

Her View and Collaboration With Lay People

Fr. Manny Schembri, ocd, Provincial



Teresa, without a shadow of a doubt, is a talented woman skilled in letter writing. We may come to this conclusion when we keep in mind that maybe none more than the letters capture and express who she truly was. A woman with many gifts as St Teresa leads us to appreciate and acknowledge the unique contribution of the letters for the better understanding of this giant of a woman and saint. Her letters, as a rule, were never intended to produce that kind of teaching we have grown accustomed to in her other works. Rather they show us a Teresa immersed in the relationships and grim business matters engulfed in her values which as reformer and foundress she transmits through her letter writing. We are speaking of the last couple decades of her life, - these are the letters that have reached us – and they make up nearly one half of all her writings.¹ This is, by the way, the same period in which she wrote her major works (Life, and so on).

During the early years of Teresa’s Reform of the Carmelite Order, the letters she wrote were mostly short and of no great substance, but before long they became truly formidable, as regards both their number and the complicated nature of the subjects with which they dealt.

With a compelling spontaneity, the letters disclose a St Teresa who is not bashful in expressing and sharing her worries, troubles and triumphs, sadness and joy. In a few words they express and pour out the magnanimous open heart to others.

Often, even and especially on her travels (...), she would find her letter writing more of a trial rather than the bad roads and the bad weather she had to encounter. She would much rather write a book, she told Fr. Gracian, when at work on the Book of Foundations, than have “this continual letter-writing”. *Me matatantabarahunda*, she adds: “the worry of it is killing me” (letter Oct 31 1576). With her tight schedule (observance of everyday life in community, travels... it is amazing how she was able to sit day after day writing far into the night. “I was writing (letters) till two in the morning,” she tells her brother Lorenzo, “which gave me a dreadful headache...; the doctor has told me I must never write after midnight and I am not to do all my writing in my own hand” (Feb 10, 1577). Then she would be up with the rest of the community at five in summer, and six in winter.²

¹Cfr. Diccionario de S. Teresa, pg. 127. And this keeping in mind that Tomas Alvarez has located 468 existent letters. From Teresa’s own words about her correspondence, this number must be only a mere fraction of those she wrote. The following editors state: Vicente de la Fuente (18th cent.) = about 1200; Silverio de S. Teresa (19th cent.) = 5,000; Efren Stegink = 15,000; and Rodriguez-Egido assert that it could have easily gone higher, as high as 25,000.

² The burden and lack of sleep eventually took its toll, and she fell into an alarming exhaustion in 1577, precisely in the most intense period of her correspondence. “My head can’t do anything more” (Let 28). The use of a secretary became more common after the exhaustion in 1577. Sometimes Teresa begins the letter herself, gives it to the secretary to continue, and then adds some final words in her own hand. The uncertainty of the mail couriers of the

Dealing with so many matters, at times on the same day, she would skilfully rise up to the occasion. Now she would advise her addressee's and now in turn she would ask them for counsel; now she would engage in lively controversy with them, showing herself a born organiser and woman of business, skilled in diplomacy yet sincere and open in her affairs with others. She could easily follow the logic of reasoning and be seductive in bringing others to understand and share her ideals. She had a way how to rebuke her sons and daughters in Carmel, especially superiors, and at the same time gain their confidence.

On one and the same day she will write to the King, respectfully but decisively, imploring his protection for her Reform; to the General of the Order, finding excuses and begging his indulgence, for some Discalced friars; to an aristocratic lady congratulating her on her marriage or on the birth of her firstborn; to a prioress, rebuking her severely for some ill-judged decision; and to one of her nuns, thanking her for the gift of some verses. She could adapt herself in a moment to each new circumstance or environment and express the subject in hand with the happiest expressions.

Numerous as were the trials which pressed upon the Holy Mother, her letters are full of gaiety as well as confidence. Never once, even in the most critical moments of aggression and persecution, does she falter. Here we find discreet judgement, there a merry jest: her letters are not even free of an innocent maliciousness, typical of her native Spanish region, which must have delighted the correspondents. A prioress writes complaining that one of her nuns is given too much reading, and the Saint replies that she would rather her nuns were bookworms than fools.

Again and again, passages in light vein will show how freely the Saint could indulge in laughter and endearment. She called St John of the Cross "my little Seneca" (*mi Senecita*) and "the little saint" (*santico*) although she acknowledges to the full extent her confidence in him and his great holiness, calling him "her father". St Teresa is amused at Gracian, who was no great horseman, and is positive that one day he will fall off his little mule (Letter 81 – Peers). But she can laugh about herself too: there was that day, she tells Gracian, when the "terrible thing" happened to her – when a large-sized lizard crawled up her sleeve between her tunic and her arm (Letter 95 – Peers). And how thrilled she was when Maria de San Jose sent her some coconuts – a fruit she had never seen before: she was like a child with a new toy (Letter 185 – Peers).

And yet she could be severe and stern as well as merry and joyful: she was able to rebuke the faults even of her dearest and most cherished children. When Maria de San Jose, prioress of Seville, one of those closest to her, had not been too particular over money matters, she does not scruple to use the word "raposa" ("foxy") of her conduct and to reprove her of the "childish antics" ("*rapocerias*") which she observed in her (Letter 162 - Peers). One of the most notably energetic of her letters of this kind is one of the last – written from Burgos to the Venerable Anne of Jesus, rebuking her for certain faults of obedience and government which she committed at the founding of the house at Granada – and Anne of Jesus was another of her dearest and cherished children.

time, lead her to ask a secretary to make another copy (two or three) so that at least one copy would arrive at its intended destination.

And what about the literary merits of these letters? Her style surely reflects her vital personality even more vividly than in her other works. If in a book treating of such high matters as the Interior Castle she could preserve her simplicity and spontaneity, much more should we expect these qualities to be outstanding in a collection of documents never intended for the general public. Clear, vivid and energetic in expression, true in her choice of words to the best traditions of Castilian, she combines dignity with naturalness and simplicity. At times she writes in brief, concise, staccato sentences yet quite persuasive. At other times she pours herself out in long paragraphs, maybe writing at feverish speed as some testimonies attest to. But there are also other times when we can feel her heavy heart at some misfortune, bereavement or disaster. The fact is, that when we read her, we are admitted to her intimacy and nothing else is of the least importance.

In the thirty-seventh chapter of her *Life*, St Teresa has a striking passage on the conventions which were beginning to attach themselves to the art of letter-writing: “They say,” she remarks, “... Even for a matter like the addressing of letters we need a University professorship, and lectures would have to be given in that art, or whatever it is to be called. For in one case one part of the paper has to be left blank, and in another case, another part, and the title ‘Illustrious’ has to be given to a man who formerly was not even described as ‘Magnificent’. I cannot think what we are coming to.”

Notwithstanding her ironic comments, however, St Teresa was herself very particular as to the method of addressing persons of rank. She generally wrote, as was the custom of the time, on large sheets which, when folded, made four pages of about twelve inches by eight. At the top of each page she would leave a margin about one inch, and in the middle of it she had the custom to write a large I H S, with a stroke running through the H, to form a cross, and she usually began the text of the letter with a Christian greeting, such as: “Jesus be with you”. At the end of each letter she was accustomed to ask for the recipient’s prayer or to assure the person of her own prayers. Finally, after the date, came the signature. Before founding her Reform she signed herself “Doña Teresa de Ahumada”; afterwards, “Teresa de Jesus”, sometimes with the addition of the word “Carmelite”. Envelopes, of course, had not been invented in St Teresa’s day: a letter was folded in such a way that one section was left blank and served as a cover on which to write the address. The letter was then sealed with wax and stamped with one of the Saint’s two seals – the one she preferred bore the letters I H S, though she had two others, each with the figure of a skull and cross-bones, slightly different in design.

Apart from some short notes dated 1541 and 1546, the first of the extant letters were written to her sister Juana and her favourite brother Lorenzo in 1561. St Teresa wished to keep herself informed and involved in the life of her siblings. FAMILY, for Teresa, was of great importance. She would have written mainly to those who had gone to the New World, to tell them of such events as the death of her father in 1543 or the marriage of her sister Juana to Don Juan de Ovalle ten years later. As Juana had lived with her for those ten years at the Incarnation, and as we know she was in close contact with the Ovalles, when they eventually settled in Alba de Tormes, she must have written frequently to them, yet none of these early letters have survived (the first extant letter to Dona Juana is dated November 29, 1560). Furthermore, other early

correspondents of hers will have been her early counsellors – St Peter of Alcantara, P. Pedro Ibañez and P. Baltasar Alvarez.

Even when the Reform began it may well have been some time before the Mother Foundress was frequent in her letter-writing. For five years after the foundation of St. Joseph's Avila, she remained in her native city of Avila, and for this period, 1562-67, we have hardly a single letter. Nor is there much more for the eight years following, most of those which survive refer to her foundations (Malaga, Toledo, Salamanca, Alba de Tormes, Segovia, Beas and Seville). Then the number suddenly increases, from 22 in 1575, it rises to 69 in the important year 1576, falls only to 53 for each year of 1577 and 1578, again to 39 in 1579, mounts to 43 in 1580 and 59 in 1581, and for the last nine months of her life (1582) the total is 37. The increase in number could be due to her larger circle of acquaintances as her Reform made progress or else the critical situation she found herself in during the years 1576-80. The decrease in number can be attributed to the unfortunate fact that her letters were destroyed by the recipients, mainly when not recognizing their value as happened to the contrary later on.

The most fruitful period, so far as the extant letters are concerned, is the 13 months which she spent in Toledo (arriving there from Seville at the end of June 1576 and leaving for Avila at the end of July 1577). During this period she also wrote a large part of the Interior Castle, several chapters of the Foundations, and the Method for the Visitation of Monasteries. But it is also among the letters of this period that we suspect the most serious issues, for, if early letters may have been destroyed by those who failed to appreciate their value, many of the later ones must have been destroyed because their recipients were afraid to keep them. Often, during the years of persecution, St Teresa herself gave instructions that her letters were to be burned after being read. Such was the fate of many letters written to Maria de San Jose, and far more of those written to Gracián. From the twenty years correspondence with Isabel de Santo Domingo, none survived. The same may be said for the many letters the Saint sent to Venerable Anne of Jesus: all were burnt by the writer's command, and only one survived (to this day) by mistake.

Surprising as it is that there are so few letters written by St Teresa to persons who she knew so well as Doña Luisa de la Cerda and Francisco de Salcedo, not to mention her principal man in her Reform St John of the Cross. It is true that his role in the Reform was more in formation and contemplative, and also we must remember that between the Summer of 1572 and the autumn of 1574, she had him continually by her side as confessor at the Incarnation. From Teresa's letter to King Philip II (Dec 4 1577) we do know that the Calced did impound St John's papers when he was kidnapped by the Calced in December 1577. But it seems – according to the testimony of P. Jeronimo de la Cruz (biographer of St John of the Cross) in whom St John of the Cross confided one day at El Calvario – it was due to the saintly friar's sense of detachment that one day he took out the "little bag" of St Teresa's letters that he carried with him, and tore up every one.

ST TERESA AND LAY PEOPLE

The letters can be of help to us to indulge in what kind of relationship did Teresa have with lay people. Undoubtedly, in chronological order, the first letters may point out the importance she

gave to her family and siblings, at times being able to provide some solid spiritual direction to her brother Lorenzo, for instance. But what matters is the over-all picture.

St Teresa deeply appreciated the laity she encountered and kept a good relationship with them as Foundress of the Reformed Carmel, coming as they were from different strata of social life. Already in the Book of Life, chapter 16, she mentions persons with whom she had to do; and others who were privy to her projects, like Doña Guiomar de Ulloa³ and Don Francisco de Salcedo,⁴ who formed part of the group of five whose love for Christ brought them together for each other's encouragement, growth in knowing and improving themselves to better please God (L 16,7).⁵

A special place was occupied with people who had a great desire for the spiritual life like herself. They would be preferred, so to speak, because they could share her own desires and projects for God. Birds of the same feather flock together (?).

A place for an unending list of lay people is the Book of Foundations. These are people taken from the ordinary strata of life: nobles, merchants, notaries, artisans, students, maids, and other workers, all in some measure at the service of her foundational projects. Among them, there were those who had great spiritual bearing. We shall limit ourselves to mention only three: the first of which is Antonio Gaytán, about whom she wrote:

“was a gentleman from Alba. He was called by the Lord some years before... he helped me much and did a great deal of work for me (in Segovia) ...If I have to tell of his virtues, I would not

³(b. 1529). One of Teresa's best friends, she was noted for her beauty and ostentatious manner. She married at the age of 18 Francisco Davila, a large property owner at Salabralajo. Widowed in 1554, she was left at 25 yrs of age with a small fortune and 3 children. She began to devote herself to works of charity. Her daughter entered the Incarnation, and that was where Dona Guiomar met St Teresa. Teresa stayed in her home 1555-58 as companion to her daughter. Doan Guiomar provided a great part of the income for Teresa's foundation of St Joseph's in Avila and solicited the brief from Rome for its establishment. She was the one that arranged for St Teresa to meet St Peter of Alcantara. Teresa asserted that GOD GAVE HER MANY FAVOURS IN PRAYER and that she herself was enlightened in matters that learned men were ignorant of. In 1578 Dona Guiomar entered St Joseph's in Avila, but had to leave because of poor health. She took St John of the Cross as her confessor while he was in Avila. In 1585 she wrote her memories of St Teresa for Teresa's biographer Padre Ribera, but after that nothing is known of her.

⁴(d. 1580). Born in Avila, he married a cousin of Teresa's aunt. He studied theology for 20 yrs at the Dominican school in Avila. The first one in whom Teresa confided when her mystical life began in full, he was the one who was also most sceptical about her experiences and caused her the greatest suffering. He was convinced of the devil's involvement. Peter of Alcantara had to go to great lengths to assure him that Teresa's experiences were indeed from God. In the end, since he was always well intentioned, he did change his opinion and was ever faithful in trying to help Teresa with her undertakings. She wrote of him in her Life: “THIS GENTLEMAN IS SO PRAYERFUL AND CHARITABLE THAT HIS GOODNESS AND PERFECTION SHINE THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE TOWN” (23,6). When he started to refer himself as old and infirm, in reply joked with him: “Don't keep telling me that you are old, which leaves me in total dismay. As though there were some security in being young.” In 1570, after his wife died, he was ordained a priest. In 1576 he got tangled up in a lawsuit in which he lost a greater part of his possessions. Teresa wrote to her brother Lorenzo to show him much kindness. When he died there were rumors went around that he had left the nuns a fortune and so their benefactors stopped their help. The poor community ended up in great poverty, for the legacy they received could hardly provide for one meal (lunch).

⁵Cfr. Myrna Torbay's valuable intervention during the recent General Chapter in Avila.

finish very quickly... He is a man of deep prayer, and God has granted him so many favours that everything others would consider a burden made him happy and was easy for him to accept. This is the way he is in all the work that he has done for these foundations... (With Fr Julian de Avila), while travelling (used) to speak of God and to teach those who travelled with us or whom we met. And thus in every way he served His Majesty” (F21,6).

Another person worth mentioning is Doña Beatriz de Beamonte y Navarra, who was, quoting Teresa, a “benefactress (of Soria)... of a noble and pure lineage... mild mannered person, generous and penitent; in sum, a very great servant of God” (F 30,3-4).

And then we have Alonso de Avila, citing again Teresa’s own words, who was “a merchant, and friend of mine... who had never married, and who thinks only of doing good works for those in prison, and he does so many good works as well; he told me not to be afflicted, that he would find a house for me” (F 15,6). He died shortly after enjoying great fame and esteem.⁶

St Teresa herself promotes the idea that spiritual people (nuns, etc.) keep the company and friendship of others of the same spiritual criteria. Just as “worldly” people seek the company of those who are “worldly” like them, so should the sons and daughters of light ought to seek and maintain a good relationship with good people.

(Letters to collaborators in her work as foundress: a group of 27 addressees. We find bank people like Simon Ruiz, Mateo de las Peñuelas, a modest servant of the monastery of the Incarnation. In the forefront of extant letters are the letters addressed to Roque de Huerta, “guarda mayor de los montes de Su Majestad” (17 letters). Here we have a total of 78 letters, these exclude the (4) letters to the King, or the 45 to her family members. These 45 letters are addressed to 10 of her family members, especially Lorenzo de Cepeda, but some are only fragments.)⁷

Worthy of our attention are the words St Teresa relates regarding prayer, being at the heart of the whole matter of prayer. In the Interior Castle (3M 2,7) she does not mince her words (whether she had in mind lay people or not): “...what matters is not whether or not we wear a religious habit; it is whether we try to practise the virtues and make a complete surrender of our wills as His Majesty ordains; let us desire that not our wills, but His will be done.” The lay Carmelite is thus called to the union of wills as his/her aim in life, a mission to be accomplished by one and all. This meeting or fusion of wills is in fact, for St Teresa, true holiness, a teaching and conviction echoed and practically rectified in all her writings.

St Teresa explains how God’s ways are not necessarily our own:⁸ and in chapter 5 of Foundations declares: “I was sorry for some individuals to see they were so occupied with so many business matters and things that obedience commanded them. I was thinking to myself, and even said so, that it wasn’t possible in the midst of such commotion for the spirit to grow...

⁶Ávila, *Alonso de*, in Tomás ÁLVAREZ(dir.), *Diccionario de Santa Teresa*, Monte Carmelo, Burgos 2002, p. 732.

⁷Diccionario de S. Teresa, pg. 131.

⁸ The very title of chapter 5 of the Foundations is revealing: “Gives some counsels on matters concerning prayer. This chapter is very beneficial for those engaged in occupations belonging to the active life.”

O Lord, how different are your paths from our clumsy imaginings! And how from a soul that is already determined to love You and is abandoned into Your hands... that it inquire well into what is for Your greater service, and that it desire this!" (F 5,6). Referring then to a person she had met a few days earlier, who was occupied so much in occupations and government for years, trying the best he could to keep a pure conscience and have some periods each day for prayer, she moves on to remark to her nuns: "Know that if it is in the kitchen, the Lord walks among the pots and pans helping you both interiorly and exteriorly" (F 5,7) In these people "I saw such improvement in spiritual things that I was amazed!"

Teresa is here at her best. For this gives her the opportunity to illustrate the essence of prayer for one and all: friars, nuns and lay people, all walks of life. It is a genuine explanation of the Teresian charism of prayer. Let us listen to her own words:

"The first thing I wish to discuss, as far as my limited understanding will allow, is the nature of the essence of perfect prayer. For I have come across some people who believe that the whole thing consists in thought; and thus, if they are able to think a great deal about God, however much the effort may cost them, they immediately imagine they are spiritually minded... I do not mean that it is not a favour from the Lord if any of us is able to be continually meditating upon his works; and it is good for us to try to do this. But it must be realised that not everyone has by nature an imagination capable of meditating, whereas all souls are capable of love. ... The soul's profit, then, consists not in thinking much but in loving much... How will this love be acquired? By our resolving to work and to suffer and by our doing so whenever the occasion offers" (F5, 2-3).⁹

Without doubt, the better source for relations with lay people Teresa reserves through her extant letters, some 468 of them. 135 are addressed to 42 lay persons (a mere 29% of her letters); but though this may not appear significant, we should bear in mind, that relatives of the persons concerned could hardly be expected to conserve them through the passage of years and from one generation to another. (This is different with monasteries, dioceses or her own family.)

1. Trust in lay people

Teresa **believes** and **trusts** in lay people, not caring whether they be old stock Catholic or conversos. This is true in all her letters. She presumes good intention in all persons, and doesn't hesitate to entrust them with her foundational project: monasteries, writings, her own life. Possibly, without which none could have prospered. Two examples (among a host of others) represent all kinds of people perfectly:

a) To Roque de Huerta she entrusts her most confidential and personal letters, especially during the Toledo confinement (L 209, 3-7 Oct 1577; L 274, 1 – end of Oct 1578).

b) To Luisa de la Cerda she entrusts her Book of Life, "her soul", so as "that saint (Juan d'Avila), may read it and let us know what he thinks about it" (L 10, 2-23 Jul 1568), even if she had to remind her to pass on the manuscript in several letters.

⁹She continues: "the highest perfection consists not in interior favours or in great raptures... but in the bringing of our wills so closely into conformity with the will of God that, as soon as we realize he wills anything, we desire it ourselves with all our might..." (F5, 10).

Teresa recommends prayers for herself from her lay people in a time when her interest in them was directly and almost exclusively proportional to their material means. But even so she saw to it that they be shown the way to prayer and good living, friendship and communion with God. She offered friendship founded on love and personal dialogue, a friendship which 'gave the right' to intercede for others, to help toward their sanctity, transformation, conversion and fullness. This friendship was reserved to some privileged persons and consecrated religious. For her prayer is not free from duties and responsibilities of everyday life ("Jacob did not become less a saint for tending his flock, nor Abraham, nor St. Joachim. When we try to avoid work, everything tires us" she would write to her brother Lorenzo in the letter of the 2nd Jan 1577, L 172 n. 11), nor is it dependent on the person's religious standing as to affectations and desires; Martha and Mary are one in this.

We observe also that such trust raised the level of contact to something intimate and personal, as when everyday vicissitudes are shared and so happens with the King (Another example is when she writes to María de Mendoza, and adds details of her own health condition, (L 41, 1 – 1st March 1572)).

2. Assistance of lay people

The assistance and collaboration by lay people may seem to be a frequent motif in her dealings with lay people. From the very first to the last of her letters to lay people, Teresa constantly asks for help of all kinds, material as well as moral and spiritual; and all concern her foundational project, God's project, or both as she encounters daily difficulties of all kinds.

“May His name be blessed for He has wished to work things out through people who are such servants of God, that I know His Majesty will be greatly served through this” (To Dona Luisa de la Cerda, L 16 – 13.12.68).

“Indeed, I believe that our Lord and His glorious Mother, my Patroness and Lady, has moved your heart to so holy a work, which I hope His Majesty will make good use of. And I hope you will as a result receive many spiritual blessings” (L 17 to Diego Ortiz – co-executor of property to found a Carmel in Toledo – 9.1.69).

The Saint ‘asks’ lay people: pleads for mediation to obtain permission to found her monasteries, asks for patronage of her new foundations, and suggests giving up houses and land for them; and she asks for support so that her foundations will fall under a new province, or for injustices to be redressed where her fathers are concerned; begs for food (L 47, Martín Dávila Maldonado Bocalán, 1 Feb 1573), money and information (L 32, Diego Ortiz, 29 Mar 1571), commends mediation for the reception of her letters, work and help for her family, asks fathers to let their daughters enter her monasteries (L 26, Diego de San Pedro de Palma, 15 Jul 1570)...; commends writing back (C 13, Francisco de Salcedo, Sept 1568; L 85, Antonio Gaytán, 10 Jul 1575), asks for counsel, to see those who expressed wishes to ask for her, or pleads not to forget her (L 77, Ana Enríquez, 23 Dec 1574, “for the love of God, don’t forget me, which I always hold dear”), demands attention for her sisters and fathers, that they be given advice and support; recommends confession, interior freedom, but also she prays God for each of them, with divine love and respect (L 17, Diego Ortiz, 9 Jan 1569), for light and understanding, health and grace, tranquillity to serve better, and asks God to reward those who help her, and make them better Christians (L 77, Ana Enríquez, 23 Dec 1574).

And curiously, she asks her lay people to pray for her and her sisters (as to Dona Francisca Ramírezcfr. L 33, Roque de Huerta, 27 May 1571); to Alonso Alvarez Ramirez (L 18, 19 Febr 1569), Simón Ruiz (L 21, 18 Oct 1569), to Don Pedro Juan de Casademonte (L 373, Febr 1581), Doña Luisa de la Cerda (L 16, 13 Dec 1568).

Teresa confides in the intervention of the King the most important matters: for her sisters at the Incarnation who were in dire need (Lt 52 of 11.6.73), To King Philip II, she confides the erection of the Province and goes further ...to suggest who best might direct the Order: the young Gracian (Lt 86, of 19.7.75), in defence of Fr. Gracian (Lt 208 of 18.8.77), and to intervene for St. John of the Cross persecuted and held captive for his dealings in her newly fledged Carmel (Lt 218 of 4.12.77).

3. Dialogue with lay people

Teresa does not hesitate to give her point of view on issues arising in her letters. She is ready for dialogue, the more so when it’s a matter to clarify immediately some misunderstanding. This is a very important point in the spiritual life. She explains and discerns, and in the course of dialogue, she too benefits by seeing things more clearly; consequently following her conscience as always, and unencumbered by fleeting passions.

When she is called to correct, she does so without resorting to silence, but does so soberly, holding high the dignity of the person. While speaking her mind, she urges freedom from self, so

as to advance in humility, in self-mastery, in inner freedom, in wholeness, availing oneself fully for the building of the Kingdom. She goes about this way when confronting María de Mendoza (L 19, 2 – end of March 1569); Luisa de la Cerda (L 14, 2 November 1568); or Diego de Sarmiento (L 354, 21 August 1580). Look at how she treats with dignity and cunningness the misunderstanding of María de Mendoza, and tells her: “The Mother Prioress of your monastery writes me that you want her to admit an aspirant and that you are displeased because they told you I did not want to accept her... I think there has been a mistake. I would be distressed if it were true that you were displeased with me, for you may give me orders and scold me. I cannot believe that you would be displeased and not tell me, unless you pretended to be so in order to avoid some trouble... I only beseech your ladyship to look well into the matter... (L 41, 4-5 - 1 Mar 1572).

She says the same thing to Diego Ortiz (L 28, middle of August 1570), Rodrigo de Moya (L 103, 19 February 1576), Antonio Gaytán (L 386, 28 March 1581), Beatriz de Castilla y Mendoza (L 425, 4 December 1581), Teresa de Láyz (L 460, 6 August 1582), as well as to her sister Juana de Ahumada (L 404, 26 August 1581, and following), and to her brother Lorenzo, among others.

Teresa is not simply interested that people do their daily material duties, but also that they discover that their identity is a gift of grace’ that they do their best to let it be so, that they grow as persons, that they take hold of and control their daily life while fixing their eyes on the Risen One and shape their life on His.

4. Counselling and accompaniment – Encouragement and companionship

One cannot desist from mentioning the freedom she counsels away from unhealthy friendships (which she refers to in two of her letters). She also had a knack for empathising with those who suffer: she proved herself to be a source of comfort and strength for those around her in bearing life’s crosses, like sickness, death and various kinds of needs: see the letter to Doña Inés Nieto, wife of the secretary of the Duke of Alba (L 310, 17 Sept 1579).

And she took up questions of **prayer and the interior life**. She offered her spiritual assistance and guidance even to family members, such as her father and her favourite brother Lorenzo. Especially, with Antonio Gaytán she goes beyond herself, calling him ‘my son’ and advises him not to bother to think much, nor to give up meditation for anything, ... and as it is a major offering to the Lord, always giving oneself to praise and striving to have others do likewise, it’s of great profit to stay occupied with His Majesty” (L 64, 2 – 30, May 1574). In another letter she writes: “To give an answer to what you asked, give more time (in prayer) to what is substantial which is the more ordinary way to proceed like those who have reached contemplation...”¹⁰

Often she admires the praying abilities of her lay people as well as their determination to live a truly Christian life. Clear examples are her brother Lorenzo de Cepeda, Antonio Gaytán (mentioned above), or Francisco de Salcedo, whom she encourages to persevere without resorting to harsh asceticism, penances and inhuman mortifications. Not all roads to prayer

¹⁰ And continues: “y hartasveces lo he dicho a vuestramerced, sino que se le olvida. **Sepa que comoenestemundo hay tiemposdiferentes, asíen el interior, y no esposiblemenos; podeso no tengapena, que no espor culpa**” (L 75, last months 1574).

demand the same means. To her brother Lorenzo, for example, she is keen to subdue and correct his overzealous acts of mortification, and leads him on a milder path, and leaves stronger measures to those who are called to that way of life as Francisco de Salcedo (she writes to her brother in Jan. 1575).

She was an expert in dealing with life companionship: in this, she herself submitted to clerics and religious. In turn she offered spiritual accompaniment for her nuns, and lay people as well (see L 21, Simón Ruiz, 18 Oct 1569; L 85, Antonio Gaytán, 10 Jul 1575; among others). All this while she was enjoying the fullness of spiritual marriage. Her writings are the fruit of her lifelong experiences. She saw the need to constantly compare what she went through with the experiences of others. Ultimately, what she believed in, her thinking, the way of expressing herself and actual living, all tended to progressively configure herself with Christ, to live in the image and likeness of Him, always set in her determination and relying on the grace of God, to change her sum of frailties into virtues (2M). What does this mean? It means that Teresa found that her union with Christ never went against the mediation of those who lived close to her, and that in humility she would find the necessary help to uncover traps along the way and so to live in truth in order to always please God (Life 16, 7).

And trials in life:

“Oh, if you had the interior dominion that you have in exterior things, how little would all that we call trials here below matter to you. In what way do you think is the example given? In suffering so many trials. In this way the Lord, by means of the fire of love that He sets in your soul, begins to kindle it in others” (to Dona Maria Mendoza, previously foundress of Valladolid – L end of March 69).

She sheds light on the mystery of life and death and has some deep teaching on the Christian teaching, realizing the pain it may bring to the dear ones left behind, but that at that moment of passing of our dear ones, we should not hang on to them selflessly but consider the reward due to them....

Teresa views the person as one unity (she never distinguishes between the spiritual, the psychic affectivity or the physical, but all dimensions are integrated). And she treats the person as such. Moreover, when she opens out to accompany a person, she is aware of her own and the other's limits. Again we could take as an example Antonio Gaytán, to whom she says: “As for the rest, I cannot be a judge, since I am an interested party; and also my spiritual inclination has always been towards the estate of solitude, although I have not merited to have it, and since this is a state proper to our order, I could be living counsel appropriate for myself but not for what is fitting for you. Speak about this clearly with Father Rector (Jesuits of Salamanca), and he will see what is best; and try observing to which one your spirit has the greater leaning” (L 75, last months of 1574).

5. Loving lay people

Teresa loves and feels loved. She acts moved for love of the Loved One and His mercy. So she is considerate towards all, irradiates love, and manifests this love not only by acts but by words as well. Her writings show this in every other page. Just an example:

“In order to profit by this path and ascend to the dwelling places we desire, the important thing is not to think much but to love much;¹¹ and so do that which best stirs you to love. Perhaps we don’t know what love is. I wouldn’t be very surprised, because it doesn’t consist in great delight but in desiring with strong determination (la mayor determinación) to please God in everything, in striving, insofar as possible, not to offend Him, and in asking Him for the advancement of the honour and glory of his Son ...” (4M 1,7).

It’s an evangelising love, free of all concupiscence and selfishness. It’s a gift of love, which far from enslaving, generates strength, lifts up the spirit into bouts of courage and creativity. Teresa is able to give expression to this kind of love with freedom of spirit to (clergy, friars, nuns and) lay people: “May our Lord keep you for many years and allow me to enjoy your presence, for I certainly love you in the Lord” (L 31, Alonso ÁlvarezRamírez, 5 Feb 1571); “... for, indeed, I love him tenderly in the Lord. I am praying for him” (L 97, Diego Ortiz, 26 Dec 1575); or to the king with all freedom: “the great love I bear you has made me bold...” (L 208, 18 Sept 1577).

6. “Servant” of all

Another common element in all her letters is that she refers to herself as a servant of all. In her case it wasn’t an obligatory gentle way of politeness proper to her times. Hers was a disposition of the heart to apathy and service whenever needed in daily life and in spiritual matters. So she says to her friend Francisco de Salcedo, the ‘holy knight’ (L 13, Sept 1568), to Diego Ortiz (L 97, 26 Dec 1575), to her friend Antonio Gaytán (L 75, later months of 1574), to Luisa de la Cerda (L 16, 13 Dec 1568), only to mention a few names. And she uses the same formula in writing to his majesty the king, without sounding out of tune, rather expressing sincerely what she felt: “Unworthy servant and subject of your majesty” (L 52, 11 Jun 1573). Sincere and unworthy servant, she repeats once or twice throughout her letters, without any self-doubts whatsoever.

And feeling herself poor and in need, unworthy servant, is what motivates her life... Teresa is in constant communion with Christ, and she acts accordingly. Christ is her Master; poor like never as in Gethsemane... Who came to serve and not be served...; it’s the realisation of becoming a ‘servant’, a servant of God, to the point of becoming a unique force for the relations with her lay people (and with all those in contact with her). It becomes the key for opening up interiorly to each and all of them... The famous writer the Venerable Eugene of the Child Jesus wrote his masterpiece on the spirituality of St Teresa and Carmel published in two volumes. The first was entitled “I want to see God” expressing the yearning and driving force of Teresa, which eventually is quenched in the title of his second volume, “I am a Daughter of the Church” – the idea of service which marks Teresa’s life and existence from beginning to end...

And this she does as daughter of the Virgin Mary, Patroness and Mother of Carmel. For her, we wear the habit of Mary, we live with the attitude of Mary, her foundations are Houses belonging to Mary, and the Order is eminently Mary’s.

¹¹One of Teresa’s cherished maxims. See F 5,2 above.

TO SUM UP. Teresa, with lay people, pleads, recommends, asks for prayers, serves, trusts, holds close personal friendships, dialogues, instructs, intercedes and forms, accompanies and is accompanied, counsels and asks for counselling. Ultimately, she loves and brings about in the lay people she encounters an awareness to be “with them” and “for them”. There’s a connection!

The perspective of the person as image and likeness of God, a paradise in whom the King keeps His delights (1M 1,1), determines Teresa’s relationship with lay persons. Because for her all persons are capable of God, able to live in communion with Him irrespective of their state in life, with no distinctions. With this perspective lay people are not mere passive devotees, submissive servants, or the answer to the material needs of the Church. Rather, they should be moved into being active subjects, competent, who enrich Christian life theologically, mystically, spiritually and pastorally. They are gifts of grace, with specific missions according to their possibilities. All have a place and nothing is excluded (we call to mind the youth Andrada during the foundation of the Toledo monastery, see F 15). They can guide and accompany priests, men and women religious, especially, if they are praying persons, with some experience of God, and could well be made co-responsible in the running of the life of the Church and the building up of the Kingdom. As she writes to Doña Inés Nieto, immersed as so many others in “the tumult of Madrid, ...nothing disturbs those who truly love God” (cf. L 84, 19 Jun 1575).

(Teresa does not appear to make mention of tertiaries in her writings. When the Province of the Discalced Carmelites was declared a province apart in 1581, Pope Clement VIII to the new Superior General of the Discalced gave the same faculties enjoyed by the Superior General of the Calced Carmelites, maintaining a consistency in papal documents. Documents with references to the Secular Order are found in ‘Cum Dudum’ of 1594 and ‘Romanum Pontificem’ of 1603. In Avila, we know of the existence of the Third Order since 1678¹²).

¹² Juan Bosco de J., *Ávila (conventodel Carmen)*, in Tomás ÁLVAREZ(dir.), *Diccionario de Santa Teresa*, Monte Carmelo, Burgos 2002, p. 737. It’s worth mentioning that around this time, Fr Miguel de La Fuente O.CARM. (1573-1625), besides other Spanish mystics of the era, worked extensively among lay Carmelites, for whom he wrote “Rule and a way of life for tertiaries and beatas of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, with some exercises of mental prayer apt for those who wish to make spiritual progress”. He was inspired by the work of Diego Martínez de Coria Maldonado, “A Manual for beatas and tertiaries of the Order of the ever Virgin Mother of God, Holy Mary of Mount Carmel” published in Seville, 1592. It would be interesting to know what the Discalced did in this respect.