor of humanity, the lamb of God who carries the sins of the world. He saves mankind and with it the whole of creation."<sup>233</sup>

This chapter has tried to explore some ways in which the humanity of Christ in the spirituality of Teresa can be made more relevant to the African Christian. Hence, the humanity of Christ was applied to the African situation from two perspectives: the individual and the society.

At the level of the individual, the application of the teachings of Teresa on the humanity of Christ, summons the African Christian to constantly draw strength from the earthly life of Jesus in order to be able to make meaning out of the challenges of the present times. In this way, Christ becomes a source of hope. There is also a need for the African Christian to be committed to personal growth. This will help to overcome the selfish tendencies of the human person that lie at the root of the ethnic conflicts and economic mismanagement that characterize the African situation today.

The application of the humanity of Christ to the society aims at underscoring human dignity, fostering justice, peace and the common good. This is rooted in the earthly life of Jesus, which poses a great challenge to the structures of injustice perpetuated by many African governments. An attempt was also made to take into cognizance the rather strong cultural factor in the life of the African. Thus the image of the Ancestor, quite common to most African cultures, was employed in order to appeal more to the African mindset. In this regard, Jesus was presented as The Ancestor.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

Over the centuries, Christian spirituality gradually laid more emphasis on the humanity of Christ. This reached a high point in the Middle Ages with the writings of St. Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. Francis of Assisi. The humanity of Christ is a note that reverberates throughout the spiritual writings of St. Teresa of Avila. Drawing on her experience, Teresa teaches that the humanity of Christ remains indispensable at all stages in the spiritual journey. She writes, no one "will make me think, however spiritual he may be, that he will advance by trying to turn away from these mysteries;"<sup>234</sup> the mysteries in the life of Christ.

Teresa's personal experience of Christ in her spiritual journey gradually matured as she advanced on the way to union with God. Initially, dwelling on various scenes in the life of Christ helped Teresa to make up for her inability to engage her intellect in discursive meditation. As she journeyed along (in her spiritual life), she became "attracted powerfully to the mystery of divine condescension particularly as it was manifested in the person of Jesus."<sup>235</sup> The fact that Christ assumed human reality and shared with us the human condition makes him (Christ) a good company for us in the various challenges of life.<sup>236</sup> In this regard, Christ also becomes a model for all wayfarers.<sup>237</sup> It is however important to note that the primacy that

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<sup>234</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

<sup>235</sup> J. Mary Luti, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. St. Teresa of Avila, "The Book of Her Life" in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Volume One, Trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD & Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987, p.196, 325.

<sup>237</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

Teresa gives to the humanity of Christ does not in any way downplay the Risen Christ. While she contemplated Christ in all the scenes and mysteries of his earthly life, "Christ was also her risen and eternally glorified Lord and King" who dwells in the center of the soul.<sup>238</sup> In this regard, Teresa remarks that the Christ who accompanies us in the spiritual life is "our Lord, in whom the divine and human are joined."<sup>239</sup>

The humanity of Christ in the spirituality of St. Teresa of Avila does hold a lot of hope for the African Christian when it is applied to the African situation. Christ becomes for the African Christian a model that will inspire a constant striving in the direction of growth: transcending self-centered tendencies in order to seek the common good. In his humanity, Christ helps the African to develop a new outlook on life.<sup>240</sup> As an Ancestor *par excellence* (Proto-Ancestor), "all the African thirsts find their ultimate expression in Christ."<sup>241</sup> It should be noted that although the ancestral relationship applied to Christ underscores his proximity to the African situation, "Christ transcends all cultures, all nations, all languages."<sup>242</sup> In this vein, Christ who is beyond every pattern or model, is henceforth the pattern of a new humanity. In him, all peoples are in solidarity with one another.

The fact that there is room for application of the teachings of St. Teresa of Avila on the humanity of Christ to the African setting, is an

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<sup>238</sup> J. Mary Luti, *op. cit.*, p. 96-97.

<sup>239</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

<sup>240</sup> Masumbuko Mununguri, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

indication of hope for Carmelite spirituality in Africa. Hence, there is need for more research work, such that an application of the spirituality of St. Teresa of Avila can be made at the level of the various cultures in Nigeria. This will obviously entail a detailed study and reflection on the various cultural values vis-à-vis Carmelite spirituality in order to establish a common ground for application.

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