

St Teresa of Avila: "Solo Dios basta."

Wherever the Kingdom of God is preached and lived, there will be some among the faithful called to a life of consecrated contemplation. The scriptural figures of Elijah and John the Baptist in the desert, Simeon and Anna praying in the Temple of Jerusalem, and Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus sitting at the feet of Christ have resonated down the centuries as examples of an essential expression of Christian discipleship. "We look not to the things that are seen," wrote St. Paul, "but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:18). According to the vision of reality given by Christ, the whole of the seen world is a kind of outward clothing that rests upon invisible realities, and the real business of life is to use the seen things to approach the more important and lasting unseen world. This being so, it makes sense that Jesus would defend Mary from the complaints of her sister Martha and insist that in setting her gaze upon him, Mary had chosen "the good portion," the one thing necessary.

Through the long centuries of Christianity, from the explosion of the monastic movement in fourth-century Egypt to the crystallization of the contemplative spirit in religious communities of many places and times, contemplative men and women have played a role of importance in the Church's life out of all proportion to their numbers. They have been a kind of spiritual heart, a vital organ of Christ's Body that has held the whole Christian people in proper relation to eternal realities. Through their intercessory prayer, their battling with demonic forces, their lifting a constant song of praise to Heaven, their keeping a vision of the invisible world clear and present, and their incarnating in time the Christian hope of eternity, the often hidden lives of contemplatives have gained for the Church much of her spiritual potency. As the contemplative goes, so goes the Church as a whole. It is therefore not surprising to find that a great deal of spiritual conflict swirls around these congregations.

The attack on contemplative life comes from two main directions. The first of these is a frontal assault on the very idea of a life given entirely to prayer and solitude. Because the contemplative life makes no sense whatever apart from the existence of an invisible world, it is a standing challenge to worldliness. For the person with no faith, it can hardly seem anything but mentally imbalanced to spend all of one's time on what are considered only phantoms. Contemplatives have been called antisocial, drawing off otherwise useful members of the society into idleness and self-absorption, breaking up families, and walling up healthy young men and women in a fruitless existence. At the very least they have been thought foolish, wasting their time on unimportant matters while the great world passes them by. It

was not for nothing that the French revolutionary armies destroyed every monastery they could find or that Napoleon forcibly dissolved any religious order that could not demonstrate its immediate social utility. For those who were aggressively pursuing a vision of the world that began and ended with what was seen, it was necessary to destroy the cultural and spiritual influence of those monuments to the unseen world. But even for believers, Mary's "good portion" can present a problem. Contemplatives have been accused by other Christians of cowardice in attempting to escape the hard realities of the world and have been berated for laziness in shirking Christian responsibilities of evangelizing and serving the needy. Jesus's defense of Mary has been a needed corrective in every age.

A second attack on contemplative life comes in a subtler form and arises from a happier and more natural, but not less debilitating, process. An old saying has it that the contemplative leaves the world, and then the world seeks out the contemplative. Again and again the pattern has repeated itself: an individual or a group of men or women have left normal society and have pursued solitude and poverty to follow the contemplative vocation. Like Anthony, they have penetrated the inhospitable desert or, like Benedict, have sought out lonely mountain caves. They have gone deep into the dark and untamed forests like Bruno and Bernard or, more strangely, have settled themselves on platforms high in the midst of the city like Simeon Stylites.

But wherever they have gone, however much they have attempted to flee the world, the world has followed them. Much to their surprise, contemplatives have regularly found themselves important members of their societies, surrounded by the trappings of usefulness and even of power and wealth. St. Benedict has been called the father of European civilization and not without good reason; but founding or saving a civilization was nowhere on the list of his intended achievements. It all seems to happen innocently enough, even by a kind of accident: the innate strength of a life focused on the worship of God and the mastery of the self - spills over into all manner of social benefits.

But this integration of the contemplative into normal social life brings with it a creeping worldliness. The great danger for a house of contemplation is not that it will become a den of iniquity; despite the fog of the Black Legend, few monasteries or convents in history have been places of obvious evil. When contemplative life gets corrupted, monks and nuns do not typically become criminals. Their problem, one that is often more difficult to address, is that they grow comfortable. Rather than maintaining their true nature as outposts of vigilant

prayer, frontline fortresses against the powers of darkness, strongholds of solitude preserving the fundamentally otherworldly nature of the Church by their worship and their witness, they lapse into pleasant lodgings for the spiritually inclined to enjoy a life of relative ease.

In 1662, in the city of Avila in Spain, a handful of nuns of the Carmelite order began a new foundation under the protection of St. Joseph. Their prioress was the forty-seven-year-old Teresa Sanchez de Cepeda y Ahumada. The founding would prove to be a significant event in the reform of the Church's contemplative life and therefore of great importance for the life of the Church as a whole. And in the character and writings of Teresa of Avila, the Church was given a remarkable personality and a source of spiritual vitality that has reached far beyond the world of Carmel.

Teresa is a highly attractive figure. She has been one of Spain's favorite saints. It says something of her popularity that she has been proposed as patron of her country, which would mean displacing the great Santiago, the Apostle James. Her autobiography has been the most widely read book in Spain after Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Her works on prayer are spiritual classics, and in 1970 she was declared by Pope Paul VI a Doctor of the Church, the first woman ever to have been given that honor. But if she has been attractive to moderns, she has also been difficult to understand. An age that has lost sympathy with its ancestors and that has little understanding of traditional faith can find in Teresa a bundle of contradictions. She is such an irrepressible personality, so full of warmth and honesty, and so obviously strong and courageous, that we want her to be one of us.

But how could such a talented woman have desired to shut herself up in a convent? How could such a strong-minded individual have lived so willingly under the authority of the Church and of the crown in an age when the Spanish Inquisition was at its most active? So we find ways to adjust the seeming paradox. She was an irreverent proto-feminist; she was a politically clever operator who knew how to feign obedience in order to make her way in an authoritarian world; and perhaps most persistently, she was able, despite her Catholic faith and her profession as a Carmelite nun, to be "her own person." But the glory of St. Teresa is precisely that she expended all of her energies of mind and will to make sure that she was not her own person. With all the considerable force of her being, she wanted to belong to another. She is a shining example of the truth taught by Christ that we find perfect freedom in perfect obedience, that we grow larger when we make ourselves smaller, and that we most find ourselves in all the particularities of our personalities exactly when we most lose ourselves in God.

Teresa's Early Life and Conversion: Teresa was born in 1515 in the Avila region of Spain, the sixth of twelve children. Her father was a wealthy merchant who had bought a knighthood. Her mother was from a family of high Spanish nobility. Her grandfather on her father's side was Jewish and had been degraded as a converso, one who had become Catholic but who had been found by the Inquisition to be continuing some aspect of Jewish practice or belief. But this taint in the family's noble lineage had been hushed up and forgotten. The home in which Teresa grew up was comfortable and devout. From a young age it was clear that Teresa had strong gifts of personality. She was outgoing and attractive, and she knew how to please those around her. She was a natural leader among her friends and family.

The first serious shock in Teresa's life came in her fourteenth year when her mother, to whom she was deeply attached, died. Two years later she was sent to a convent school, but it was not long before the ill health that would dog her throughout her life forced her to return home. At the age of twenty, she slipped away without telling her father and joined the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation, a well-established house in Avila with some 150 nuns in residence. Her decision to enter religious life was sincere but not particularly passionate. It seemed to be something of a marriage of convenience. She had no doubt about the truths of the Catholic Faith, and she wanted to gain salvation. She thought that entrance into a convent was the safest way to gain that end. In this she was similar to many of her contemporaries in religious communities.

Teresa begins her autobiography: "I beg anyone who reads this account to bear in mind, for the love of the Lord, how wicked my life has been - so wicked, indeed, that among all the Saints who have turned to God I can find none whose history affords me any comfort. For I see that, once the Lord called them, they never fell back into sin. I, however, not only fell back and became worse, but seem deliberately to have sought ways of resisting the favors which His Majesty granted me.

These strong words, repeated in different ways throughout Teresa's account, might seem to point to a past that had been filled with the worst sort of iniquity. But there was never a time in Teresa's life, from her girlhood on, when she was not a believing Christian, saying her prayers, avoiding serious sin, and living under the shadow of the Church's teaching. She was not a Magdalene, an Augustine, or an Ignatius - someone who came to faith after wandering far from God. Yet when she writes this way she is not merely affecting pose or tossing off pious phrases; the evident honesty of her self-assessment rules out that possibility. What could she have meant by accusing herself of such wickedness?

Some have seen in Teresa's self-condemnation the expression of a wounded spirit that had been crushed by the overly strict demands of a disciplinarian father and further oppressed by her experience as a woman and as a person with Jewish blood in sixteenth-century Spain. To put it in modern therapeutic terms, she denigrated herself because she was someone with low self-esteem who saw herself in an inaccurately negative light. The difficulty with this reading is that there is virtually nothing in Teresa's manner of going through life that showed this kind of wound. She had all the confidence and self-assurance of her Spanish noble upbringing, an attitude of bold decisiveness that was often described as masculine, combined with a commonsensical insight into others that allowed her to view the world with an ironically humorous lens. She had a generous measure of courage and resilience in all her dealings with the world. Her sense of her own wickedness was not in any observable way a psychological symptom. Its source was elsewhere.

Teresa is not alone in this saintly habit of self-condemnation. It is also notably present in Francis of Assisi and Philip Neri, two of the most joyful personalities known to history. Paradoxically, their joy in life and their dismay at their own darkness come from the same source: a profound insertion into the being of God. Those who are closest to God see most clearly his love and mercy; they also see more clearly than others the horror of a will that turns from him. So with Teresa—the sins she saw in herself were not the stuff of tabloids. But where great light is given and great love is present, even a seemingly small offense becomes a serious matter.

In any case, as Teresa lays out her inner life, she notes that soon after her entry into the convent, during a protracted period of grave illness, she was given the grace of prayer and union with God, but she then turned from that grace and for many years avoided praying. During this time she lived outwardly as a model Carmelite according to the customs of the day - she was faithful to the communal prayers and lived an ordered life - but she was not regularly practicing meditative, or mental, prayer. As a result, she began to lose pleasure in the life of virtue. "I was vain," she writes, "and knew how to get credit for those qualities usually esteemed in the world." Because she did many things that gave the appearance of virtue, she was given a wide latitude in receiving visitors and in leaving the house to make visits to others. "Though my follies were sometimes crystal clear, they [the sisters] would not believe them since they always thought much of me."

She described the general tenor of her life as outwardly respectable but inwardly miserable: "I spent nearly twenty years on this stormy sea, falling and evermore rising again, but to little purpose as afterwards I would fall once more. My life was

so far from perfection that I took hardly any notice of venial sins, and, though I feared mortal sins, I was not sufficiently afraid to keep myself out of temptations. I derived no joy from God and no pleasure from the world.”

She called her experience "one of the most painful ways of life that can be imagined." A convent may be a place of refuge from external distractions and battles, but that outward protection only brings the inner battles of the soul more clearly into focus. Those interior struggles, when honestly faced, can be the most difficult to manage. And Teresa was nothing if not honest.

But through this period of misery, God was preparing something extraordinary for her. At a certain point her desire for meditative prayer began to grow again, and she experienced a new grace and ease in its practice. The turning point came when she happened upon a statue of Christ in agony that had been brought into the convent for the celebration of a festival. Touched by the grace of God, she saw the sufferings of Christ in a new light and was overcome by remorse for the weakness of her response. She was transfixed, and she stayed before the statue weeping until she was sure that her prayers for a deeper life in Christ had been answered. She was given the grace to make the final offering of herself, to hold nothing back, to become, as she would later say, a servant of love. She often called this experience her second, and deeper, conversion. The change is noted dramatically in her autobiography:

From now onwards this is a new book - I mean another and new life. Up to now the life I described was my own. But the life I have been living since I began to expound these methods of prayer is one which God has been living in me - or so it has seemed to me.

Teresa's "second conversion" took place in her fortieth year, in 1555. She was greatly helped along the way by the reforming Franciscan friar Peter of Alcantara and by the Jesuits who had recently been established in Spain, notably Francis Borgia, who was for a time her confessor. During the next five years, she experienced a spiritual revolution. She lost interest in the social visits that she had earlier found so attractive and plunged ever more deeply into prayer. She received many graces of contemplation in the form of visions and locutions and often was drawn into the quiet prayer of union with God. It was during this time that she had the experience, famously captured by Bernini's sculpture at the Church of Maria della Vittoria in Rome, of being painfully pierced by the love of God. She writes: "Beside me, on the left hand, appeared an angel in bodily form. He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful. In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the

iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he pulled it out, I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul then content with anything but God. This is not a physical, but a spiritual pain.... So gentle is this wooing which takes place between God and the soul.”

During this five-year period, Teresa was schooled in the ways of contemplative prayer that would form the content of her books of spiritual teaching. Teresa's immersion in the life of God brought her face to face with a Christian paradox that has pervaded the lives of many of the saints. Jesus said to his disciples, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mk 12:30). He also said, "I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear him!" (Lk 12:5). For many, love and fear are mutually exclusive dispositions. We think that we cannot love what we fear and that we do not fear what we love. In Teresa, her deeper conversion meant the integration of her response to the presence of God at a higher level. She experienced both her love and her fear of God growing apace with each other.

As to love of God: Teresa's warm heart constantly overflowed with expressions of her delight at the love and mercy of her Beloved. “O my God, how infinitely good you are! O joy of the angels, when I think of it, I long to dissolve in love for you! How true it is that you suffer those who will not suffer you to be with them! What a good friend you are, O my Lord, to comfort and endure them, and wait for them to rise to your condition, and yet in the meantime to be patient of the state they are in! You take into account, O Lord, the times they loved you, and for one moment of penitence you forget all their offences against you.

The whole of Teresa's life was an extended act of love offered to the God who meant everything to her. As to fear of God: Teresa recorded a vision she received in which she was shown the place the devil had prepared for her in Hell. It was deeply troubling to her: "I was terrified, and though this happened six years ago, I am still terrified as I write; even as I sit here my natural heat seems to be drained away by fear." Yet she understood this horrific experience to be motivated by, and to give depth to, her love. "This vision was one of the greatest mercies that the Lord had bestowed on me. It has benefited me very much, both by freeing me from fear of the tribulations and oppositions of this life, and by giving me the strength, while bearing them, to give thanks to the Lord, who, as I now believe, has

delivered me from these continuous and terrible torments."

Teresa's Missionary Foundations The origins of the Carmelite order are lost in a haze of uncertain history and golden legend. Early traditions within the order held that it was begun by the prophet Elijah. By all accounts, the Blessed Mother had a decisive hand in the inspiration of its founding; the official name of the male order is "the Order of the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel." The site of Mount Carmel in Israel seems traditionally to have been a favored place for hermits.

In 1185, a group of monks were found to be living there, and they were given a rule by the Latin patriarch of the crusader kingdom Jerusalem. This event marks the official beginning of the Carmelites as a Catholic order. Increasing danger from Saracens and tension between the eastern and western Churches motivated the order to relocate to Europe around 1242. In 1245, under the patronage of Pope Innocent IV, they adopted a rule more suited to European conditions. No longer classified as monks, they took their place alongside the three existing mendicant orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians), which meant, among other provisions, that they were not required to work, but could subsist on alms. Like the other mendicant orders, the Carmelites grew rapidly and spread throughout Europe. Then in 1432, in what came to be a point of contention, Pope Eugenius IV allowed the order a different rule that relaxed much of their earlier austerity. This new set of constitutions came to be called the mitigated rule. The Convent of the Incarnation in Avila that Teresa joined was conducted under the discipline of this rule.

Teresa's deeper conversion sparked in her a growing desire to live under a stricter rule of life, one that included more time for contemplation, more asceticism and penitential exercises, and greater seclusion from the world. She longed for the earlier expression of the Carmelite charism, and she came to think that the order needed to be reformed in a stricter direction. Her desire was fueled by a vision she received of St. Joseph, encouraging her to found a new house. In 1562, her hopes were realized with the establishment of the Convent of St. Joseph in Avila. Teresa wrote the constitutions for the new house, basing them on the earlier Carmelite rule. She made habits out of coarse material for the four sisters who joined her in the undertaking. The new reform came to be called the Discalced (barefoot) Carmelites; and though the sisters seldom went without shoes, they took for themselves the rough peasant sandal typical of the time as a sign of their chosen poverty. Teresa originally proposed to limit the number of nuns to twelve to keep the convent from becoming too comfortable or powerful. She wrote of the new

foundation, "Their joy was in being alone, and they assured me they were never long enough alone; and so they looked on it as a torment whenever anyone came to see them, even though it were a brother. She who had the most opportunities of being alone in a hermitage considered herself the happiest."

The new Convent of St. Joseph was a modest enough venture. But it set off a storm of struggle and controversy in Avila so great that the priest serving as chaplain said that it was as though the city had been attacked simultaneously by fire, plague, and an invading army. "I was astonished," wrote Teresa, "at all the trouble the devil was taking about a few poor women, and at the universal belief that a mere dozen sisters and a Prioress would do such harm to the town while living so strictly." We might ask, why all this tumult? Why such harsh opposition to what was a praiseworthy initiative, or at least a harmless one? To understand the sharp antagonism to Teresa and her reform is to open a window on a different kind of society, one that took spiritual matters very seriously, believing them to have profound practical implications. The Spain of Teresa's day had a hundred thousand men and women in religious orders. Those religious communities were at the center of Spanish life, and a significant development among them was felt at all levels of the society, from the king to the peasantry.

The opposition to Teresa's new foundation came from various quarters and for different reasons. First, there was an implied critique of existing Carmelite life in the very notion of a needed reform. Many among the Carmelites were resentful at this accusatory finger. "I was very unpopular throughout the convent for wanting to found a more strictly enclosed house," Teresa wrote. "The nuns said that this was an insult to them; that I could serve God just as well where I was, since there were others there better than myself; that I had no love for my own house, and that I should have been better employed raising money for it than for founding another. Some said that I ought to be put in the prison-cell."

A second set of concerns came from certain theologians of the Inquisition. Teresa was known to have been the recipient of mystical graces, and those responsible for the discipline of the Church were concerned at the potentially explosive ramifications of visionary experiences. The Protestant Reformation had roiled through western Christendom and had torn many European states apart, often at the hands of prophetic claims to special revelation. There were also "illuminati" in Spain who were claiming that their mystical connection with God did away with their need for a Church or for the sacramental life. At such a time, it was understandable, if not commendable, to find Church authorities overly careful about mystical movements, thinking that it was better to be safe even at the risk of

quashing genuine inspiration. This risk-averse attitude meant that for many in authority, any claim to mystical experience was immediately under suspicion. Yet a third set of concerns came from Teresa's insistence that the new foundation was not to be endowed, lest the sisters be unable to practice true poverty. The bishop of Avila and many of the townspeople were opposed to the establishment of yet another religious house that would need to be supported by the alms of the residents of the city; and other religious orders whose livelihood came from collecting alms were not pleased at the appearance of a competitor for possible funds.

Nonetheless, despite formidable opposition, the house was established, thanks to Teresa's combination of fervent faith, winning personality, and ability to manage practical affairs. With the founding of St. Joseph's Convent, Teresa took the name Teresa of Jesus; she was now close to fifty years old, and she thought that she had found a place of prayer and seclusion where she might live out the rest of her days in relative peace. "As I am now out of the world," she wrote toward the end of her autobiography, "and in a small and saintly society, I look down on things as from a height and care very little what people say or know about me. It seems that the Lord has at last been pleased to bring me to a haven, which I trust in His Majesty will be secure. But it was not to be.

Four years after the founding of the new convent, the general of the Carmelites paid an unprecedented visit to Spain and arrived in the city of Avila. Teresa was afraid that the general might take offense at the new Discalced convent since it had been founded under the protection of the local bishop rather than under Carmelite authority. She met with him and opened her heart concerning her hopes for a reformed Carmelite house, recounting the ways the convent had been blessed since its opening. The general, who was himself concerned for reform, was deeply moved by what he saw, and not only did he approve the foundation, but he encouraged her to make as many more foundations as she could. Pius V had come to the papal office the year before, and a new wind of reform was blowing through the Church. Thus began for Teresa a fifteen-year period of intense activity, ending only with her death, during which time she founded sixteen more convents of the Discalced Carmelites in locations all over Spain and supported the founding of as many houses of friars. She was helped in this project by, among others, St. John of the Cross, whom she had won as a young priest to the cause of Carmelite reform. There would be many battles to face; the Discalced Carmelites would have a stormy time before they were finally given status as a congregation in their own right. But that first foundation of St. Joseph's, begun with a few sisters, was the spiritual wedge that broke open the field for a fertile harvest.

Nothing shows Teresa's ability to lead others and to manage practical affairs better than her term as prioress of her own Convent of the Incarnation in Avila. This was the house where she had lived for more than twenty years before leaving it to establish the Convent of St. Joseph under the reformed rule. Now ten years had passed, and Teresa's reform was growing: between 1567 and 1571 she had established eight new Discalced convents and was busily looking after them. The Carmelite provincial, no friend to the reform, wanted to curtail Teresa's activity; he was also concerned at the growing laxity and administrative chaos at Avila's large convent. So he decided to take care of both matters at once by appointing Teresa as the new prioress. Teresa characteristically obeyed, leaving the future of the reform in God's hands. The effect in Avila of Teresa's appointment was cataclysmic. It had always been the custom for members of the convent to elect their own superior. To have one thrust upon them in this manner was hard enough, but to have that one be the same Teresa who had thrown the convent and the city into such turmoil ten years previously was not to be borne. As Teresa walked in solemn procession with the provincial to take up her new duties, she was harassed and insulted by the townspeople. When the procession arrived at the convent, they found it barricaded against them. After forcing his way in, the provincial installed Teresa amid screams and shouts from the outraged nuns. A less propitious beginning to a term of office could hardly be imagined.

Yet Teresa's three-year term was a distinct success. Her first act in gathering the mutinous sisters together was to place a statue of the Blessed Mother in the chair of the prioress, so as to make clear who was the true head of the house. She told the sisters that she understood their position and that she would not force upon them the more rigorous practices of the reform. She brought order to the house's finances, which meant that for the first time in many months the sisters had enough to eat. She engaged John of the Cross as spiritual director, a ministry for which he had a great talent. She was firm and demanding but fair and humble in the exercise of her office. She would be the first to take up the most menial of practical duties, and if she thought she had done something wrong in her care of her sisters, she would prostrate herself before them and ask their forgiveness. In 1574, her term of office ended. Three years later, the Discalced reform came under renewed attack, and as a result Teresa was prohibited for a time from founding new houses and was once more confined by her authorities to the Convent of the Incarnation. Those authorities wanted to make Teresa more or less disappear, but now a remarkable scene ensued. The office of prioress came open, and the same nuns who a few years previously had been so outraged at having Teresa forced upon them now wanted her back as prioress. The majority voted for her, even in the face of being excommunicated by the representative of the Carmelite order. Such was the love

and admiration she had won from her sisters in the teeth of their earlier resistance.

Teresa was remarkable among mystics in her ability to live a profound contemplative life even in the midst of busy outward activity. This quality was evident throughout her life, but it was especially noteworthy in the time and circumstances of the writing of the spiritual classic, *Las Moradas*, or in English, *The Interior Castle*. Under the obedience of her superiors, Teresa wrote the work in 1577, just at the time when the Discalced reform was under grave attack and its continued existence was in peril. As the initiator of the reform, Teresa was squarely in the midst of that battle, writing letters to all parties, keeping in touch with her many foundations, and handling the awkward fallout of being elected prioress of the Incarnation against the wishes of the provincial. The actual writing of the book was accomplished in two, fourteen-day periods, during which she wrote in the early morning and late evening, taking up the business of the day during the hours in between. Yet there is no sign in her writing of those external battles and the many anxieties they brought with them. Her sisters remembered Teresa often being rapt in contemplation as she took up her pen. One of them later wrote: "Once, while she was composing the work, I entered to deliver a message, and found her so absorbed that she did not notice me; her face seemed quite illuminated and most beautiful. After having listened to me she said: 'Sit down, my child, and let me write what our Lord has told me ere I forget it,' and she went on writing with great rapidity and without stopping."

The Discalced reform weathered that storm, and Teresa, now a woman of sixty-five and wracked with many illnesses, was back on the road. Despite opposition, the reform was gaining support, and there were many requests for new foundations. Teresa herself was increasingly thought of as a saint, a development that made her acutely uncomfortable. Every new foundation meant strenuous travel in all kinds of weather, a mountain of difficult administrative work and tiresome attention to the lawsuits and false rumors inevitably initiated by the reform's opponents. The tale of that relentless reforming activity can be found in Teresa's book of Foundations. In the midst her many labors, Teresa's inner spirit remained in close union with God. "In some respects my soul is not really subject to the miseries of the world as it used to be," she wrote at this time. "It suffers more but it feels as if the sufferings were wounding only its garments; it does not itself lose its peace." As she felt her final illness coming on in the midst of her labors, she longed once more to be at her home convent in Avila. But death overtook her before she could return.

There might seem something incongruous in the overall shape of Teresa of Avila's life: an eager contemplative, and yet embroiled in the affairs of the world; a person who longed for seclusion, yet who traveled constantly to all parts of Spain; an austere nun who turned her back on the things of time and sense and yet possessed to the end a spontaneous delight in friends and in the beauty of the natural world. But this combination of qualities is only incongruous if the Christian contemplative ideal is not fully understood. Teresa, like all true contemplatives, was not strictly running away from the world; rather, she was running into the arms of the world's Creator and center, God himself. In giving herself to the highest of loves, she received all things in return. She did not learn to despise loves of a lower kind; she only insisted that they be rightly ordered.

Along with her prose writings, Teresa left behind many poems. The best remembered among them was found in her breviary after she died, a testimony to her inner life of union and calm amid the distraction and trouble of a fallen but graced world. *Nada te turbe, Nada te espante, Todo se pasa, Dios no se muda. La paciencia Todo lo alcanza; Quien a Dios tiene Nada le falta; Solo Dios basta.* Let nothing disturb you, Let nothing frighten you, All things are passing: God never changes. Patience gains all things. He who has God lacks nothing; God alone is enough.