

The Cloud of Witnesses

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory...” – 2 Corinthians 3:18a

John of the Cross & Teresa of Avila



- John of the Cross (1542-1591) and Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), both Spaniards, were the founders of the Discalced Carmelites. They gave the Catholic Counter-Reformation a new inspiration for prayer and the personal devotional life.

- As a young man, John joined the Carmelite order, which focused on contemplative prayer. But he didn't find it dedicated strongly enough toward this goal, so he considered leaving to join the Carthusians, a stricter order. Then he met Teresa of Avila, an older Carmelite nun, who convinced him to reform the Carmelites rather than leave them. Together they launched their reformation and produced the Discalced (“Barefoot”) Carmelites. They suffered severe opposition and persecution from the old “calced” Carmelites.

- Both John and Teresa are regarded as among the foremost “mystics” in the history of the church. Mysticism is a way of looking at the Christian life that emphasizes prayer, internal transformation, and spiritual intimacy with God. John of the Cross (also regarded as a great poet) produced two classic books of mysticism, *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *Dark Night of the Soul*; and Teresa of Avila wrote many works, the most famous of which is her *Interior Castle*. These books all focus on the progress of the soul towards union with God.

Themes of John’s theology of mysticism:

- Complete self-renunciation to God
- Giving up our dependence on comforts, both physical and spiritual
- The goal: a spiritual union of love with God himself



[A sketch of the crucifixion by John of the Cross]

The Classical Christian Pilgrimage

1.) *Purgation / Purification*

- a. Renunciation of sins and of disobedience against God; fighting sinful habits
- b. Building devotional disciplines into one's life
- c. A "dark night" may lead into the next phase

2.) *Illumination*

- a. Total consecration to God in love
- b. God experienced within
- c. Unceasing prayer
- d. Increasing social concern
- e. Another "dark night" may lead into the next and final phase

3.) *Union*

- a. Abandonment to grace
- b. Prayer of quietness / true contemplative prayer
- c. Full union / ecstatic union

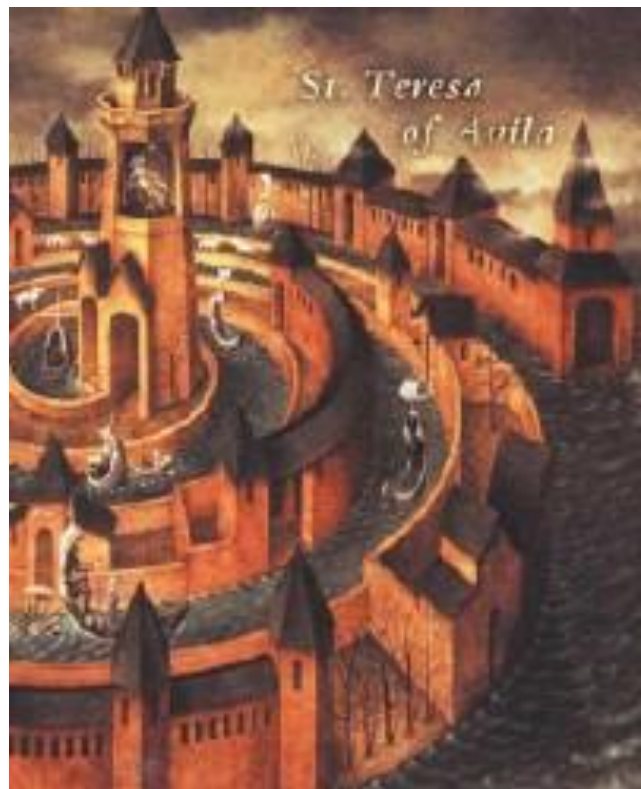
"Let nothing trouble you; let nothing frighten you; Everything passes, but God will never change; Patient endurance attains to all things; Whoever has God wants for nothing at all: God alone is enough." – Teresa of Avila

"If a man wishes to be sure of the road he treads on, he must close his eyes and walk in the dark." – John of the Cross

"In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone." – John of the Cross

The 7 Mansions of Teresa's "Interior Castle":

- 1.) One has the desire to pursue God, yet is easily distracted by the things of the world
- 2.) The active practices of prayer begin
- 3.) Fighting sins and stepping out to love one's neighbor
- 4.) Transition to the mystical life: surrendering to God; learning to let go of our own activity and allowing God to accomplish our spiritual formation
- 5.) First experiences of union: the suspension of normal senses and consolations, but with a certainty of God's closeness
- 6.) "The Betrothal"—experiences of ecstatic union; active prayer and reasoning gives way fully to a simple, loving gaze towards God
- 7.) "Marriage" / Full union—one's spirit is fully conformed and united with Christ



ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF TERMS USED IN ST. JOHN'S ORIGINAL DRAWING.

