

Interpersonal Friendship: A Prerequisite to Mystical Contemplation, according to St. Teresa of Avila

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Abstract

Teresa of Avila, a 16th-century Carmelite nun known as a teacher of the mystical life, proposed interpersonal friendship as one of the prerequisites for the life of prayer. She envisaged prayer as an interpersonal relationship with the triune God and considered interpersonal friendship among the aspirants of prayer as essential. For her, prayer was the practical fruit of the sisterly relationship lived in the community. With mystical contemplation as destination, an attempt is made to bring out the nuances of Teresa's thoughts on the need for friendship for prayer, the right form of love, and the atmosphere required to nurture such love.

Keywords: Teresa of Avila, interpersonal friendship, spiritual love, prayer, love of neighbor

Introduction

St. Teresa of Avila (henceforth Teresa), a woman of 16th-century Spain, a Carmelite nun of distinctive personality and character, was born in a Catholic family of Jewish paternal background in the city of Avila, Spain, on March 28, 1515. She joined the Carmelite Order (a contemplative religious order) and had many struggles as a young religious woman. Later she became a reformer, founder, leader, writer, and a great mystic of the Catholic Church. Together with St. John of the Cross, she reformed the Carmelite Order that was on the verge of decadence. The reformed branch of the Carmelite order,

founded on the original Carmelite tradition and spirituality, was thence called the Discalced Carmelite Order.

Teresa is renowned for her holiness and ability to harmonize contemplation with action. The universal church and Catholic tradition accept her as a great teacher of mystical prayer. Her literary contributions are considered as classics, being the outstanding guides to spirituality, winning her the title of Doctor of the Church. Teresa breathed her last in Alba de Tormes, Spain, on October 4, 1582. She was canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622.

Love of God and the love of neighbor have always been the pillars of Christian spirituality. While love of God has been considered as its vertical dimension, the love of neighbor served as its horizontal dimension that stood the test of true spirituality. The novel thought that the love of neighbor was a prerequisite to the life of prayer, goes to the credit of Teresa. Though this perspective is biblical and has been dealt with by the early Church Fathers, a greater thrust to this dimension was given by Teresa. A mystic herself, she had learned the indispensability of interpersonal friendship for the growth of a life of prayer. Her writings reveal that she loved genuinely, humanly, and deeply, but not indiscriminately. She regarded dignified human interactions or friendship not as an obstacle in the spiritual endeavor, but as a source of mutual aid to one's heavenward journey. Dubay asserts, 'St. Teresa looked upon friendship as a source of mutual aid in our pilgrimage to the fatherland – a concept that nicely integrates our propensity toward human intimacy with our even deeper need for God' (Dubay 1989:63). Not surprisingly, Teresa wanted the 17 cloistered communities of nuns, established by her, to be very proactive spaces for communal life. She called these communities the 'colleges of Christ' which would re-live the familial and friendly communion that existed between Jesus and his apostles (Jn 15:15).

This essay is an attempt to glean the writings of Teresa to understand the meaning of interpersonal friendship from her perspective and bring out the importance of such friendship in arriving at a mystical contemplation. It would naturally be an inclusive reading of the substratum of a particular class of interpersonal relationships.

The Need for Interpersonal Friendship

Teresa's writings underline the importance of friendship and sharing in her life as an individual and as a mystic. She acknowledged, 'Of myself, I know and say that if the Lord had not revealed this truth to me and given me the means by which I could ordinarily talk with persons who practiced prayer, I, falling and rising, would have ended by throwing myself straight into hell' (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 1:65). Companions nourish the soul, heart, mind, and body. Just as food nourishes human life, so do companions for the advancement in the life of prayer. Carl Koch, in the foreword to a book by Broughton (1996) called, *Praying with Teresa of Avila*, brings out the nuances of the friendship hidden in the term 'companion': 'The etymological root of the word companion offers an apt explanation to this indispensable need of a friend on the journey of prayer. The word companion is derived from two Latin words: *cum*, meaning "with", and *panis*, meaning "bread"'. What bread is for survival, so are companions for the life of prayer.

Dubay (1989:84) summarizes the mind of Teresa in the study of the second mansion spoken of by Teresa and spells out the advice she gives to the aspirants,

The soul should avoid a close association with 'evil' and mediocre people and make it a point to mix with the good, that is, not only with those in the early mansions but also with those who have advanced into the mansions 'nearer to the center', where the king is.

Teresa narrated:

Enlighten it that it may see how all its good is within this castle and that it may turn away from bad companions. It's a wonderful thing for a person to talk to those who speak about this interior castle, to draw near not only to those seen to be in these rooms where he is but to those known to have entered the ones closer to the center (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:300).

Friends are a great source of support as one walks the path of prayer. Teresa considered it a 'great evil' to be friendless amidst the dangers the world poses

for those earnestly seeking God. They need the support of each other as is stated below:

For this reason I would counsel those who practice prayer, to seek, at least in the beginning, friendship and association with other persons having the same interest...Since friends are sought out for conversations and human attachments, even though these latter may not be good, so as to relax and better enjoy telling about vain pleasures, I don't know why it is not permitted that persons beginning truly to love and to serve God talk with some others about their joys and trials, which all who practice prayer undergo...I believe that they who discuss these joys and trials for the sake of this friendship with God will benefit themselves and those who hear them, and they will come away instructed; even without understanding how, they will have instructed their friends...Since this spiritual friendship is so extremely important for souls not yet fortified in virtue – since they have so many opponents and friends to incite them to evil – I don't know how to urge it enough...It is necessary for those who serve Him to become shields for one another that they might advance...It is a kind of humility not to trust in oneself but to believe that through those with whom one converses God will help and increase charity while it is being shared. And there are a thousand graces I would not dare speak of if I did not have powerful experience of the benefit that comes from this sharing (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 1:64).

Any journey is eased by the presence of a companion. Teresa could never downplay the role of a friend and an atmosphere of friendship on her journey towards the mystical union. She believed that in the early stages of prayer, God often speaks to people in and through good conversations with their friends. For her, friendship was not simply a matter of companionship but rather a ladder, a means on the way – a reciprocal theme. One ought not only to look for better companionship but also strive to become one. It is a mutual need, as is clear from the reference from *The way of perfection* (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol 2:199):

Sisters, strive as much as you can, without offense to God, to be affable and understanding in such a way that everyone you talk to will

love your conversation and desire your manner of living and acting, and not be frightened and intimidated by virtue. This is very important for religious; the holier they are the more sociable they are with their Sisters. And even though you may feel very distressed if all your Sisters' conversations do not go as you would like them to, never turn away from them if you want to help your Sisters and be loved. This is what we must strive for earnestly, to be affable, agreeable, and pleasing to persons with whom we deal, especially our Sisters.

'If beginners with the assistance of God struggle to reach the summit of perfection, I believe they will never go to heaven alone; they will always lead many people along after them' (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 1:114). This is what Teresa said about the advantage of having someone in the community who is honest about the goal. No one goes to heaven alone; if at all one goes to heaven, the presence of the brothers and sisters with such a one is a presumed conclusion. This is the crux of Christian spirituality. God made the human individual a social being, needing the aid of society.

Teresa was aware that the Sisters in the convent were pilgrims on their way to God. Although she was quite sure that God would sustain the souls with what she calls 'particular helps' on their way, she was equally convinced of and propagated the need of the company and the help of their neighbors. A person's sanctification is not the exclusive fruit of one's activity; it rather requires collaboration. Teresa, who knew the importance of companionship and direction in one's journey towards union with God, held spiritual friendship and spiritual direction as a high priority. She feared the harm that could come to a soul:

A great evil it is for a soul to be alone in the midst of so many dangers. It seems to me that if I should have had someone to talk all this over with, it would have helped me, at least out of shame, not to fall again since I did not have any shame before God (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 1:64).

Commitment to prayer and holiness, although attractive, is hard and needs a tremendous push and a desire to keep up the momentum despite temptations to give up. Having a friend to encourage and to share the progress, goes a long way in advancing on the narrow path to the mount of the union: 'Since

this spiritual friendship is so extremely important for souls not yet fortified in virtue – since they have so many opponents and friends to incite them to evil – I don't know how to urge it enough' (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 1:64).

Holiness is what everyone is called to. Though this is a universal call implied in the Bible and made explicit in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (LG #40), those who embark on it are hardly received with enthusiasm. The world can often look down upon them with contempt as they look odd amidst people who walk the trodden path of mediocrity. Having a friend who shares the same intent can be a great blessing as they get to shield each other from the unwanted and sometimes unwarranted attack of the evil one. Teresa advocated such companionship to ease the journey and enhance progress:

[I]t is necessary for those who serve Him to become shields for one another that they might advance. For it is considered good to walk in the vanities and pleasures of the world, and those who don't, are unnoticed. If any begin to give themselves to God, there are so many to criticize them that they need to seek companionship to defend themselves until they are so strong that it is no longer a burden for them to suffer this criticism. And if they don't seek this companionship, they will find themselves in much difficulty (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:65).

Since prayer and union with God is not something so attractive or to be put on public display, seldom do we find enthusiastic aspirants. In her 16th-century context, there was a 'hierarchy' of holiness, while religious life was regarded as 'higher' than the life of the laity. Teresa did leave hints to guess that her intention to join the convent was not the purest. As years passed by, her motives were purified by divine interventions. Teresa, having grown in appreciation for the universal call to holiness, and having benefitted from healthy companionship during her prayer journey, could not but insist on the importance of such friends. She acknowledged that there is an innate capacity in individuals to help each other on this journey and she pled with all not to hide the talent that could profit many: 'I should very much like to advise these souls to be careful not to hide the talent since it seems God desires to choose them to bring profit to many others, especially in these times when

staunch friends of God are necessary to sustain the weak' (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 1:104).

Types of Love

Friendship is characterized by the love that individuals have for each other: 'Today, the term "love" has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings' (DCE #2; cf. Benedict XVI 2006:par. 2). Not all kinds of love qualify as a means to mystical contemplation, according to Teresa. Given the importance of friendship and the nobility of the end, she felt the need for prudence in the choice of friends. Teresa, in *The way of perfection* (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2: 55-70), helps the nuns to evaluate friendship by qualifying the love that inspires it. She makes a distinction between three types of love, namely, sensible love, spiritual-sensible love, and spiritual love.

What is the connection between friendship and the types of love that Teresa dwelt upon quite elaborately? Love is an essential constituent of friendship. Friendship is defined and graded by the type of love people have for each other and the intensity and intimacy they have grown into. For entering into union with God, one needs to nurture the right type of love and friendship.

Sensible Love

Sensible love is a type of love that Teresa does not care to speak about at length, for it is proper to the state of marriage. Since she is writing to the nuns who have vowed their virginity to God and preserve it as a divine treasure, she qualifies sensible love as 'wrong love'. However, she was aware of the possibility of this sensual love making its ugly appearance among nuns, ruining the very purpose of contemplative communities:

[A]nd not these other miserable earthly affections – although I don't mean evil ones, for God deliver us from them. We must never tire of condemning anything that leads to hell, for the slightest evil of hell cannot be exaggerated. We shouldn't let our mouths utter even a word about this sinful love, Sisters, nor should we think that it exists in the world. We shouldn't listen to anything said about it, whether

this be done in jest or in truth. Do not allow that this type of love be spoken of or discussed in your presence. Such love has nothing good in it, and even hearing about it can be harmful (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:66).

Spiritual-Sensible Love

Spiritual-sensible love is the love that is ordinarily present in the relationship between individuals. Teresa considered it a kind of love that one has for relatives and friends, and so very licit. This love is not totally spiritual since it stems out of the faculties that are not purified. It can create an atmosphere of friendship between souls, persuade them, offer affectionate support, reduce loneliness, and elevate love to its purer form. This kind of love always calls for a balance between the spiritual and the sensible elements.

According to her, however, this kind of love does not bring true freedom to a person. This love runs the risk of being overridden by sensuality. The spiritual-sensible friendship can naively transform itself into an inordinate affection, or an exclusive and particular friendship which is a disorder, according to Teresa. Warning against the evils of disorderly friendship, Teresa remarked:

Be aware that, without understanding how, you will find yourselves so attached that you will be unable to manage the attachment...Little by little it takes away the strength of will to be totally occupied in loving God...this excessive love found among men and women; the harm it does in the community is well known...the silly things that come from such attachment are too numerous to be counted (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:55).

Teresa ruled out the spiritual-sensual love from the kinds of love that could be practiced at Carmel. She was convinced that it has nothing in common with anyone keen on reaching the heights of perfection in mystical contemplation. D'Souza clarifies the stand of Teresa, stating,

She indicates that when one loves a person because of his natural qualities, such as physical beauty, one does not love the person but rather his qualities; and this too for his advantage. Such love is selfish

and not genuine. It is the love of concupiscence which inordinately attaches him to that person (D'Souza 1981:37).

It is obvious that Teresa could already apply her mind so comprehensively as regards the human affective energy and make a wise and realistic critique of the same, anticipating well in advance the contribution of modern anthropology and psychology.

Spiritual Love

Spiritual love which finds its mention in the sixth and seventh chapters of *The way of perfection* (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:61-70) is a highly perfect one. She wanted her daughters to be formed by real and genuine love that is free of any sensuality. This is a dispassionate love. She wanted her daughters to dwell on spiritual love. Spiritual love derives its strength from the sacred Scriptures, the sacraments, and personal prayer. It is entwined in a spiritual relationship, not caught up in the physical or sensual relationship. These people are still very human, but their love is very deep.

The influence of possessive passions and corporal hormonal cravings are superseded by altruistic and sacrificial love akin to that of a parent. They rejoice in being loved and, at the same time, they can change from the human side to the spiritual wellbeing and lift them to God in prayer. They witness what Teresa narrated, 'All other affections wearies [sic.] these persons, for they understand that no benefit comes from it and that it could be harmful. But this does not make these persons ungrateful or unwilling to repay the love of others by recommending them to God' (Locker 2004:46).

This love can creatively combine selfless love, charity, and humility. This love desires for the beloved the same spiritual good and benefit as one seeks to enjoy. The primary concern of one who wants to reach perfection is the love of God. If something wrong is sensed in the way it relates to the other – anything that does not pave the way to love of God – she suggested that the relationship be broken before it is too late. The ideal Teresa has set for her nuns is an elevated one; it is purely spiritual:

In this pure love, the spiritual benefit of the beloved is desired above all other things. If the beloved is regarded to be lacking in pure love, then either the lover prevails upon him for a completely detached

love, or else the friendship will cease, for a true friend cannot be indifferent to anything in the friend (D'Souza 1981:37).

In the sixth and seventh chapters of *The way of perfection* (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:61-70), Teresa spelled out the salient features of spiritual love. The nature of this love is such

that you know them in such a way that they be important to you and impressed deep within your being. For if you have this knowledge, you will see that you do not lie in saying that whoever the Lord brings to the state of perfection has this love. The persons the Lord brings to this state are generous souls, majestic souls (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:62).

This love frees up the will and the heart by detaching itself from all vanities and attachments. When a person has reached this state, one can respond to the will of God instantly, for it is already free and unencumbered.

Interpersonal Friendship – a Prerequisite to Mystical Contemplation

The genuine love that goes beyond one's kin is a sure sign of the true love of God. This self-sacrificing and sacred love is the way the New Testament speaks of God, and Teresa has been given this insight: 'If we desire to make a true and complete donation of ourselves to God in response to the divine self-offer in order to enter into union with the God of love, then we must liberate ourselves of the selfishness that impedes our self-donation to God' (O'Keefe 2016:58). She has articulated it in her life and taught her nuns to practice it in the cloister where the intimate contemplation of the God of love and the self-less love for others ruled supreme.

Teresa stood next to none in emphasizing and elaborating the love of neighbor as an essential aspect of spiritual life. Love of neighbor is the ultimate test for the state of perfection one has attained. Everything is to be set aside when one's neighbor is in need. Some may be tempted to carve a niche for themselves, to set themselves exclusively for the Lord, or specifically not to miss the favors like visions, ecstasies, and locutions. An aspirant of prayer

may be inclined to such enjoyment and may choose favors and delights, but for Teresa, the good of the needy neighbor was the priority. Love of neighbor is a vital sign of the transforming union. Anyone who forfeits the opportunity to serve the needy neighbor, jeopardizes the possibilities of attaining transforming union. Conformity of wills is the crux of spiritual maturity; the climax of this conformity of wills is reached when the person is responding to the neighbor in need. This is a remarkable teaching coming from Teresa, who had known how important the love of neighbor is for mystical contemplation. In the closing argument on this teaching in *The interior castle* (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol 2:353), she stated:

I have said a lot on this subject elsewhere, because I see, Sisters, that if we fail in love of neighbours we are lost. May it please the Lord that this will never be so; for if you do not fail, I tell you that you shall receive from His Majesty the union that was mentioned. When you see yourselves lacking in this love, even though you have devotion and gratifying experiences that make you think you have reached this stage, and you experience some little suspension in the prayer of quiet (for to some it then appears that everything has been accomplished), believe me you have not reached union...And force your will to do the will of your Sisters in everything even though you may lose your rights; forget your own good for their sakes no matter how much resistance your nature puts up; and, when the occasion arises, strive to accept work yourself so as to relieve your neighbour of it. Don't think that it won't cost you anything or that you will find everything done for you. Look at what our Spouse's love for us cost Him; in order to free us from death, He died that most painful death of the cross.

To reach this stage of mystical union, is to become like Jesus. It is only when the bride has become or has been made fit by God's grace that she is ready for this favor. The person in the mystical marriage takes in the total and all-encompassing love of Jesus – to be oneself a vehicle of this love. Only when one yields to this love, one is transformed into him: 'Mystical marriage is to be with Jesus a total "for-Godness" which must mean being totally for others. It is those who are totally hidden and lost in God, living only with the life of

Christ who are fire on the earth” (Burrows 2006:117). Teresa would add that ‘they catch fire from its fire’ (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:348).

The ability to love a person or others without an enslaving attachment as well as to order one’s needs and priorities, judiciously is the hallmark of authentic spiritual growth. A spiritually mature person can see meaning in everything, including oneself and others in God. A genuine friend, according to the Teresian mind, experiences an intense longing that the other party may be immersed in God. Teresa advocates, on the one hand, a detachment from every created thing including one’s self, and on the other hand, emphasized the need of loving everything and above all, one’s neighbor in God. Personal growth or maturity comes from the realization of love as the common denominator of all humans. Love propelled by this understanding is genuine. When one loves anything in God, one loves God.

Teresa, as a reformer of the Carmelite Order, did not visualize establishing an eremitical structure. She rather established a community life with hermitical elements. Her nuns were called to be ‘not merely nuns but hermits’ (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:87), emphasizing the need to be detached from everything and be exposed to God. She knew that to encounter God, one must be purified and mature, for which one needs others. There are no better means of undergoing the process of purification, a prerequisite to rising to higher levels of God-consciousness, than by learning to live with others. It calls for continual sacrifice and provides opportunities for seeing the evil in oneself and overcoming it. She was convinced that one cannot forgo this essential means of human and spiritual growth. Teresa stated,

The most certain sign, in my opinion, as to whether or not we are observing these two laws is whether we observe well the love of neighbour. We cannot know whether or not we love God, although there are strong indications for recognizing that we do love Him; but we can know whether we love our neighbour” (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:351).

Thus, in the mind of Teresa, it was crystal clear that a divine-human relationship can be considered to be authentic only if the person involved enters into a selfless and genuine relationship with fellow humans.

One of the most significant reasons for which Teresa set out to reform the Carmelite Order, was the noticeable absence of interpersonal friend-

ship in the communities where she lived previously. In *The book of her life*, Teresa narrated that the Community of Incarnation was composed of 180 nuns: ‘Before the first of these convents of ours was founded, I spent twenty-five years in one in which there were a hundred and eighty nuns’ (Teresa of Avila 2018, Vol. 2:425). Given the vast number of members in the community, it was a herculean task, if not impossible, to have a friendly and sisterly relationship in the community, as is indicated by her intention to withdraw from a large community she lived in and to establish smaller ones. ‘Key to Teresa’s reform was her conviction that the Monastery of the Incarnation where she entered and had lived for some twenty years was too crowded and busy for the solitude and contemplative prayer that she had come to consider integral to Carmelite life’ (Egan 2005:50).

One of the criteria by which Teresa would discern the genuine character of prayer is the quality of relationship: ‘[I]f we fail in love of neighbours we are lost. May it please the Lord that this will never be so; for if you do not fail, I tell you that you shall receive from His Majesty the union’ (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:353); ‘for if we practice love of neighbour with great perfection, we will have done everything’ (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:351). The nature of the community relationship that she had in mind is brought out best in the three different names she assigns to her communities in her writings: ‘The little school of Christ’, ‘The castle of Christians’, and ‘A cozy little dwelling corner for God’. In the next paragraphs, these communities will be cursory discussed.

El pequeno colegio de Cristo (The little school of Christ). Teresa envisioned Carmel as the little school of Christ, passionately dedicated and committed to God. Her idea was to have not more than 13 nuns, including the prioress, in a convent, corresponding to the number of twelve apostles with Jesus as their master: ‘I should like that there be many of these friendships where there is a large community, but in this house where there are no more than thirteen – nor must there be anymore – all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped’ (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:55). The idea of a smaller community was based on the lack of sisterly life in the large communities she previously lived in. She restricted the number to 13 with the intent to have a stronger interpersonal relationship among the community members. Mathew Blake refers to her communities as perfect and ideal societies when he states, ‘Her communities are a perfect or ideal society: Everyone will be equal; everyone loves everyone; everyone has true inner

freedom; the sick, weak and vulnerable are respected and cared for; power is used in the right way; and all participate in God-given honour and glory' (Tyler & Howells 2017:99).

El Castillo de Cristianos (The castle of Christians). The term 'castle' is a constant imagery in Teresa's understanding of higher levels of spiritual life and a place of refuge from invaders or the attack of enemies. Her monasteries were, in her mind, little castles where Christians would live in unity against the enemy's attack, and in a loving relationship with God. When she founded St. Joseph's, the first reformed house, she desired to call it 'The little castle of Christians': '[M]y Sisters, that what we must ask God is that in this little castle where there are already good Christians not one of us will go over to the enemy' (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:48). It is one thing to have a well-fortified structure and another to have a relationship of trust and devotion among the dwellers within. When the castle cannot offer security, the dwellers can suffer loneliness because of its disconnect with the outside world. The only cure for loneliness is to have a warm relationship within. While the castle walls repulse the invaders, the members within serve as walls to each other and offer the security of love and relationship.

Un rinconcito de Dios (A cozy little dwelling corner for God): '[F]or He once said to me while I was in prayer that this house was a paradise of delight for Him' (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 1:239). The warmth of relationships among the members in the communities led her to think of them as cozy little dwelling corners. She could not imagine a close relationship in big communities. She dreaded communities where members were deprived of love and a sense of belonging. Doubtless, Teresa envisioned small communities with adequate structures that facilitated warm and cordial relationships, where everyone felt loved and helped.

Communal life was so important to Teresa that she has put it as a prerequisite for mystical contemplation. In *The way of perfection*, she dedicated four chapters to the aspects pertaining to community life, calling the attention of the Sisters to the significance of the same (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2: 53-71): 'Taking up the first practice, love of neighbor, Teresa devotes four chapters to an analysis of love' (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:29).

The way of perfection is a manual of prayer, containing instructions on prayer. The nuns, having seen the caliber of prayer of their founder, requested that a book specifically on prayer be written by her for their benefit. However, in a book containing 42 chapters, Teresa did not begin to explain

prayer until chapter 22. Instead, in all the preliminary chapters she dealt with ‘the things that must be done by those who intend to lead a life of prayer’. In other words, she was dealing with the prerequisites before beginning the subject of prayer. She was not too enthused to write a manual for studying how to do mental prayer without addressing the primary concerns or the atmosphere that is required for prayer. In this aspect, she was very much rooted in the basic Christian attitude to prayer life as an interpersonal rapport between God and the human person, and not merely as a good image. A lateral rapport with visible fellow human beings is an essential prerequisite as well as a confirmation of the authenticity of the vertical relationship with the invisible God. Hence, in the first place, she insisted on building up the atmosphere in which the life of prayer can be lived:

Before I say anything about interior matters, that is, about prayer, I shall mention some things that are necessary for those who seek to follow the way of prayer; so necessary that even if these persons are not very contemplative, they can be far advanced in the service of the Lord if they possess these things. And if they do not possess them, it is impossible for them to be very contemplative. And if they think they are, they are being deceived (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:53).

By laying down the list of prerequisites, she listed love for one another as the first: ‘The first of these is love for one another; the second is detachment from all created things; the third is true humility, which, even though I speak of it last, is the main practice and embraces all the others’ (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:54). Teresa considered that the atmosphere in which the life of prayer was to be lived, was of the greatest importance. Having spoken of the three prerequisites essential for mystical prayer, Teresa spoke of the importance of the first prerequisite – love for one another. She narrated that love for others is of prime importance to the love of prayer and life in common:

About the first – love for one another – it is most important that we have this, for there is nothing annoying that is not suffered easily by those who love one another – a thing would have to be extremely annoying before causing any displeasure. If this commandment were observed in the world as it should be, I think such love would be very helpful for the observance of the other commandments. But, because

of either excess or defect, we never reach the point of observing this commandment perfectly (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:54).

Referring to Jesus' insistence on love of God and love of neighbor, she stated that the love of God cannot be completely ascertained whereas the love of neighbor could be ascertained with certainty. The criterion by which the love of God is judged, is the love that one bears for one's neighbor:

The most certain sign, in my opinion, as to whether or not we are observing these two laws is whether we observe well the love of neighbour. We cannot know whether or not we love God, although there are strong indications for recognizing that we do love Him; but we can know whether we love our neighbour' (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 2:351).

Friendship between human beings becomes a redemptive reality in the church. St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, dwelling on the friendship in the cloister, relates, 'The mystery of the Three has been reproduced on earth since our two hearts have found their union in Yours' (Arborelius 2020:72).

For Teresa, contemplative prayer itself is interpersonal as is seen in her definition of prayer in *The book of her life*: 'Mental prayer, in my view, is nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse, with Him who we know, loves us' (Teresa of Avila 1982, Vol. 1:67). Community life is both a prerequisite and an external manifestation of such a relationship with God in prayer. Eager for certainty, and with all the passion that drew her to God, Teresa loved God in her neighbor. In her great heart, love of God fashioned abysses of inscrutable depth; love of neighbor enlarged it until it embraced the whole world: 'Like the commandment bequeathed to us by our Lord, Carmel is wholly concentrated on a double and single movement of love. Double, because it is directed to God and to our brothers and sisters. Single, because the one theological virtue of charity informs the two movements, the two tempos of Carmelite Spirituality that give it its vital rhythm and are, as it were, its heartbeat and its breath' (Marie 1999:46).

Prayer brings one to the threshold of the discovery of one's identity and goal. One realizes that one is part of the other. In discovering the other, one discovers a part of oneself. When one cooperates with the other, the

whole journey is made shorter and easier. To discover God who is present in the neighbor is to draw one step closer to God.

Teresa seems to have grasped this reality and embarked on initiating a revolution of sorts by establishing human communities where love for God and selfless love among human beings were the only and absolute rule. Therefore, Teresa called her cloisters a true family, little tabernacles of Christ, colleges of Christ, bee-hives of charity, houses of God and gates of heaven, etc. She has brought the symphony and harmony which are evident in a delicate balance between activities that are God-centric and person-centric, very close to each other. For her, they were not opposite but mutually complementary poles. One who loves God, excels in sacrificial love for the most undeserving, and one who truly loves fellow sisters and arrives at a mature interpersonal relationship, can easily approach God and be involved with a pure conscience in contemplation. God is not worshiped by animal sacrifices, gifts, money, music, elaborate rituals, or cult; these are but gestures of our good will. A true moral life that manifests the victory of love over evil, is the worship that can be offered to God in 'spirit and truth'. It is simple and sincere worship of seeing and serving God in fellow human beings without any self-interest, coming to God in prayer, and expressing that love to God in the intimacy of the heart. Doing the will of God is the core of the command of love.

The discourse of communal relationships arises precisely among those who have the conviction that love will finally win, provided everyone slowly but decisively chooses to rise above the clutches of passion that divide and distance one from another, to build bridges between people without any condition. No doubt the Christian teaching of the kingdom of God speaks of the possibility of building an earthly city where peace and justice can be experienced and relished.

Conclusion

What is stated above will reveal a few aspects: First, a human person in essentially relational and interpersonal relationships is crucial to human society, as the happiness of people hinges on healthy relationships. Second, it is crucial for survival. Third, everything one learns, depends on the relationships initiated with others, and lastly, the development of the interpersonal relation-

ship is a presumed conclusion. Can a group of people who have decided to advance in prayer, which is a relationship of the highest order, call for an exception to this indispensable norm of society? It would be a unanimous NO.

For Teresa, interpersonal friendship was very close to her heart. She, a reformer of the Carmelite Order with its charism of prayer and contemplation, saw it as one of the primary prerequisites to arrive at mystical contemplation.

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Interpersonal Friendship

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